

# UNKNOWN ARMIES

A ROLEPLAYING GAME OF TRANSCENDENTAL HORROR AND FURIOUS ACTION



BY  
GREG STOLZE  
& JOHN TYNES

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ATLAS GAMES PRESENTS



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BY GREG STOLZE & JOHN TYNES

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DIGITAL VERSION 1.0



*chapter one*  
*overview*

**UNKNOWN  
ARMIES**



"IT IS THE CUSTOMARY FATE OF NEW TRUTHS  
TO BEGIN AS HERESIES AND END AS SUPERSTITIONS."  
—THOMAS HUXLEY

"I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO BELIEVE ANYMORE.  
SO I BELIEVE I'LL HAVE A DRINK."  
—DIRK ALLEN



## Welcome to *Unknown Armies*—

UA for short. This is a roleplaying game about transcendental horror, which is another way of saying that we're going to explore the heights of human potential and find that everything isn't sweetness and light. We're going to see behind the mask of reality and examine the clockwork of existence, and find that everything isn't bearded gods and Thou Shalt Nots. We're going to look at what makes people tick, and find that our neuroses, obsessions, and fears define us just as strongly—if not moreso—than our aspirations, ideals, and conscience.

Is this a negative vision? Yes and no. It is a negative vision in that we're going to kick loose the rocks of the collective unconscious and find some nasty, squirming bugs underneath. It is not a negative vision in that there is still room for personal heroism. When characters can acknowledge and even embrace the terrible, naked face of reality and yet not lose sight of their personal goals and beliefs, when they can see the worst that the cosmos has to offer and still persevere, when hope can be maintained and even strengthened despite the lessons life has to teach, then we know life is worth living, even if it faces seemingly overwhelming odds.

This is also a roleplaying game about furious action, which is another way of saying that philosophy is all well and good but sometimes you've just gotta kick some butt. To put it less bluntly,

your characters and the people they meet in the game all have goals that are important to them, and when those goals are in conflict a common result is violence. By all means, negotiate whenever you can. But in UA the stakes are so high that you never know when danger is going to rear its ugly head. (Of course, the butt you kick isn't necessarily physical; it might be magickal, or even psychological.)

## Design Goals

It's worth noting in brief a few of the design goals we had for this game, and some of the things that led us to create it, so that you know what you're in for and why we've made the choices we've made. We hope that you will adopt these as campaign goals as well—these are goals we think you should aim for in the course of play.

**Accountability.** Typical gaming campaigns have the characters committing murder, burglary, and any number of other acts that most societies—even the societies in the campaigns themselves—would consider reprehensible. Yet there's usually some sort of dubious justification for almost any crime the characters might commit. Kill three people in a bus station? They had the devil's taint! Break into a mansion and steal valuable old books? Their owner was an evil sorcerer! Burn down a building full of expensive

### What is a Roleplaying Game? (John's Answer)

If you don't know, or you're just curious to see what I'd say, here's how I describe what a roleplaying game is. The analogy here comes courtesy of game designer Greg Stafford.

A roleplaying game is like *improvisational radio theater*.

It's *theater* because each player in the game portrays a single character, just as an actor on stage does. Each player creates his own character, and each time he plays, the character becomes more and more believable because of the time invested in portraying him. (Much as in a television series: the main characters in the first episode of the long-running comedy *Cheers* became a lot richer and more entertaining as the series went on, as the actors and writers got to know them better.) Also like theater, the game presents a story, rich with drama, mystery, excitement, and all those other things that the Greeks bequeathed to the western world through theater.

It's *radio* theater because unlike a stage play, the game's players don't walk around or use props, and there is no set. (Yes, there are exceptions, but let's keep this simple.) Typically, a roleplaying game is played around a table, which means that players mostly use their voices, faces, and gestures to portray their character. Instead of seeing a stage set with furniture, walls, and props, the locations and items in a roleplaying game story are described verbally and are often assumed to be there without being described. If a scene takes place in a warehouse, you don't need to be told that there are large crates, forklifts, and similar stuff. You can just get a simple description and move on.

It's *improvisational radio theater* because there is no script. Dialogue is made up on the spot, improvisationally, by the players. The story for the game will have been created, but it's a rough outline of events, not a moment-by-moment description like a script for a play or movie. The players all work together, through their characters, to both *follow* and *lead* the story. They follow it when events occur beyond their control—for instance, it could start raining, or someone the characters haven't met before could knock on their door—but most of the time they lead it, by making decisions and taking action to pursue their goals. No one knows for sure what's going to happen in the story of the game, and in particular the ending is very much up for grabs. The story is told improvisationally, which is both the major challenge and the core entertainment of roleplaying games.

Although the players only play one character each, there is a different kind of player. This player is like the director of your improvisational radio theater. He works out and presents the story, he plays the role of all the characters in the story besides the players' characters, and he guides the flow of the game. He also is responsible for judging the rules of the game, which are used to introduce an exciting random element to the story, and also to resolve what happens when characters come into some form of physical, magickal, or psychological conflict. This different kind of player is often known by a lot of different titles, including referee, narrator, game master, storyteller, dungeon master, and on and on. We're going to use game master—or just GM for short—but you can use whatever title you want.

If you've never played a roleplaying game before, it can be tough to learn on your own. The best way to learn is to find people who play roleplaying games and either watch them play for a while or, preferably, join in and play with them. Hobby shops often provide ways to meet up with other players, and many universities and schools have official groups that meet regularly to play roleplaying games.

equipment? It was a mind-control microwave laser that programmed people to assassinate politicians!

In the real world, people who follow this kind of logic wind up in asylums.

In the name of plausibility, we try to avoid these kinds of dubious rationales in UA. Your characters have free will, and choose their paths according to their personal beliefs and goals. If your character occasionally kills someone, it'll be up to you to justify why this is okay—and if you can't, the game's rules will penalize your character by hardening him to the notion of murder. If you're playing a sociopath, even unintentionally, then a sociopath is what your character will become. Your actions have consequences for your character.

**Big Goals.** While the reasons for your characters to initially get involved in the thick of things will vary widely, there are some high-level goals to work towards, goals that will let your characters have a real effect on a grand scale. (Whether this effect is positive or negative is up to you.) Characters—player characters and GM characters alike—have a chance to join a sort of collective consciousness and participate in the creation of a new reality. Reincarnation and karma work, but on a cosmic level rather than a personal one. If you play your cards right, you can eventually be an integral part of that process. You can actually help determine what the reality you play in will consist of. If your character chooses this path, the rewards can be great—but the risks rise commensurately. What you do in UA really matters to the world your character lives in, even if most of the teeming masses never realize it. You aren't just political opportunists, or crusaders against some nebulous evil. You could really make a difference on a cosmic scale. Of course, you'll have lots of competition—and not all of it will be full of goodwill towards humanity. Potentially, even your own characters might be numbered with the dark crowd, depending on the choices you make.

**Realism.** Pages and pages of rules for ballistics-based damage and a complete flowchart-governed sub-system for picking locks are just some of the realism-focused rules that you *won't* find in UA. We don't make any real effort at a simulative game system in terms of physics or human physical actions. Our rules are geared towards telling good stories, not towards simulating reality accurately. We *do*, however, make a real stab at *emotional realism*. UA has been designed from the ground up to focus on the emotional and mental states of your character. The choices you make have gameplay repercussions on your mental well-being, and your pas-

sions and fears have quantitative gameplay effects. Not only are these built into the game's rules, they're also built into the game's world: if you fail to hold on to your humanity and succumb to your obsessions, you're much less likely to achieve those Big Goals we just talked about.

(Incidentally, we have made one major concession to how the real world works: in UA it's possible for a reasonably skilled shooter to kill someone with a single shot of almost any gun. You've been warned.)

**Fun.** Sure, the preceding may make UA sound like a graduate student's thesis. But the point of roleplaying games is entertainment, and we've got it in spades. The setting is full of challenging conflict and engaging opportunity, and the rules are genuinely a blast. We fully understand that rolling dice is *fun*, and you'll get to roll a bunch of those polyhedral suckers in UA. You'll have way-cool opportunities to turn failures into triumph, to tweak your chances of success, and to just have a dandy time kicking butt and taking names. Your victories will be genuine and won't be watered-down by cheeseball, slapdash rationales and half-baked justifications. Your failures will be deeply felt and will spur you on to victory the next time around. Your characters will be people you care about, roles you enjoy portraying and that your fellow players will enjoy interacting with.

When we began designing UA, we wanted to make a game that would embody the best that roleplaying has to offer. We think we've succeeded, and we hope you'll agree.

## Three Views of Reality

Although we live in an objective reality—that is, there is a consistent order of existence beyond that which we humans perceive—we still perceive it subjectively, each from our own perspective and filtered through our limited senses and idiosyncratic understanding. However, humans are enough alike that we can summarize the ways in which characters in the game view their reality. Three summaries follow, each provided by a different character in the world of UA.

### Street-Level Reality

*Dirk Allen is a minor but long-term player in the occult underground. A washed-up fringe novelist with a cult following, Allen is*

## What is a Roleplaying Game? (Greg's Answer)

Personally, I'd call roleplaying games an attempt to get inside a story in a way that older forms of literature and entertainment (such as movies, novels, and short stories) do not allow. When you read *Paradise Lost*, you're a passive observer. When you watch *Casablanca*, you can't tell Ilsa Lund to pick Rick instead of Victor. In a roleplaying game we can finally satisfy the frustrated novelist, screenwriter, and actor that many of us have inside.

It's not exactly the same, however. With a novel, the writer controls the outcome and the reader gets the thrill of novelty, suspense, and surprise. A player in a roleplaying game keeps that pleasurable uncertainty, but in addition has some of the writer's power over the plot. Specifically, the player "writes" the actions and reactions of one specific character.

In order to keep the suspense, there has to be uncertainty. That's where the *game* element of a roleplaying game comes in. The uncertainty has to be genuine, not simulated; the suspense is badly cut if you know your character is going to succeed (or even just survive) no matter what he or she tries. The rules, the funny-shaped dice, and the mechanics governing the failure or success of an action are all in place to provide support for the story. There are games where the GM simply decides outcomes based on gut feelings, and they can be just as fun as any other type of game; but for a setting like this one, full of treachery, uncertainty, and unpredictable *weirdness*, a high degree of chaos is desirable.

also a **boozehound**, a magickal adept who works magick by drinking alcohol. He's a lifelong alcoholic, and his health is pretty much shot. His view of reality is based on a lifetime of hard choices and hard living, a life in which he never quite got the brass ring.

"There's some serious shit going down these days, friend. Sure, the **clockworkers** are still around from the old world, building their tick-tock creations of blood and gears and sending them lumbering about dark alleys to retrieve forgotten tomes of mystical lore. But that's old school. I'm talking about the **Invisible Clergy** and the **Sect of the Naked Goddess** and the **Flesh Mages** and freaking **Alex Abel** and his goddamn **New Inquisition** and all the rest.

"The occult underground ain't what it used to be.

"Used to be you'd hang out with creepy old ex-rabbis and talk about the secret names of God and that sort of thing, giving them smack in exchange for old scrolls that you discovered you couldn't translate anyway. Used to be the worst you'd face might be some tricked-out incantrix who could make you forget that she'd cut off your dick and eaten it for dinner, but that only happened to rank amateurs. Used to be that when you wanted information, you'd have to go shake down some moldy old professor and threaten to pull out a ouija board right then and there and graft an astral parasite on his ass.

"But those days are over, man. The Invisible Clergy sent all that old school shit packing, by and large, and cranked the volume on what was left. Big-money guys like Abel got into the scene and bought up those long-lost tomes of forbidden lore, only to find out they were just written by a bunch of crackpots and the info was generations stale. Once the Naked Goddess ascended right in

front of the video cameras and the bootlegs began getting around the underground, heavy hitters started coming out of the woodwork and making life tough for the rest of us.

"I used to make a good living at this stuff, man. I'd track down old legends, stake vampires, drive off poltergeists, collect rare occult texts, that whole Kolchak trip. Now, there's young turks who've come outta nowhere. Who needs the secrets of the Kabbala when you've got chaos magick? These guys are hungry and lean, and they smell the power that's been waiting for someone to grab this whole time. Me, I knew better—play with fire and you get burnt. But jerks like Alex Abel are funding their own private armies of occultists and duking it out on the astral plane and in the streets of every city. Who needs it?

"Sad to say, I do. A man's gotta pay the bills, you know what I'm saying? And if that means I'm shaking down wiccan priests and waxing Crowley-Grant-Lovecraft nuts and doing divinations with a Barbie doll, so-be-freaking-it. The times change and so does the occult underground, but one thing doesn't change: when people are this hungry for power, you better be the one with the fork."

## Global-Level Reality

*Alex Abel is the proverbial eccentric billionaire, and he's got a jones for the occult. Abel has founded what he calls the New Inquisition: dozens of hit men, legbreakers, ex-detectives, computer hackers, you name it. He picks people that are in deep trouble—occupational hazard, for most of them—and makes them a Foreign Legion deal. They come to work for the Inquisition, and Abel erases their entire life. No records, no warrants, no nothing. They get a new life, a fat paycheck, and a crash course in the occult. They do for him whatever he needs done, and they do it well. Mostly this consists of getting magickal items Abel wants, or digging up information, or putting the hurt on Abel's enemies—and Alex Abel has a lot of enemies. His view of reality is based on a lifetime of deal-making, of taking risks, of being savvy about the global marketplace.*

"There are a lot of fleas in this circus. They don't matter, even if they bite your legs now and then.

"The only people that matter are the people who have ascended—people who have left their physical bodies behind and joined a higher order of reality. They're known as the Invisible Clergy. They live up in the **statosphere**. That's slang for a rarefied level of existence where probabilities take individual form. You know how you and that special someone in high school were just destined to be together, but it never happened? The Clergy could have made it so—hell, they might have made it *not* so. They can manipulate probabilities as easily as you or I put our hands under a faucet and disrupt the flow of water.

"Skilled adepts can perceive the statosphere in certain ways. They can spot the turbulence in reality where the clergy have been mucking about with things. They can see what is likely to happen, and do their best to mold reality to their will. They can even work magick, the real hocus-pocus mojo.

"The only thing worth doing with your life, if you ask me, is trying to join the clergy. It's not easy. The thing is, you have to be *destined* to join them, in order to join them. But no one, not even the clergy, can tell who is destined and who isn't. That means you have to *act* like you're destined, all the time, and deep down just hope that you really are.



TONY MOSELEY



“You also have to claim a specialty. See, only people that really represent important **archetypes** of human existence in our modern world can join the Clergy. And there are a lot of slots to fill. All the easy ones are taken—love, war, hate, happiness, all that stuff. There are hundreds of slots, but the Clergy are very picky about who they take (or rather, destiny is). You’ve gotta represent something really important.

“If you meet someone else who has chosen to embody the same archetype as you, well hell—only one of you is going to make it, if either of you do. You better take them down, fast, before they take you down. Either that, or get a new archetype.

“If you don’t join the Clergy, or if you die before you do, you take your chances with everyone else. No one knows what happens when you die. But when you join the Clergy, hell, everyone in the know knows what happens then.

“You rule the world. You get to put your spin on reality itself.

“Now that’s a prize worth winning.

“By any means necessary.”

## Cosmic-Level Reality

*Daphnee Lee is the Imperatrix of the Sect of the Naked Goddess. The Naked Goddess is the name given to one of the everyday mortals who lucked into ascending to the Invisible Clergy. She was a porn star, and her ascension happened right in the middle of a taping session. It was caught on videotape, a first, and the bootlegs of the tape kicked off a new wave of occult activity. Daphnee understands the importance of synchronicity well enough that she’ll take even the most banal event as an important sign. Her view of reality is based on a keen understanding of the nature of the cosmos, and of the cosmic forces at work in our lives.*

“The cosmos is a living organism. **Reincarnation** and **karma** are real, but only on a cosmic level. That means that the cosmos is continually reborn from scratch (reincarnation) and that each new incarnation of the cosmos represents the life that the previous cosmos deserves (karma).

“These twin attributes are determined by the Invisible Clergy. The Clergy consists of a maximum of 333 human souls, all of whom have ascended from normal physical existence to a higher plane of existence. Each person that ascends disappears from our physical world. (This isn’t a euphemism for death—they literally disappear right in front of your eyes while still alive and well.) Each soul represents some fundamental archetype of our current incarnation of reality.

“When the cosmos begins a new incarnation, there are zero members of the Invisible Clergy. It is only as humans develop that some of them begin to represent primal forces, known as archetypes. The obvious archetypes—motherhood, fear, leadership—all occur very early on. Whenever a human fully represents an archetype that is representative of that incarnation of the cosmos, he ascends to the Invisible Clergy and is in place to adjudicate the nature of the *next* incarnation of the cosmos. In addition, the mere act of ascension triggers ripple effects among the remaining human reality.

“As the centuries roll on, more and more archetypal slots within the Invisible Clergy are filled. All told, there are only 333 slots available during any one incarnation of the cosmos. 333 is the sacred number of God, or the cosmos, or whatever you want to call it. When all 333 slots are filled with human souls that represent

the 333 primal archetypes of the current incarnation of Earth, the 333 souls merge into one collective **Godhead**. This godhead creates the new incarnation of the cosmos. The ranks of the Invisible Clergy once again drop to zero, and the cycle continues.

“Not all 333 archetypes are necessarily positive—this is where karma comes into play. If the cosmic incarnation has strong negative elements, such as intolerance, persecution, and lack of self-esteem, there will be archetypes representing these negative attributes. The stronger these attributes become, the more archetypes representing permutations of these attributes there will be—and the worse off the next reincarnation of the cosmos will be, likewise. We get the reality we deserve.

“**Entropy**—the natural tendency of reality to descend into a chaotic state—plays an important role here. The primal battle of the cosmos consists of entropy versus **order**. The twin processes of reincarnation and karma represent the force of order—they are organizing forces that work towards a collective goal. The ultimate goal of the cosmos is to be reincarnated into a higher state of being, much as individual humans attempt to ascend into the Invisible Clergy. (You can judge from our current reality and history just how far the cosmos is from ascending to a higher order.) In working towards this goal, the cosmos is attempting to overcome its natural tendency towards entropy. From our perspective, entropy manifests primarily in humanity’s chaotic and violent nature; the unwitting agents of this force seek to delay the cosmos from reincarnating again, or at least to degrade cosmic karma so that we get worse and worse realities each time. (This means that anyone making a serious bid for ascension into the Invisible Clergy will find himself opposed by strange people crawling out of the woodwork to stop him or to turn him towards darker paths.) Eventually, cosmic karma could become so bad that reality will collapse in on itself once and for all, surrendering to entropy.”

## What Do You Do?

Now that you’ve gotten a quick look at the world of UA, you’re probably curious about what happens in play. That is to say, what will your characters be doing? What kinds of adventures will you be having? If you’re a GM, what kinds of stories will you be telling?

We’ll get into the thick of the game’s setting and storylines later in this book, but for now, here are some quick scenes that might happen in your UA game. These should give you enough of the flavor and terminology of the game that the ensuing chapters will make sense.

*You’re working for Alex Abel’s New Inquisition. He sends your team to a remote mountain plateau in Chile where, it’s said, the members of the Invisible Clergy gather once a decade in physical form. He has a proposal for you to make . . .*

*. . . your group has pursued a flesh mage into the miles of tunnels beneath New York City. He flees into a weird grotto where a dozen homeless men are bowing before a statue of a long-ascended archetype: The Mother. The mage spins a magick and the flesh of the men flows together; they become a roiling mass of bone and skin and lumber towards you . . .*

*. . . the dining room of the clockworker’s house is full of dancers in strange costumes. They whirl about in wild circles, cre-*

ating and breaking patterns of incredible complexity and speed. No music plays. The dancers make no sound save for their feet on the hardwood floor, and a curious rhythmic, ticking sound that emanates from inside every one . . .

. . . the window shatters with the sound of a gunshot, and Magda cries out in pain as a blossom of blood appears on her abdomen. Harry pulls her down to the floor as the rest of you hit the deck. More shots smash through the glass, striking the wall behind where you were standing. You dare to peek over the windowsill. A fifteen-year-old girl is levitating outside the window, ten feet away and twelve stories off the ground, and just as you duck back down she pops off another shot with the .38 . . .

. . . you're not sure which way Boris ran after the priest exploded, but you've got to find him before the next spontaneous combustion occurs. As you stand on the street corner looking around, Zara cocks her head to one side. "Hear that radio?" The song A-Train is playing from a nearby window, slow and mournful. You both nod, and head for the nearest subway entrance. You catch Boris just before the doors close . . .

. . . on the private estate of the Mackinaw family, they're having a booze-soaked party that's swiftly turning into an orgy. Magda looks at you edgily. You know why she's worried. If this keeps up, they're in danger of unwittingly summoning the vengeful spirit of Jack Mackinaw, the decadent senator thirty years dead whose own brother murdered him—the same brother who is the only one that knows where Jack's body is buried. You need the hip flask Jack had on him when he died, or you're going to be in a world of hurt come the dawn. Just then, Jack's brother starts to claw his own eyes out . . .

. . . you're sitting around with Harry, a law-abiding computer programmer of your acquaintance, when the door breaks down and a bunch of guys in suits come barging in. They throw you both against the wall and start grabbing Harry's computer equipment. "Secret Service," the lead agent says. "We've got you nailed, hacker boy." Harry looks at you and shakes his head. You're both thinking the same thing: sometimes Entropy wears a badge . . .

. . . you're in your hotel room in Seattle. For the last six hours you've been having the most incredible sex of your life. You don't know the name of the woman you're with—she picked you up in the hotel bar—but she sure likes to talk dirty. Then you recognize what she's saying: dialogue from a cheesy porn flick you saw recently while doing research. No, really. A porn flick starring the Naked Goddess. That means—"Tsk, tsk, lover." She passes her hand over your face and suddenly you can't move. "I've got a good charge going now, thanks to you. Usually it doesn't take this long, but you aren't half so hot in the sack as you think. But that aside, you aren't going anywhere except in the trunk of my car . . ."

. . . Dirk Allen looks at the hip flask you retrieved from Mackinaw's unmarked grave out by his old hunting cabin. He gingerly unscrews the cap and gives it a sniff. "Balvenie," he says approvingly. "All right. It's a deal. Here's your friend's soul." Allen reaches into a cabinet and pulls out a crystal decanter with some sort of greenish liquid inside. You hold it up to the light, and for a moment an image of Zara's face crawls across the inside of the glass . . .



... the enforcer sprays a rough line of 9mm bullets across the wall as you duck around the corner just ahead of the shots. Breathing heavily and scared out of your wits, you catch sight of Jason, your entropomancer sidekick, lurking behind the enforcer. Jason makes a noisy charge at the man, who promptly spins around and pops a burst into Jason's abdomen. Jason buckles, drops, and bleeds, but then he forces a weird grin. "Thanks," he says in a pained voice, "I needed that." The enforcer's head explodes . . .

... Lydia is doing her performance routine on stage at the club. You've heard it about sixteen times and it hasn't gotten any better. But she's close to telling you what Eponymous is up to, and that's worth enduring even this agony. Then she starts to smolder, smoke rising from her skin, and you bang your head on the table slowly and methodically. Your eyes are closed, but you can hear the audience screaming as Lydia turns to ash in seconds. "Damn, damn, damn," you're muttering drunkenly. "Why do they have to keep exploding?" . . .

... Boris coughs up blood from the gunshot you delivered to him. "You think you've got me, don't you?" he asks raggedly. "You're wrong. I'm going to ascend now. I can feel it." You snort derisively. "Oh yeah? What's your archetype, sucker?" Boris smiles grimly. "The innocent man, killed for a 'higher cause'." Before your eyes, he vanishes.

## Oh, I Get It

Hopefully that's what you're saying. Simply put, you and your allies in the occult underground mix it up with good guys and bad guys alike, pursuing your goals and interfering whenever something rubs you the wrong way. But this deserves elaboration—you need to understand what lies behind every story. So, here are the cogwheels that crank the engine of play.

**Character-driven plots.** UA is all about people. You may encounter some monsters here and there, but both your opponents and your allies will almost all be fellow humans. The characters you interact with will have strong goals that they're pursuing, and they'll be making progress on those goals whether you're involved or not. The UA campaign is a complex web of character actions, some of which you'll stop, some of which you'll support, and some of which you'll never even notice. You aren't just reacting to GM characters, though. You'll have your own goals, and players will be expected to pursue those goals—which, of course, GM characters will work to stop or support. Good UA stories grow naturally out of characters in conflict, just like good fiction.

**A varied tone.** UA is a meld of a couple different genres, namely action and horror. You'll have Hollywood-style fight scenes one minute, and have your mental fuses blown by some atrocity the next. Threats can come in a wide variety of styles, and you won't know what to expect. Guys with guns? Vengeful spirits? Clockwork lions? Crazed sorcerers? A lot can happen in a UA game, and a lot of the fun comes from being surprised at what *does* happen.

**Fractal storytelling.** This is our term for the nature of UA stories. As you've read in "Three Views of Reality," people see the world in different ways. They're all correct—it's just that each view is both broader and deeper than the preceding one. Your stories can be street-level, with nothing going on that you can't see right in front of you. Your stories can be world-level, where you're dealing with entire factions competing with each other for the ultimate prize. Your stories can even be cosmic-level, where you try to join the Invisible Clergy yourself and change the world. Or a story's main thrust may matter only in the mind of one character. Any UA story you tell has ramifications on multiple levels, and "fractal storytelling" means that you can scurry up or down the reality-level ladder at any time. A street-level game where you're chasing some occultist down a dark alleyway might shift to world-level when he hands over the artifact that the agents of the House of Renunciation are seeking. A cosmic-level game might zoom down to street level when your ascended character tries to alter the probabilities of an assassination—which in turn kicks off a world-level storyline. Things are going on all around you all the time, and you can never be sure what consequences your actions will bring.

**Narrative structure.** When you start playing UA, you'll be picking from one of several narrative structures. These are essentially frameworks that explain how and why the player characters are working together, and they help to define what both your collective and personal goals are. You might be playing a team working for Alex Abel's New Inquisition. You might be an occult group, like the Sect of the Naked Goddess. You might be a loose association of friends and colleagues out to avenge someone's death. You might be supporting someone in her attempt to ascend. You might all be trying to get rich, or powerful, or both, just for the sake of doing so. The narrative structure you choose is something that affects every story you tell.

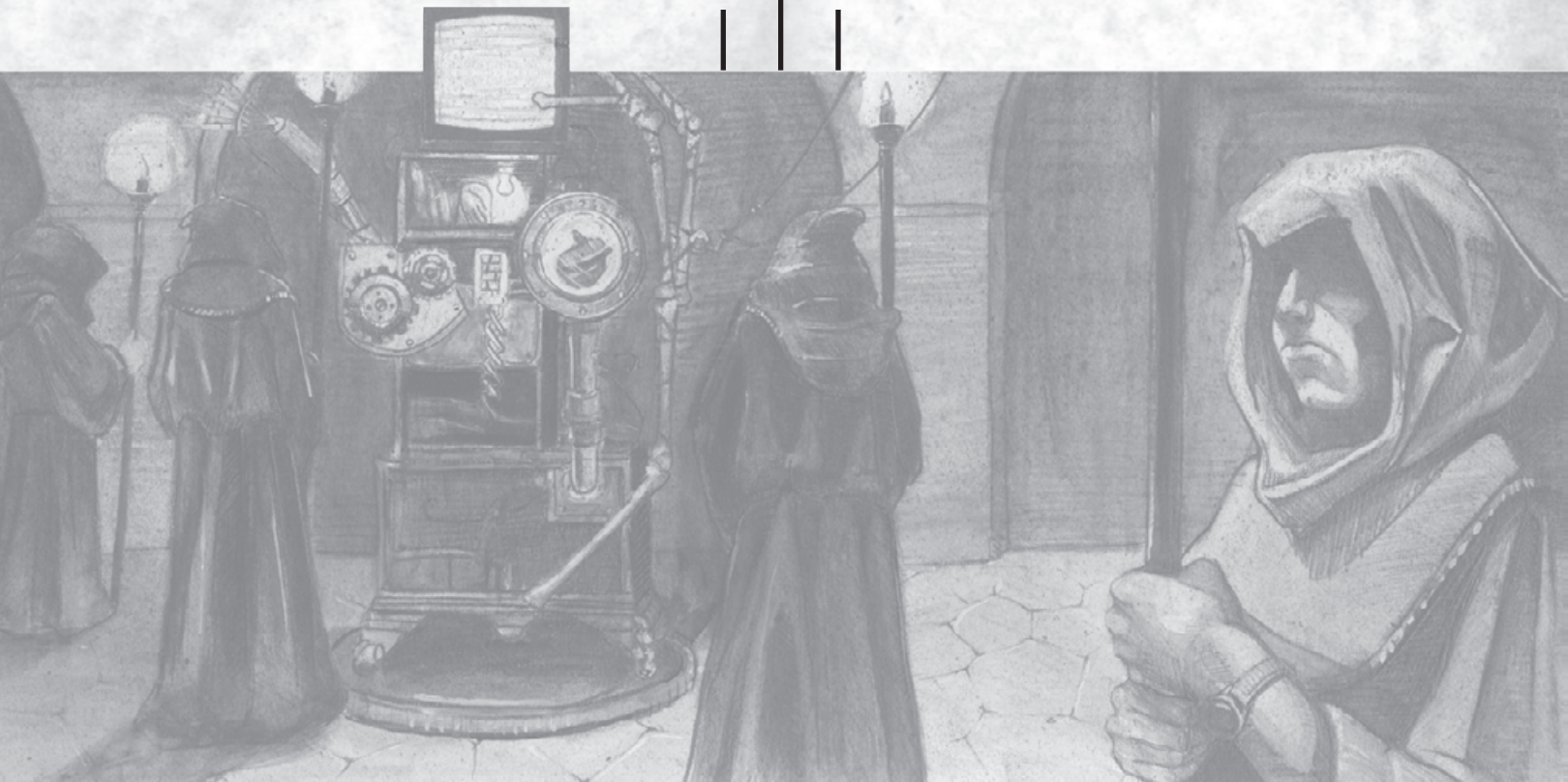
## Conclusion

We'll get more into UA stories later in this book, including guidelines for creating them and some sample stories you can make your own. Next up, though, we're going to take a closer look at the world of UA. After that, we'll cover the basic game mechanics and move on to character creation.

"THE DEWS DROP SLOWLY AND DREAMS GATHER: UNKNOWN SPEARS  
SUDDENLY HURTLE BEFORE MY DREAM-AWAKENED EYES,  
AND THEN THE CLASH OF FALLEN HORSEMEN AND THE CRIES  
OF UNKNOWN PERISHING ARMIES BEAT ABOUT MY EARS."

—W.B. YEATS, "THE VALLEY OF THE BLACK PIG"





*chapter two*  
*the occult*  
*underground*

**UNKNOWN  
ARMIES**



"THE HISTORY OF IDEAS IS THE HISTORY  
OF THE GRUDGES OF SOLITARY MEN."

—E.M. CIORAN

"FROM WHAT I'VE SEEN, THE 'OCCULT UNDERGROUND'  
IS LARGELY AN EXCUSE TO WEAR BLACK, SPEAK  
PORTENTOUSLY, AND SMOKE CLOVE CIGARETTES  
WITH LIKE-MINDED LUNATICS."

—B.D. DOVER





# LEGACY

**START** “What kind of name is ‘Renata Dakota?’  
“It’s my name, duh.”

Renata bit at the inside of her lip, thinking she should have given this guy a fake name. Or simply told him to go to hell. He was a scary-looking dude, no doubt about it. He wasn’t scary-big, like her dad. He was thin, needed a shave, *really* needed a shower. He had bad teeth and weird eyes; it was like they didn’t blink enough, or they weren’t pointing where you thought they were going.

He was scary-crazy, was what he was. His eyes were like that guy from the comet cult on television, or that other guy with the Nazi thing on his forehead.

“I’m Eugene LaRue,” he said, and held out a hand with too many veins and scabby, bitten nails. She didn’t take it, and didn’t say anything. She slipped her hand discreetly into her pocket, where she had a small canister of pepper spray on a keychain. She wished she was bold enough to look away from him, but she didn’t like the idea of turning her back on him.

*This is nuts, she thought. We’re on a crowded bus. What’s he gonna try? Nothing . . . but on the other hand, I’m stuck with him until we get to Atlanta.*

“So, how come you’re going to Atlanta?” he asked.  
“None of your goddamn business!”

He leaned back and raised his hands. “Hey, just making small talk, little lady. I see a young girl by herself on a bus, and . . .”

“And what? You figure, ‘She’ll be easy to pick up, strangle and leave in a ditch’? You probably think I’m a runaway, right? No one to take care of me or pick me up at the bus station? Well I’ve got news for you, buddy, my dad’s a U.S. Marine who eats guys like you for lunch, and if he even sees you talking to me he’ll, he’ll . . .”

“Eat me? Gee, it isn’t even lunch time.” He had a mean little smirk on his face, and suddenly he reminded Renata of Dale Carter, the teacher’s pet back in Romeoville, near Chicago. Dale had always smirked like that when he’d given the teacher a right answer. This guy had the same look—the same smartass, know-it-all look.

He turned away and stretched his legs into the aisle. She turned away too, looking out the window at the dark highway. The white lines dashed by like a morse code message that didn’t say anything. She hoped he wouldn’t watch her at the station, hoped he wouldn’t see that she *didn’t* have anyone waiting, didn’t even know for sure what she was going to do next.

Four days ago her parents had vanished. She’d come home from school and they’d gone—taken most of their clothes, closed their bank account, rented a trailer, and driven away without telling her anything, without leaving a note or a forwarding address or even a message on the answering machine.

# ONE

CHAPTER ILLUSTRATION BY THOMAS MANNING

**This chapter offers** a sampling of elements that define the world of *Unknown Armies*. These are the building blocks of UA stories, and comprise the occult underground that is the game's focus.

## What is the Occult Underground?

This is a catch-all term for the myriad forces, groups, and individuals operating unseen in our world, all of which have something in common: they know that magick works, and that there is a lot of power out there for those strong enough to grab it. The occult underground is not a single organization. It's more like a neighborhood—a very insular one—but a neighborhood whose terrain encompasses abstract ideas and beliefs as well as people and landscapes. It has no single geographic location, extending as it does all over the world. In general, however, pockets of its presence are mostly found in major cities of industrialized nations. Wherever enough people get together, some of them are bound to be into the occult.

The underground is comprised of three primary elements: those aforementioned forces, groups, and individuals. These elements are explored in the following sections. Each element is detailed in both its major and minor components.

## Major Forces

Forces are impersonal, abstract, motile principles: they are ideas with legs. Major forces are things intrinsic to reality itself—they express *the way things are*, cosmically.

## Matter

This is what we're all made of. Everything that exists is a form of matter. Rocks, trees, atoms, energy, popcorn, you name it. It's us. Some people think that matter is all an illusion, and that the cosmos is in fact a shared creation of all conscious beings; if so, we could hypothetically abandon the trappings of the cosmos and exist in some sort of pure state. Other people think that conscious beings are just an irrelevant by-product of matter's existence—lint in the cosmic dust trap. Who is right? You're not likely to find out.

The concept of matter itself is not so important. Sure, it's what we are—but so what? What matters about matter is that it is inherently conflicted. Matter *tends* to move towards a chaotic state. (Entropy.) Matter *desires* to move towards a systemic state. (Order.) It is this conflict that makes life so interesting.

## Entropy

Entropy is the natural tendency of matter to move towards a chaotic state. Entropy is responsible for the slow collapse of the cosmos in the aftermath of the big bang. Entropy functions at the most fundamental levels of physics, slowly breaking down systems into chaos.

Entropy has had a great effect on humans. We can thank entropy for medical problems such as cancer and Alzheimer's disease—but also for humanity's destructive urges and inability to realize the promise of systemic concepts such as social harmony and tolerance.

Entropy is not a bad guy in a black cloak cackling over a crystal ball. It is a primal force of the cosmos, always in motion but utterly lacking in consciousness. Still, when things suck you know what to blame.

## Order

Order is the natural desire of matter to move towards a systemic state. Order is responsible for the formation of galaxies, solar systems, planets, life, consciousness, and societies. Order functions at the most fundamental levels of physics, doing its best to organize matter into productive, efficient systems that grow and propagate.

Order has had a great effect on humans. We can thank order for our bodies and how well they function under most circumstances—but also for civilization, for love, for creativity, and all the other positive, unifying things we spend our time with.

Order is not a saintly guy with a flowing beard and a white robe peering down at us from heaven. It is a primal force of the cosmos, always in motion but utterly lacking in consciousness. Still, when everything comes together for you, you know what to thank.

## The Conflict

It is the inherent conflict between entropy and order that exists within matter itself—which is to say the cosmos itself—that makes things so interesting. Matter aspires towards order, but surrenders to chaos. The great test of the cosmos is whether its matter will ultimately embrace one or the other. If the cosmos embraces entropy, the cosmos will utterly cease to exist. If the cosmos embraces order, well, *something* will happen and it'll probably be pretty good.

This conflict isn't just something to talk about at cocktail parties. It's with you every moment of every day. You see, your body's cellular awareness of the entropic and systemic forces struggling on the atomic level filters up slowly through the central nervous system, affecting the way you think and act. Millions of years of evolution have made this awareness a part of every living thing. It is why we all have both chaotic and systemic tendencies built into our brains. Order builds societies; entropy brings war. Order sends you out in search of friends and lovers; entropy encourages you to betray them. Order puts you in stylish clothes; entropy makes you fall in a mud puddle. We are who we are because of this primal conflict, and yet we are also a part of that conflict. In the end, we may even be the ones who resolve it.

## The Cosmos

Given the preceding notes on the major forces of our world, and the conflict between them, we can now explain the critical aspects of the cosmos—that is, the way things work in our reality.

As described in "Three Views of Reality" on p. 5, our reality is governed by a group of archetypes. What are archetypes? As human society develops, certain ideas or social roles become increasingly important and well-known. The most important and primal of these are referred to as archetypes. Eventually, a single human being comes to embody a given archetype. When this occurs, the human in question ascends to a higher plane of incorporeal being. Collectively, these ascended humans are known as the Invisible Clergy. They dwell in a realm of pure energy known as the statosphere, where the probabilities that govern human existence can be directly manipulated. No human can enter the statosphere without ascending to join the Clergy.

There can be a maximum of 333 archetypes in the Clergy. At the dawn of humanity, there are no archetypes and the Clergy does not exist. But humans quickly ascend as the core actions that de-



fine us occur for the first time: love, war, tolerance, consumption, production, and so on. It doesn't take long—maybe a few centuries—for several dozen humans to ascend and form the core of the Clergy. As human history rolls on, more and more people ascend, and more and more archetypes join the Clergy.

At some point, the 333rd and final archetype joins the Clergy. When this happens, the universe dies. The archetypes of the Invisible Clergy merge into a single godhead, a cosmic being who then creates the next incarnation of the universe. Everything starts over, the Clergy is empty again, and on we go.

Each time this happens, the new incarnation of the universe is different from the last one. The new one reflects the particular set of archetypes that comprised the godhead last time around, and those archetypes in turn represent all that humanity was during that incarnation. If a given incarnation of humanity moves along more violent and warlike paths, for example, then the archetypes will reflect that and the next incarnation of the universe will be even *more* violent and warlike.

Still, free will is a major factor. Even in an incarnation of violence and war, humanity can make collective choices that lead down different paths, counteracting the influence of the last godhead and causing more peaceful archetypes to ascend this time around. We get the reality we deserve.

### The First and Last Man

In every incarnation of the universe, there is one human being who sees it all happen. He is always the very first human to exist, and is always the last to ascend to the Clergy. He is the only true immortal, and he remembers every incarnation the universe has ever experienced. When he ascends, he always represents the archetype of Karmic Reincarnation. If he were somehow to be killed or destroyed, the universe would not reincarnate—it would simply go on, until the end of time, and no one knows what would happen then. He represents the force of order, and his survival is critical to the ultimate fate of the cosmos. Fortunately, no one has ever been able to hurt him, let alone kill him. History knows him as the legendary figure, the Comte de Saint-Germain, but he has gone by a variety of names and genders across time and across incarnations.

There is no counterpart representing the force of entropy. Such direct, cohesive representation of entropy would in fact constitute a form of order. As a result, entropy has to work in the aggregate, like a disease, more or less at random.

### Avatars & Godwalkers

It is possible for humans to follow in the footsteps of an archetype that already has an ascended human representative among the Clergy. Such humans are known as **avatars**, and they strive to embody everything they can about their chosen archetype. As a result, they gain magickal powers.

Each archetype can have a single, special type of avatar, known as a **godwalker**. Godwalkers are the most powerful of avatars, and they embody the archetype nearly as well as the archetype's representative did when he was still human. There can only be one godwalker per archetype.

Avatars and godwalkers do not necessarily work with the blessing of the ascended humans that they emulate. If a godwalker comes to embody the archetype better than the existing Clergy

member did when he was a mortal, the godwalker ascends to the Clergy and the existing Clergy member is exiled. Such unfortunates enter a place known as the House of Renunciation (described later in this chapter) and emerge as anti-archetypes, opposing that which they formerly represented.

## Minor Forces

Minor forces are forces that owe their existence to human society. These forces include things like *justice*, *peace*, *tolerance*, *hatred*, and so on. We're only going to look at the minor forces that are of particular importance to the occult underground. Keep in mind that all of these forces, originating as they do within human society, are naturally under the umbrella of the major forces and are both representative of and influenced by those same major forces.

## Power

Power is the illusion of order. It makes other people do what you say, it helps you achieve your goals, and it makes you feel good about yourself. Power can be used in good ways, to be sure, but it is not pure order. Power *feels* like order, but may be much closer to entropy. Whenever you get a bunch of energy of any sort together and try to hold onto it (power, in other words), it's prone to blow up sooner or later and wreak havoc.

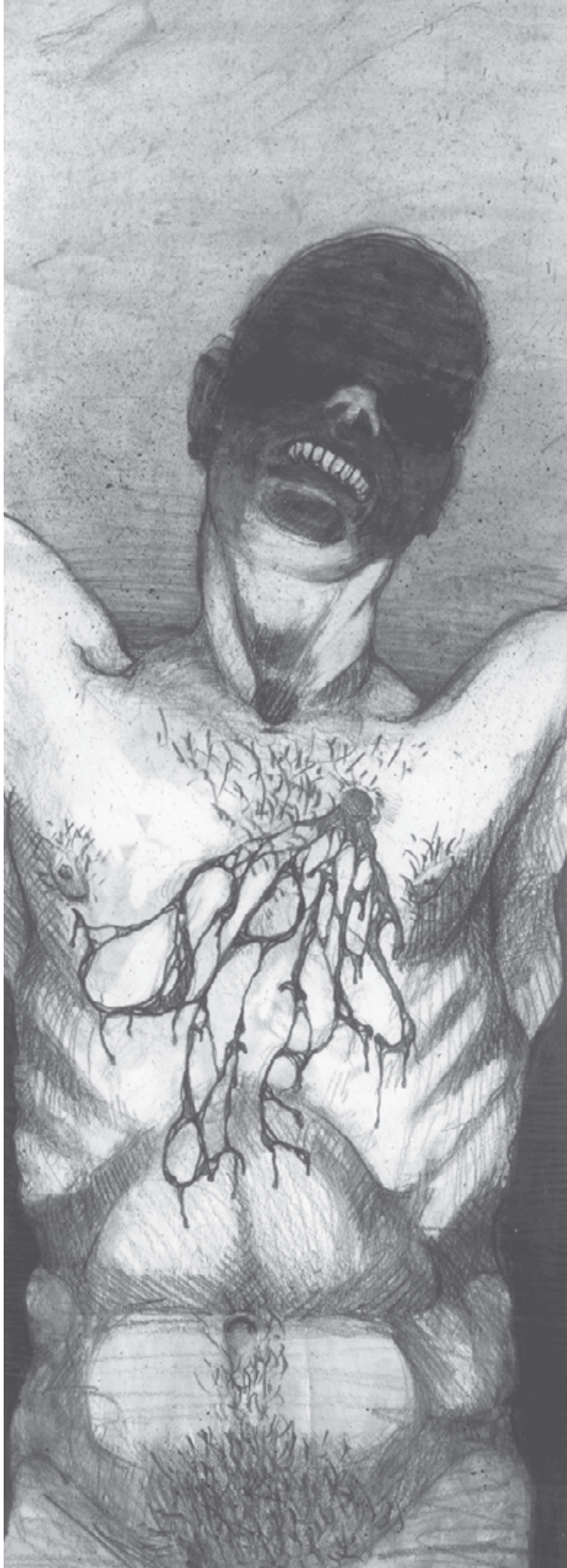
The occult underground is largely fixated on power. People gravitate towards magick because magick is all about the control of energy—yes, power. The power sought may be seemingly peaceable, such as the power to better understand yourself and to achieve a higher state of peaceful consciousness. The power sought may instead be clearly entropic, such as the power to hurt or to kill. But no matter what, the pursuit of power puts you into situations with lots of energy bouncing around, and sooner or later you're going to get hurt or you're going to hurt someone.

Magickal energy is especially enticing, because it is a form of power very close to the cosmos itself. Political power, physical power, emotional power—all these are forms of energy that arise from humanity. But magickal power is the real stuff, a cosmic form of power that stands higher than all the humanocentric forms.

## Secrecy

The occult underground is highly secretive about its activities for two big reasons. First and foremost, humanity has a history of persecuting those who explore the occult. Even today, when "occult" practices such as wicca are reasonably well accepted or at least tolerated in industrialized nations, there is still a kneejerk bigotry among many humans. In addition, the organizational division between daily life and religious life has kept religious/occult practices out of the workplace and the other places where we spend our days. Being open about your occult ties is just another mark against you as you try to make your way in the world. The second reason for secrecy, however, is less sympathetic: members of the occult underground know there is power there, and whether they know it or not, they are not eager to allow just anyone access to that power. They may say that the mainstream wouldn't understand, or that it's not something to be entered into lightly—and the "claws of the tiger" argument on page 111 certainly has a lot of historical evidence to back it up—but a largely unacknowledged component is





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certainly a desire to keep the power flowing primarily through the occult underground, under wraps and in the shadows.

## Violence

Although violence is a natural part of human existence—yes, you can thank entropy for that one—it is especially prevalent in the occult underground. It shouldn't be hard to see why. When you mix power and secrecy, you get passionate competition. From there, it's a short leap to violence.

Members of the occult underground are typically strong-willed, and they have clear goals that they are pursuing. Because they pursue those goals within a limited subset of civilization—the occult underground—it is much more likely that they will cross paths with other strong-willed individuals who have different or even conflicting goals.

The access to power afforded by the underground encourages violence because it encourages confidence to the point of arrogance, and supplies the tools needed to express arrogance in a violent fashion. The urge for secrecy heightens the survival instincts of those in the underground, making it more likely that they will turn to violence to solve their problems—since using other forms of conflict resolution (such as the police) may endanger the secrecy of the underground.

## The Unnatural

Because the occult underground is a nexus of power, secrecy, and violence, things don't work quite the same within its abstract neighborhood. The flow of magick—encouraged by magickal adepts and by the numerous non-adepts who nevertheless recognize magick when it's around—is strong in the underground, resulting in unnatural events and beings. “Unnatural” in this sense means things that are not believed to exist (or at least, not to occur) by the majority of humans in industrialized nations.

Manifestations of the unnatural vary widely. First off, the magickal abilities of adepts are a major example of the unnatural at work. The mere fact that a dipsomancer can make the environment attack you just by willing it to happen—well, that's pretty unnatural. Besides the abilities of adepts, however, there are a lot of other unnatural things.

Revenants, for example. Revenants are incorporeal obsessions, the blunt remnants of dead people whose obsessions were so strong that they ate their own souls at the moment of death so they could keep on obsessing. Revenants retain little of their memories or personalities, except as expressed through their obsessions. Revenants haunt houses, possess people, manipulate objects, appear as visions, and do many other unnatural things. Everything they do, however, is a manifestation of their obsession.

The unnatural is a big topic—big enough that it gets its own chapter. See page 142 for a complete look at this minor (but potent) force.

## Major Groups

There are many groups within the underground, varying widely in their goals and knowledge. The major groups are powerful, secretive, and sometimes violent. (Funny how that works, eh?) These groups have a chokehold on magickal power, and are intent on understanding the nature of the cosmos and exploiting it for their own



benefit. Some of them may be idealistic in their notions of exploitation, but that's still what it is. Just don't try to tell them that.

### The Invisible Clergy

Inscrutable and incorporeal, the Invisible Clergy are a group of humans who have transcended mortal existence and are no longer human; they are known instead as archetypes. The Clergy exist in an area of reality known as the statosphere, the region where the probabilities that arbitrate moment-to-moment reality flow like water and can be manipulated just as easily. They rarely communicate with humans directly or take any obvious action. They no longer have bodies or physical presences of any sort. Like silent angels, the Clergy simply observe, and occasionally tilt the balance of probability so that events cascade in a direction more to their liking. They don't just understand the mechanics of synchronicity; they *are* synchronicity. They are luck (good or bad) infused with consciousness. Their very nebulous nature and lack of direct representation—no one ever sees them, no one really knows which events are due to them and which aren't—has led some observers to dismiss their existence outright or else liken them to the weather: everyone talks about the Invisible Clergy, but no one can do anything about them. Except, perhaps, to join them—but few have any idea of how to do that.

### The House of Renunciation

The House is a magickal space in which people change, renouncing their past and embracing a diametrically opposed future. The House latches on to the most important aspect of your self-identity and inverts it, and you re-enter the mortal world as a truly changed person. Most unusual of all, the House's powers work on mortals and members of the Invisible Clergy alike.

You can't find the House on your own. You have to be brought there by an agent of the House, someone who either serves the House directly or who serves those who have been changed by it. Some agents live in the House permanently, sometimes venturing forth on strange errands. Others live in the mortal world, only occasionally visiting the House or working on its behalf. All agents of the House are greatly feared, since they are responsible for luring people in. Many people claim to be agents of the House, just to impress or frighten others. This cheaply common tactic has muddied the waters to the extent that you don't know if you're dealing with a true agent of the House until it's too late.

The location of the house is unknown. Entry occurs by means of a magickal process, not by physical travel (though there are some who dispute this, variously claiming that the house exists in London, or Jerusalem, or the Gobi Desert, or . . .).

When an agent of the House brings you there, one of two things happens. Either you undergo a reversal of self, or you are possessed by a former member of the Invisible Clergy who has already undergone a reversal and is waiting in the House for an appropriate host body to possess. Both possible outcomes are permanent. Once you've visited the House and been changed, the power of the House will never affect you again.

The most common result is personal reversal, largely because it's very, very rare to encounter an exiled Clergy member. Typical personal reversals might include: whore into nun, selfish into selfless, humble into arrogant, cruel into kind, and so on. The reversed

person will evaluate her entire life, and usually make sweeping changes that trickle down from the newly changed self.

Much more rarely, a member of the Invisible Clergy may be ejected from the fold, usually because another human has come to embody the archetype better than the existing Clergy member. When that happens, the Clergy member is immediately banished to the House of Renunciation, there to wait for a host body he can possess. (Meanwhile, the replacement member ascends and takes control of the archetype.) The displaced member must, from that day forward, take the role of a sort of anti-archetype, working to oppose everything his former archetype stands for. From the trickle of people that the agents bring to the house, the displaced Clergy member can only choose one who is already predisposed towards the new anti-archetype mindset; no other will do. (Note that displaced Clergy members enter the modern world with full knowledge of current cultures, technology, languages, and so forth—the retained benefits of their lost omniscience.)

No one, not even the agents, knows who runs the House. There is no organization to it, no leadership or hierarchy. Agents who work directly for the House are typically outcasts from society, and they seem to follow their own orders and inclinations rather than working towards some common goal. (Rivalries and even outright hostilities between agents are legendary.) Some members of the occult underground believe that the House is a sort of karmic repair shop, where people who have somehow escaped their proper karma are brought in and put to right. Others believe that there *is* a consistent agenda behind the choice of who is to be reversed, and that this agenda may favor a particular archetype, a major force such as entropy or order, or something else altogether.

### The Sect of the Naked Goddess

The Goddess is a porn star who experienced ascension into the Invisible Clergy during a videotaped sex act—she vanished right in front of the cameras. The videotape and bootlegs of it are now highly prized by occultists, as they represent the only visual evidence of an ascension into the Clergy. A sect of devoted followers (or lunatics, depending on who you ask) revere the Goddess as a demigod. They seek out all of her tapes, magazine appearances, high school yearbooks, *etc.*, and search out her words as clues to their own ascension so they can join her in the great beyond—it's a religion structured like a fan club. Her followers are adept at recognizing the skeins of synchronicity in daily life and following a trail of seemingly random, unconnected events that nevertheless lead them exactly where they want to go. The founder/leader of the sect is Daphnee Lee, a videographer who was on the set of the Goddess's infamous final porn shoot. She has been accused of fabricating the entire incident—including the videotape—right from the start, an accusation she hotly denies. Bootlegs of the tape have circulated through the occult underground, but the original was stolen several years ago and has not resurfaced. The sect numbers about three dozen people.

### The New Inquisition

Billionaire Alex Abel is on a mission: to make the world a better place to live. Sounds great—he's got the resources to do it, right? But Abel's definition of "a better place to live" is "a world where I call the shots." Abel has his heart in the right place—or used to, at

least—but years of cynical manipulation have left him increasingly hardened. His New Inquisition is an occult Foreign Legion: come to work for the New Inquisition and Abel will erase your entire life. Your enemies think you're dead, your traffic tickets gather dust, and your mail comes back with no forwarding address. His soldiers get a new identity, a good salary with benefits, and a crash course in the occult. They do what they're told: getting whatever Abel wants, digging up information, or putting the hurt on Abel's enemies—and there are lots of those. His troops are often underinformed, but they do the best they can and are almost always frighteningly competent at a variety of unusual skills. His New Inquisition consists of perhaps a hundred people altogether.

## The True Order of Saint-Germain

In 1978, this international, violent, extremist religious sect broke away from the "Iam" Temple of Saint-Germain—also an international, violent, extremist religious sect—because the "Iam" Temple wasn't violent or extreme *enough*. The True Order claims to serve the Comte de Saint-Germain, a notorious historical figure who, if scattered accounts are true, lived for several hundred years (or more) and was an exceptional magickal adept. The True Order numbers perhaps two hundred people, spread among twelve congregations in America (Austin, Seattle, New York, and Miami), Canada (Vancouver), Britain (London, Manchester), Germany (Frankfurt, Berlin), South Africa (Johannesburg), Japan (Tokyo), and India (New Delhi).

In a nutshell, they are an apocalyptic cult believing that the world will end in the next two decades and that it is their holy mission to eradicate as many of their enemies as possible before it's too late. Their chosen enemies include the Vatican, the World Bank, the United Nations, the Yakuza, and anyone who disputes their beliefs regarding Saint-Germain's immortality, his magickal powers, his role as the bringer of a new age, and on and on. In the past twenty years, they have been unofficially credited (but never charged) with twenty-seven murders in eight countries, including the deaths of three Catholic priests. Primarily, however, they are suspected of accumulating substantial amounts of illegal firearms and other munitions in preparation for a massive and violent purge of their enemies sometime before their predicted apocalypse. For the past decade, members of the True Order have been clandestinely infiltrating the occult underground; allegedly, they are very quietly trying to find the still-living (?) Comte de Saint-Germain who is supposed to resurface when the end times draw near.

## Mak Attax

Youthful, arrogant, and idealistic, the members of Mak Attax are sick of magick being a secret, mysterious force. Their goal is simple: make magick mainstream. They all claim to be adepts (though their schools of magick vary) and they use their powers to add small moments of magick to the lives of ordinary people—the sorts of ordinary people they meet at work each day. Members of Mak Attax live all over the United States, but every single one of them is an employee of the nation's largest burger-and-fries franchise. They run cash registers, make milkshakes, flip burgers, and ask if you'd like an apple pie with that. If they can, they'll bless you with a little nugget of magickal power, a sort of time-bomb that will lead to a moment of small magick later in your day. (This ability is apparent-

ly unique to Mak Attax initiates.) Mak Attax believe that by subverting from within, by channeling magick through the biggest force for bland consumer acceptance ever known, they can accelerate the flow of magick into the mainstream. It's unclear how many members Mak Attax has, since the ranks are swollen with hip fakes just along for the ride (their private, encrypted email discussion list has almost four hundred members). All members, however, are encouraged to get jobs at very specific locations of the fast-food franchise. The founders of Mak Attax have drawn up a magickal map of America with ley lines and other important metaphysical features marked, and noted where these intersect with their employer's restaurants; those are the restaurants they target for their magickal, minimum-wage infiltrators.

Many within the occult underground would like to dismiss Mak Attax's up-with-people efforts, but it's an experiment on such an unprecedentedly grand scale that no one can say for sure just how successful it could become. Regardless, however, Mak Attax members are known for being the sort of naive, trusting, cheerful people who are ripe for manipulation and exploitation by the cynical, predatory elements within the occult underground—a handful of dreadful incidents led to the current level of secrecy maintained by Mak Attax's anonymous leaders.

## Minor Groups

There are tens of thousands of minor groups in the occult underground. The vast majority of them have no real part to play and don't really understand the magnitude of what is going on, but they



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can serve as entry points for more dedicated individuals. This section presents both general types and specific examples of minor groups.

### Types of Minor Groups

There are three general types of minor groups: Clued-In Magick Cabals, Clueless Magick Cabals, and Anti-Magick Cabals. Each type is a sort of template or set of guidelines for you to create your own groups from. A sample group follows each type.

#### Clued-In Magick Cabals

These are groups of people who are deep into the occult underground and who include some that can successfully practice magick. Their understanding of the underground may be very narrow, or very flawed, but they've got their foot in the door. Examples of clued-in magick cabals that have attained major-group status include Mak Attax and the Sect of the Naked Goddess. They typically have a very particular agenda and set of beliefs that colors their understanding of and modulates their participation in the occult underground, much like the different agendas and sets of beliefs among the many denominations of the Christian church.

#### The Sleepers

The story of the Claws of the Tiger (see page 111) is a popular one in the occult underground. The most powerful adepts fear nothing—except a torch-bearing mob of mere humans. Most members of the occult underground take the threat of public exposure quite seriously. Consequently, the Sleepers were formed to keep the tiger of public scrutiny nice and drowsy.

The Sleepers come from a variety of magick schools, and their self-appointed mission is to find adepts who are in danger of providing proof of magick's existence to the world at large. Then they kill them in nice, quiet ways.

Some magick cabals are pleased with the Sleepers. Not only do they keep the practice of magick marginally safer by preventing interference from nosy normals, they tend to target those powerful individuals that make other adepts nervous. Others regard them as a kind of magical Ku Klux Klan, handing out murderous judgment on anyone who catches their attention. Still others claim that the Sleepers don't even exist.

For every purported fact known about the Sleepers, there are a dozen rumors. Some say they were founded by an adept who fears the return of the Spanish Inquisition—because she lived through it. Others claim they're a myth, used by some unknown party as a cover for their own agenda. Still others say they operate like a secret society; their members are all highly placed in normal magick cabals. If they spot anything that might wake the tiger, they're ready to mobilize and arrange a "death by natural causes."

As with so much in the occult underground, no one really knows.

#### Clueless Magick Cabals

These are groups of people who, while into the occult underground in principle, have no clue about what is really going on and cannot practice any of the known schools of magick. The vast majority of wiccan/pagan/thelemic/atlantean/space brothers/satanic/you-name-it groups around the world fall under this category. Any such cabal is

certainly on the right track and can serve as an entry route into the underground. Typically, these cabals are harmlessly satisfied with their approach to life and aren't on some mad quest for power—exceptions exist, such as the the True Order of Saint-Germain, which is a clueless magick cabal granted major-group status because of the size and goals of their membership. These are the groups closest to the mainstream, the ones who are usually the first targets of anti-magick cabals (described next) because they are the most visible and the most open. Broadly defined, the designation of "clueless magick cabal" could be applied to any congregation within Christianity or Judaism or Islam or Buddhism or any other mainstream religion. Note that "clueless" does not mean "pointless"—these groups deliver what their members want, by and large. The designation "clueless" refers to their lack of understanding in regards to the occult underground, the Invisible Clergy, and so forth.

#### Satan's Chosen Temple

A fine example of a clueless magick cabal, the self-styled "Satan's Chosen Temple" is actually a gang of a dozen or so dimbulb teenagers in upstate New York who had nothing better to do than dress in black, wear pentagrams, listen to "Satanic" heavy-metal music and waste their time with ouija boards. Like countless similar boneheads throughout America, they probably would have gotten bored eventually if one of their number hadn't actually succeeded in piercing the veil and calling up a demon.

(Demons are described on p. 148; you should understand that the term "demon" refers to any soul in the afterlife who has not passed on to some final reward but instead desires to live as a mortal again. Happy, healthy souls move on to their reward; the rest linger and cause trouble for those who summon them.)

Judy Bradie was the "Satanist" in question and she was astonished to find herself a helpless passenger as her body ran out of the house and dropped \$60 on excruciatingly hot Mexican food (something Judy normally loathed). To her credit, she kept her wits about her and managed to retake her body while the demon possessing her was distracted by puking up quarts of half-digested *gringo*-killers. She demanded to know which "spirit of the abyss" had possessed her. The demon was happy to play along and pretended to be "Gazadrel . . . uh, lord of gluttony." The self-christened Gazadrel then offered to teach Judy how to call up other demons whenever she wanted in exchange for the right to occasionally possess Judy's body and taste mortal life again. Judy jumped at the chance, as long as the other demons she summoned could only possess other people. Gazadrel was cool with it.

That's how Judy Bradie became the high priestess of Satan's Chosen Temple. Gazadrel (actually the soul of a troubled, but not violent, woman named Lisa Cisneros) taught her how to call up demons and put them in the bodies of willing participants. Pretty soon, Judy was busy brokering deals between her teenage chums and the spirits of the departed. The kids agree to host a demon for a day in exchange for promises of "Satan's favor." Most of her teenaged hosts are willing to give up their volition for short periods of time just because it's *cool*, but Judy has a slightly more sophisticated agenda. She's figured out all on her own how to exorcise demons, which gives her leverage with them. (She uses a cross and stolen holy water; actually it's just her own innate mystic potential and force of will, but regardless, it works.) She can now bring them to the world of the living and send them away.

The demons recognize that going along with her gets them bodies with a minimum of fuss, while trying to cross her gets their joyride license revoked.

Judy really wants what every slightly disturbed nineteen-year-old girl wants: magickal powers, her own place to live, cool clothes, a lot of friends, and an easy way to piss off her parents. Accordingly, her most frequent demand of the “demons” she summons is money without hassles. She’s had to cut off a few demonic liquor-store robbers, but eventually she got hold of a demon calling itself “Mammon” who promised her lots of cash if she’d just set him up with a string of young girls. Several of Judy’s teeny-bopper Satanist friends were willing to have sex with a demon (“*Of course . . . my dark master . . . will reward you . . . in the end times . . . faster . . . that’s it . . .*”), and “Mammon” quickly started fixing horse races for Judy to bet on. (Horses, like most animals, can be spooked by possessed humans; a little selective spooking ensured a winner every time.)

Judy now calls herself “Rebecca DeGhoule” (pronounced DAY-goo-WELL). She rents a ramshackle house where her buddies crash, party, listen to Marilyn Manson, and “worship the devil.” She also has a stable of demons she can contact and something of a schedule of rates for services rendered.

That’s not to say there haven’t been problems. Judy’s demons frequently pretend to be each other in order to get extra joyrides. A few of her demons have pretty disturbing tastes. Most importantly, two members of the Temple simply took off once they were possessed and she hasn’t seen them again—except when one turned up on *America’s Most Wanted* as a spree-killer suspect.

“Rebecca DeGhoule” is riding high. She thinks she’s got Satan on her side and that nothing can touch her. She has no clue that there *is* no Satan, and that her “demons” are just a bunch of misfit souls using her to satisfy their personal needs for mortal hosts. So far, she’s been very lucky. If the wrong people—on this side of the veil or the other side—notice her and clue in to her power and what she’s doing, she and her friends are going to be in *big* trouble.

## Anti-Magick Cabals

These are groups of people on the outside looking in, and they don’t like what they see. Anti-magick cabals know that there is an occult underground, but their understanding of it varies widely. Your basic book-burning reactionary fundamentalist groups who see Satan in every rock album are anti-magick cabals, even though they have no understanding of what they’re ranting about. Alex Abel’s *New Inquisition* could *almost* be considered an anti-magick cabal, since Abel would generally like it if no one had access to magick except himself. Other anti-magick cabals might include a government task force investigating the occult, a television news program that deals with the paranormal, or your local Parent-Teacher Association who has been spooked by the latest Ozzy Osborne comeback tour.

## The Order of Saint Cecil

Some people claim that every Catholic diocese has an exorcist on call twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year. Not many believe it, not in this day and age. It’s ridiculous to imagine a priest sitting around the rectory with nothing to do but wait for a call about a possession and maybe practice his vampire-staking technique. Es-

pecially when you consider the declining numbers of men entering the Catholic clergy every year; the Catholic Church doesn’t have the manpower, right?

Actually, that *is* right. There aren’t enough exorcists for every diocese to have one. However, every bishop has a number he can call, and a promise that if he calls it, a team of “experts” will arrive within twenty-four hours. These experts are members of the Order of Saint Cecil.

You won’t find the story of Saint Cecil and the Moor in any history outside of the Vatican’s most secret libraries. Pope Urban V believed that if the kings of Europe had final proof of the power of Moorish sorcery, they would become less likely to support another Crusade. Instead, he founded a special order of monks to covertly seek and suppress the powers of magick, and they were named after the martyr who had brought the Church true knowledge of magick—and paid with his life.

While the Inquisition was the public face of the search for witchcraft and heresy, the Order of Saint Cecil investigated those who were normally above suspicion: princes, priests, and even some members of the Inquisition itself were quietly pursued and dealt with by the monks of Saint Cecil.

Time passed, the world changed, but the need to protect it remained. Now the monks of Saint Cecil are as highly trained as any SAS operative or FBI agent. They put on the armor of faith every morning—followed by the armor of Kevlar. Well-funded, well-armed, and well-trained, the monks of Saint Cecil are completely fearless. There is no room in the order for doubt and hesitation. Each member is willing to give up his own life to keep the world safe from magick, and they’re equally willing to give up anyone else’s life as well.

## Major Individuals

Some people in the occult underground are just so darned important that they deserve discussion. These are mostly the movers and the shakers, but we also include the little people who are important just because they’ve been around for so long. They rub shoulders with the movers and shakers and often play a role in their plans, but they aren’t going to take over the world.

## Comte de Saint-Germain

A legendary figure from world history, the Comte de Saint-Germain popped up in the royal courts of Europe numerous times over several hundred years following the middle ages. Allegedly an adept of substantial power and apparently immortal, the Comte de Saint-Germain has not been knowingly seen (or at least, identified) in almost two hundred years. Most adepts consider him a legend, no more real than Bigfoot or the golden discs of the Mormon church. They’re dead wrong. The Comte de Saint-Germain is the only true immortal human being, and he is very much alive. His is a critical role: every time the cosmos reincarnates and Earth reforms, Saint-Germain is always the very first human being. He watches the whole of human history from the sidelines, mucking about with things when he feels like it. Eventually, when the current incarnation of the cosmos draws to an apocalyptic close, Saint-Germain is the last human left on Earth. He is always the 333rd archetype to ascend, and so he is always the one who completes the godhead and forges the deity that creates the next cos-



mos. If Saint-Germain could somehow be destroyed, the cosmos would never reincarnate and entropy would triumph over all creation. Of course, no one has ever been able to scratch so much as a hair on his head—but that wouldn't stop people from trying whenever he pops up again. Many have claimed to worship him over the years, most recently the True Order of Saint-Germain (p. 17); the real Saint-Germain usually has little or nothing to do with such people.

### Alex Abel

To the world at large, Alex Abel is the embodiment of the black American dream. Born in a lower-class Chicago housing project, he shot through school like a bullet and got his bachelor's degree in business when he was 19. Years of hard-won success followed, and by his early thirties he was a billionaire financier and real-estate mogul, investing in a blinding array of enterprises and rarely losing a dime. Luck was with him—Abel had an instinctive, unconscious awareness of the statusphere. Somewhere along the way, Abel decided to use his success and his no-nonsense sensibility to make the world a better place. His business contacts got him access to the world of organized crime, and there he found professional killers to do his bidding in exchange for miniscule (to him) sums of money. He directed them on a sporadic campaign of violence against targets he personally chose, starting with street-level scumbags (rapists, child abusers) whose crimes irked him in some way, then moving up to the worlds of corporations and politics where corruption held sway, and eventually global terrorism. The bodies mounted. Along the way he adopted more subtle methods, such as extortion and blackmail. He hired a staff of detectives, journalists, researchers, accountants, burglars, and others to carry out his plan to improve society by rooting out the bad apples. Eventually, he learned of the occult underground and shifted his focus. Abel has become obsessed with the power offered by magick, and has turned his efforts entirely towards gathering magickal power and putting roadblocks in the paths of his competitors. Abel's ultimate goal at this point is unknown. He lives and works in Seattle.

### Eponymous

Alex Abel doesn't extort, hurt, or kill people himself—that's what he's got Eponymous for. Eponymous used to have a name and a life that he no longer has to worry about, thanks to Alex; most rumors credit him with being a hit man for organized crime before something went wrong and he took Alex's Foreign-Legion deal. He's good with a gun, doesn't mind gouging out someone's eyes to get them to talk, and is your basic cynical hardcase badass. He's not an inherently evil or cruel man; he's just very hardened to violence and does what it takes to carry out his assignments. Eponymous didn't know jack about the occult before Abel recruited him, but he's learned a lot in the six months he's been with the Inquisition. He thinks Abel is a stone-cold freak, but doesn't care—he's doing what he's good at, and he's getting paid well to do it. If that means he's duking it out with sorcerers and plugging bullets into magical clockwork automatons instead of running drugs and kacking stool pigeons, well, life goes on. Eponymous has swiftly become Alex's favorite operative within the New Inquisition, and his name is becoming a legend in the occult underground.

### Daphnee Lee

Daphnee is the Imperatrix of the Sect of the Naked Goddess, thank you very much, and don't you forget it. She was a videographer in the porn studio the day the Naked Goddess ascended, and she saw it first-hand. It changed her life, and she's devoted herself to serving the Goddess. Of course, the Goddess has never contacted Daphnee—but that's the way these things go. Most people consider Daphnee's cult to be a bunch of rank amateurs, but the funny thing about synchronicity patterns is that even rank amateurs can end up in the right place at the right time. No matter the circumstances, when something heavy goes down there's a good chance that Daphnee and her crew will be involved for the most unlikely of reasons. Daphnee is turning into an adept of no mean skill, and her followers are becoming skilled at using pornomancy to get what they want from people. Daphnee understands the importance of synchronicity well enough that she'll take even the most banal event as a sign to do something; usually she's right, and she's becoming a major player as a result. Daphnee and the majority of her followers live in Chicago.

### Dirk Allen

Allen is an aging, dissipated writer with a small following and a lifetime of bad drugs, bad marriages, and bad choices. He's a boozehound, someone who draws magickal power from getting drunk. Allen has been a boozier for most of his life and he can work some serious magick if he's sufficiently drunk. His goals are muddled at best. A hardcore alcoholic, he's not sure if he pursues booze for the sake of power, or power for the sake of booze. Either way, he's a mean old bastard. At present he's on the trail of life-restoring magicks, as his health is so shot from a lifetime of hard drinking that he'll be in the grave inside a year without serious help. Going sober and getting medical treatment, of course, is out of the question. He's a minor player, but he has tons of connections and has been in the underground for decades. He has homes or apartments in New York, Seattle, and Austin. Most tolerate him out of a mix of fear and respect, much the way the glitterati of an earlier generation tolerated Truman Capote in their social circles; few understand the degree of ruthlessness that Allen is capable of, however. One individual who is fully aware of Allen's moral lapses is the Freak, who holds a grudge from way back. No one's sure what Allen did to piss off someone who's a strong contender for Scariest Bastard on the Planet, including Allen himself. He's done dirt on a lot of people in his long past, any one of whom might have become the Freak.

### Derek Jackson

The current leader of Mak Attax is a mechanical engineering student in the graduate program at the University of Missouri at Rolla. He's a friendly, unassuming guy who (*very*) secretly leads the four hundred or so members of Mak Attax. Derek maintains the encrypted email discussion list that is the core of the cabal, and directs new members (always referrals) to appropriate fast-food franchises in their areas. The founder and former leader of the cabal, a woman named Janet Kumyar, disappeared from her home following a violent magickal altercation with an unknown assailant and has never been seen again. Her disappearance, and the occa-

sional predations visited upon naive members of the cabal, led Derek to graft some heavy-duty layers of secrecy onto the cabal to protect the identities of everyone involved, including himself. Derek has little interest in what the occult underground is up to, preferring to concentrate his cabal's energies on pumping magickal energy into the massive flow of power that passes through the nation's biggest fast-food franchise corporation and into the lives of the American people. Despite his lack of interest in events outside of his agenda, his followers are always getting mixed up in one sticky situation or another. He spends a lot of his time putting out fires, trying to keep his charges safe and anonymous. It's quite possible that events could lead him to change Mak Attax's goals to something a little more direct; if so, it would make him a force to be reckoned with.

## Lili Morgan

Lili is a reporter for *The Mama Janson News*, a yuppie-left monthly magazine with an upper-class readership and lower-class sympathies. She travels all over the country on assignment, and is known as an ace reporter; she occasionally does high-profile interviews on National Public Radio. Her true allegiance, however, lies far beyond the gentrified left. Lili is an agent of the House of Renunciation. She first entered the house at the age of thirty, twenty-plus years ago. At that time she was a youthful White House aide to Richard Nixon, and the product of six generations of old-money Republicans from Connecticut. When a handsome stranger promised to blow her mind, she didn't know what she was getting into. Walking away from the House, she turned her back on her family and her politics and got into journalism. Since then, she has used her mystical connection to the House to effect the transformations of more than a dozen people—politicians, captains of industry, despots, and so forth—by leading them to the House. Rumors about her inside the beltway are legion, including the allegation that she was Deep Throat, the White House insider who provided the clandestine scoop on Nixon's misdeeds to *Washington Post* reporters Woodward & Bernstein. She avoids contact with the occult underground as much as she can, preferring to use her status to further her goals in the world at large. However, her ties with the underground are deep (if a bit dated) and she has a journalist's nose for big events. If something is going down in the underground, odds are she'll hear about it.

## Randy Douglas

A lifelong resident of Miami, Randy is the head of the True Order of Saint-Germain (p. 17). The vast majority of his actions and plans have little or nothing to do with the occult underground; Randy is first and foremost a political and social extremist, staunchly anti-government and very paranoid. He and his staff have enough to do just making arms purchases, researching fertilizer bombs and nerve gas manufacturing, and all sorts of other, ugly, solutions to the perceived woes of the world, without spending their time screwing around in the occult underground. But—but. Randy believes that the end of the world is less than two decades away, and if that's the case, he thinks it's high time for the immortal Comte de Saint-Germain (discussed earlier in this section) to pop up again. As a result, he's had a few handfuls of people worming their way into the occult underground for the last ten years, trying to keep their ears

perked for tales of a man who might be Saint-Germain. Randy's agents could be anywhere, or anyone. They are fiercely dedicated to their cause, and sufficiently sociopathic that they can deftly blend into any group. Randy's interest in Saint-Germain is simple: he wants to show the Comte that the True Order lives up to its name, and has been doing the Comte's good work in the world. Privately, Randy has a second interest: if Saint-Germain should repudiate the True Order, the man must die. Randy is no fool—he knows he has no special mandate to justify his hate crimes. He's hoping that Saint-Germain will grant such a mandate, or will at least die quietly and leave Randy's rule unchallenged. Randy is a ruthless and violent man who genuinely believes that the end of the world is at hand and he's got nothing to lose. His two hundred followers are not much different, though a challenge to Randy's authority by Saint-Germain could shake them up. Short of that, however, with his followers behind him Randy is one of the most dangerous men in the country.

## The Freak

No one's all that sure about the Freak. Some don't even believe in it, which is probably just fine with the Freak. However, those who have the motivation and power to track such things—and the skills to stay alive while doing so—generally agree on the following points:

- The Freak is a very powerful, skilled, and above all, *dangerous* fleshworker.
- It can change its gender and appearance at will. One day it might look like Mike Tyson, and the next, Michelle Pfeiffer.
- Whatever its form, it has a raspy voice. It's often accompanied by a very quiet jingling sound.
- It moves around a lot, but seems to live (some would say "make its lair") in Chicago.
- People who try to find out much more than that usually die dramatically.
- He, she, or it hates Dirk Allen but doesn't want to kill him; the Freak finds it much more satisfying to sit back and watch Allen kill himself.

No one's quite sure what the Freak is up to. Not too long ago, one of Alex Abel's six-person Hit Squads was killed by the Freak. Since that time the billionaire and the fleshworker seem to have reached some kind of truce, based largely on the realization that while neither could be *sure* of killing the other, both can be sure that the other would provide massive headaches if an assassination was attempted.

The soft jingling comes from a series of slender metal chains strung *through* the Freak's torso at various points. Any time it needs a charge, all it has to do is rip some chains out of its multiple piercings. No matter what shape it changes to, the chains remain.

What makes the Freak doubly dangerous is that it's an Avatar in addition to being a powerful adept. Its Archetype is one of the most difficult but powerful ones: it embodies the *Mystic Hermaphrodite*.

## Minor Individuals

There are hundreds of thousands of people who could be said to comprise the occult underground. Like the minor groups, the vast



## Types as Slang

Within the occult underground, the names for the types of minor individuals described here are also used as slang. Slang can be a subtle thing, so a few guidelines on its use in the underground are in order.

When referring to anyone in the underground whose status and abilities you are unsure of, the default term is “duke.” Everyone you meet in the underground is a duke, until you know more about them. “I was at the club and Derek was there with some duke.”

When you know more about a duke, you can employ more-accurate slang. “Derek’s friend? Aw man, he ain’t no duke, he’s in with those Saint-Germain freaks. He’s a peon.”

Adepts and enforcers get their own slang because they’re noteworthy. The reasons should be self-evident: adepts can use magick, so you pay attention to them; enforcers can hurt you, so you pay attention to them, too. Nobody else gets any special slang because of what they do. “Hey, I tangled with that Saint-Germain peon last year. He’s an enforcer, man. Bad news.”

Among adepts, of course, each school of magick has a slang name for its practitioners that might or might not be used. Adepts of dipsomancy, for example, are called boozehounds. “This adept duke was hanging around there.” “What’s his game?” “He’s one of them freaking boozehounds.”

The important thing to note here is that these slang terms are used for minor individuals. People with reputations are simply referred to by their names, or nicknames. The use of slang in the underground is almost always derogatory or at least status-oriented; if you use slang to refer to someone, you’re higher up the food chain than they are, or at least you think so at the moment.

majority of them have no real part to play and don’t really understand the magnitude of what is going on, but they might get caught up in events just because they’re on the sidelines. No specific individuals are described here. Rather, general types of minor individuals are described, from which individual examples can be readily created as needed.

### Adept

A follower of a magickal school, the adept can be of any level of ability. As a rule of thumb, classify an adept as *minor*, *significant*, or *major*, according to whether he is routinely capable of generating a magickal charge of a particular type and has done so in the past. A boozehound who has the requisite potent vessel for a significant charge and who has used it can be classified as a *significant adept*, for example. Note that these sub-divisions are almost exclusively game-rule terminologies. These terms *are* used in the underground, but only rarely; adepts tend to be known by their general reputation, if at all, rather than by their specific abilities—and some are not keen to advertise what they are capable of. (Derek Jackson, the leader of Mak Attax, is an adept.)

### Enforcer

This is slang for non-adept tough guys; “thug,” “legbreaker,” “torpedo,” or any other gangster slang for a tough guy would also be appropriate. Enforcers are distinguished by their criminal-violence prowess, which might be in hand-to-hand combat or firearms use or torture or what have you. Enforcers generally have no magickal abilities, but probably have some useful knowledge gained first-hand in the back alleys of the underground. If nothing else, they’re more likely to gossip about magick and the underground than adepts are, because they’re not entirely sure what it is they’re gossiping about. (Eponymous, Alex Abel’s favorite operative, is an enforcer.)

### Cabalist

A cabalist can also be an adept or an enforcer and *vice versa* (though enforcer cabalists are rare). In general, a cabalist is a ranking member of a magickal cabal—a leader, or almost so, of such a group. The term has a strong political connotation: while an adept might be a loner, obsessed with introspective analysis and magickal study, a cabalist (even a cabalistic adept) has a goodly portion of his attention focused on the politics and power struggles within the occult underground. The term “cabalist” is used when speaking of a person in a political sense or a general sense; “adept” would be used when specifically critiquing said cabalist’s magickal aptitude. An adept is *what* you are; a cabalist is *who* you are. A Hollywood term analogous to “cabalist” would be “player,” as in, “You know Darrin over at Graceton Studios? He’s a player.” That’s what being a cabalist means. (Daphnee Lee, head of the Naked Goddess sect, is a cabalist.)

### Peon

A peon can also be an adept or enforcer and *vice versa*. A peon cannot be a cabalist unless the term is used in a disparaging, exaggerated manner. A peon is a member of a cabal, magickal or otherwise, who plays no high-level leadership role. Peons are the foot soldiers of the occult underground, distinguished by the fact that they follow or are associated with a cabalist. A lone adept with no political ties is not a peon; he’s a duke (*q.v.*). (Eponymous is a peon.)

### Duke

A duke can also be an adept or enforcer and *vice versa*. Dukes are members of the occult underground who are not cabalists and who are not peons—they are loners. Most dukes are rank-and-file weirdos who are either too clueless or too weak to be in a cabal, but there are some of substantial power and reputation who have chosen to stay on their own. (Dirk Allen, the aging boozehound, is a duke.)



START

No Live Organism Can Continue For Long To Exist Sane Under Conditions of Absolute Reality.

The Bod Couple '89. Sloppy sexpot Olivia and her tidy friend Felice put the 'mate' back in 'room mates.' Directed by Carl Plogue. [ORT: 93] 'NR' PLA Mon. 10:20 p.m. 23489789; Thurs. 1:20 a.m. 09877892 [PW]

12/17 - This is the TV guide entry for the movie with her in it. It doesn't list her name, but she played Felice. I nearly went into shock when I saw her in it - I've got to take this when it comes on again. This could be the key to finding her name, finding out why she's so important.

The movie is a cheap rip-off of "The Odd Couple" with an emphasis on 'couple' HA HA. Olivia is the sloppy slutty sportswriter and Felice is her prissy roommate, the Felix type, and the 'plot' revolves around Olivia getting Felice to loosen up. It's about what you'd expect, except for her.



The Sexorcist '92. Possessed woman tempts Catholic priest with all the infernal pleasures. Directed by Gunter Lorenz. [ORT: 105] 'NR' PLA Wed. Midnight 09878927 [PW]

12/19 - R. from Piston Video recommended this to me, and I ~~now~~ rented it before I saw it coming on cable. She's in it, but they didn't even put credits on this movie. I asked R. if her name was on the box, and he said he'd throw it away a long time ago. The little rental panel had her name on it, but it's so bent and folded that the lamination pulled the ink off her name. Damn!

It's "The Exorcist" played for erections, and there are a lot of scenes that were clearly added in later. The whole thing is a hack job: half the time it looked filmed and was clearly dubbed from another language! Then there are these cheap video scenes spliced in in English (she's in both the film and the English scenes). What the hell is going on with this? R. doesn't know.

12/21 - Taped "The Bod Couple" off cable, but there was a power spike during the credits. No name!



112 110

*chapter three*  
*game mechanics*

**UNKNOWN  
ARMIES**



"EVERY LAW IS AN INFRACTION OF LIBERTY."  
—JEREMY BENTHAM

"SURE, I LIKE PLAYING GAMES.  
MY FAVORITE IS *MAKE THE PUNK BLEED*."  
—EPONYMOUS



**This chapter explains** the basic mechanics of the game—the simple rules you’ll use most often.

## Rolling Dice

Almost everything in this game is reduced to a percentile skill from 1% to 99%. (No human can ever get a 100% skill at something.) To play, all you need are two ten-sided dice of different colors. Before play begins, tell your GM which is the “tens die” and which is the “ones die.”

Whenever you try to do something, roll both dice. Whatever comes up on the tens die is in the tens place of your roll, and the ones die is the ones place. So if you roll a 6 on the tens die, and a 2 on the ones die, your roll is 62.

Sometimes you’ll be told to add the dice together. That 62 becomes  $6 + 2 = 8$ . A 0 in either place is read as a 10, so a 30 becomes  $3 + 10 = 13$ ; an 03 also becomes  $10 + 3 = 13$ .

There are some times when you’ll just be told to “roll a die.” This means a ten-sided die, not any other kind of die. Furthermore, if you roll a 0, it counts as a 10—this allows a range of 1–10 on such rolls. (If you’re familiar with roleplaying games already, this is old hat. If you’re new to it, don’t worry—it’ll make more sense in context as we go along.)

## When Do I Roll?

You *only* have to roll when the result is significantly in doubt. All other times, your GM will usually let you succeed if you have a significant amount of skill.

To make this clear, there are two levels of stress: *relaxed* and *tense*. There’s no stress if nothing’s at stake. If you’re practicing your hook kick down at the karate dojo, nothing bad is going to happen if you screw it up, except your teacher might yell at you. If you’re taking your black belt test, *that’s* tense—a failure would be pretty embarrassing; and if you’re in combat, that hook kick might save your life.

So here’s the breakdown: if you’re in a relaxed situation, you can automatically succeed at any skill you have at 15% or above. For a guy with Karate 20%, doing a hook kick in class is a no-brainer.

In a tense situation, you succeed if you roll equal to under your skill and fail if you roll over it. It’s that simple.

On the other hand, GMs may demand skill checks in relaxed situations in order to see how *long* it takes you to do something, or because there’s a danger you don’t know about, or to keep you on your toes, or just because they feel like it. That’s their prerogative—GMs can demand a skill check any time a skill is used, no matter how trivial. GMs shouldn’t abuse this privilege, of course.

**Example:** Rodney has a Safecracking skill at 30%. If he’s sitting at home with a safe he’s lifted and has lots of time and no pressure, he doesn’t need to roll; he’ll get it eventually. If he’s trying to open a safe while dangling from the ceiling because he’s broken into Alex Abel’s mansion and doesn’t want to alert the guards, dogs, and whatever else Abel has guarding his safe—then that’s the time to roll.

## What Do I Want To Roll?

You want to roll as close to your skill as you can without going over. That’s because the higher you roll, the better you do—assuming you succeed at all. (If you fail your roll, it doesn’t matter how high you roll. It’s only a real bad failure if you roll a **matched** failure, which is explained in the next section.)

Firearms are a lovely example. If you have a 30% skill in firearms and you roll a 17 while firing your shotgun at someone, that’s a success—and you do 17 points of damage. If you’d rolled a 25, that would also be a success, and it would do 25 points of damage. However, if you rolled a 40, that would be a miss—because it’s higher than your skill.

If you’d had a 55% skill, that 40 would have been a hit—and done 40 points of damage.

(Just in case you’re wondering, you should know that different types of firearms do have limits on their maximum damage, so a shotgun can potentially do a lot more damage than a .22 ever could—but that doesn’t change the way you roll the dice. We’ll get to this stuff later in the book.)

Generally you should only have to roll if it’s a tricky situation. Your 30% driving skill means you have a 30% chance of succeeding at a difficult maneuver in a car chase, not a 30% chance of backing out of your garage. Similarly, a 20% firearms skill means you have a 20% chance of hitting a dodging target in a highly fluid and dangerous situation—your chances of hitting a target in a controlled, slow-paced situation are much, much higher.

## Summary

There are other fiddly rules governing special cases—namely shooting, hand-to-hand fighting, and using magick—but the general, quick-and-dirty die-rolling process is this:

- Roll two ten-sided dice to generate a number from 1 to 100.
- If you roll 01, you succeed magnificently if it’s at all plausible.
- If you roll 00, you fail utterly and completely.
- If the result is equal to or less than your skill, you succeed.
  - The higher you roll without rolling over your skill, the better.
  - Matched successes—“doubles” such as 11, 33, 77, *etc.*—are the best of all.
  - You may fail some especially hard tasks if you don’t get a high *enough* roll without rolling over your skill.
- If the result is more than your skill, you fail.
  - Matched failures—“doubles” such as 11, 33, 77 *etc.*—are really bad.
- Sometimes you can flip-flop a bad roll and make it a good one: 91 can become 19; 10 can become 01.
- Sometimes you will have a positive or negative shift to your skill percentile.

Similarly, in some really, really hard situations, your GM may require you to get a certain degree of success. For example, if you try to shoot someone in the leg as he's running away, the GM may rule that you have to roll a success that's at least a 30. If your skill is lower than 30, forget about it; you're not good enough to make that shot without rolling a 01.

## Matches

A match is when both dice come up with the same number—such as 11, 66, 44, 55, *etc.* If it's a success, it's an extra-super-good success. If it's a failure, it's a dismal, abysmal, and cataclysmal failure.

So if you roll a 70 and fail while trying to hack into someone's computer network, it means you just couldn't get in. If you rolled a 77, you not only failed—they're onto you and alarms start going off. On the other hand, if you'd rolled a 22—a matched success—you not only would have gotten what you wanted, undetected, but you would possibly have been able to set up a dummy superuser account so that you could come back and browse, undetected, at will.

## BOHICA

BOHICA (pronounced with a slur for no good reason, like *bo-hu-wee-kuh*) is an acronym for "Bend Over, Here It Comes Again." If you roll double zeroes (00) on anything, you're ultra-screwed. The GM will make the worst outcome happen, short of death—usually. It's more excruciating to really screw up and live to see the results than to drop dead on the spot, after all.

Note that a BOHICA is *always* a failure, even if—for some reason—your chance of success is higher than 99%.

## OACOWA

OACOWA (pronounced with an extra "w," like *uh-wack-uh-wa*) is an acronym for "Open A Can Of Whoop-Ass." If you roll 01, you're ultra-super cool: your attempt succeeds perfectly. (A flip-flopped 10 works fine, too.) If you get this with a gunshot, you do maximum damage for your weapon. If you get it with a martial arts attack, you kill your target or knock him unconscious instantly, your choice (assuming this is possible).

Note to all you wise guys out there: you can't succeed at impossible tasks, even if you roll an OACOWA. If you say your character is going to pick up a building or turn an El Camino into a nuclear bomb, your GM shouldn't even let you roll—except maybe to see how much time you waste.

Barring impossible actions, however, an OACOWA is *always* a success. Some die rolls you'll make will be described in this rulebook as failures if they aren't at least some number or higher, but the OACOWA always supersedes such restrictions: it's a pure success.

## Flip-Flops

When you can **flip-flop** a roll, that just means you can switch the tens and the ones die. You can only flip-flop rolls made on your "obsession skill" (see page 43) or if you've gotten some special help—magickal or situational (GM's call).

Suppose you're trying to punch someone, and you roll a 91—a failure (though not a terrible one, because it's not matched, and it's not 00). If punching people is a normal skill, you just missed and

that's all. However, if you can flip-flop the roll because you're a highly trained commando who lies awake at night thinking about doing mayhem, you can turn that 91 into a 19—success!

## Shifts

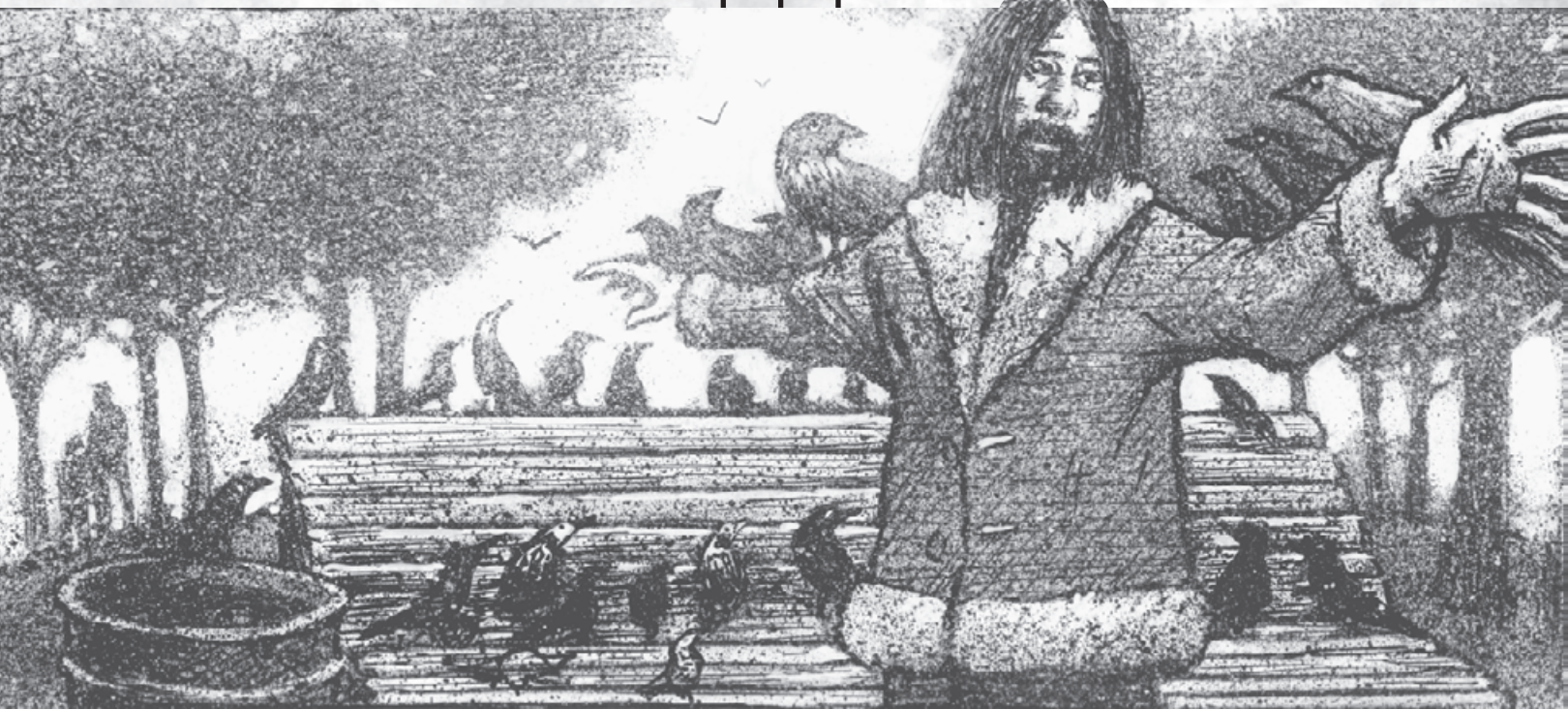
Some situations can give you an increased or decreased chance to make a roll. This is represented by **shifts** to your skill percentile. If someone puts some kind of mojo hex on you, your skill when attacking them might drop by 20 or 30 points (from a 70% to a 50% or a 40%, for example). Similarly, if your magick-working buddy tells you that your next shot will be "extra lucky" you might get a +10%, +20%, or even +50% shift to your skill. (Probably not +50%, though . . .)

## Hunches

Sometimes, you just feel lucky—or not. You can get a **hunch** for a number of reasons, most of them magickal. But if your character is really on a roll, the GM may give you a hunch just for the heck of it. When you get a hunch, roll percentile dice and leave them there. Use that roll for the next check you make. (You don't have a choice—that *is* your next roll.) If it's a lousy roll, you just *know* that your luck isn't what it should be. Do something unimportant to use up that roll, and quick! If it's a good roll, of course, you know you're on easy street. You'll want to be extra-careful and avoid triggering any checks until it's time for a check that's really worthwhile. Of course, you can't always control when you'll have to make a check . . .



PAUL (PROF) HERBERT



*chapter four*  
*character creation*

**UNKNOWN  
ARMIES**



"THE BEST LACK ALL CONVICTION, WHILE THE WORST  
ARE FULL OF PASSIONATE INTENSITY."  
—W.B. YEATS, "THE SECOND COMING"

"EVERY ASPECT OF 'CHARACTER' CAN BE REDUCED TO PRICE.  
MORALS—LIKE GROCERIES, JUSTICE, USED CARS, AND ALL  
FORMS OF POWER—EXIST IN A MARKETPLACE."  
—ALEX ABEL



# LEGACY

▲ 12 Between beating her and watching the Home Shopping Network, Renata's dad had made an unimpressive living as a collection agent for a rental company. In his rare good moods (often when he'd gotten to pound on someone at work) he'd explained that the key to getting what you wanted was simple guts.

"You just gotta act like everything's on your side, and you know it. Like this a-hole at work today. Big as Texas, all worked-out, right? And right behind him is the gun case with all kinds of shotguns and stuff in it. So when I ask him to give up the TV he's defaulted on, he says no and expects me to just buzz off. And I don't, so right there he gets antsy, 'cause I'm looking at him like he's nothin'—I got the law on my side, and more than that, I ain't scared of him and his guns. That makes him wonder why I'm so confident. Like, am I some kind of kung-fu badass, or am I just nuts? I tell him I'm taking the TV and I start to unplug it, and he gets in my face and pushes me back, only it's a real weak push—see, 'cause he's uncertain, he just does it halfway. That's it, though. He put his hands on me, that's assault, so I got call to yank out the pepper spray. You keep that in your pocket, the top of your pocket, like I showed you? You better be, the world's full of creeps and a-holes, girl. So I spray this guy, and he falls and starts crying like a little baby, and I figure I better be sure he isn't going to backshoot me while I'm carrying the tube away, so I give him a good kick between the legs. That put him down.

"The thing is though, he really *did* hold all the cards. If he'd really pushed me like he *meant* it, he could have tumbled my ass five ways from Sunday. But because I acted like I was in charge, it happened. So you remember that. You can start out with a bluff and turn it true."

She was thinking about that while she jiggled the air conditioner in Hiram Ossowski's window. It was loose, and like most air conditioners it was off balance. Graham Joad, her kind-of boyfriend in Romeoville, had shown her this easy way to break into houses. They'd done some stealing together, and when she left town, Graham had gotten her a couple hundred bucks for the stuff her parents had left behind—most of it was rented from Dad's work anyhow.

The air conditioner slipped forward. When she and Graham were stealing in the hick sticks way out from Chicago, the two of them could usually lower it to the floor of the house pretty quiet, but this time she was alone. She strained her back trying to make it go down slow, but it made a loud clunk. She froze for the slow count of thirty, watching everything and listening, ready to run. She'd always been a fast runner.

When she felt ready, she went through the window into Hiram Ossowski's house.

First thing, she did a quick, quiet look through the whole place. It didn't take much time, 'cause it wasn't much of a house. Not a lot bigger than a double-wide trailer. She found a checkbook in a drawer in the kitchen—usual place for it. While there, she helped herself to a long, nasty-looking knife in a plastic sheath. A real Norman Bates kind of knife.

Then she went into the bedroom and took out her camera—a cheap, disposable one from a drugstore. When she was done, she schlepped the air conditioner back into its hole, then went out the back door.

She had a long walk back to the highway. She kept her right hand on her pepper spray as she hitchhiked back to the 'burbs of Atlanta. The Norman Bates knife was at the top of her backpack.

66 ▼

# TWO

CHAPTER ILLU BY FELIPE ECHEVARRIA



**This chapter shows you** how to create your character—the persona you’ll be portraying in the course of the game. In terms of game rules, characters are defined by their innate attributes (such as how strong or fast they are), by their learned attributes (such as driving a car or programming a computer), and by their current mental attributes (such as how much violence bothers them, or whether they’re comfortable with who they really are). This chapter explains these different attributes and helps you choose them to make a character you’ll find interesting.

## The Fundamentals

The first steps you need to take in creating your character all deal with *who he is*, rather than *what he can do*. In other words, we’re going to start with some general brainstorming, then settle on his personality, then his obsessions, and finally his passions. Later we’ll get to stuff like how strong he is, whether or not he can fire a gun, and that sort of thing.

## General Brainstorming

This character is going to be your proxy in the fictional setting of UA. You’ll decide all of his actions, make all his tough choices, and seek his goals even as you use him to explore your own.

Make him good.

We don’t mean “good” in the sense of “a Boy Scout who rights wrongs, picks up trash, and helps old ladies across the street.” If that sounds fun for you, go for it. But “good” in this sense means a good character for stories. Make your character someone that you’re interested in, and someone who will be interesting to your GM and fellow players, too. Good characters in novels are rarely perfect; in fact, it’s often their flaws and failures that make us relate to them, and makes any eventual victories more exhilarating.

So pick a character you want to follow for a long time. Make someone you can empathize with. While over-the-top characters

(“mad-dog rapist,” for example) provide shock value, they’re cheap and one-dimensional, and unless the character grows a personality in the course of the game, you’ll get bored pretty quick. You’ll have more fun if you create a character you can take seriously.

Pick out what he does for a living, and why he does it. Does he get welfare checks, or does he own a mansion and a yacht? Decide what his upbringing was like, and how it affected him. Don’t feel like you have to be Dostoevski here, but you should feel comfortable enough with this character to make his decisions for him. To do that, you need to know him well.

Now, keeping all of that in mind, here’s one more consideration: make him a team player. Your group of players and the GM will have already settled on a narrative structure for your campaign, so you should know what sorts of characters will work within your group. Create a character that is appropriate for the structure you’ve chosen.

## Your Personality

Your character’s personality is, at heart, the impression he makes on people who know him. When people ask, “What kind of a guy is he?”, your personality is the answer. Are you shy or aggressive? Are you a thinker or a feeler? There are a lot of questions that can define your personality, but it’s not something that’s easy to write down and it’s not easy for other people to quickly understand.

So we’ll use a shortcut. In the box on the next page are twelve basic personality types that are easy to grasp and distinctive, and there’s a good chance you’re already familiar with some of them: they’re the twelve signs of the Zodiac. (Read your horoscope lately?) Saying that you’re a sensitive, emotional, passionate artistic type isn’t as easy to say as “I’m a Pisces.” Your character doesn’t *really* have to have been born under that astrological sign—it’s just a convenient rulebook shorthand for a dozen recognizable personality types that most roleplayers will already have some degree of familiarity with. If you don’t like our summaries, use your own.

## A Philosophy of Character Creation

First and foremost, *Unknown Armies* is about making a good story. You’re not playing it against the GM and you’re not playing it against the other players. You’re playing it against the fictions your GM is creating to oppose you.

Now this may sound real artsy-fartsy and abstract, but in the end it’s simple: the best story is the one that keeps getting told. So all the point-stacking in the world isn’t going to save a boring character.

What makes a character boring? Safety is the biggest thing. This game (like most roleplaying games) is all about risk, danger, adventure, and intrigue. Since you signed on to play, you have to accept the fact that bad things are likely to happen to your character, including madness, maiming, and death.

If you try to build a character who is immune to all those things, not only will you fail, but your character will be built around avoiding conflict (or at best, surviving it) instead of resolving it. Sure, you want your character to be competent, and the rules are tools to do that. But he should be just as competent at *starting* things as at finishing them.

Maybe roleplaying games got off to a bad start. The primal, amoeba version of the roleplaying game consisted of wandering through mazes, whacking monsters, and getting treasure—a low-tech version of *DOOM* without the need for reflexes. The adversaries were pretty straightforward, it was easy to think that the players were against the GM, and there wasn’t a lot of depth to plot or character (to say the least). In those old-style games, survival (and making some bucks) was paramount; it was the GM who kept sticking you in those nasty old dungeons.

If you want your character to survive in UA, it’s easy: ratchet up your accounting skill and play a guy who works for a bank. Of course, you won’t be doing *anything* while everyone else is doing *everything*—but you’ll survive! (Bleah.)

If you want to do more than survive, you’ll need an interesting character. Lucky for you, the rules are designed to help you develop one.



## Zodiac Personalities

**Aries (March 21–April 19):** You're courageous, powerful and straightforward. You burn bright and strong, but you burn out quickly. The source of your strength and energy is egocentrism; everything's always about you, you, you. You'd make a good boxer.

**Taurus (April 20–May 20):** You're steadfast and creative, with a generally positive outlook. Thick-skinned, you find that problems and criticisms just bounce off you. The downside of this is that you can be a bully, and you may not realize how badly you've screwed up until it's way too late. You'd make a good receptionist or cop.

**Gemini (May 21–June 20):** Shrewd and insightful, you see both sides of every question. Unfazed by deception, you can quickly reach the facts. Unfortunately, you prefer Truth to facts, and your intellect can spin out multiple "meanings" for every fact—so you spend a lot of time debating with yourself. Gemini are often philosophy professors or strung-out drug addicts.

**Cancer (June 21–July 22):** You're intuitive, sensitive to the feelings of others, and tend to take a mystical outlook. You're tremendously loyal to friends and family, which makes it hurt all the more when they're mean to you. And they always are; you're so sensitive that you can see an insult in anything. You'd be a swell mom, with a pack of sons who come by every weekend to check up on you. You'd also make a fine spokesperson for a charity.

**Leo (July 23–August 22):** Leadership and authority are your strengths. Arrogance and an insatiable hunger for approval are your weaknesses. While your confidence and majesty draw people to you, you also need for them to depend on you and reinforce your self-image as *übermensch* and top dog. You'd make a good CEO or cult leader.

**Virgo (August 23–September 22):** Wise, cautious and pure, you're efficient and hard to fool. You also set high standards—and tend to raise them when anyone shows signs of success. You can be standoffish and critical. Proving you're smarter is one of your favorite things in the whole world. Virgos make good lawyers, drama critics, art critics, book critics . . . you get the picture.

**Libra (September 23–October 22):** You're a tremendous believer in balance—what goes around, comes around. This makes it easy for you to shrug off failures and overcome setbacks. However, it also means that you can be an ungrateful jerk. People who know you think you're cool, but kind of self-absorbed. You'd make a good model or a low-pressure salesman.

**Scorpio (October 23–November 21):** The cardinal trait of the Scorpio is relentlessness. You tend to become fixated on one goal or idea and pursue it obsessively. Your indomitable will scares people, but also fascinates them. Scorpions are known as great lovers and cruel ex-lovers. Scorpions are the most effective poets, pimps, and telemarketers.

**Sagittarius (November 22–December 21):** The archer is practical and free, more concerned with results than theories. You don't waste your time trying to control others, and you expect them to extend you the same courtesy. However, your love of freedom makes it hard to form attachments—so you may bail on your friends when they're counting on you. If you're not a drifter, you'll probably wind up as a freelance something or other.

**Capricorn (December 22–January 19):** You are the crosser of boundaries, able to operate well in different circumstances. Patient and subtle, you prefer to work slowly, adapting to changing circumstances but always building a power structure with yourself at the center. You're not confrontational; if someone crosses you today, you'll back down and pay the motherfucker back in spades half a year down the line. Capricorns make good spymasters and better snitches.

**Aquarius (January 20–February 18):** Aquariuses are reactive, perceptive, and good at keeping their cool. You take the long view and are concerned with the big picture more than the minute details of daily existence. However, you want to be recognized for your brilliance and demand recognition when you've done well (which is often). You'd be a good producer of big-budget movie epics. You could also be a popular politician who keeps the mob happy without doing too much.

**Pisces (February 19–March 20):** Crisis brings out the best in you, because you're best at doing two things at once. In less stressful circumstances, this can make you look scatterbrained. You're friendly and eager to please, but without pressure on you, you're often lazy and incompetent. You'd be good as a firefighter, or in any other job that's 99% waiting and 1% sheer terror. Priests and hookers also tend to be Pisces.

If you don't want to use one of these personality types, you don't have to. You can ignore this section entirely ("You'll know me through my actions."), or pick a personality from a character you like in fiction or movies ("I'm like Han Solo in *Star Wars*."), or write up a brief, customized summary of your personality like the zodiac ones we gave.

The important thing is that you should have some idea of what kind of person your character is. This can always evolve in the course of play, certainly, but get *something* down on paper right off the bat that you can look at, think about, or tweak in games to come.

## Your Obsession

Your character is obsessed with something, by definition—all UA characters are. This goes beyond a quirky interest or minor hobby; your

**obsession** is what you live for, what defines your existence, what gives your life meaning. Pick carefully. You want something useful, but original. (If you want to play an adept—someone who follows a **school of magick**—or want your character to become an adept later, you must pick "magick" or something closely tied to your use of magick as your obsession. Only the terminally fascinated ever get good enough at magick to make it work.) It should also be something simple to express. "Toughness" is a good obsession; "getting really strong so I can beat people up" is a needless elaboration. Save the modulation for the description of what your obsession means to you. Some examples:

- **Human motivation.** You've always been fascinated by what makes people stubborn, what makes them give in, what makes them love and hate different things.

## Personality Example: Cage

Phil is trying to think up a cool character. He's talked it over with his fellow players, and they think it would be fun to play a hit squad for Alex Abel's New Inquisition—that's going to be their narrative structure. One player wants a jaded ex-cop who hates the paranormal, but is uneasy around all the criminals Abel's got working for him. Another player has a computer hacker and burglar who's more talk than walk when it comes to fighting. A third player has a sweet, charming, personable former nun who's convinced that all aspects of the supernatural are illusions from Satan.

Looking this over, Phil decides that while the cop is good in a fight, the other two are probably going to be fairly limp. He doesn't want a guy like the cop, though; Phil wants to be *bad*.

The character concept he comes up with is Cage: a tough, mean-ass hood—but one with style. Phil doesn't dig the zodiac personality types, so he thinks of a Hollywood example: Cage is the kind of character who'd be played by a young Robert De Niro in a Martin Scorsese film (*Mean Streets*, for example). (Cage is pictured on p. 45.)

## Personality Example: Jennifer Zaraya

Kim's group has decided to play a magick cabal named the Freebusters, youthful adepts working to fight the entrenched power systems of unenlightened capitalist society. Everyone's going to be playing adepts, at least initially, so Kim starts brainstorming on her new character.

She comes up with Jennifer Zaraya, a twentysomething adept from Portland, Oregon. Jennifer is a caring, giving soul who is nevertheless far from naive; she knows life has bad times and bad people, but she's determined to make a difference. For her personality, she decides to go with the Zodiac system and chooses Cancer. (Jennifer is pictured on p. 35.)

- **Physical perfection.** You diet, stretch out every morning and evening, lift weights three times a week, and try to run ten miles or swim sixty laps at least as often. If you don't get your exercise, you can practically *feel* your body turning to putty.
- **Egyptian antiquities.** You not only have a large personal collection and a degree in archaeology, you compulsively track current artistic and design trends looking for ancient-Egyptian influences.
- **Pleasure.** You've tried S&M, B&D, LSD, PCP, and XTC—and then you tried it all again, only this time on a water slide. Too much fun is never enough for you, which will probably get you into big trouble some day.
- **Religion.** Your dedication to Roman Catholicism (or orthodox Judaism, or Zen Buddhism, or whatever you want) guides your every action and thought. You strive completely to live a Christlike life (or to adhere to the laws of the Talmud, or to annihilate your ego, or . . .).
- **Toughness.** You are compelled to be the baddest mofo on the street. Guns, knives, bare fists—they're all props, all part of the killer mystique you anxiously seek.

Once you've got your obsession figured out, write it down on the character sheet in the provided slot. Then write a brief descrip-

## Obsession Example: Cage

Cage's obsession seems pretty obvious at first: he wants to be the toughest guy in town, the man who owns the street. The GM asks why this is, and Phil suddenly finds himself stuck. After all, *Phil* isn't the toughest guy in town, so he has to think about what would make someone want to be that much of a thug.

He decides that Cage was a real weakling and coward when he was young, and got beat up a lot—both by his dad and by the bullies in his neighborhood. His mom eventually ditched Cage's dad and moved to a new city with a new guy. This new guy told Cage he better learn to fight, and went a long way towards teaching him. In his new neighborhood, Cage decided he was never going to take any crap from anyone. By being the meanest predator, he'd keep the other kids back. No one would ever have to know what a simp he used to be.

Cage's obsession is "toughness." Its description is, "If you're hard on the outside, no one can find out how soft you are on the inside. You'd rather have people's fear than their understanding, because you don't like it when people understand you." Another character might also have the obsession "toughness," but have a completely different description.

## Obsession Example: Jennifer Zaraya

Kim needs to pick an obsession. She thinks about just what Jennifer would obsess on, considering ideas such as compassion, peace, love, and so on, but all of these just seem to be facets of some larger goal. Finally she hits on the concept of *gnosis*, a Greek word representing mystical or transcendental knowledge. She defines it like this: "You want to understand the cosmos. It's so easy to sit back and see only the trees, but you insist on finding the forest. You believe that everything would fall into place and the world would be better if only we could all possess a true personal understanding of reality."





tion of what your obsession means to you—usually a two-sentence summary like the ones you just read.

## Your Passions

Everyone has certain irrational (or pre-rational) reactions to certain things. Maybe you're afraid of spiders: all the concentration and rational thought in the world aren't going to make you blithely able to walk across a carpet of arachnids. Maybe the sight of children being hurt gets you mad: no matter how helpless you are, or how justified a spanking is, you're going to feel rage when you see a child in pain.

These are the **passions** that rule your life. In a very real way, they're the foundation of all the "logical" and "rational" decisions your character makes. It's now time to pick out the hot buttons for your character.

You get three: a **Fear** stimulus, a **Rage** stimulus, and a **Noble** stimulus. There are slots for these on your character sheet.

**Fear** is pretty self-explanatory. What does your character fear most? This can be something obvious ("pointy things") or very subtle ("looking weak in front of people I respect"). Your Fear is what you always want to flee or avoid, even when that isn't possible.

(Later on, you're going to be taking a look at the "Madness Meter" at the bottom of the character sheet. There are five types of **mental stress** defined there—**Violence**, **Helplessness**, **The Unnatural**, **Isolation**, and **Self**. Pick one stress that your Fear plays to the

most. What that means is that if you encounter your Fear and have to deal with it, you'll have to make a **stat check** against the mental stress linked to your fear to overcome your natural instinct to run the heck away or curl up in a ball and wail or whatever. If you don't understand mental stresses or stat checks yet, don't worry about it for now; leave the Fear-link slot on your character sheet blank until you've looked at the chapter on madness and understand what this is about.)

**Rage** is also obvious. It's what your character wants to destroy and remove. Good choices here can also be obvious ("child abusers") or obscure ("people who have undeservedly been rewarded with the things I work so hard for but cannot obtain").

Your **Noble** stimulus is the most subtle of the three passions. This represents your higher values—in a very real sense, your character at his best. To avoid your Fear, you might leave your friends in the lurch. To destroy your Rage, you might lie, torture, and murder (certainly you want to). To pursue your Noble goal, you would make sacrifices, risk your own life, and endure terrible suffering for the common good. Just as nobody is perfect, nobody is completely evil either. Noble goals can be broad ("relieve the worldwide burden of poverty") or extremely narrow ("get the money for my grandma's operation").

*Do not* pick passions that contradict your obsession without good reason. If you're an obsessive Roman Catholic, you're going to have a hard time explaining a Rage against nuns. Similarly, don't pick contradicting passions. If you have a Fear of homosexuals, don't make gay rights your Noble stimulus.

## Passions Example: Cage

Having figured out Cage's past, it's pretty easy for Phil to come up with some realistic passions. The Rage stimulus is anyone who tries to pick on Cage and belittle him. Any time someone has challenged his status as "the toughest guy around," he's likely to get really ticked off. The Fear is keyed to Self; he's afraid that people will find out that underneath it all, he's a fraud. If he's in danger of looking cowardly or weak, he can justify a reroll or a flip-flop (as explained on the next page).

The GM suggests that Phil make this "in danger of looking *physically* cowardly or weak." Otherwise, Phil could justify re-rolling *any* failure, since any failure could make Cage look cowardly or weak in a variety of ways. Phil counters with the suggestion that it be any time he might look *emotionally* weak, and the GM says okay. (Phil figures any serious physical challenge might be handled by his Rage—besides, he's worried that Cage is going to have trouble with Madness checks, which are explained on page 67, so the chance to flip-flop or reroll such checks could come in handy.)

Finally, there's Cage's Noble impulse. Phil considers having it be "protect the weak," but that doesn't really fit Cage's philosophy—he used to be weak and he became strong. He hates his weak self, so he has only contempt for those who accept weakness. Phil decides that Cage's Noble impulse is to help those who are weak but trying to *become* strong. He can really identify with people who are working to overcome their difficulties.

## Passions Example: Jennifer Zaraya

Kim needs to choose her Fear, Rage, and Noble passions for her character, Jennifer. Noble is obvious to her: "oppose ignorance." Whenever Jennifer encounters some form of ignorance, she is moved to attempt to enlighten the person in question. The GM asks if this means Jennifer will stop to help someone do their homework or work out a bus schedule, so Kim refines the Noble passion to "oppose ignorant prejudice."

Then there's Rage. What would tick off the calm, compassionate Jennifer Zaraya? Kim decides that the answer is "savage cruelty." The modulation "savage" means her passion only gets invoked during intense physical or emotional situations, rather than every time a kid pulls the wings off a fly.

Finally, Kim considers Fear. What would Jennifer be afraid of? Kim mulls this and eventually decides that Jennifer fears "personal selfishness." In other words, Jennifer fears that all of her aspirations could be false, egotistical projections of what she'd like to be, rather than what she is. If Jennifer is in a situation where she acts to help herself before helping someone else, her Fear passion is triggered—as is the connected madness meter of Self.



EARL GEIER

When you're interacting with one of these passions in an appropriate fashion (trying to destroy what enrages you, trying to get away from what scares you, or trying to obey your nobler instincts) you can either flip-flop or reroll a failed roll during that interaction. You can only do this once per session for each passion, no matter how many such interactions you trigger.

Note that you have to explain to the GM *specifically* why your passion has come into play—and the GM can veto it. (“I’m sorry. Just because you know he was born under the zodiac sign of Scorpio, you don’t get to use your hatred of scorpions as a justification for trying to re-roll that gunshot. Maybe if you were obsessed with the zodiac . . .”)

## Your Attributes

Ready to figure out what your new character can do? It’s easy to get started. Just divide 220 points between the four core numbers (or **stats**) that define your character—**Body**, **Speed**, **Mind** and **Soul**. These are your **attributes**.

You can’t start with any stat higher than 70 or lower than 30 unless you get the GM’s permission—and you better have a good reason for it. 70 and 30 pretty well define the usual range of human ability. A Body of 99 would be the product of advanced genetic engineering and a lifetime spent in a physical-therapy facility; a Speed of 1 would be paralysis. Your stats *can* go beyond 30 or 70 in the course of play, however, through experience (to go above 70) or injury (to go below 30).

## Stats

A stat is a number that represents the capacity your character has for achievement in a certain area. They’re a game mechanic—a handy numerical system for judging how good one character is when compared to another.

There are four stats. Everything you learn to do is governed by one of them.

**Body:** This is a measure of how healthy, strong, and generally fit you are. A fitness buff will have a really high Body score. A strung-out alcoholic will have a really low score. Body determines how hard it is to kill you.

**Speed:** This stat measures how quick you are, and how easily you react to stimuli. You may not be huge or strong, but if you have a high Speed score, you kick ass at computer games and have a superb driving record. It’s also a gauge of how well you control your body—everything from walking quietly to catching yourself when you slip on ice.

**Mind:** Steven Hawking or Aeschylus would have really high Mind scores. Gomer Pyle—well, not so high. This governs how quickly you think, and how good you are at examining an idea from all sides. It also measures your skill at assimilating or rationalizing anomalous stimuli. (In other words, it’s good for not going crazy.)

**Soul:** Not just useful for doing James Brown impersonations, it primarily governs all the nonverbal, “feeling” stuff that Mind doesn’t cover. If you want a skill in Seduce Younger Men it would be a Soul skill, as are social skills like Lie Like a Rug, or Sell Freezers to Eskimos. Finally, Soul is what sorcerers and adepts use to work their weird magick.

Once you’ve chosen your stats, add a **descriptor** to each one. This is a word or short phrase that characterizes the nature of your stat. A high Soul stat might have a descriptor of “shoulder to cry on,” while a low Soul might be a “cold fish.” Mind descriptors might range from “irrational” to “quotes encyclopedias.” Speed descriptors might be “catches flies” or “all thumbs.” Body descriptors might be “totally ripped abs” or “flabby.” Descriptors don’t have a direct gameplay effect, but help to better differentiate your character from other characters with similar stats.

## Skills

**Skills** are narrow applications of stats. You can be a huge, strong guy—but if you’ve never been in a fight and have no idea how brawling works, you’re not going to do well against a scrawny guy who’s been scrapping since infancy. Similarly, all the hand-eye coordination in the world isn’t going to help you if you don’t know how to take the safety catch off a pistol.

Skills work on a percentile basis. If the outcome is in doubt (and you usually won’t have to roll unless it is), you make a roll as explained on page 26. If the result is less than or equal to your skill, you succeed.

You cannot start the game with any skill higher than 55%.

There’s no comprehensive skill list. You can pretty much define any skill you want. It’s important to understand which of the four stats governs the skill, for two reasons.

First, your skill number can never exceed its governing stat. If you have Body 30, no way are you going to be able to handle the training to get Boxing at 45%.

## What Do These Stats Mean?

The stats of Body, Speed, Mind, and Soul are abstractions of a person's basic, innate abilities. To give them a little more meaning, here are some examples and explanations. Remember that the average person has stats between 40 and 55.

### Body

- 10s You're on death's door. You can't walk unassisted and require constant medical care.
- 20s You're very frail. You can manage maybe five shallow steps without taking a rest, but that's it.
- 30s You're sickly and weak. You breathe heavy after climbing a flight of stairs. Your muscle tone is best described as "suety."
- 40s You're either generally puny or a lard-ass, but not too bad.
- 50s You're average: you can wear a swimsuit without too much embarrassment and helping a friend move is no big effort.
- 60s You qualify as "brawny." You're always among the first picks at the company softball game.
- 70s As far as you're concerned, every bottle has a twist-off top. You can do one-handed chin-ups.
- 80s You had the potential to be a professional athlete. You move heavy furniture without effort. "Getting tired" is something that happens to other people.
- 90s Professional strongman level here: tearing phone books, lifting the front end of cars, bending metal bars, *etc.*

### Speed

- 10s You're pretty much immobile, capable of only limited and tentative movements. People in the advanced stages of degenerative nerve disease fit into this category.
- 20s You can get around on your own, but you're still pathologically clumsy. You probably need canes or a walker to get around.
- 30s You're a klutz: you routinely spill drinks (even when you're sober), walk into door frames, and trip over your own feet.
- 40s The low end of average. When you play darts, almost all your shots hit the board. If you drive a stick-shift, it rarely stalls due to incompetence.
- 50s You're normal. You can hit the bullseye at darts (sometimes), you can run a city block in a reasonable amount of time, and you can box-shuffle a deck of cards without playing 52 Pick-Up.
- 60s As a kid, you were the local champ at "Bloody Knuckles" (or *Pac-Man*, depending on your age and inclination). You can manage an impressive sprint when you want to, and if you're not a good dancer it's because you didn't care to try.
- 70s Your childhood nickname was "Flash," even if you kept your clothes on all the time. You learned to juggle in about two minutes, just by watching someone do it. You can run a five-minute mile.
- 80s Your control of your body is nearly complete. You can beat carnival games of skill.
- 90s Your grace and dexterity is incredible. With training, you could compete at the Olympic level.

### Mind

- 10s You are a clinical moron requiring institutional care.
- 20s You're mentally retarded, but capable of independent living with frequent oversight.
- 30s You've got an IQ around 60. You can read (slowly) and write (poorly), but long division is pushing it.
- 40s You're no genius, but you can answer the occasional question on *Jeopardy* and remember to phrase it as a question.
- 50s You're average. You can balance a checkbook and you're fairly well-informed on subjects that interest you or employ you (sports, finance, Greek history, *etc.*).
- 60s You do crosswords in ink. You sometimes complete other people's sentences for them.
- 70s If you wanted to, you could get into Mensa. Whenever you took standardized intelligence tests, you scored in the top 5%. Even if you have little formal education, you retain information well and remember easily.
- 80s You're a genius, with an IQ of 150+. It takes you about ten minutes to do the *New York Times* Sunday crossword—less if you really push yourself.
- 90s You're capable of lightning-fast inductions and deductions that look like ESP to average minds.

### Soul

- 10s You're emotionally stunted and almost incapable of forming emotional attachments.
- 20s You're congenitally crude, uncultured, and crass. Any time you dress acceptably or do the polite thing, it's completely accidental.
- 30s You're an uncouth slob with all the sensitivity of a toilet seat.
- 40s You're at the low end of average in the personality department. You probably make people uncomfortable sometimes with your boorish comments and rude jokes, but you can get along. At least one person in your life secretly despises you.
- 50s You're average. You at least know enough to be uncomfortable in a delicate situation.
- 60s You're unusually sensitive. If you turn this towards supernatural matters, you probably have a general feeling of the unseen powers in the world around you. If you turn it towards human society, you're probably empathetic and likeable.
- 70s At this level, those who pay attention to the spirit world get indistinct feelings about certain objects, areas, and people. Those who turn their perceptions to their fellow humans always seem to say and do the right thing.
- 80s Emotional energy and supernatural energy are both quite perceptible to you, and your own emotions are pretty easy to detect if you're not bothering to conceal them. If you turn your mind to politics and manipulation, you could be a state senator within a few years.
- 90s You can learn almost as much from your "extra" senses as you do from the normal five.

## Stats Example: Cage

Obviously, Cage is going to be pretty much buffed out in Body, and no slouch in Speed either. Phil knows something's going to have to suffer, and decides it's Soul. (He doesn't want Cage to be anybody's fool—or wind up in an asylum—so he won't sacrifice Mind as much. Plus he figures the smooth-talking nun and the hacker can handle the social stuff.)

So he divides his points like this: Body 70, Speed 70, Mind 50, Soul 30. Cage is a phenomenal physical specimen with an average intellect—but he's pretty damn charmless.

Put another way, his idea of a charming pick-up line is, "So . . . uh, wanna screw?" He can't maintain a romantic relationship and doesn't really feel much desire to. His friends are his friends because they share common goals and interests, not because they have any sort of deep emotional bond. But when your back is against the wall, you want Cage at your side.

For Cage's descriptors, Phil chooses the following: Body (meaty), Speed (surprisingly quick), Mind (street-smart), Soul (what you see is what you get).

## Stats Example: Jennifer Zaraya

Since Jennifer is an adept, Kim plans to put lots of points into Soul—the stat that governs magickal ability. She also figures that Jennifer is a smart woman, so she'll give her a high Mind score. Kim considers the remaining two stats and decides to favor Speed over Body, since she associates physical quickness with mental acuity. She ends up with: Body 35, Speed 55, Mind 60, Soul 70.

Kim now sees Jennifer as a small, slight woman with quick reflexes and an intelligent, passionate demeanor. She's no fighter, at least physically, but she values her friends deeply and will go to the wall to protect them. She's also smart enough to figure out ways around violent obstacles—and failing that, she's always got magick on her side.

For Jennifer's descriptors, Kim chooses the following: Body (short & scrawny), Speed (quick as a cat), Mind (whip-smart), Soul (perceptive & passionate).

Second, your stats govern how many points you can put in starting skills. You get as many skill points as you have stat points—220. The points you get from each stat can only be spent on skills governed by that stat. If you have a Mind stat of 70, for example, you can spend those 70 points only on Mind-based skills. (You also get some free skills that aren't deducted from your 220 points; these are described later on this page.)

## Which Stat for Which Skill?

Use your common sense, but check it with the GM (who should be helping you build your character anyhow). An explanation of how each stat relates to skills follows, along with a list of sample skills governed by each stat.

**Body:** Anything you do with strength or endurance. It also covers anything involving physical exercises that are physically taxing. (The prime example is, of course, Martial Arts. Reflexes are also important, but fighting skill is largely based on training—even if it's the informal "training" of simply fighting a lot. It is therefore a physical skill.) Body can also govern many inborn physical traits (like "gorgeous").

**Body Skill Examples:** General Athletics, Climbing, Boxing, Fencing, Marathon Running, Football, Basketball, Judo, Street Fighting, Enduring Torture.

**Speed:** This governs any skill involving reaction time, aim, or coordination—basically, stuff governed by your sense of where your body is. You'll notice that there is some overlap with Body; this is because a lot of sports and other activities have a reflex component and a physical-training aspect. If in doubt, ask your GM. (GMs, be sure to cut slack as necessary.) Note that if you have Speed 50 and Body 40, you can still probably get away with having a Tennis skill

at 45% if you really want it and your GM says okay. If you had Body 30, it might be a different matter.

**Speed Skill Examples:** Driving, Billiards, Ping Pong, Firearms, Darts, Sleight of Hand, Picking Pockets, Moving Silently, Sprinting, Tennis, Juggling, Dodging, Horseback Riding.

**Mind:** Anything you can learn out of a book is a Mind skill. (You can read a book about karate without learning how to fight.) These are the skills of logic and reason. If a skill requires alertness, perception, and generally being-on-the-ball, it may also be a Mind skill.

**Mind Skill Examples:** General Education (what you should have learned in high school), Locksmithing, Automotive Repair, Biology, Medicine, Strategy, Physics, Occult.

**Soul:** These are skills based on interaction and intuition rather than on mental acuity. Any social skill is a Soul skill, as are most artistic skills.

**Soul Skill Examples:** Lying, Persuasion, Acting, Getting Sympathy, Painting, Intimidation, Seduction, Cadging Drinks, Getting Bank Loans, Dancing, Psychotherapy, *any* school-of-magick skill.

## Free Skills

There are a few things that pretty much every adult born and raised in an industrialized nation can do. You automatically start out with a skill of 15% in these skills, and those 15 points are *not* deducted from your total. That's why they're **free skills**. You can increase them by paying points out of your total for the governing stat, or you can decrease them, but you don't get any benefit by knocking them lower (except for the intangible benefits if it makes your character more interesting). There are two free skills for each stat. You can spend points to increase these skills, but



## The Magick Skill

If you want your character to use magick, you'll be taking Magick as a Soul skill. But don't write down "Magick"—what you need to use as the skill title is the school of magick your character follows. Different schools of magick are covered in the magick chapter, but examples include **Entropomancy**, **Pornomancy**, **Cliomancy**, and **Dipsomancy**. If you're not sure yet, go ahead and write down "Magick" on the character sheet. Just make sure and change it to the name of your school of magick once you know what it is.

remember that no skill number can ever be higher than the associated stat.

Also, feel free to change the names of these skills, as long as you and your GM both know what you're talking about. After all, half the fun of a do-it-yourself skill system is being able to change Struggle into Take 'Em Down Street-Style, or make boring old Driving into Reckless Driving.

### Body

**General Athletics 15%.** It's very hard to grow up without ever playing softball or going bowling. Almost everyone can make at least a half-assed attempt at shagging a fly or catching a football. This is a pretty poor substitute for specialization, though; if you're playing dollar-a-point volleyball against someone with a Volleyball skill, you're probably going to get creamed. To reflect this, when there's a direct, one-on-one competition between general athletics and a specific sport, you deduct your opponent's specific sport skill from your general athletics skill. Not that this should come up all that often, but you never know.



DAN PARSONS

**Struggle 15%.** This is the basic skill of putting up a fight. Even if you're untrained and inexperienced you can try to dodge, throw haymakers, pinch, spit, and bite. Besides, you might get lucky and roll that 01, right? If you want a martial-arts skill such as Tae Kwon Do or Brawling, that's what Struggle becomes.

### Speed

**Driving 15%.** From our experience, this seems about right for the average person's skill at driving a car. Let us stress again that most driving tasks can be completed without a roll; it's only when you're in trouble that you need to get the dice out. To put it another way, this is your chance of avoiding an accident when your tire blows out at 70 mph—you don't have to roll it every time you parallel park.

**Dodge 15%.** People have natural flinch impulses when lunged at or startled. This dodge score represents that reflex.

### Mind

**General Education 15%.** It is difficult to get through life without learning *something* in school. (We, for example, learned that microwave ovens work by reversing the polarity of water molecules many times, really fast, in order to produce heat through friction. That's why styrofoam doesn't get hot in a microwave—no water in it. We also learned how to forge hall passes and which classes it was safe to booze it up in, but *that* isn't covered by this skill.) This skill represents the cumulative effects of generations of educators. 15% is the low end of average. 25% would be enough to put you on the honor roll, while 50% probably represents a college degree and some postgraduate work. If you do have a skill indicating a college degree or substantial professional training, you can change General Education to Philosophy, Medicine, Eastern European History, or whatever other academic or professional knowledge you specialize in.

**Notice 15%.** Most people live in a haze of self-absorption, but every once in a while we do pick up on things that stand out: an exceptionally cute puppy, a brand new car in a neighborhood of beaters, the glint of a telescopic sight moments before the sniper shoots at us, that sort of thing. Some people notice more than others; police detectives tend to have a Notice skill of 40% or higher.

### Soul

**Lying 15%.** Everyone fibs a little now and then, and if you say you don't—well, we'll just consider it proof that everyone lies. Most people can't do it without looking around nervously, blushing, nervously over-elaborating their stories, *etc.*

**Charm 15%.** Just as everyone tells the occasional whopper, everyone also tries to make a good impression sometimes—may-



## The Skill Penumbra

A given skill does not refer solely to the specific use of that ability. Each skill has a **penumbra**—an area of associated abilities that you gain as part of the skill. The two most common forms of penumbra are general knowledge of matters related to the skill beyond its specific application, and contacts with other people who are related to the skill.

For example, the firearms skill lets you shoot guns. But because skills have a penumbra, the firearms skill will also give you general knowledge about matters related to firearms—such as the legality of various weapons, the capabilities of different firearms and firearms-related equipment, and so on. Plus, you have contacts related to firearms: gun dealers, marksmen, black-market dealers, smugglers, firearms journalists, whatever.

For another example, a skill in Egyptology will let you make appropriate skill checks on the topic. But you also have contacts with egyptologists, you are aware of current Egyptian exhibits nationally or internationally, you know the best Egyptian collections at museums, and so on.

The higher your skill, the wider your penumbra. Someone with a Firearms skill of 30 is unlikely to know any arms smugglers. Someone with an Egyptology of 70 is on a first-name basis with nationally recognized experts in the field.

be with Miss Congeniality down at the local bar, maybe in a job interview, maybe with the high priestess of the cult you're trying to infiltrate.

If you want and if your GM approves, you can localize these free skills to better fit your character—but the replacement free skill should be as similar as possible. If you were born and raised without access to cars, for example, you could replace Driving with Horseback Riding or Sprinting or whatever form of swift locomo-

tion you used in place of cars. You couldn't replace Driving with, say, Cheating at Poker or Firearms.

Try not to muck around with your free skills unless they're just *really* inappropriate for your character. It's a slippery slope from changing a free skill to better reflect your character's background to changing a free skill to try and get some sneaky advantage for your character. Save the political machinations for in-game intrigue, rather than rules-mongering.

## Agh! That's Too Abstract!

Some roleplayers, and even some entire groups, are just not going to be happy without a hard-coded list of skills for the game and a definitive list of which stat governs which skill. And, frankly, they're not out of line. Most games do something like that, and our approach can potentially lead to disagreements and confusion. (There's a list of *sample* skills later in this chapter, but we'll freely admit it's not exhaustive.) Here's why we've done it this way.

First off, it's simple. Having a big list of skills to choose from—and a much larger pool of points to spread among them—really ratchets up the time it takes to make a character and the complexity involved in doing so. When you have a big pool of points to spend and a lot of choices to make, you're going to sweat over every decision and worry about juggling the numbers in umpteen different ways. We think that just having a handful of important skills—and resolving actions without a related skill by common sense, GM fiat, or a roll against an appropriate stat—is a smarter and easier way to play.

Second, it's pure. In games where characters all have big lists of skills, the differences between characters aren't immediately apparent. Keeping the number of skills down makes it obvious what the character's specialties are. It helps to define the character without a lot of rigmorole.

Third, it lets you use your imagination. Instead of going through a shopping list of standard skills, you are asked to think, "What does my character do that is noteworthy?" and then see what pops into your head. Maybe white-water rafting is something that would be a big part of your character's life, but a skill like that isn't going to turn up on many roleplaying game skill lists. You can also modulate a skill to better reflect your character. Where a typical roleplaying game skill might be History, you can take 17th Century French History. Make your skills reflect who your character is, rather than having your character defined by what skills are available.

Finally, it encourages cooperation. Yes, there is a red flag over this approach to skills—you're reading it, in fact. But that flag doesn't mean that you're supposed to challenge the GM over the governing stat of every skill or what a skill can do. What you're *supposed* to do is to work with the GM in an open atmosphere of cooperation. If the two of you disagree over the nature of a skill, find some middle ground. But just accept that the GM's word is final. If your disagreement occurs during a game session, feel free to discuss it in depth *after* the game. But don't hold up play with an argument. Accept the GM's ruling and move on.

We really think this is a good, clean system, and one that is very appropriate for the game. Other games have used it to great success. If you disagree, you're welcome to come up with something on your own. Gamers do it all the time—it isn't hard. Just grab the rulebook for a roleplaying game that you think has a good skill set, scribble in the margin which UA character stat governs each skill, and use that as your skill guide. If you think characters should buy more skills than just a handful, multiply the number of points available. As a rule of thumb, assume that the typical UA character has ten to fifteen skills (including the free ones). For every multiple of ten skills that your characters are required to spend points on, double the number of points available.



## What Do These Skills Mean?

This section breaks down the eight free skills—General Athletics, Struggle, Dodge, Drive, General Education, Notice, Charm, and Lie—into ranges of ability. Each range gives a brief description of what you can accomplish at that level of skill. When you're creating new skills for your character, use these descriptions to help you and the GM understand what you can do with that skill.

It's important to remember that there's a slightly different scale for stats and skills. Your stats serve as a ceiling for your abilities: if you've got a Mind of 40, you're simply never going to get a Mind based skill at 41% because you're not smart enough. (Though you can raise your stats with experience points.)

Similarly, if you have a Body of 40% you're pretty weak by nature. Skills can overcome that natural lethargy, but only in narrow areas. If someone who was born scrawny signed up at a dojo and studied kendo for years, he would eventually become a pretty good swordfighter. He wouldn't be able to go above 40% without doing some physical conditioning, but study and effort counts for a lot. So a score of 40% is pretty low for a stat because it's the limit of your potential: but it's quite good for a skill, because skills measure how well you've fulfilled your potential.

If you pick one of these skills as an Obsession skill, you can flip-flop your rolls. This effectively adds 10% to a low skill, and something like 20% or more for a skill in the 50s.

### General Athletics

- 15-20% You can shag a pop fly—sometimes. With a lot of huffing and puffing you can scale a ten foot fence.
- 20-30% This is about average for someone with an inactive lifestyle. You can hit an overhand pitch—sometimes. Your golf game hovers around the bad side of par.
- 30-40% This is about average for someone with an active lifestyle. You can sink free throws predictably. You can run a mile and not be exhausted at the end.
- 40-50% This level of skill is appropriate for someone with a very active lifestyle. Teenagers down at the schoolyard try to get you to play basketball on their team. You could outrun attack dogs with a little luck or a head start.
- 50-60% If you're on the company softball team, you pitch and bat clean-up. You get a lot of spikes playing volleyball and can sometimes slam-dunk a basketball.
- 60-70% You could play AAA baseball, or possibly be a minor pro in a less-lucrative sport like ice skating or horse racing.
- 70-80% You could be on a professional baseball, basketball, or football team. You'd spend a lot of time on the bench, but you'd be a pampered, well-paid pro.
- 80-90% You could be a top professional athlete—a Brett Favre or Tiger Woods.

### Struggle

- 15-20% Your combat skills are pretty much limited to slapping, shin kicks, and hair pulling.
- 20-30% This is about right for someone who grew up in a nasty neighborhood but who has outgrown weekly fisticuffs.

- 30-40% You're a skilled fighter. Nothing really impressive, but you're the equal of the average unarmed mugger.
- 40-50% Which nickname do you prefer, "Crusher" or "Lightning"? If you've studied the martial arts, you may have your black belt.
- 50-60% If you don't pound on people for a living, you could. Your punches can break ribs and pop jawbones.
- 60-70% You're a match for two average opponents, even if they've got knives.
- 70-80% You could go toe-to-toe with most professional boxers.
- 80-90% Your body is a finely tuned killing machine.

### Dodge

- 15-20% You can barely get out of the way of your own feet when you're dancing.
- 20-30% You can dodge a single falling object.
- 30-40% You have an okay—not good—chance of avoiding being hit by a speeding car.
- 40-50% The other kids never liked playing tag with you—you were too good.
- 50-60% If you work at a high-risk job (firefighting, police work), your co-workers probably call you "Cat" and make jokes about your nine lives.
- 60-70% You're darn near impossible to hit or kick when you put your mind to it.
- 70-80% People who try to shoot at you tend to get unnerved by your uncanny ability to not be where the bullets go.
- 80-90% Two words: Jackie Chan.

### Drive

- 15-20% You're a bad driver. You either go too fast when it isn't safe or you crawl along at ten miles below the speed limit.
- 20-30% You're an average driver: you still get caught in traffic jams, but you know enough to pump the brakes on ice.
- 30-40% This is a good level for a professional driver, like a cabbie or a trucker. Not a professional with an outstanding record for safety, but a professional.
- 40-50% You actually *are* as good behind the wheel as the standard jerk in a Trans Am *thinks* he is.
- 50-60% Your car could pop up on the two driver's-side wheels and you'd have a good chance of bringing it back down safely.
- 60-70% This is a good level for a professional stunt driver or an adequate race car driver.
- 70-80% You're an honorary *Duke of Hazzard*.
- 80-90% You could be a strong competitor on the stock-car circuit.

### General Education

- 15-20% If you graduated high school, you did so with an unimpressive C average.
- 20-30% You were a good student and probably graduated from college.

- 30-40% You graduated from college with honors.
- 40-50% You probably have a master's degree.
- 50-60% You either have a terminal degree (Ph.D., M.D., M.F.A.) or multiple master's degrees.
- 60-70% You are an acknowledged expert in your area of study.
- 70-80% You are internationally known in your area of specialization. You can demand high fees as a consultant.
- 80-90% If lay people are aware of your field of study, yours is one of the few names they know. You appear in documentaries and get mentioned in *Newsweek*.

### Notice

- 15-20% You notice the obvious, most of the time, but you're easily distracted.
- 20-30% You're about average: if someone drops a shiny dime on the sidewalk, you'll at least see it.
- 30-40% You're pretty sharp: you can spy a toupee or dye job at twenty paces, and your typing is always free of typos.
- 40-50% You're remarkably perceptive: this level is typical of police detectives, forensic pathologists, and archaeologists.
- 50-60% You notice even tiny details—the one book that's upside-down in a shelf, incongruous scents, a previously locked door that's now open a crack.
- 60-70% You can hear a whisper from twenty feet away on a still night, or read a newspaper by starlight.
- 70-80% You could trail a cat through a dark alley.
- 80-90% Like Sherlock Holmes, no detail escapes you.

### Charm

- 15-20% Even your friends find you a bit annoying at times.

- 20-30% You can get along with people, if you have a lot in common. You can flatter the boss without being too slimy.
- 30-40% You can be entertaining and friendly, even with people you don't particularly care for.
- 40-50% Whenever an important client comes into town, your boss asks you to take him or her out to dinner.
- 50-60% You could make a pretty good living as a confidence trickster, provided that you can lie as well as you schmooze.
- 60-70% You have the skills of a great diplomat or a great seducer (or both).
- 70-80% Your honeyed tongue is nigh irresistible.
- 80-90% Even your enemies feel bad about hating you.

### Lie

- 15-20% You can lie convincingly—as long as it's a white lie and you're telling your listener what they want to hear.
- 20-30% You can put one over on people now and again, as long as you don't have to sustain it for too long.
- 30-40% You can tell a complete whopper with a straight face.
- 40-50% You lie with ease and facility. This is a standard level of Lie skill for people who deceive routinely—crooked salespeople, con artists, private investigators, and compulsive philanderers.
- 50-60% You lie like it's second nature. This is the minimum level of skill possessed by most undercover cops or deep-cover secret agents.
- 60-70% You can instantly create elaborate and intricate lies, and keep track of them.
- 70-80% You can present the most illogical untruth and still be persuasive. You can keep track of multiple identities and stories without getting them confused.
- 80-90% People basically believe anything you tell them.

## Unskilled Actions

At some point, your character is probably going to try to do something that he has no skill for. Does this mean success is impossible? Certainly not—being unskilled in something doesn't mean you can't do it. Consider learning to catch a baseball: you start out unskilled, but you have to catch it the first time eventually. However, you probably wouldn't catch it for the first time if you were in a game with two dozen little-league parents screaming at you. Stress is a big factor.

To simulate this in game terms, there are two rough divisions of how stressful a situation is: **relaxed** and **tense**. A relaxed situation is one where nothing really important is on the line if you screw up; for the baseball example, you're playing catch with your dad. Tense is where you're going to look foolish or lose something worthwhile if you fail, or where you're in combat. A little-league game is pretty tense, for a young kid; catching a spare ammo magazine in the midst of a firefight is pretty tense for adults.

In a relaxed situation where you don't have the right skill, you succeed if you roll under your relevant trait and above 30. If you wanted to catch a baseball, you'd have to roll between 30 and your Speed score.

In a tense situation, you can't make an unskilled attempt at anything. You're just too frazzled to have any chance of success.

**Example:** Cage doesn't have a Photography skill, but this doesn't mean he can't point and shoot. If he's taking pictures at his brother's wedding, he has to roll between 30 and his Mind score. A picky GM might ask if he was trying to take "artistic" photos, in which case he'd have to roll his pitiful Soul score, but Cage just wants something his mom can stick in her scrapbook.

Now suppose Cage is staking out an apartment with his hacker chum. The hacker takes off for coffee, leaving behind his complicated surveillance camera with telephoto lens, *etc.* The hacker is gone for a few minutes—and during that time, a car drives up and honks. The surveillance target leaves the building and hurries to the car. Cage wants to get a picture of the car so they can identify it later, but he has no idea how to work the camera and only moments to figure it out. He fumbles around but can't make it work—the player doesn't even get to make a roll. Without some sort of Photography skill, he just doesn't have a chance when the pressure is on.

## Impossible Actions

As a caveat to the rules in the previous section, there are some things you just can't do even in a relaxed situation if you don't have



## Sample Skills

This isn't a comprehensive list of skills and isn't intended as such; it's a starting point, not the be-all and end-all. We've included it for several reasons.

First, to give examples of how we handled some popular skills whose classification wasn't immediately obvious. Second, we wanted to give examples of unusual skills—the kind of highly specialized thing you can't easily do with other systems. Third, we wanted to show how advantages that you wouldn't immediately call a "skill" can still be shoehorned into the system. Finally, we also wanted to give examples of how to work a skill into the rules. Note that individual GMs can (and will) find different compromises. Take the Hold Your Breath skill for example; one GM might just allow the skill to extend the amount of time someone can spend without breathing. Someone else might rule that when a normal person would be *forced* to take a breath, someone with the Hold Your Breath skill can roll their skill instead. While this makes it theoretically possible to hold your breath forever (if your skill is high enough or you're a lucky roller) it also adds an exciting element of chance. Both approaches are fine.

### Body

**Distracting Physique.** There's something about your body that just draws stares. Maybe you're almost inhumanly beautiful. Or maybe you have a gigantic goiter on your neck, a filmed-over eye, or one arm is a foot longer than the other. In any event, whenever someone sees you for the first time, you can make a Distracting Physique roll. If you succeed, the viewer is freaked out and is at -10% to all skills until you leave his presence. Unfortunately, this only works once per target—and it works on your allies as well as your enemies.

**Hold Your Breath.** You can hold your breath a freakishly long time. Normally a person can hold their breath for a number of seconds equal to their Body score. Then they have to breathe. Not you; you can hold your breath for an extra second for each point you put in this skill.

**Hold Your Liquor.** Normally, people take penalties for sucking down booze like a dissipated writer; some people with iron guts can imbibe like William Faulkner and show no appreciable effects. At that point where an unskilled drinker would start taking penalties, your GM rolls this skill for you. If the roll succeeds, you don't take the penalty. If it fails, you still do—but you don't know it until you try to make a roll on your own. You cannot negate the effects of more than four drinks within a six-hour period.

**Large And Hard To Move.** You've got a low center of gravity, so you're hard to knock off your feet. Any attack or effect that would knock you down only does so if the person who rolled for it rolled *over* your Large And Hard To Move skill. (Note that you can also be Small And Hard To Move; ever try to push over someone who weighs 140 pounds and is only four feet tall?)

### Speed

**Do Two Things At Once.** You're adept at splitting your attention without halving it. As a consequence, whenever you're

successful at a Speed-based skill, and your roll was lower than your Do Two Things At Once skill, you can do something different at the same time (as long as the two actions aren't mutually exclusive). For instance, you can shoot your gun and kick someone in the same round, if your Firearms roll was low enough. Or you can yank the parachute out of your enemy's hands and pull the cord at the same time. The possibilities are endless.

**Fast Draw.** You're real good at getting a weapon ready real fast. Normally it takes an action to draw a weapon; however, if your initiative roll is under your Fast Draw skill, you can draw your weapon and attack with it immediately.

**Snatch.** This is the skill of grabbing things out of people's hands or pockets before they can react. This is not the same as picking a pocket; the victim is immediately going to know what you've done. However, there's not a lot he can do about it. One limit to the Snatch skill is on its use in combat; if you try to snatch a gun or knife out of someone's hand, you have to not only roll under your Snatch skill, but *above* the target's relevant skill (Handguns or Knife Fighting or whatever). This is only for disarming someone with a drawn weapon; it doesn't apply to weapons still in their holsters, which can be yanked with a simple snatch roll.

**Squirrely Reflexes.** You're just an intrinsically jumpy, paranoid person. When a fight starts, your first instinct is to make like a squirrel—grab your nuts and run. Consequently, when you're making an initiative roll, you can flip-flop it if the roll is lower than your Squirrely Reflexes skill. You can do this even if the result would then be *higher* than your skill level (but still under your Speed). For example, if you have Squirrely Reflexes 30% and you roll a 24 on initiative, you can make it into a 42.

### Mind

**Authority.** For whatever reason, you are in a position to tell people to do things and have them get done. This is the requisite skill for people who want to play cops, mob bosses, bishops and other people who have a power structure backing them up. (GM characters in such positions don't need to take this skill; it's just a game balance thing for players in these jobs.) A police officer has an Authority score of about 15%, while a federal agent would have a score more like 30%. You can use this skill to wow the yokels, call for backup, obtain the skills of specialists—it's a very broad-based skill. (If you need to coerce someone into obeying you in a normal situation, like writing a speeding ticket, it happens automatically unless the person is predisposed against compliance.) Just make sure you and your GM agree on what kind of authority you are. You can also lose this skill by failing to uphold the responsibilities and expected duties of your station ("You were out of line, McBlain! Hand in your badge!"), so be warned.

**Doublethink.** This is a weird skill, similar in nature to what many schools of magick require for their spells. Simply put, it's the skill of briefly convincing yourself of things you really *know* aren't true. "I don't know what you're talking about! I didn't shoot nobody!" It's a short-term and intense form of method acting that involves suppressing your memories under waves of intense emotion—usually an intense *wish* that what you're saying was true.

When you make a successful Doublethink roll, the next time someone asks you about something, you can give them a brief answer that appears true; you don't have to make a Lie roll because you believe it. The down side of Doublethink is that using it about minor stuff is a rank-2 Self challenge, and using it on anything important ("Of *course* I love you!") is a rank-5 Self challenge. (For more on stress checks for madness, see page 67.)

**Hypnotherapist.** This isn't any kind of mind-control shtick. ("My will is stronger than yours. You must obey!") It just means you can put a willing subject into a trance state. You can use this to recover lost memories, reinforce suggestions, and get them to quack like a duck or gibber like a mandrill. You're more than just a sideshow entertainer, however; you're also trained in helping people deal with repressed, distorted, or just plain painful memories. (Meaning, you're qualified to put people under and erase those nasty "Failed" dots on their Madness Meters—see page 69. for more info on therapy). Note that it is possible to hypnotize an unsuspecting suspect, but it's hard—you have to roll at least a 40% and still get under your skill. It is impossible to hypnotize an unwilling suspect who knows what you're doing.

**Photographic Memory.** This is the ability to rapidly memorize everything in your visual field. You have to do it deliberately and it takes one action. Write down what you've mentally "photographed" when you do it; later you can roll to pull discrete details out of your "picture." (This means you can do that trick where you glance at a page in a phone book and can later recite it back.) A variation is eidetic memory or "total recall" where you can roll to recall anything you paid attention to; this does *not* allow you to do the phone book trick (you'd have to thoroughly read the page first instead of just looking at it), but you can (with an okay roll) remember any page of any book you've ever read.

## Soul

**A Friend in the Family.** You have a buddy who's a mobster. (Or a forensic pathologist, or an expert in the occult, or whatever.) Your buddy will help you out on minor matters without a roll. ("Hey Rocco, can you spot me a twenty until payday?") Activities involving risk or considerable effort will not only require a roll but

an explanation. ("Hey Rocco, can you help me bury the body of this dead senator I got in my trunk?") You may also lose points off this skill if you only see your pal at *your* convenience; after all, who likes a friend who's only around when he needs something?

**Aura Sight.** Even though you're not trained in a school of magick, you're aware of auras. If you make a conscious effort, you can roll to pick up information about someone's magickal aptitude, health, physical capabilities, mood, and general state of metaphysical health. Demon possession and astral parasite infestation are easily detectable. Only living things have auras, however, so you can't tell if an item is magickal or if a car was last driven by a werewolf.

**Commanding Presence.** You come across as someone who should be obeyed, regardless of whether you actually have any authority or not. You're the kind of guy who can direct people to the lifeboats in a calm and orderly fashion, tell people convincingly that the situation is under control, and get them to answer questions on the flimsiest of pretexts.

**Good Old Whatsisname.** You seem awfully familiar to people. Maybe you just have an unusually average face. Maybe you subconsciously imitate the word choice and accent of those you hear around you. In any event, people are always mistaking you for distant cousins, old high school acquaintances, long-ago frat buddies, *etc.*

**Hunches.** Here's a simple one. If you make a successful roll, you then get a hunch, as explained on page 27. Unfortunately for you, you can't do this *in* combat—though an existing hunch is valid when combat starts.

**Play Dumb.** You're real good at convincing people that you're about as sharp as a sack of wet mice. This means they're likely to underestimate you as a threat and often put the best interpretation on your actions ("Aw, the poor retard just wandered into a restricted area. Show him out and kick his ass a little, but don't bother writing it up.") It can also be used to get people to tell you more than they meant to in the process of explaining what they *do* want you to know.

**Vocal Imitation.** You have a knack for recreating sounds with your voice. Not only is this a useful skill for doing duck calls and spicing up your Bill Clinton jokes at parties, it can be remarkably useful for fooling people over the telephone.

the appropriate skill. If you don't have Russian skill, you're not going to get anyone in Moscow to show you where the bathroom is unless they also speak your language. If you don't have Pilot Jet skill, you're not going to hop into an F-15 Tomcat and take off from an aircraft carrier. If you've never fired a gun before, you're not going to know what to do when the semi-automatic handgun you just picked up off a corpse jams.

The GM is the final arbiter of all unskilled action attempts. He may choose to impose stiffer penalties than outlined herein if it seems appropriate, and may even disallow the attempt outright. In some cases, he may choose to make things easier.

## Tidying Up

Ok, you've got an obsessed, passionate character with a definite personality. You've got stats that describe your character's general capacities, and skills that measure how well he's lived up to his

potential. There's still a few blanks left on your character sheet for us to address.

## Obsession Skill

Pick one of your skills as your **obsession skill**. This must, of course, be related to your obsession. (If you're an adept, your school of magick must be your obsession skill.) Put a star next to that skill. *Any time* you make a roll on your obsession skill, you can flip-flop the roll (see page 27). You only get one obsession skill, and never get another, and can't change—so pick carefully.

## Cherries

Players who choose a school of magick or some form of hand-to-hand combat (brawling, tae kwon do, whatever) as their obsession skill get a special bonus: cherries. These are special effects trig-



### Skills Example: Cage

The skills Cage wants to have maxed out are Street Fighting (a Body skill, which is just another name for “Struggle”) and Firearms (a Speed skill). Once he’s taken those at 55%, he’s got 15 points left in Speed and 30 left in Body. He decides to put his Body points into a Weight Lifting skill (‘cause it fits). He’s thinking of using his 15 Speed points to get a better Driving score of 30%, but the nun’s player suggests that he crank up his Dodge skill, so he raises that to 30% instead.

Next, he’s got only 30 Soul points to distribute. He decides to plop them all into Intimidation—Cage doesn’t strike Phil as a particularly seductive, persuasive or artistic type.

Finally, there’s 50 Mind points left. Phil doesn’t think Cage spent a lot of time in school, and when he was there he was probably in auto shop, so he gives him Automotive Tinkering at 25%, and decides that using the rest to raise his Notice skill to 40% wouldn’t be amiss.

### Skills Example: Jennifer Zaraya

Right off the bat, Kim knows she wants to max out her Magick skill at 55%. Given her Soul of 70, that leaves 15 points left. She puts the rest into Compassion, a variant of the free skill of Charm. That gets her a Compassion skill of 30%.

Under Body, Kim decides on the spot that Jennifer is a professional dancer. She drops 20 of her Body points into Dancing—a variant of General Athletics—for a score of 35%. The remaining 15 points go into Struggle.

Mind is next. Kim sees Jennifer as a perceptive woman, so she drops twenty points on the free skill of Notice, getting a score of 35%. This leaves 40 points left to spend. Kim decides to drop them all on a skill she makes up called Savvy Advice, which allows her to examine an interpersonal situation of some sort and decide on the wisest course of action.

Finally, there’s Speed. Kim knows Jennifer isn’t much for combat, so she puts thirty points into the free skill of Dodge, giving her 45%. The remaining 25 points go into Sleight-of-Hand; Kim figures that Jennifer has had a lifelong interest in magic tricks and clever hand games, so she’s acquired some proficiency in such things.

gered whenever your character rolls a successful match on your magick attempt or hand-to-hand attack. You need to choose your cherries during character creation. A list of sample cherries appears in the Combat chapter on page 60 for hand-to-hand attacks, and in the Magick chapter on page 83 for spells.

### Madness Meters

You’ll see several little charts that have ten **hardened** notches on the top and five **failed** notches on the bottom. These measure how close you are to going crazy, and are explained in the chapter on madness (p. 64).

If you decide that your character has a traumatic event (or events) in his past, you can choose to represent this by giving yourself failed notches on one or more of the gauges. You can only take a maximum of three such notches, total. For each failed notch you take, you can get a hardened notch on the gauge of your choice. (If you like, you can put your failed and hardened notches on the same gauge.)

Characters with a school-of-magick skill must take one failed and one hardened spot in the gauge marked “The Unnatural.”

### Wound Points

These are a measure of how much damage your character can take before dying the death of a small brown dog. Your initial store of **wound points** is equal to your Body score. Every time your Body score goes up through experience (but not through magick) your wound points increase too.

Once you’re at 0 wound points, you’re dead. Once you’re at 5, you’re unconscious or in shock. More information on wounds and healing can be found in the Combat chapter, page 48.

## Experience

In the course of the game, you’re probably going to wish your character had a skill she’s lacking, or that one of her skills was better. Lucky for you, the generous game designers have provided a way for you to fix it.

The fix is called an “experience point.” You get points for doing various things, and at the end of each session you can spend them to improve skills and traits.

### Gaining Experience

First off, you really ought to get between two and ten experience points just for getting to the game session and playing, depending on how fast the GM wants to allow advancement. (Hey, commitment should be rewarded.) Five points per session is recommended as a happy medium, at least until the GM is used to experience points and has a good handle on the way the players are using them.

Second, any character should get another point if he’s present at the climax of a plotline—no matter how it came out. This means that if you confront the evil cult leader, or figure out the mystery and retrieve the magick thingamabob, or even if you just wind up getting your butts kicked, you still resolved the issue (or at worst, had it resolved on your chin).

Third, you should also get another point if you do something really clever. This can be either you (the player) or your character. If your character figures out a way to get around a gang of thugs without anyone getting hurt, or pulls off a spectacular bluff, or makes some other coup, that’s worth a point. Similarly, if you make a joke that gets the GM to laugh until she squirts Coke out of her nose, she’ll probably give you a point through



EARL GEER

her tears. These “clever” points are awarded for making the game session entertaining, exciting, and unpredictable, and are up to the GM to award.

Finally, at the end of every session, all the players vote and decide which player did the best job. Players are *not* allowed to vote for themselves. The GM breaks ties, if needed, either by choosing or by rolling a die. Whoever wins the vote as the best player gets another point. Note that “best player” is pretty nebulous. It could mean who stayed in character best, who had the best ideas, or maybe it’s just the guy who needs one more experience point before he can raise his Put A Cap In Your Ass skill to 60%.

So this means you’ll usually pull down six to eight experience points per session, assuming you get five just for playing. Don’t whine if your GM seems stingy with the points—experience points are one way a GM can pace the campaign. If your GM wants to play in a high-power style, you may get a lot of experience points so you can turn into hardcore badassess really fast. If she wants a gritty-realism tone, she’ll probably keep the point load low and make you work for ‘em.

## Using Experience Points

It’s simple. You can raise the “ones place” of any skill or stat by paying points equal to its new value. So if you want go from Body 55 to Body 56, it costs six points—the value of the new ones place. Going from Dodge 12 to Dodge 13 is three points. Going from Nose For Trouble 90 to Nose For Trouble 91 is only one point.

But remember that a 0 by itself means 10, so if your new number ends in a 0, it’s not free. You spend ten points to get it. Going from 49 to 50 in your Create A Diversion skill costs ten, just like going from 29 to 30 in Run Fast.

Just so there’s no confusion: this does *not* mean that you can go from skill 22 to skill 25 by spending three points. That would actually cost twelve points, because you’d have to jump from 22 to 23 (three points) then to 24 (four points) then to 25 (five points).  $5 + 4 + 3 = 12$ . But you’re not here for a math lesson, are you?

Buying a new skill costs five experience points. It starts out at 01. However, some skills (GM’s discretion) may require you to find a teacher. (After all, you can’t teach yourself how to pilot a helicopter.)

If you want your character to spend a dedicated amount of time pursuing the improvement of a given skill or stat—such as taking a night-school course in Spanish—your GM may decide to grant you extra experience points to spend exclusively on that skill. The amount of points gained is up to the GM, but as a rule of thumb, a given session of learning (say a couple of hours) should grant one or perhaps two points of experience to apply towards improving that skill.

### Tidying Up Example: Cage


Phil agonizes over having his firearms skill be his obsession skill, but in his heart he knows it's street fighting. Cage can flip-flop any rolls he makes when trying to hurt someone bad with fists, pool cues, monkey wrenches, or his steel-toed boots. He also gets other advantages for being a martial artist (well—sort of an artist), as explained on page 59.

Phil also decides that Cage isn't any kind of shrinking violet when it comes to violence, so he takes two hardened dots in the Violence gauge. He pays for them by taking failed dots in Self and Helplessness—Phil thinks this is fitting, since Cage fears that people will realize he's really a helpless guy underneath it all.

Finally, Phil puts a big fat 70 in the Wound Points box, and he's ready to rock and roll.

<b>NAME</b>	CAGE			
<b>SUMMARY</b>	TOUGH-ASS #000			
<b>PERSONALITY</b>	A YOUNG ROBERT DE NIRO IN A MARTIN SCORCSESE FILM.			
<b>OBSESSION</b>	TOUGHNESS. IF <del>YOU'RE</del> YOU'RE HARD ON THE OUTSIDE, NO ONE CAN FIND OUT HOW SOFT YOU ARE ON THE INSIDE. HE'D RATHER HAVE PEOPLE'S FEAR THAN THEIR UNDERSTANDING, BECAUSE HE DOESN'T LIKE IT WHEN PEOPLE UNDERSTAND HIM.			
<b>RAGE STIMULUS</b>	ANYONE WHO TRIES TO PICK ON CAGE AND BELITTLE HIM. WHEN SOMEONE CHALLENGES HIS STATUS AS "THE TOUGHEST GUY AROUND," HE'S LIKELY TO GET REALLY PISSED OFF.			
<b>FEAR STIMULUS</b>	(SELF) WHEN HE'S IN DANGER OF LOOKING EMOTIONALLY WEAK, HE'S AFRAID THAT PEOPLE WILL FIND OUT THAT UNDERNEATH IT ALL, HE'S A FRAUD — A PSYCHOLOGICAL WEAKLING.			
<b>NOBLE STIMULUS</b>	PEOPLE WHO ARE WEAK BUT WHO ARE TRYING TO BECOME STRONG. HE CAN REALLY IDENTIFY WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE WORKING TO OVERCOME THEIR DIFFICULTIES.			

<b>BODY</b>	70	70	70	<b>SPEED</b>
	MEATY	<b>WOUND POINTS</b>	SURPRISINGLY QUICK	
<b>UNKNOWN ARMIES</b>			WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET	<b>UNKNOWN ARMIES</b>
	STREET-SMART			
<b>MIND</b>	50		30	<b>SOUL</b>

<b>BODY SKILLS</b>	General Athletics 15%, Street Fighting 55%, Weight Lifting 30%
<b>SPEED SKILLS</b>	Dodge 30%, Driving 15%, Firearms 55%
<b>MIND SKILLS</b>	General Education 15%, Automotive Tinkering 25%, Notice 40%
<b>SOUL SKILLS</b>	Intimidation 30%, Lying 15%, Charm 15%

<b>VIOLENCE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1	<b>HARDENED</b>	<b>FAILED</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
<b>THE UNNATURAL</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1	<b>HARDENED</b>	<b>FAILED</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
<b>HELPLESSNESS</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1	<b>HARDENED</b>	<b>FAILED</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
<b>ISOLATION</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1	<b>HARDENED</b>	<b>FAILED</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5
<b>SELF</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 10 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 1	<b>HARDENED</b>	<b>FAILED</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5



## Tidying Up Example: Jennifer Zaraya


It's easy for Kim to choose Jennifer's obsession skill—as an adept, Jennifer must obsess on Magick. This seems like a good point to choose her school of magick, and here Kim pulls a rabbit out of her hat: sweet, compassionate Jennifer is an epideromancer, an adept who fuels her magick by causing herself physical pain and uses it to alter the flesh of others. This choice suggests a streak of self-loathing that Kim pegged earlier with her choice of “personal selfishness” as her Fear passion. Jennifer's obsession with the human body betrays her insecurities about her own body, while at the same time demonstrating her understanding that our physical appearances are often what others judge us by. Jennifer feels that as an epideromancer, she has already mastered flesh and passed beyond it, ready for a higher understanding. The cruelty she has to inflict on herself to work her magick is transmuted into a form of sacrifice: as long as Jennifer has to hurt herself to help others, it helps her avoid her fear of a secret selfishness. The pain she suffers is her martyr-like proof that she really does put the well-being of others over her own.

As for her madness meters, Kim decides to give Jennifer two hardened notches against The Unnatural and one against Violence, reflecting her experiences with the strange form of magick she practices. Kim pays for this by taking one failed notch in Helplessness, Unnatural, and Self.

Finally, she puts 35 under her wound points, and she's ready to go.

<b>NAME</b>	Jennifer Zaraya		
<b>SUMMARY</b>	Compassionate, tortured truth-seeker and Epideromancer.		
<b>PERSONALITY</b>	Cancer. Nurturing, understanding, coalition-building.		
<b>OBSESSION</b>	Gnosis. You want to understand the cosmos. It's so easy to sit back and see only the trees, but you insist on finding the forest. The world would be better if only we could all possess a true personal understanding of reality.		
<b>RAGE STIMULUS</b>	Savage cruelty. Mental or physical cruelty makes her see red. Why can't we all just get along?		
<b>FEAR STIMULUS</b>	(Self) Personal selfishness. She always has to put others before herself, or she feels guilty and afraid that she's a hypocrite.		
<b>NOBLE STIMULUS</b>	Ignorant prejudice. When she sees someone hurting someone else out of stupidity, she strides in to make things right.		

<b>BODY</b>	35	35	55	<b>SPEED</b>
	short & scrawny	<b>WOUND POINTS</b>	quick as a cat	
<b>UNKNOWN ARMIES</b>				<b>UNKNOWN ARMIES</b>
	whip-smart		perceptive & passionate	
<b>MIND</b>	60		70	<b>SOUL</b>

<b>BODY SKILLS</b>	Dancing 35%, Struggle 30%		
<b>SPEED SKILLS</b>	Dodge 45%, Driving 15%, Sleight-of-Hand 25%		
<b>MIND SKILLS</b>	General Education 15%, Notice 35%, Savvy Advice 40%		
<b>SOUL SKILLS</b>	Compassion 30%, Lying 15%, Magick: Epideromancy 55%		

<b>VIOLENCE</b>	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>HARDENED</b>	FAILED	1 2 3 4 5
<b>THE UNNATURAL</b>	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>HARDENED</b>	FAILED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 3 4 5
<b>HELPLESSNESS</b>	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>HARDENED</b>	FAILED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 3 4 5
<b>ISOLATION</b>	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>HARDENED</b>	FAILED	1 2 3 4 5
<b>SELF</b>	10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>HARDENED</b>	FAILED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2 3 4 5





*chapter five*  
*combat*

**UNKNOWN  
ARMIES**



"WAR IS, AT FIRST, THE HOPE THAT ONE WILL BE BETTER OFF; NEXT, THE EXPECTATION THAT THE OTHER FELLOW WILL BE WORSE OFF; THEN, THE SATISFACTION THAT HE ISN'T ANY BETTER OFF; AND, FINALLY, THE SURPRISE AT EVERYONE'S BEING WORSE OFF."

—KARL KRAUS

"YOU WANNA PLAY SMARTASS WITH ME?  
'CAUSE IF YOU DO, SON, I'LL SCHOOL YOUR ASS *GOOD*."

—RANDY DOUGLAS



▲ 23

69 1/2 Weeks—Over a year's worth of non-stop action on one videotape! This film features adult video legend Wick Diepper's debut in the infamous "Paris Catacombs" orgy scene. A must have for any collector! Directed by Carl Plogue. Re-released on Apex Video, \$29.95.

2/16 - FOUND THIS IN AVN TODAY. NO YEAR ON IT, DAMMIT, BUT THIS IS ONE OF HER MOVIES. I'LL SEND AWAY TOMORROW.

Rem: CHECK OUT DIEPPER CONNECTION.

3/7-'69.5' FINALLY ARRIVED. IT WAS FILMED IN 1996, AND APPARENTLY HER CAREER IS ON THE DOWNWARD SLIDE. IT'S HER ALL RIGHT, BUT STILL NO NAME! THERE'S SOME KIND OF 'MAGNETIC ERROR' ON THE TAPE WHERE HER NAME SHOULD BE IN THE CREDITS. YEAH, RIGHT. HER NAME HAS TO BE THE KEY.

COULD THOSE N.G. BITCHES HAVE GONE THROUGH AND VANDALISED EVERY TAPE? IMPOSSIBLE... MAY BE THE MASTER TAPE, THOUGHT. THAT WOULD BE A LOT EASIER. IT'S CERTAINLY WITHIN D.L.'S POWER TO ARRANGE A 'CONVENIENT ACCIDENT'. HELL, SHE MIGHT HAVE EVEN DONE IT MANUALLY - MUST CHECK

ON CONNECTION BETWEEN APEX VIDEO AND D.L. THEY'RE BASED IN MILWAUKEE, THAT'S A SHORT DRIVE FROM HER STOMPING GROUNDS.

3/16 - SAW HER ON MTV TODAY! BLOODY DANNY KRACK OR WHATEVER HIS NAME WAS PUT HER IN A VIDEO! IT'S CALLED "VIDEO VIXEN" OR SOME SUCH TRIPE.

HE MUST HAVE MET HER WORKING ON "BRIPAL WHOREHOUSE" BEFORE HE MADE IT BIG. GREAT, NOW I HAVE TO RESEARCH SOME LATTER-DAY JON BAN JOU, TOO. STILL,

HER APPEARANCE IN THE VIDEO - AS A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN ON A VIDEO THAT DANNY CAN'T MEET OR TOUCH OR GET TO - THAT'S SIGNIFICANT. EVEN AS STOPPED CLOCK

IS RIGHT TWICE A DAY. EVEN A PUFFY-HAIRED POP-STAR CAN REVEAL MYSTIC WISDOM...

**Why do people** fall in love? Beats us. Why do people kick the crap out of each other? Because humans are impulsive, destructive beings with a strong survival instinct, and because they like the feel of an adrenalin rush. (Maybe that answers the first question, too.) When characters in *Unknown Armies* decide to kick (or shoot or cut or hit or beat) the crap out of each other, that's combat. And that's what this chapter is all about.

Combat consists of a few main concepts: who goes first (**initiative**), how do you hurt someone (**attacking**), how do you avoid getting hurt (**dodging**), what happens when you get hurt (**damage**), what else you can do besides fight (**non-combat actions**), and what to do after the fight (**wounds and healing**). We cover these topics in the next few pages.

## Initiative

When people fight in real life, things happen simultaneously and there's no order of action—combat isn't chess. But in a roleplaying game, we need to formalize things to make combat easy to manage.

Each time a combat starts, character actions are taken in a regimented series of steps called **rounds**—sort of like the rounds of a boxing match, but they're much shorter. In UA, a round of combat lasts approximately three seconds, during which every character in the combat has the potential to use an attack skill, to dodge, to cast a spell, or to start performing some other simple action. But keep in mind that rounds are an abstraction for the sake of having simple rules. No character is aware of rounds as such, and no player should make an issue over highly accurate timekeeping (“That should take *five* seconds, not *three!*”). Combat is abstracted. Don't sweat it.

At the beginning of each round, the GM determines who—including the player characters and any GM characters—gets to go first, second, third, and so on, sort of like playing enie-meenie-

minie-moe. This process is known as initiative. When it's your turn, you get to say what you're doing during this round.

Characters with a higher Speed stat are more likely to go first, or at least to go early rather than later, in a given round. This gives them an advantage, because they lead the pack in terms of deciding what to do. They can put slower characters in the position of having to react to what the faster characters are doing—the faster characters make the first move, and everyone else copes the best they can. The initiative process is still random, however; slower characters still have a chance to go first or early. It's just that statistically, the faster characters will go first or early more often than the slower characters.

## Determining Initiative

To determine initiative, every player makes a Speed check: roll percentile dice and hope to get the highest number he can without going over the Speed stat. Each player makes a roll for his character.

**You always want to roll high.** If you roll too high and fail the check, you still want to get a high result because you'll get to go ahead of the other people who also failed their check but who rolled lower than you. This is important, since you might be able to flip-flop or otherwise change your result—and even if you can't make a success out of your roll, you still want as high a result as possible if you want to go early rather than later.

Once the rolls are made, and any flip-flops or other result-manipulation occurs, the characters are broken into two groups: those who *succeeded* in rolling equal to or less than their Speed stats, and those who *failed* by rolling too high. To make this simple, players who succeed in their initiative roll might raise their hands and keep them raised until their turn comes. That makes it clear who succeeded and who didn't.



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GM characters (GMCs) determine initiative in a different way that doesn't involve dice. All GMCs in this rulebook have either an (F) or an (S) next to their Speed scores. (F) means *failed* and (S) means *succeeded*. All GMCs' initiative results are always equal to their Speed scores—as if they had rolled the dice and scored exactly their Speeds—but the (F) or (S) indicates whether they go during the successful-initiative part of the round or the failed-initiative part of the round. As a rule of thumb, major GMCs get an (S) and minor GMCs get an (F).

With that decided, initiative proceeds in the order of highest roll *within* the group that succeeded. Then when all of the successful characters have taken their turns, all of the *unsuccessful* characters proceed in the order of highest failed roll *within their* group. To summarize:

- I. All successful rolls go before any failed rolls do
  1. OACOWA always goes first
  2. High numbers that succeed go early
  3. Low numbers that succeed go late
- II. Any failed rolls go after all successful rolls do
  1. High numbers that failed go early
  2. Low numbers that failed go late
  3. BOHICA always goes last

**Example:** Four player characters—Aron, Brian, Claudia, and Derek—are facing three members of a rival cabal—Xander, Yolanda, and Zack. Here are the PCs' Speed scores and what they rolled:

Aron	Speed: 30	Roll: 03
Brian	Speed: 40	Roll: 47
Claudia	Speed: 50	Roll: 98
Derek	Speed: 60	Roll: 54

The GMCs don't get die rolls, as noted earlier—their “rolls” are simply equal to their Speed scores. Their initiative results are as follows:

Xander	Speed: 45 (S)	Roll: 45 (succeeded)
Yolanda	Speed: 55 (F)	Roll: 55 (failed)
Zack	Speed: 65 (S)	Roll: 65 (succeeded)

But wait! Aron and Claudia both have the opportunity to flip-flop their rolls for one reason or another. Aron decides that yes, he'll flip-flop: that gives him a result of 30, equal to his skill. He hopes it's worth doing because it gives him a higher, but still successful, result. (In fact, it won't make any difference since the next lowest successful result, Xander's 45, is still higher than his—but he doesn't know that.) Claudia, on the other hand, does not flip-flop: she'd have an 89 instead of 98, and while that's closer to her skill of 50 it's still a failure. Since she can't succeed, she wants the highest failed result she can get so she can go ahead of the other unsuccessful characters like herself, and the 98 that she already rolled is higher than what she'd have if she flip-flopped.

The successful players—Aron and Derek—raise their hands. The GM notes that of the GM characters, Xander and Zack were successful. We now have our two groups. First, the successes, in order of highest successful roll:

Zack	Result: 65
Derek	Result: 54
Xander	Result: 45
Aron	Result: 30

Those four characters get to act in the above order, with Zack being the very first one to make a move during this round. Once Zack, Derek, Xander, and Aron have each taken their turn, we go on to the second group—the unsuccessful characters. They are listed below in order of highest unsuccessful roll:

Claudia	Result: 98
Yolanda	Result: 55
Brian	Result: 47

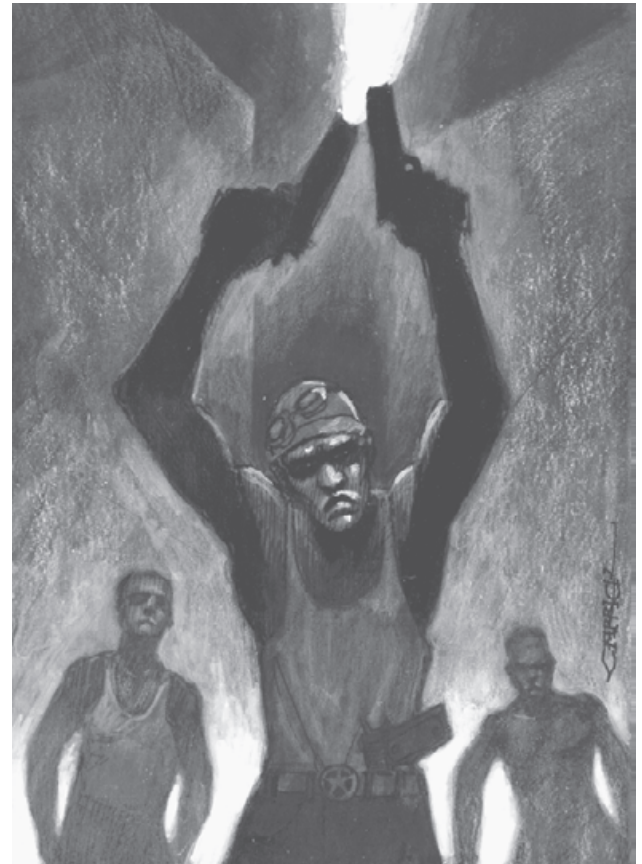
Once Claudia, Yolanda, and Brian have each taken their turns, it's time for a new round and another bout of initiative.

## Simultaneous Initiative

If two (or more) characters get identical successful results, or identical failed results, it means that they're supposed to take their actions at the same time. When this occurs, the GM has two options.

The default option is to not worry about it. The players (and GM) declare their actions simultaneously and the GM adjudicates as needed.

If the GM thinks it's a good idea—especially if the characters in question are fighting *each other* rather than as allies—then each player who tied should roll percentile dice. Whoever rolls highest goes first among the tied characters; then the next-highest character goes, and so on (re-roll any ties). This does *not* change their original result—it just determines what order they go in within that same step. This tie-breaking roll can not be altered in any way by



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flip-flops or magick or whatever. It's just a simple out-of-game way to settle ties; you could play rock-paper-scissors or guess-what-col-or-is-my-underwear if you wanted.

The best reason to use the tie-breaking method is that characters fighting each other might be taking actions that would affect each others' actions, and if they're acting simultaneously, it could be difficult for the GM to decide what happens.

## Attacking

When it's your turn to take an action during a round of combat, you can choose to attack someone. You attack by using a combat skill of some sort. It might be called Struggle, or Firearms, or Jeet Kun Do, or Brawling, or Kill Kill Kill—whatever you like.

To attack, once it's your turn in a given round just tell the GM what skill you're going to use and who you're going to use it on. Then roll percentile dice. You want to roll equal to or less than your combat skill, and given that, you want as high a result as possible. If you succeed, you've just hurt or killed someone. Congratulations.

## Attack Shifts

Attack shifts are shifts—bonuses or penalties—applied to your combat skill for a given attack or attacks. (Note that shifts are always applied to your skill, *not* to your die roll.) Some shifts happen because of magickal effects, and those are described in the magick chapter. Other shifts are summarized under "Sample Attack Shifts," below. There's a bunch of sample shifts on that table. But if you're a GM, don't make a habit of applying every shift you can to a situation—the table is meant to serve as a guideline, not a shopping list. You don't *have* to use every shift that applies.

A character's attack skill represents his chance of attacking when things are really difficult—a fast-paced, confusing situation. You don't need to add a bunch of non-magickal shifts to make things harder. His skill already assumes that things are pretty hard as is, so don't sweat the small stuff.

In general, the time to use attack shifts is when they're positive. In other words, if the attack is being made in a situation that is *easier* than a typical knock-down drag-out fight—against an unsuspecting target, for example—then it's appropriate to add a +10% or +20% shift to the character's attack skill for that attack.

**Don't use shifts to model reality.** If it's raining, don't give every combatant a -3% shift or something because the ground is slippery. Try to keep shifts in multiples of +/-10%, and use them only to represent aggregate dramatics. Let's say the character is wounded, angry, confused, hasn't slept for three days, and it's raining. Don't break each of those things down into a separate shift—just assign an overall shift that makes things a bit tougher for him. (-20% would be appropriate for that example.)

As a rule of thumb, don't assign a shift greater than +/-30% (not including magick shifts) to a character's attack skill unless it's a *really* extreme situation. And don't get bogged down in sweating the details of each situation. Does it seem like the character should have a little tougher time? -10% shift. Does it seem like things are going his way? +10% shift. Use the entries on the Shift Table to gauge an aggregate shift, not to add up every little factor. You should be able to stop looking at the Shift Table after your first couple of combats, and just wing it from there.

(Assume that -10% is good for when a situation is unusually tough, -20% is good for when a situation is seriously challenging, and -30% for when a situation is wildly difficult.)

Shifts should reflect dramatics and modulate gameplay. They should not dictate dramatics and encumber gameplay.

### Sample Attack Shifts

Situation	Shift
You're blind .....	-30%
You're punching or shooting with a broken arm .....	-20%
It's ten degrees below zero and you're just wearing sweatpants .....	-20%
You've been set on fire .....	-20%
You're fighting on a thin plank over a forty foot drop .....	-20%
You're naked in front of a <i>lot</i> of innocent bystanders .....	-10%
You're underwater (at least up to the waist) .....	-10%
You've been drugged and are having a hell of a bad trip .....	-10%
You're shooting while falling after jumping through a plate glass window .....	-10%
Your feet are manacled together .....	-10%
You're in free fall .....	-10%
You're shooting someone far away who isn't dodging .....	+10%
You're using a long hand-to-hand weapon against an unarmed opponent at appropriate distance .....	+10%
Opponent is barefoot on broken glass .....	+10%
Opponent is easily scared and just saw you gruesomely kill somebody .....	+10%
Opponent has on a big, heavy, off-balance frame backpack .....	+10%
You're emerging from concealment in order to attack .....	+10%
Opponent's feet are tightly chained to the ground .....	+20%
Opponent just ran a marathon .....	+20%
Opponent is in leg irons and handcuffs .....	+30%



## What “Dodge” Means

When we use the word “dodge” in this chapter and in the rest of the book, we mean “an active use of the Dodge skill in lieu of making an attack or doing anything else.” It doesn’t mean ordinary getting-out-of-the-way, which the rules assume you’re doing in combat all the time. For instance, when you put someone in a Kung Fu Grip (page 60), the text says, “Your target cannot attack or dodge next round because you’ve got him held.” The guy in the grip can’t use his Dodge skill, but anyone attacking him still makes a normal attack roll (shifted appropriately, of course).

## Dodging

If you choose to forego your attack and take no action except to scuttle about like a craven coward, you get to roll your Dodge skill. There’s not much to it: when it’s your turn to take an action, just say you’re dodging. (This *does* mean you can’t dodge attacks made by people with better initiative—they’ve got the drop on you, period.) After you’ve declared your dodge, you roll every time someone makes a successful attack on you for the rest of the round. If you roll well, you can reduce damage or even avoid it completely, as explained below. You can’t do anything else while dodging, though—you can’t attack or cast a spell or what have you.

**Exception #1:** if your Dodge skill is 85% or higher, you can attack or perform other actions while dodging, as long as your GM thinks it’s plausible under the circumstances.

**Exception #2:** the Dodge skill has no effect against most Blast attacks—that is, magickal energy attacks made against you by an adept and known in the game rules as Blast attacks. Blast attacks succeed or fail on their own merits, and are not affected in any way by your Dodge skill. Blast attacks are discussed in the Magick chapter.

For each successful attack made against you while you’re dodging, two things happen. First, if your opponent’s attack roll is lower than your Dodge skill—not what you roll, but the skill itself—then the attack does only half damage (round up). Second, you also get to make a Dodge skill check. If it’s successful, *and* it’s higher than your opponent’s attack roll, the attack does no damage at all.

The protection afforded by Dodge only lasts until the end of the round. Once the new round starts, you’re just as vulnerable as anyone else. Needless to say, the higher you score during initiative, the more good Dodge is going to do you.

## Damage

If someone is hit by an attack during combat, he loses wound points as a result. These wound points are lost immediately, before the next combatant acts, with whatever consequences that brings.

Damage is determined by the same roll you make to see if you succeed in your attack, but it is computed in one of two dif-

ferent ways depending on what sort of an attack it was. In short, firearms damage is equal to your successful attack roll (a 43 attack roll does 43 wound points of damage); hand-to-hand damage is equal to the *sum* of your successful attack dice (a 43 attack roll does  $4 + 3 = 7$  wound points of damage). Both of these methods are modulated by a variety of factors, discussed in the following sections.

**Note:** Damage from an adept’s use of the Blast magickal attack is covered in the magick chapter.

## Firearms Damage

For firearms, the damage you do is identical to the percentile result you rolled to attack with—a roll of 45 that succeeds will do 45 wound points of damage. That means that the higher your skill, the more damage you can do. A character with a Firearms skill of 40 can *not* do 70 points of damage in a single gunshot—but if his Firearms skill is 80, he *can* do 70 wound points, or even 80.

Different calibers of firearms have different maximum amounts of damage they can dish out. If your result is higher than the maximum damage for the firearm you’re using, but still lower than your skill, the damage you do drops to the maximum for that firearm. Damage maximums appear on the Firearms table.

**Example:** Derek has a Firearms skill of 65%. He’s using a Colt Viper revolver, a firearm that has a maximum damage of 50 points. If his attack result is a 79, he misses and does no damage. If it’s a 23, he hits and does 23 wound points of damage to his target. If it’s a 62, however, he only does 50 wound points of damage because he can’t do more than the firearm can dish out.

This means that characters with a higher skill level can do more damage. This reflects their higher level of ability—when they shoot, they’re shooting more accurately and they’re hitting parts of the body that are more vulnerable.

## Special Rolls and Firearms Damage

Two types of special rolls—OACOWAs, and BOHICAs—affect firearms damage in simple ways.

## An Important Reminder About Firearms

Guns are tools for killing people, and they do a fine job. However, like every tool, they have limitations. Specifically, you have to have a gun with you and get it ready to use. **It takes one round to draw a gun.** Unless you have a funky Fast Draw skill, or you earlier stated that you had your gun in your hand, you can’t attack with a gun on your first round of combat; you have to take a round to draw it. Of course, some smartass martial artist with a good initiative roll may just decide to draw *your* gun. That’s another limitation of tools: they can be taken away . . .



## Firearms Table

### Handguns

Name	Caliber	Capacity	Max Damage
Ruger Mark II semi-automatic	.22 long rifle	10	35
Walther PPK semi-automatic	.32 ACP	7	40
Colt Viper revolver	.38 Special	6	50
Glock Model 17 semi-automatic	9mm Parabellum	17	50
Smith & Wesson M586 revolver	.357 magnum	6	60
Ruger Super Redhawk revolver	.44 Magnum	6	80
IMI Desert Eagle semi-automatic	.50 AE	7	95

### Rifles

Name	Caliber	Capacity	Max Damage
Iver Johnson Model EW semi-automatic	.22 Long Rifle	15	35
Hechler & Koch G41 semi-automatic	5.56mm NATO	30	60
Remington Sportsman 74 semi-automatic	.30-06	4	80
FN FAL Light semi-automatic	7.62mm NATO	20	80
SIG-Sauer SSG2000 Sniper bolt-action	.300 Weatherby Magnum	4	100
Barrett Light Fifty M82A1 semi-automatic	.50 M2	11	170

### Shotguns

Name	Caliber	Capacity	Max Damage (buckshot/slug)
Charles Daly Field Grade break-open	20 gauge	2	60/70
Mossberg 5500 semi-automatic	20 gauge	5	60/70
Mossberg Model 500ATP8 pump-action	20 gauge	8	60/70
Bernardelli Model 115S break-open	12 gauge	2	120/80
Luigi Franchi SPAS 12 semi-automatic	12 gauge	8	120/80
Mossberg Model 500TP8-SP pump-action	12 gauge	8	120/80
Browning BPS pump-action	10 gauge	5	130/85
Harrington & Richardson Model 176 break-open	10 gauge magnum	1	140/115

### Submachine Guns

Name	Caliber	Capacity	Max Damage
Heckler & Koch MP5 full-auto	9mm Parabellum	20	50
Ingram M11 full-auto	.380 ACP	32	50
Micro-Uzi full-auto	.45 ACP	16	60
AKSU-74 full-auto	5.45mm M74	30	60

If you get an OACOWA, *you do maximum damage for that firearm*—even if the maximum damage is higher than your Firearms skill rating. Lucky shot!

If you get a BOHICA, *your gun jams or misfires*—semi-automatic and full-auto firearms jam (meaning the mechanics of moving a bullet through the weapon have gotten hitched up somehow), all others misfire (meaning the bullet was just a dud and the mechanics are okay). If it's a jam, you have to spend a round and make a successful firearms skill check to clear the weapon before it will work again. If you fail the check, you can keep trying, but each attempt takes one round. If it's a misfire, nothing happens this round but next round you can fire again normally; mark off that bullet as a dud.

## Multiple Shots

The firearms rules so far have assumed that in the course of one round, a given shooter will take one shot at one target. If you want to shoot at more than one target, or shoot a single target more than once, there's an easy way to do it: you just divide up your skill.

Suppose you've got Firearms 30% and you want to shoot at two targets. You just split your skill between them any way you choose. You could take a 15% shot at each. You could take a 20% shot at one and a 10% shot at the other. Or you could take a 29% shot at one and a 1% at the other, hoping for that lucky OACOWA. Similarly, if you want to shoot one target more than once, you can split your skill again. If you have Guns 40%, you can take two 20%



## A Brief Primer on Firearms

For the curious and the damned, here's a quick look at some common firearms issues likely to come up in your games. These are necessarily brief; if your real-world knowledge supersedes these generalities, by all means go with what you know. In particular, the section on legalities contains baseline assumptions. Local laws vary, but go with these assumptions if you don't have better information yourself. If you want more details, especially about your local laws, just call a gun store and ask. This information refers to the situation in America; foreign countries have very different laws.

Note that some information in this section falls under the rubric of "how to use firearms illegally and not get caught." This information is provided because it's the sort of thing that firearms-using characters in the game are likely to try, and the GM needs to know how to handle such activity. Nothing is provided in this section that cannot be readily inferred from the mass media. As stated later, however, you should understand that nothing draws the attention of law-enforcement authorities faster than illegal usage of firearms. You may think you're slick and will get away with it, but the fact is that there will be anywhere from a couple to a couple *dozen* highly trained professionals doing everything they can to put your slick self behind bars.

### Legalities

An adult can walk into a gun store and choose from a wide variety of revolvers, semi-automatic handguns, bolt-action rifles, semi-automatic rifles, break-open shotguns, pump-action shotguns, and semi-automatic shotguns. Long arms—rifles and shotguns—can be purchased and taken from the store immediately, but the buyer must fill out a one-page form with his name and vital statistics, describing the firearm and its serial number, and asserting that he is not a felon, is not abusing drugs or alcohol, does not have mental problems, and so forth. Handguns—both revolvers and semi-automatics—can be purchased, but must be left at the store for several days so that local law-enforcement authorities can run a criminal-records check on you; if you're a felon, you can't buy a gun. The only identification required is a driver's license or some other governmental ID. (The waiting period for handgun purchases generally ranges from five to fifteen days, varying by state.)

Many restrictions on the manufacture and importation of specific types of firearms have been passed over the years. They do not restrict the sale or ownership of already-existing firearms of these types, however, and in many cases such a large quantity of these weapons are already in circulation that the various bans merely raise the price, without greatly affecting availability. If you want it, you can buy it, and you can probably afford it.

Note that the above government forms and waiting period are only a factor if you're buying a weapon from a dealer. Firearm sales between private individuals—buying a weapon from a friend, co-worker, or what have you—are legal and unregulated, with the exception of fully automatic weapons.

Fully automatic weapons—machine guns, submachine guns, military assault rifles, and the like—are not legal to buy, sell, or own without special permits. These permits are expensive, are difficult to get, and essentially require you to surrender several of your civil liberties—if you have such a permit, for example, agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms can search your home without a warrant.

### Cost

As a rule of thumb, if you need a good handgun, rifle, or shotgun, \$500 will do the trick. Depending on your needs and budget, you can go a lot cheaper or a lot more expensive.

You can legally buy a cheap .22-caliber semi-automatic handgun for well under \$200, making it very popular among street gangs. Low-end medium-caliber handguns (9mm, .38) can be had for \$200 or \$300. Good-quality handguns in a variety of calibers range from \$400-\$600. High-quality or specialty models can go for more than \$1000.

Long arms tend to fall into similar price ranges. A cheap .22-caliber hunting rifle or double-barrel break-open 12-gauge shotgun can be had for \$200 or less. Most good-quality rifles and shotguns—including semi-automatic rifles and pump-action shotguns, popular with movie criminals and player characters—are priced from \$400-\$600. Again, high-quality or specialty models—or collector pieces that have been banned from new manufacture or import—can go above \$1,000. Even among banned weapons, however, the prices may not be outrageous. A typical civilian version of the AK-47 that once sold for \$350 was banned in the spring of 1998; after the ban, the price jumped to \$520, still well within the typical range of prices.

These prices are all for new weapons. For used weapons—offered at gun stores, pawn shops, or by private owners—you can typically expect to pay \$100-\$200 less than the new price, assuming the weapon isn't some sort of collector's piece.

### Operation

The mechanics of firearms operation vary widely. Some need to be cocked in some fashion before they'll work. Others will fire from the first squeeze of the trigger. Many have a "safety" of some sort, generally a simple mechanical switch that must be flipped before the weapon will function. Details of which firearms require what sorts of operation are beyond the scope of this game, though again you're welcome to use these details if you're aware of them. Otherwise, assume that a character with some sort of firearms skill can safely and reliably operate any civilian firearm. Characters without a firearms skill are subject to the rules found in "Unskilled Actions," p. 41.

## Concealment

It is illegal to carry a concealed handgun on your body without a permit. (Long arms are generally unconcealable.) Permits vary in cost and restrictions, but in general you can assume that a concealed-weapons permit may be issued to any adult who can pass a stringent criminal-records check. Expect to wait up to thirty days to receive the permit. Once you have it, however, you can carry your handgun almost anywhere. It's often illegal to carry even otherwise legally concealed handguns into places like banks, bars, schools, and police stations, though this varies by locale. A given permit is only legal within the state where it was issued. You must keep the permit with you if you're armed and show it to police when requested.

It's generally not illegal to carry unconcealed long arms or handguns. You can walk into a gun store, buy a shotgun, and immediately wander all over town on foot, your shotgun cocked and loaded at your side, as long as you don't brandish it in anything resembling a threatening fashion. However, police usually take a dim view of such activity, and will certainly ask you a few questions, decide if you're drunk or on drugs, check your record, and maybe cite you for something like disturbing the peace or being a nuisance. You'll also probably end up causing a panic and showing up on the local news, given the spate of disgruntled mailmen/employees/schoolchildren shootings in recent years.

Rifles and shotguns must have a barrel length of at least eighteen inches. You can saw the end off your shotgun if you want with no problem, as long as the barrel doesn't go below that limit. This generally makes it impractical to conceal long arms.

## Transport

It is illegal to ship firearms through the mail across state lines without dispensation to do so—such as if you're a legitimate gun dealer. You can bring firearms on airplanes, but they must go with your checked baggage, and you cannot bring ammunition with you. You must also inform the airline that you'll be flying with a firearm.

If you're traveling in a car, any firearm you have with you should be unloaded, in the trunk, and preferably wrapped in a blanket or stored in a firearms case. Carrying a handgun in your glove compartment or under your seat is generally considered the same as illegally carrying a concealed weapon, with big penalties. This varies, however—in some states, you can have the gun lying on the seat next to you as long as it's not loaded.

## Repercussions

The presence of a firearm of any sort at the commission of a crime—even if the crime is jaywalking, or being drunk & disorderly—immediately puts up a red flag for law enforcement. Should a police officer realize you have a gun, no matter what the circumstances, he's going to take the situation very seriously and will, first and foremost, attempt to neutralize the threat of the gun. Preferably, he'll ask you to put it down, and then find out what the hell you were doing with it. If you refuse to surrender the firearm and cannot be reasoned with, he may shoot you outright, if you pose an immediate threat to him or anyone else.

If you've been charged with a crime of some sort, and you had a gun with you—even if you weren't using it in the crime—it's safe to assume that the legal consequences will be graver than if you hadn't had the gun, owing to the implied threat and level of malicious intent this suggests. In some places, there are additional, mandated penalties for having a firearm during a crime. In many places, *claiming* to have a firearm during a crime is considered the same as *having* a firearm during the crime, even if you were lying.

If you show up at a hospital or doctor's office with a gunshot wound, medical personnel are typically required to notify the police immediately.

## Forensics

Every rifle and handgun leaves unique marks on bullets, enabling a gun and a fired bullet to be matched up conclusively. The spent cartridge casing left in the weapon (or ejected to the side) also carries a unique mark from the firing pin that can be matched up as well.

Shotguns are a bit different, however, if you're using pellets (also known as "shot" such as birdshot or buckshot). The pellets can not be matched with a particular shotgun, but the metal and plastic cartridge casing that contained the pellets can. Semi-automatic and pump-action shotguns kick these used shells out to the side when fired, but break-open shotguns (such as the familiar double-barrel style) keep the shells inside until manually removed. If you want to kill someone and minimize the evidence, use a break-open shotgun and don't remove the spent shells until you're safely away, or use a pump-action or semi-automatic shotgun and pick up the shells before you leave.

When a firearm is used, it gains a distinctive smell and residue that indicates recent use. Cleaning a used firearm thoroughly can make such determinations much harder. However, residue is also left on the shooter. Tiny particles thrown off by the detonation can easily become lodged in your skin, giving away your recent firearms usage. The more time that passes since the firearm was used, the harder it is to obtain useful forensic evidence from the shooter.

Likewise, shooting someone at close range leaves evidence on their body that shows how close you were when the gun went off. The explosion from the end of the barrel actually tattoos the victim's skin permanently with powder burns, if it's within a few feet or so. If this evidence contradicts the story you tell the police, you're in trouble.





shots at a single enemy. (Note that since you're dividing your skill for these attacks, that will lower the maximum damage you can do per shot.) However, you can never shoot more than three shots in a single round (regardless of how many targets you're attempting to shoot) and let them have any chance of hitting other than an 01—except for full-auto weapons, which are covered in the next section.

All this raises the question of why you'd *want* to divide your skill. After all, you decrease the amount of damage each shot can do by lowering your skill, and you go through your ammo faster. However, you may want to do it in a situation where there are a lot of opponents who will run after they're injured, or if you're facing a lot of people who are already injured.

## Full-Auto Weapons

Handle with care. In UA, firearms are already stupendously dangerous; full auto makes them worse. Here's how they work.

- You can either fire a three-shot burst or just hold the trigger down.
- A three-shot burst gives you a Firearms shift of +5%.
- Blazing away gives you a Firearms shift of +30%, but any roll of 30 or less misses completely.
- Either way, ignore the maximum damage for your ammo type. Your total damage is whatever you roll, period.

Keep in mind that fully automatic firearms are more or less illegal in the United States and many foreign countries. (In the U.S. it's possible to own them, but it's a very expensive, time-consuming process that deprives you of some of your civil liberties and puts your name, records, *etc.* into the hands of all sorts of law-enforcement agencies; some other countries have outlawed them altogether.) Usage of full-auto weapons in combat is going to attract substantial law-enforcement attention—and of course, they just encourage your enemies to up the ante.

## Special Ammo

There are many types of ammunition available for firearms, ranging from hollow-point rounds to phosphorous rounds to teflon rounds and beyond. If you really want to load up with some sort of funky ammo, go ahead. Here's the effect it has: the maximum damage of your weapon is increased by 5.

One exception is armor-piercing bullets—the so-called cop-killer rounds that penetrate bulletproof vests. These are described in the next section.

## Bulletproof Vests

If you get shot while wearing a bulletproof vest, the gunshot does damage like it was a martial arts attack. That's right: that 62-point gunshot just became an 8-point bruise. Nice, huh? If you are shooting at someone with a bulletproof vest, you can opt to aim for the head, legs, hand, or some other unprotected area. This is discussed in the next column under "Cinematic Firearms."

Armor-piercing bullets will punch right through bulletproof vests, but when you figure damage you *round down* to the nearest multiple of 10. If you roll a 45, you do 40 points of damage. If you roll a 08, you do 0 points of damage.

## Cinematic Firearms

There are some very common firearms moves performed in action movies that players will probably want to try at one time or another. Here's a selection of such moves, explained in game terms.

"I'll shoot him in the leg as he's running away." Easy. Just make a normal attack. If you get under 30%, you missed, no matter what your skill. If you get between 30% and your skill, you hit his leg, did the damage you rolled, and he's not running away any more.

"I'll shoot him in the arm so he can't shoot back at me." Also easy. Just make the roll and have anything under 40% be a miss.

"I'll shoot the gun out of his hand!" Okay, Roy Rogers. Take the shot with a -40% shift to your skill. If you succeed, do the damage rolled and the gun goes spinning away. (This is different from the last two because it effectively limits the maximum damage.)

"I'll shoot out the tires as he's driving away!" This is just like shooting the gun out of someone's hand, except the penalty is only -30%.

"I'm gonna aim for his head." If you opt to head-hunt, anything under a 50% is a miss, but you can increase your skill by +10%. The overall effect is that you're 40% less likely to hit, but if you do you're more likely to do grievous damage.

"When I say, start running. I'll cover you!" Also known as "suppressive fire," this means you're not really aiming, you're just shooting to make your enemy *stop* shooting while your buddy does something. Laying down a convincing suppressive fire takes five bullets per round. (You can shoot more than three because you're not really aiming.) Anyone you're shooting towards takes a -10% shift on any attack made after you start firing. You may also roll for each bullet you shoot. If you get an 01 or a match, you hit someone by luck. Roll one die to see how much damage you did, while the GM determines randomly who you hit.

More than one person can lay down suppressive fire; for each additional source of fire, the enemy takes another -10% shift. This shift can never go beyond -30%, however.

## Hand-to-Hand Damage

For hand-to-hand attacks—that is, physical attacks such as punches, kicks, takedowns, baseball bat to the skull, *etc.*—the damage you do is equal to the sum of the two dice you rolled—a roll of 47 that succeeds will do  $4 + 7 = 11$  points of damage. (There are some exceptions to this, described later.)

If you're using a weapon of some sort in your hand-to-hand attack, you do more damage. Weapons do up to 9 extra wound points of damage. To decide how much damage a weapon does, ask three simple questions:

- **Is the weapon big?** ("Big" means you need both hands to wield it effectively.)
- **Is it heavy?** ("Heavy" means it has enough heft to crack bones.)
- **Is it penetrating?** ("Penetrating" means it cuts or stabs through the skin.)

For each "yes" you get, the weapon does 3 additional points of damage. A lead pipe is heavy, but not big or penetrating, so it adds 3 points of damage. A steel chair is big and heavy, so it adds 6 points of damage. A knife is penetrating, so it adds 3 points. A machete or sword is heavy and penetrating, so it adds 6 points. A chainsaw is big, heavy, *and* penetrating, so it adds 9 points. A table

## Hand-to-Hand Weapons Table

Weapon	Added Damage
Knife (switchblade, cleaver, stiletto).....	3
Blackjack, brass knuckles, roll of quarters .....	3
Light club, bo or jo staff, baseball bat, vase .....	3
Sai, tonfa, nunchaku.....	3
Small or light blunt object (toaster oven, skateboard, plank) .....	3
Serious blunt object (chair, fireplace poker, wrench, tire iron).....	6
Huge club or baseball bat with sharpened nails in the business end .....	6
Sword or machete (any sturdy blade six inches or longer) .....	6
Hatchet or kama .....	6
Very large sword or katana .....	9
Spear or fire axe .....	9
Chainsaw.....	9

of sample hand-to-hand weapons and their recommended damage appears in the table above.

### Special Rolls and Hand-to-Hand Damage

Three types of special rolls—matches, OACOWAs, and BOHICAs—all affect hand-to-hand damage in simple ways.

**Exception:** Matches work differently if your hand-to-hand combat skill is also your obsession skill. This is covered in the next section, “Obsessed Hand-to-Hand Damage.”

If you get a match and you’re using a weapon that does at least 6 points of added damage, *you do firearm-style damage plus the weapon’s added damage*. So if your skill roll is 44 and you’re using a more-powerful weapon such as a baseball bat or a chainsaw, you do 44 points of damage plus the added damage of the weapon (+6 or +9). A lucky blow in hand-to-hand combat can seriously injure or kill someone.

If you get a match and you’re not using a weapon, or you’re using a weapon that only does 3 points of added damage, *nothing special happens*. The GM may choose to reward your match in some non-damage way, but that’s up to the GM.

If you get an OACOWA, *your target dies or drops unconscious immediately, your choice*. If he hasn’t acted this round, he doesn’t get to. This can only occur if the GM rules that the attack you were making was potentially fatal or could have knocked the target out, depending on what your choice is. If you were throwing a pillow at the target, he’s just not going to die or fall unconscious as a result.

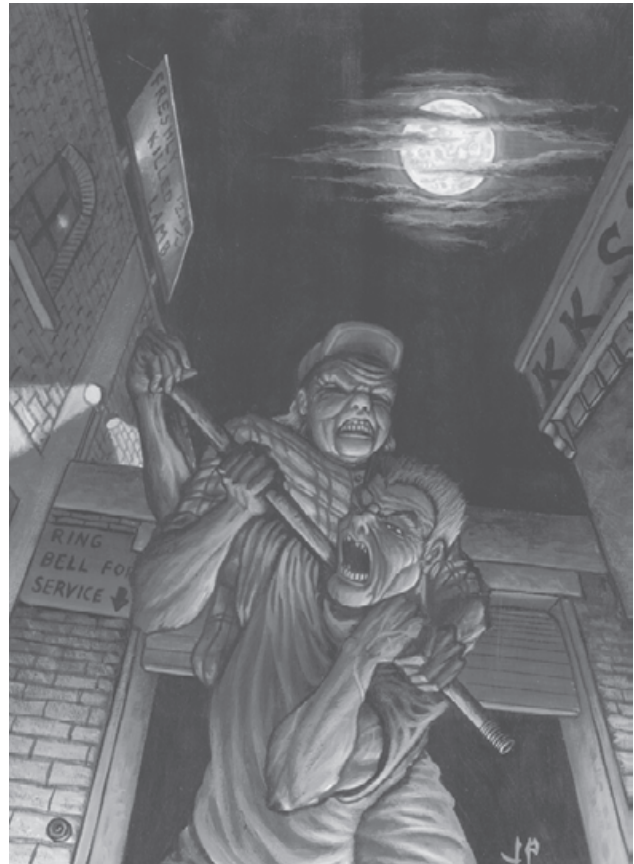
If you get a BOHICA, *you take the damage you rolled—*you’ve screwed up so badly that either you hurt yourself all on your own or your target deftly countered your attack and hurt you in the process (GM discretion).

### Obsessed Hand-to-Hand Damage

If your hand-to-hand combat skill—whether it’s street brawling or judo—is your obsession skill, you get **Cherries**. Cherries are extra-special results that occur on a successful matched roll. (Unless the cherry specifies otherwise, you still do normal matched-success damage if you’re using a +6 or larger weapon, as noted earlier, in addition to whatever benefit the cherry grants.) Having a hand-to-

hand combat skill of any sort that is not your obsession skill does not grant you these cherries.

Assuming you qualify, you get a different cherry for each match you can roll without going over your skill number, so the higher your skill, the more cherries you’ll have available. You assign one cherry to each of your possible successful matches at the time that you create your character. If your skill goes up high enough to make another match possible, you pick another cherry. A list of suggested cherries appears on the next page. You can assign the same cherry to multiple matches, if you like.



JIM PANFILI

**Example:** Aron has a Brawling skill of 63%. This means he has five possible successful matches: 11, 22, 33, 44, and 55. Anytime he rolls one of those matches during an attack, the cherry kicks in. If at some point his skill increases to at least 66%, he gets a new cherry for that new match.

## Cinematic Hand-to-Hand

There are some very common hand-to-hand moves performed in action movies that players will probably want to try at one time or another. Here's a selection of such moves, explained in game terms.

**Multiple targets.** Gun nuts can shoot at more than one person, and hand-to-hand attacks work the same way. You just divide your skill among your targets. You cannot attack more than three people per round, but other than that you can split it however you want. If you've got a skill of 55%, you can spend 20% on one guy, 25% on another and 10% on the third, or go 5%, 10%, 40%—whatever.

Splitting up your attack makes a lot more sense for a martial artist than it does for a gunner, because of the way damage works. If you split your 40% Handgun attack into two 20%, you've decreased the maximum damage you can do to either target by 20 points. On the other hand, splitting a 40% Kick Your Ass skill into

two 20%, decreases your maximum damage to either by only 2 points—instead of a successful 39% that does 12 points, you can get a successful 19 that does 10 points. If you have a weapon, it gets even nicer because it adds that extra 3, 6 or 9 points with every attack. Plus, unlike your gun-toting pal, *you* aren't going to run out of ammo.

**Multiple hits.** You can also try to hit the same target more than once, and again you just have to divide up your skill. Not only does this increase your chance of getting that sweet 01—instant death or unconsciousness—the same math that makes it extra nice to attack multiple targets makes multiple attacks against a single target attractive.

**Disarming.** If you want to try to take that gun, baseball bat, or cargo hook away from someone, just tell the GM you're trying it and roll. If you roll under a 30, you failed. If you roll between a 30 and your skill, you did no damage but the weapon is either on the floor or in your hand, your choice.

**Throwing People.** Throwing someone is a lot like a disarm; if you roll under a 30, you failed. If you get between 30 and your skill rating, your target falls to the floor. The results are identical to the Knock Down cherry: you deal damage as normal, your target automatically goes last in the next round, and he continues going last in

## Sample Hand-to-Hand Cherries

These are special way-cool results that are available to characters with a hand-to-hand combat skill that is also their obsession skill. See "Obsessed Hand-to-Hand Damage" for more information.

**Big Hurt.** You do firearms-style damage plus the weapon's added damage, if any, no matter what weapon you're using—even just your fists. If you're using a weapon worth +6 added damage or more, this doesn't do anything special that you don't get from a non-obsessed matched success, but it's great for martial artists who don't use weapons.

**Blind.** You cause no wound-point damage, but your target cannot see for the next four rounds (a -30% shift).

**Dazed.** In addition to taking the normal damage, your target has a -10% shift to all skills for the next four rounds.

**Gimme.** In addition to taking the normal damage, your target loses whatever weapon he is holding. You choose whether the weapon drops to the floor or ends up in your hands. Either way, this occurs immediately.

**Knock Down.** In addition to taking damage, your target is immediately knocked off his feet. He automatically goes last in the next round, and continues going last in every round thereafter until he spends an action getting up. If he gets up later this same round or in the next round, he still automatically goes last in that next round before the effect wears off.

**Kung Fu Grip.** Instead of doing damage, you put your target in a restraining grip. Your target cannot attack or dodge next round because you've got him held. (It has no effect in the round you first apply it.) **Getting Free:** You can choose to release the grip at the beginning of each successive round before initiative is rolled, and then you can both act normally. Your target can get free by rolling against his hand-to-hand combat skill (Struggle, Tae Kwon Do, whatever) or his Body stat, but he must roll at least your hand-to-hand skill score or higher to succeed. **Attacking:** Held targets can be attacked by anyone nearby with a +10% shift for the attacker. While holding him, you get to inflict 5 points of damage each round automatically—by wrenching his shoulder socket, kneeling him, *etc.* If you have any sort of hand-to-hand weapon ready, you get to inflict 8 points of damage each round instead. **Disarming:** Instead of doing automatic damage to your held target, you can make another hand-to-hand skill roll and take away any weapon he has. **Limitations:** You cannot make any attack besides the automatic one on the person held, and you can't dodge, either.

**Monkey Dodge.** Not only do you damage this target, but beginning at the start of the next round, you may redirect the next attack declared against you (before it is rolled) to any other combatant who could reasonably be targeted instead (GM's call). You can't use this to make someone attack himself. You can choose to redirect the attack so it hits the floor, wall, furniture, large plate-glass window, *etc.* instead of another combatant.

**More Hurt.** Roll and add another single die of damage to the current attack.

**New Damage.** Roll two dice and use that for damage instead of your original roll. (Hint: this is a nice one to put on your 11 match!) If you're using a +6 weapon or greater, you still get to do firearms-style damage no matter what your new damage roll is.

**Second Helping.** In addition to inflicting the normal damage, you can use your attack skill again *immediately* in the same round at no penalty.

**Turning Tide.** In addition to taking the normal damage, your target can't get any benefits from rolling matches for the rest of the combat.



PAUL (PROOF) HERBERT

every round thereafter until he spends an action getting up. If he gets up later this same round or in the next round, he still automatically goes last in that next round before the effect wears off.

**Throwing Objects.** If you throw something at a target, the attempt is governed by your General Athletics skill. For a thrown object to do damage, it must qualify as either big, heavy, or penetrating as described earlier. Whatever the thrown object is, it only does basic hand-to-hand damage—there are no added points for the type of object it is. (The special result of getting a match still applies, however.)

## Pointblanking

There are some special rules that govern **pointblanking**—that is, trying to kill an immobile, helpless target in close proximity.

You probably won't use these rules unless you've gotten the drop on someone completely. For example: You're standing over them while they sleep, gun in hand. You've got them handcuffed to a water pipe in the basement. They've been put into a trance with magick and wouldn't notice a parade of dancing elephants, let alone you and your filleting knife.

So your target is helpless. It's up to you to decide if they live or die.

This is a dramatic moment, so don't try to gloss it over. The consequences of your decision are likely to be severe, no matter how you decide. The decision to snuff out a human life in a cold and calculated fashion—not in combat, not by “accident,” not in a rage of anger or fear—is one of the most important ones your character may face. Choose carefully.

If you decide to murder someone, then, here's how you do it. Roll the appropriate skill. If it's martial arts and you fail, you do the damage you rolled. If it's guns and you fail, your weapon does maximum damage.

If you succeed with either roll, the defenseless victim is dead. That's it for him.

That's not it for you, though. Deliberately trying to kill a helpless target is a rank-7 Violence check. Your GM may assign other checks as well; after all, if you generally think of yourself as a friendly, forgiving guy (Cancer and Pisces types especially), or a law-abiding straight arrow (like a Virgo or some Leos), such a deed may well merit a Self check. On the other hand, if you fail to kill your target, you may have to face a Helplessness or Unnatural check (the latter if some sort of magick saved the target).

## Exotic Damage

Lots of unusual things can happen during combat, and most of them are painful. Here are guidelines for some of the most common types of exotic damage.

### Drowning

Assume that in a crisis, someone can hold their breath for a number of seconds equal to their Body score. After that, they have to breathe or pass out. If they breathe in (or pass out) underwater, they're out of the fight and drown unless someone drags them out and performs CPR. (Sadistic GMs may make characters who've

been saved roll their Body or under to have the CPR work.) Remember that a round is about three seconds—so the average Body 50 guy can stay underwater for 16 rounds without serious trouble. Avoiding drowning means doing your best to stay above water, either with the Swim skill or (if you don't know how to swim) a General Athletics check. Each success gets you a breath of air, and the breath-holding clock is restarted.

## Strangling

Interestingly enough, there are two ways to choke someone: cutting off air to the windpipe (the standard, untrained strangle) and the blood choke. We'll deal with the windpipe choke first, 'cause it's easy: just use the drowning rules. This goes for untrained neck grabbing, smothering with pillows, plastic bags over the head and other forms of smothering. An average Body 50 victim can stay alive for fifty seconds, so it takes about sixteen rounds to strangle him to death.

Blood chokes are trickier. Judo trains you how to do these with your bare hands, assassins like the Thuggee know how to do 'em, and this is what you get when you put a rope (or scarf, or pair of pantyhose) around someone's throat, cross it in back, and pull real tight. Instead of cutting off the air to the lungs, it cuts off blood to the brain and works a *lot* quicker.

Someone who tries to throw a blood choke on someone in the middle of a fight has to make a successful attack *and* roll better than a 20. If they do this, they have to maintain it for three more rounds to make their opponent pass out. Once the opponent is passed out, just keep it on for two more rounds to kill 'em. Note that for madness, this is considered pointblanking (see page 61).

This raises the question of how to *break* a choke. If someone has a choke (of any type) on you and you're struggling, you can make one Dodge or Struggle attempt each round. If you succeed, you break free. Whether you succeed or fail, however, that attempt is the only action you can take this round.

## Car Wrecks

The GM rolls one die for each 10mph the car was going, and arbitrarily assembles a number out of the dice rolled based on factors such as seatbelts, air bags, the type of car, and so on. If a car hits something at 50mph, the GM rolls five dice and picks any two to build a two-digit number from. Different occupants in the car can receive different combinations of damage numbers if the GM feels it is appropriate.

**Example:** A car strikes a brick wall at 40mph. The GM rolls four dice and gets 7, 7, 3, and 2. Possible damage results include 23, 27, 32, 37, 72, 73, and 77. It's a late-model luxury sedan. The driver is wearing his seatbelt and there's an airbag but it's still a bad wreck, so the GM assigns him 27 points of damage. The passenger wasn't wearing a seatbelt and was leaning half-way out the window shooting at someone, so the GM assigns him 77 points of damage.

Keep in mind that if two cars hit head-on, you *combine* their speeds. Two cars going at 40 that do a head-on yields eight dice of damage to the occupants.

Is your character wearing her seatbelt? Unless you stated so earlier, you need to make a Mind check: if you succeed, you have your seatbelt on.

## Falling

The GM rolls one die per ten feet fallen, adding the dice together. If it's a controlled, deliberate fall, drop the highest die. (So if you carefully jump down 10 feet, you take no damage. If you're shoved out of a first-story window, you take full damage because you aren't in control of the fall.)

## Non-Combat Actions

During combat, you can do things besides shooting, hitting, and dodging. Some things you might do are still attacks by a different name—any form of magick, for example, counts as an attack even if it doesn't do damage. But there's other stuff, too. You might need to pick something up, slam a door shut, run across the room, get in a car, or any number of other things.

As a rule of thumb, assume that any action other than an attack or dodge takes *two* rounds. The first round, you declare your action, but you still get to attack or dodge that round as normal. On the second round, you can neither attack nor dodge—you just perform your action. (Actions work this way because the player has a better understanding of the combat than the character does—the players all hear everyone's actions and have more time to ponder what to do. To make up for this advantage, it takes a little longer for characters to change gears and do something else. In combat, those who aren't focused on fighting suffer for it.)

Once you declare your action in the first round, you cannot change it in the second round. You *can* modulate it slightly if the GM allows it. If you declared that you were going to get in a car, for example, you can change that to getting *under* the car instead.

Some actions might take longer than two rounds. Use common sense to determine how long they take, and keep in mind that a round represents roughly three seconds of time. Actions that take longer than two rounds work the same as two-round actions. You declare the action but can still attack or dodge that round; the rest of the time, you're busy performing the action and cannot attack or dodge. However, the GM will allow you greater latitude in modulating your actions when they're spread out over a longer period of time. If you're running for the door and it takes you four rounds, on round three or four you could decide to change direction and run in a different direction, for example. If you want to cancel a longer action and go back to fighting, you have to announce this during your turn one round and can then attack or dodge the *next* round.

**Exception #1:** If your attack skill or Speed stat is 85% or higher and it sounds plausible to the GM, you can attack or dodge *and* perform other actions at the same time. This does not mean you can attack *and* dodge at the same time; for that you need a Dodge skill of 85%+, as explained on page 54.

**Exception #2:** It takes one round to draw a weapon, not two. When you declare you're going to draw, you do it right away instead of making an attack or dodge. It's ready for use next round. You have to draw a weapon before you can use it, of course—so you cannot shoot your gun on the first round of combat unless you were walking around with it in your hand before the combat began.

## Wounds and Healing

Your GM is in charge of keeping track of your wounds. Don't try to do it yourself; you've got enough to do without worrying about how in-



jured you are in terms of numbers and dice. Besides, “wound points” are just another necessary game abstraction. Paying too much attention to them will rob you of the joys of plot and character. To be more direct about it, players are *not allowed* to know, numerically, how damaged their characters are. The GM will give you impressions of your injuries and pain for you to run with. Just like in real life, you know it hurts, and maybe it hurts real bad or only barely, but you don’t have a godlike awareness of exactly how injured you are.

That said, characters start with a number of wound points equal to their Body score. Losing them (by getting shot, stabbed, defenestrated, throttled, poisoned, hit with acid, blasted by the king hell-daddy of all bad vibes, *etc.*) is dealt with in this chapter and the Magick chapter. Guidelines on dealing with player-character injuries narratively as a GM appear in the “Running the Game” chapter. What players will eventually want to know is, “How do I get ‘em back?”

Well, what do you do in the real world when you get hurt? You get medical attention, of course.

## Minor Injuries

For minor injuries (say, up to 10% or so of the Body score), basic first aid is sufficient. The character making the first aid attempt makes an appropriate skill roll. If the character doesn’t have an appropriate skill, make a roll against the character’s Mind stat, but to succeed the roll must be at least 30 and no more than the stat—a roll of 29 is a failure.

A successful first-aid attempt grants back a number of wound points equal to the dice rolled, added together. A roll of 56, for example, grants back  $5 + 6 = 11$  wound points. A roll of 10 grants back  $1 + 10 = 11$  wound points.

A failed attempt grants no wound points.

## Major Injuries

EMTs and doctors agree that people have a much better chance of surviving major injuries if they get treated within one hour. This sort of prompt, skilled treatment is known as *triage*, and it’s what goes on in emergency rooms everywhere, every day of the year. If a character who’s alive and injured gets to an emergency room, the GM rolls against the skill of the doctor and gives you back that many wound points right away—if the roll succeeds. A failed roll grants no wound points back.

**Example:** Your doctor rolls a 43 and it’s a success, so you get back 43 points. If he’d failed with a 94, you’d get back nothing.

If you have to wait more than an hour to get medical attention, the doctor still has to roll and still has to succeed. However, even if she succeeds, you only get the sum of the dice.

**Example:** If your doctor got that successful 43, you’d only regain  $4 + 3 = 7$  points because you lost blood and got weakened before you were treated.

(Most doctors range in skill between 35% for a newbie to 70% for an experienced sawbones. Most can flip-flop their rolls, since it’s probably their obsession skill.)

All this assumes modern medical facilities and a skilled staff of assistants, of course. If your doctor—or a helpful boy scout with a First Aid merit badge—is trying to put you back together on your kitchen table with that bathroom first-aid kit, you can only get the sum of the dice, no matter how fast you’re treated—a gauze pad won’t do much to help a broken arm.

## Multiple Treatment

Attempts at first aid or triage can only be made once per injury. Subsequent attempts can heal only up to the number of wound points your character has lost *since* the injury that was already treated. This is true even if the initial attempt failed and did no good at all.

**Example:** A character starts with 70 wound points. Then she gets shot for 50 points of damage. She goes to the hospital within an hour, but only gets 11 points back. She stays and rests until she’s back to 40 and is released. On her way home, a different enemy jumps her and makes an ineffective martial arts attack that only does 5 points of damage before our heroine blows him away. She goes back to the hospital immediately. Now her doctor rolls a 54—normally, that would heal 54 points of damage. But our heroine only gets 5 points back, because you can only apply first aid or triage to an injury once. Everything that could be done for that 50-point injury got done when she got back her 11 points; nothing else will fix it but time. All the doctor could do the second time around was help the martial-arts injury she just suffered, so only 5 points could be healed.

By the way, if the doctor makes a matched miss or a BOHICA, the GM may rule that additional wound points were lost. If so, those additional points count as a new injury.

## Convalescence

Past the point of first aid or triage, you can also spend time healing. Generally, this means a hospital stay, or moping around the house with regular attention from a doctor or nurse. For each day you spend in convalescence, you get 2 wound points back. If you leave the hospital or spend a day shopping or have a car chase or something similarly unwise, you gain back nothing; if the GM feels it’s appropriate, you may even lose a point for acting like an idiot when you should be taking it easy.

Once you’re at 60% of your normal wound point total, you should be well enough to get out and about again. You may not be fully healed, but you can get back to work. This means that you don’t lose points for engaging in normal activity, and in fact you still gain back one point a day as long as you don’t push yourself too hard. (If the GM thinks you’ve done this, you get back nothing.)

As usual, you won’t know precisely how many wound points you have. The GM will describe how you feel, such as “achy,” “tired,” or “like you’re going to puke.” (“Unable to focus your eyes” and “seeping” are probably signs that you should slow down a bit.)

## Permanent Damage

If you take 50 wound points or more in damage from a single attack and survive, you’re a stud and should feel good about yourself. However, you’ve also survived damage that would kill many people, and you will *never* fully recover. A hit that bad marks you for life, and there’s no way to avoid it.

The nature of the loss is up to your GM (though you and your fellow players may be allowed to make suggestions). It could be a straight, permanent loss of wound points—between 5 and 10 is a good number. You could lose some points in a relevant skill. (“Yeah, the old Seduce Younger Men skill just doesn’t work as well now that you have that four-inch facial scar.”) You might lose points in a stat—Body and Speed are obvious choices, but Mind is also appropriate for cranial traumas.





*chapter six*  
*madness*

**UNKNOWN  
ARMIES**



"O, THAT WAY MADNESS LIES; LET ME SHUN THAT."

—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *KING LEAR*

"LISSEN SON, WAKING UP WITH A SEVERED HORSE HEAD IN YOUR BED,  
THE WHOLE *GODFATHER* THING? OH LISSEN, THAT'S NOTHIN', LISSEN:  
WAKING UP AND, LISSEN, YOU LIFT THE LID ON THE TOILET, AND  
THERE'S A SEVERED HEAD THERE? AND IT'S YOUR *OWN* HEAD?  
THAT'S, LISSEN, THAT'S SOMETHING."

—JEETER





# LEGACY

▲ 30 Before leaving Illinois, Renata had talked a guy at the truck rental place into telling her where her parents' truck had been returned. It was a kind of seedy neighborhood outside Atlanta proper—an area with a lot of shut-down factories, not far from the highway. All of the buildings and even the people looked like they either hadn't been there long or weren't sticking around. On the bus down, she'd figured her best bet was to go to the unemployment office and see if her mom was still getting her disability checks.

Renata's first day in Atlanta had been a long one. She'd gone into the bathroom at the bus station, then climbed out a window just to make sure that creepy Eugene guy didn't follow her. Then she'd had to find the neighborhood with the truck place on a map, figure out the bus route there—all to find out the rental agent didn't know anything. He'd helped her find the unemployment place and she'd walked there, and after waiting in line for a long time she'd met Hiram Ossowski, who'd leered at her, had tried to look down her t-shirt—which was sweaty and gross from riding around and not showering—and had told her that he wouldn't tell her what Judy and Fred Dakota's new address was.

"That's confidential information," he'd said. "I could lose my job for telling you that. Now, if we were to . . . say . . . know each other a little better . . ."

For a moment she'd tried to not know what he meant, and then she'd felt like throwing up. She'd left, had spent way too much of her money on a room at a Knight's Inn. She'd taken a long shower and cried and cried and cried.

Then she planned. She got a phone book and found where Hiram Ossowski lived. Then she went to a drugstore and bought a disposable camera. The same drugstore would develop your photos in an hour.

When she picked up her photos, she blushed furiously and didn't meet the eyes of the girl (*thank God! a girl!*) behind the

counter. She paid and almost ran out the door. Then she took a few deep breaths and went to see Ossowski. The line went much faster this time.

When Hiram saw her come in his tiny office, he smirked and pulled his greasy hair back with his hands.

"Welcome back . . . Betty, right?"

"Beth," she said. She'd told him her name was Beth Wallace, and that she was Judy Dakota's daughter from a previous marriage. Without any identification he hadn't believed her, or had said he didn't.

Before she could chicken out, she showed him one of the photos. She didn't put it down on his desk—she held it in her hand.

He smiled big when he saw her naked skin in the snapshot. Then his smile vanished when he realized . . .

"Hey—that's my bedroom! How'd—"

"You want your wife to see this? Do you?"

"What did you—?"

"You just say the word, a-hole, and these pictures are in the mail."

"But . . . you . . . you broke in . . ."

"Is your fat dumpy wife going to believe that? 'Oh yeah, this crazy chick broke into our house and took naked photos of herself honey, I don't know who she was!' Is she going to believe that?"

Hiram Ossowski started to cry.

"Shit, I didn't . . . come on, I just . . ."

"You just tried to put it to a teenage girl whose parents already did a hell of a job on her. Now where are they?"

He caved completely—gave her the address, gave her his bank card, told her the PIN number. All she had to do was show him the pictures and say, "If this number doesn't work, in the mail they go. And if the cops pick me up, I'll be like, 'He took the pictures, and I'm only fifteen!' You got me?"

There was \$520 in his bank account. She left him \$100 because she felt sorry for his wife.

# THREE

CHAPTER ILLU BY EARL GEIER

**There are a lot of threats** in *Unknown Armies*, and not all of them are physical. You're going to be exposed to stresses that are beyond the normal—experiences that will challenge your mind's ability to fit them into your view of how the world works.

These stresses are measured on the Madness Meters, found on your character sheet. These are five gauges that measure how resilient or susceptible you are to different mental threats. First, let's explain how challenges to your sanity are handled.

## Stress Challenges

There are five categories of stress. It's quite possible to be very casual about, say, Violence, while being a basket case when it comes to The Unnatural.

The five stresses are described below.

- **Violence.** People have an instinctive revulsion towards actual violence. It's stressful to hurt others, to watch others get hurt, and to *get* hurt. This stress also covers the fear of death that everyone suffers from in varying degrees.
- **The Unnatural.** It hurts your brain to think of things that don't belong in your concept of the world. Contemplating infinity for too long, seeing *proof* that sometimes  $2 + 2 = 5$ , and realizing that magick actually works are all unnatural stresses.
- **Helplessness.** People like to feel empowered. Anything that drives home how little control we have over the forces in our lives is scary.
- **Isolation.** We all need contact, interaction, and interest. If you've ever gone a week without speaking to or seeing anyone, you'll know what we're talking about.
- **Self.** This is the trickiest one. It contains guilt and self-loathing, but it's more than that. A major stress is when you find out you're not the person you thought you were—by breaking a promise you honestly meant to keep, or by standing idly by when your values (or what you *thought* were your values) are desecrated. It's a sense of alienation from self that provides, perhaps, the deepest terror.

Different stresses have different levels of challenge. A rank-1 Violence challenge is seeing a friend get cut with a broken bottle in a bar fight. A rank-9 Violence challenge is getting worked over for a week by Idi Amin's favorite torture technician. Similarly, a rank-1 Self challenge is choosing to miss your young daughter's birthday when you promised her you'd be there. A rank-10 Self challenge is killing your young daughter to gain occult knowledge. (Examples of different stress-challenge levels are given on the next page.)

Every time you're challenged, you have to make a Mind check. If you make it, you mark off the lowest unmarked "hardened" notch on the appropriate gauge. If you fail, you mark off the lowest unmarked "failed" notch on the appropriate gauge. Getting callous or going crazy—the results of having all of the "hardened" or all of the "failed" notches filled on a given gauge, respectively—are covered in the following sections.

## Getting Callous

Cops, coroners, and social workers know about getting callous. When you've seen enough horrifying stuff, it loses its power to horrify you. So, every time you make a successful Mind roll (that is,

you roll your Mind score or lower) to resist a challenge to your sanity, you can fill in a "hardened" notch on that gauge.

Remember how stresses have different levels of challenge? Well, you can only be forced to roll by a challenge whose level is *higher* than your current number of hardened notches in that gauge. Once you successfully cope with one violent incident, you'll never be afraid of rank-1 Violence as long as you have that notch. Once you resist *ten* incidents on a gauge—that is, all ten hardened notches on that gauge are filled in—you're so jaded and blasé about it that *nothing* in that category of stress can endanger your mind.

(This only applies to hardened notches, not to failed notches.

Having failed notches marked in a gauge doesn't prevent you from making a roll on that gauge, unless all five failed notches are marked in that gauge and you've gone insane—this is discussed further under "Permanent Madness" on page 69.)

## Why This is Bad

Getting callous in a gauge is pretty cool, right? After all, you'll never be in danger of soiling your pants in fear ever again. I'll bet you're hoping to get callous against all five stresses, right?

Don't be so eager.

Mental stress makes us vulnerable—but it also makes us human. People who become completely callous are unable to feel fear because they've become cut off from a broad range of emotional experiences. They're hardened all right—hardened into emotional fortresses, completely isolated, unable to make a fundamental connection with other human beings.

They're **sociopaths**.

To represent this in game terms, once you've got ten hardened points in all five gauges, you can no longer use your passions (see page 34)—you don't get to flip-flop or reroll checks the way you used to (this doesn't affect your obsession skill).

To represent this in *game-world* terms, a person who is callous in all five gauges cannot ascend to the Invisible Clergy—you're never going to achieve your full potential as a human being, good or bad. Furthermore, if you're on the path to becoming an Avatar (as explained in Chapter 13), you lose your ability to use your Avatar skill.

## Going Crazy

On the other hand, sometimes you fail your roll (by rolling higher than your Mind score). This failure has a short-term effect and a long-term effect.

The short-term effect is that you freak out. You can pick exactly how you lose it, out of three main options: **panic**, **paralysis**, and **frenzy**.

If you **panic**, you run away at high speed. You can take no action except to run full out in the direction farthest from what made you panic.

On the other hand, disturbing events often produce **paralysis**: indecision, terror, and a general "deer in the headlights" effect that persists until the stimulus ceases. This can be completely silent, or accompanied by screams and moans.

**Frenzy** is just what it sounds like. You attack the source of discomfort with any means at your disposal. You can't dodge or attempt any fancy moves, like multiple attacks on a single target. You just shoot or punch or start biting.



## Sample Stress Ratings

These illustrate what sorts of incidents trigger what levels of stress for a mental challenge.

### Violence

- 1 Be attacked with a weapon—shot at or slashed.
- 2 Witness an act of torture.
- 3 Get shot at random. Be tortured briefly.
- 4 Kill someone in a fight.
- 5 Be present at a massive battle, with hundreds of deaths on both sides.
- 6 Perform an act of torture.
- 7 Deliberately kill a helpless target.
- 8 Get tortured for an hour or longer.
- 9 Witness a brutal mass execution.
- 10 Watch as someone you love is tortured to death.

### The Unnatural

- 1 Experience a preternaturally strong *deja vu*.
- 2 See a clockwork automaton.
- 3 Realize that a vision you had of the future has come true.
- 4 Watch the Naked Goddess videotape.
- 5 Be successfully attacked with magick.
- 6 See someone you know killed by magick, without any visible or “rational” cause.
- 7 Have a conversation with a loved one who you know is dead.
- 8 See an animal with human features.
- 9 See the dead rise.
- 10 Realize that the reason you and your husband of ten years have never had children is that he’s a clockwork automaton.

### Isolation

- 1 Spend a day without seeing anyone you know.
- 2 Spend five hours in a sensory-deprivation tank.
- 3 Spend three days without talking to another human being.
- 4 Be institutionalized by someone you love and trust.
- 5 Spend a week in solitary confinement.
- 6 See someone you thought you knew intimately behaving in a fashion completely contrary to her normal behavior.
- 7 Spend a month in a country where no one speaks your language and where you can’t make yourself understood no matter how hard you try.
- 8 Be deeply, painfully, and violently betrayed by someone you love.

- 9 Be treated like a stranger by your closest friends.
- 10 Spend a month in a sensory-deprivation tank.

### Helplessness

- 1 Unintentionally humiliate yourself in public.
- 2 Get fired from a job you love.
- 3 Fail at something when it’s *imperative* that you succeed.
- 4 Get dumped into a pit of maggots.
- 5 Spend a month in jail.
- 6 Watch a videotape of your spouse committing adultery.
- 7 Be placed in a situation where you have to either saw off one of your limbs or die.
- 8 Watch someone you love die.
- 9 Watch someone you love die because you tried to save them and failed.
- 10 Be possessed, yet conscious, as your body commits unspeakable acts against your will.

### Self

- 1 Break a minor promise.
- 2 Be confronted with proof that your self-image is incorrect. (“I’m very responsible; I’m sure I’ve called you back every time I said I would.” “Actually, you’ve blown me off so many times I started keeping track in my journal. Lessee, November 19, December 3 . . . again on December 17 . . . January 9 . . .”)
- 3 Secretly gratify an urge that is unacceptable to your upbringing and background. (Spit on a cross if Christian, date a person of another race if raised in a racist home, have a homosexual affair if you come from a homophobic background, *etc.*)
- 4 Lie to conceal some aspect of your personality from a close friend or loved one who trusts you implicitly.
- 5 Decide not to act on an impulse from your Noble stimulus (see page 34) because it’s “too dangerous.”
- 6 Deliberately deceive someone you love in a way that is certain to cause them terrible pain if they find out.
- 7 Discover that you have inadvertently committed an act of cannibalism.
- 8 Deliberately act completely contrary to your Noble impulse.
- 9 Kill someone you love.
- 10 Deliberately destroy everything you’ve risked your life to support.

Be warned: once you pick the way you lose it, you can’t change to something else for the duration of the madness. If you frenzy against someone who can beat the holy heck out of you, you *will not* be able to run away. You’ll fight until you or your opponent is dead.

That’s the short term. It subsides when the stimulus is removed or somewhat resolved. (The next time you lose it, you can pick a different option—whatever seems appropriate each time you go short-term crazy.)

Once that short-term effect is over, mark a “failed” notch on the appropriate gauge. Once you get five failures in a single gauge, you’ve picked up a permanent mental aberration, explained in the section on “Permanent Madness.”

There’s one slender upside to freaking out. You don’t have to make any more stress checks while you’re panicking, frozen, or going berserk.

**Example:** Bob the ex-cop swings his nightstick at a fleshwarp called the Freak. The Freak is using a spell called Body Like a

Still Pond, which allows it to simply flow around damage. When Bob sees his nightstick go right *through* the Freak's arm with little apparent effect, he has to make a rank-3 Unnatural check. He fails it and flips his lid, attacking the Freak with mindless frenzy. The Freak defends itself by using a magickal attack called Warping, which lets it tear chunks out of Bob with its bare hands. Being successfully attacked with magick is a rank-5 Unnatural check, but since Bob is already out of his mind, he doesn't have to make the roll; he just takes the failed notch for the first one, once he gets out of the fight (assuming he survives).

## Mental Help: Pre-Insanity

It's perfectly possible to get counseling to help you with your mental problems before you become certifiable—that is, before all the failed notches on one of your madness meters are filled. To do so, you have to get to a psychotherapist, social worker, philosophical counselor, or whatever rattles your scabbard. (Note that these professionals are usually pretty expensive, but the kindlier ones operate on a sliding-fee scale.)

Here's how it works. Your GM will secretly decide what your counselor's skill percentile is in whatever relevant skill the counselor has (it's going to be a Mind skill, since Mind governs mental health). After a few introductory sessions to get trust established, you make a Mind roll and your counselor makes a skill roll on her Psychoanalysis skill for each session. (Note that if you have a relevant counseling skill, you cannot use it on yourself. It's called "the Talking Cure," not "the Talking to Yourself Cure.")

- Any time either you or your counselor gets a matched success, you can erase a hardened notch or a failed notch of your choice.
- Any time both you and your counselor succeed, you can erase a hardened notch or a failed notch of your choice.
- If you succeed and your counselor fails, you can choose to erase any failed notch.
- If you fail and your counselor succeeds, you can choose to erase any hardened notch. (Or choose not to erase any notch—and get a lecture on "resisting therapy.")
- Any time *both* of you get a matched success, you can erase up to three failed or up to three hardened notches in any one gauge. (You cannot erase some of each; excess erasures are lost.)

Another (simpler) option is to get **psychological first aid**. If you've got a buddy (or another player character) who's got psychological training, that friend can attempt to counsel you right away—as long as you talk to him within an hour of your Mind check failure. Anecdotal evidence indicates that people who get counseling right away tend to do better in the long run. After all, if the counselor can put things in perspective right away, it saves the effort of uprooting an entrenched and sick attitude. If you can get counseling that fast, your counselor makes a roll. If he makes any success, you can erase that failed notch. Note that psychological first aid is not effective in removing hardened notches, only failed ones, and it is not possible to treat yourself.

## Permanent Madness

Once you have five failed notches marked in a single gauge, you don't have to make rolls when confronted with that mental stress

any more. You automatically fail (and flee, fight, or freeze), but you don't get any more failed notches because you're sort of maxed out. You've hit bottom.

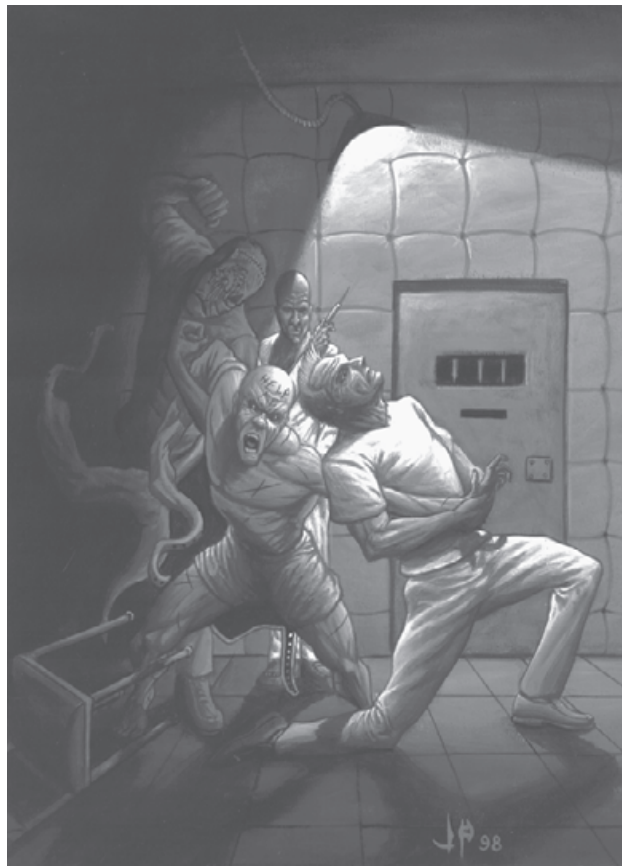
**Exception:** You still reap the benefits of any hardened notches you may have in that gauge—if you've got five failed notches and one hardened notch in Self, a rank-1 Self check won't affect you.

When you fill the failed notches in a given gauge, you pick up some kind of mental aberration. You and your GM should work out your character's insanity together. Keep in mind that insane people can often get along okay (if not very well) in the world. Many go undetected for years.

(Note that an automatic failure on a mental stress gauge that you've maxed out on doesn't give you *another* aberration. One per gauge is plenty.)

Some permanent forms of madness include:

- **Phobia.** If something drove you mad, it's quite likely that you'll develop a debilitating and irrational fear of it. If someone only *talks* about it or shows you a picture of it, you have to make a Mind check in order to avoid freezing or panicking. If you're exposed to the thing itself, you automatically freak out without making a check.
- **Trauma Bond.** This is like a phobia, but instead of the actual stimulus, you get scared around something incidental to the trauma. (One example would be a boy whose father sometimes molested him in the morning before work. The boy repressed all memories of the molestation—but couldn't stand the smell of brewing coffee, which he always associated with the event.)



JIM PAIVETIC

- **Flashbacks.** This is also known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (or PTSD for short). Simply put, if you're exposed to any element that was present during the trauma, you're in danger of reliving the event. In the example given above, the smell of coffee might sometimes be a perfectly okay scent for the boy—but other times, it might make him relive the event. Or sometimes he might flash back from hearing footsteps on stairs, or simply from waking up in a bed that reminds him of the bed where the assault took place. There are many examples of combat veterans who flash back at the sound of fireworks, or when in a setting similar to that where combat occurred.
- **Blackouts.** Sometimes traumatized people slip into a semi-conscious state and simply wander away in an attempt to flee their past. When they come to, they have no recollection of their flight. These blackouts (or “fugue states”) can last for days and cover a lot of territory. Fugal people are usually non-violent and seem pretty dazed—they're just wandering away. Threatening stimuli will usually snap someone out of a fugue. So can the presence of friends or trusted individuals.
- **Addictive Behaviors.** Lots of people with bad pasts like to deaden them with any one of the countless chemicals available in this modern world. Alcohol is a perennial favorite—powerful and easily available. Marijuana, heroin, and synthetic depressants appeal to many traumatized people because it deadens the pain and makes everything seem generally okay. On the other hand, uppers like 'drines, speed, or coke can give vital illusions of being in control.
- **Philia/Obsession.** You may develop an unhealthy affection for an individual, object, or action that you perceive (for whatever reason) to have “saved” you from the trauma. (Obviously, you must have been saved somehow if you survived, right?) The target of your affection didn't necessarily have to save you directly—you see some sort of salvation connection that isn't necessarily rational. This philia could result in a desire to constantly be around that person/object/area, or it could result in a compulsive repetition of the saving action. (For example, if you were saying the Lord's Prayer when you were “saved,” you might develop an obsession with the Lord's Prayer, say it constantly, carry a rosary at all times, *etc.*)
- **Delusions.** A delusion is when you believe something that simply isn't true. Delusions in response to trauma can range from simple denial (“What are you talking about? He didn't rape me; we just had breakfast, then he went to work. That's all.”) to elaborate confabulations that rationalize or justify the experience (“No, those weren't ‘mechanical men’; I was gassed with a hallucinogen and hypnotized by agents of the CIA who tried to make me *think* they were mechanical men. They were actually Cuban expatriates in league with the Mafia.”)

By the way, this is the perfect time to play off your obsession and your passions. Anything that central to your personality is almost *certain* to be reflected in your madness.

You may notice that schizophrenia and multiple personalities are missing. This is not an accidental omission. A great many people have misperceptions about these disorders, and we don't want to reinforce any incorrect information out there.

Multiple Personality Disorder (or MPD for short) is generally believed to be the result of severe and repeated traumatic betrayals in childhood. As one professional put it, “people who go through

this sort of treatment end up one of three ways: catatonic, dead, or multiple.” One reason to keep it out of UA is that the traumas that send your character over the edge are rarely childhood experiences. For better or worse, you face it as a grownup.

The second reason to keep it out is that we don't want to split your attention. If you're busy running two personalities, both are more likely to end up as caricatures. Instead of having one character with two personalities, we'd rather see more single characters with twice as much personality.

Now that MPD is taken care of, that leaves schizophrenia. Actually, the two disorders are often mixed up, because both are injuries to the sense of self. However, where the self fragments into separate selves in the case of a multiple, in the case of a schizophrenic the self is simply fractured and has a difficult time processing the world or interacting with it appropriately. Furthermore, there's strong evidence for a physical, neurological basis for schizophrenia. (The success of certain psychotropic drugs in alleviating its symptoms also argues for a chemical disorder.) While psychological stresses probably play a part in causing the disease to manifest, it first has to be present (albeit dormant) in the chemistry of the brain.

We left schizophrenia out of UA because *we* don't understand it all that well, and because its effects are so varied and intrusive that it would detract from most stories that did not center on it exclusively.

Both of these cases are suggestions. If you're interested in playing a character who suffers—or who is predisposed to suffer—from such a mental illness, go for it. But the time to make this decision is during character creation, not the heat of play, and you should know something about these illnesses before taking a stab at playing them.

## Mental Help: Post-Insanity

All right, “permanent madness” is a bit of a misnomer. It's only permanent if you don't get cured. However, curing insanity is no walk in the park. By the time you're that badly hung up on an issue, it's sunk deep into your psyche. Seeking professional help at this point is sort of like shutting the gate after the cows have wandered away.

To get rid of a permanent insanity, you need a therapist to rid you of that final, fifth failure notch that drove you over the edge. A therapist will often suggest residential treatment—probably a good idea. In other words, you pack up your things, leave your job, and go to live in a residential treatment facility to try and get better. (You can try normal therapy, but as you'll see, it takes a *lot* longer once you've gone mad.)

Every month of residential treatment, or every *six* months of non-residential treatment (normal therapy), you make a Mind check while your therapist makes his skill check. If both of you succeed you can shake off your insanity and go back to four failed notches in that gauge—you're not stable, but you're okay, and you can leave the residence and go back to normal therapy. If either of you fails, you're still insane. (Matches have no effect on these outcomes.)

Needless to say, it's a good idea to continue normal therapy after this point (as described back under “Mental Help: Pre-Insanity”) to work off a few more of those failed notches. Otherwise, all it takes is one failed Mind check on that same old mental stress to knock you back into your insanity again.



## How Unbalanced Are You?

The Madness Meters are an orderly but abstract way to gauge the attitudes and mental states of your characters. In order to translate the dry ranks of dots into roleplaying opportunities, here's a general rundown of what it means to be hardened and failed in the various gauges.

Note that it is possible to have hardened and failed notches in the same gauge. Someone who's deep in both directions on Isolation probably has a highly ambivalent attitude towards being alone, which is perfectly in character for people who have been repeatedly exposed to that mental stress. Someone with the same situation for Violence feels little or nothing when exposed to most forms of bloodshed, but when something is so shocking that it gets through the barrier, the result is devastating.

### Violence

This is perhaps the most obvious and visceral of the stresses. In addition to measuring your attitudes towards bloodshed, it also measures your reactions towards the fear of death.

#### Violence, Failed

- 1 **At this level, you're superficially fine.** Perhaps you're a little edgy whenever a knife in the room happens to be pointing your direction.
- 2 **You are very aware of violence,** both as it exists and as it is depicted. It strikes you as somewhat odd that so many people don't realize that movie violence is very different from real violence.
- 3 **You get alert or uneasy** every time you see blood, even badly faked blood in a horror flick or when someone cuts a rare steak. Sometimes you have nightmares about violence you've witnessed.
- 4 **You instinctively take a defensive posture** whenever there's a loud noise or raised voice nearby. Your nightmares are frequent, and you have a hard time looking at anyone without imagining (if briefly) what you would do at that moment if they attacked you.

#### Violence, Hardened

- 1-3 **Superficially,** you're much like everyone else.
- 4-5 **Your attitude towards violence** shows on your face when the subject comes up in conversation, unless you work to keep it hidden. It might be intensity, or nervousness, or just a grim silence, depending on how you cope.
- 6-7 **Violence is a common feature** of your mental landscape. Unlike less-hardened people, you show little reaction at all when it is discussed or depicted in fiction.
- 8-9 **Your callousness shows** in your every word and expression unless you make a continuous effort to suppress it. Again, the exact tone is up to you: it could be bitter and harsh, feverish and vehement, or icy cold.
- 10 **It's not hard for people to realize** that the deepest horrors of torture and brutality have become commonplace to you, unless you work very, very hard to keep it hidden—which means you'll come off as tense and guarded all the time. The death

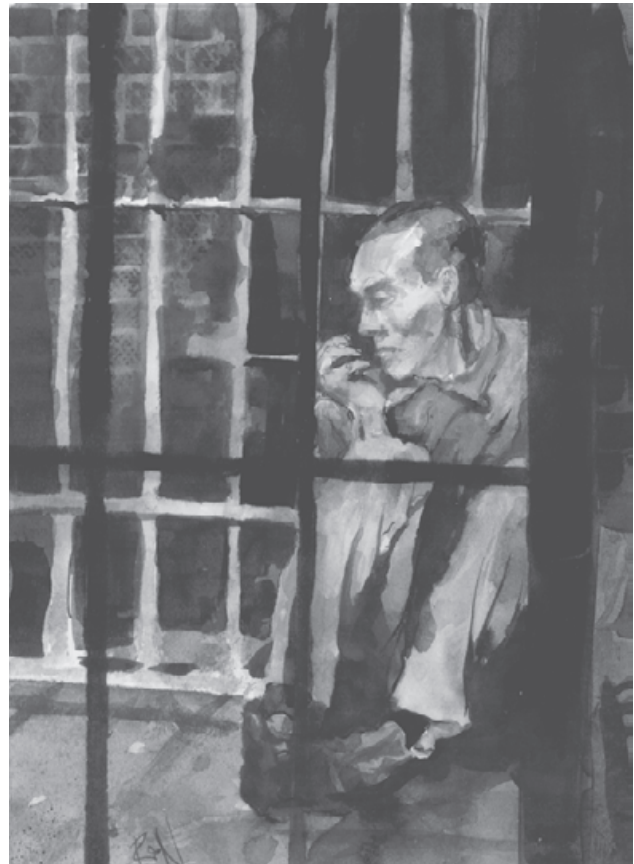
of others, or yourself, has no intrinsic significance. You might prefer to stay alive, but it's only a matter of personal taste. Life, in the abstract, doesn't mean anything.

### The Unnatural

This stress tends to be a bit more subtle and unnerving than Violence. Everyone recognizes that violence exists, even those who are insulated from it. Unnatural stresses don't just attack your idea of safety; they attack your idea of how the universe works.

#### The Unnatural, Failed

- 1 **At this level it's pretty hard to tell.** Perhaps you become a little superstitious—reading your horoscope daily, watching for “lucky” numbers, avoiding cracks in the sidewalk, *etc.*
- 2 **You have a few nightmares,** and you are suspicious of and/or fascinated by occult and religious books, places, paraphernalia, and people.
- 3 **You frequently feel like you're being watched,** even when there's no one around. Sometimes it seems like you hear voices in “white noise”—sounds like the wind in the trees, the sloshing of a washing machine, or the noises of traffic.
- 4 **The nightmares are frequent,** and often you don't know you're dreaming until you jerk awake. Sometimes you feel like there's someone—or *something*—watching you and you can almost see it out of the corner of your eye. When you whip your head around, there's nothing there.



ROB NEWETH

## The Unnatural, Hardened

- 1-3 There's little to distinguish you from the average person, except perhaps a tendency to snort derisively when someone mentions their "intuitions."
- 4-5 You tend to listen very closely and intently when someone discusses the paranormal or supernatural, trying to figure out if they know something or if they're just talking trash.
- 6-7 You now know and accept that there are vast, incomprehensible forces governing the universe. It strikes you as odd when people act as if they're in control of their lives: you know better.
- 8-9 Things that average people consider "meaningless coincidences" strike you as deeply, intensely funny because you see the connections that they do not. You may develop a reputation for laughing inappropriately.
- 10 You are no longer surprised by violations of ordinary logic. Everything is "normal" to you—talking foliage, spontaneous combustion, and stigmata are as ordinary and reasonable as cars, dogs, and rain.

## Isolation

Isolation is another subtle danger: it corrodes your sanity by denying you input. Human beings rely on each other for feedback. Without the opinions of others, we do not know how to judge ourselves. People who become resistant to isolation tend to overlook social mores and unwritten rules because they've forgotten how to conform to the expectations of others. People who have suffered from isolation tend to become very needy. (Note that these are not mutually exclusive: it's possible to be very clingy and still be unable to pick up hints about when your behavior is unacceptable.)

### Isolation, Failed

- 1 You can interact in society and get through your everyday life with no real problems. You're maybe a little shy with people at first, but you feel a kind of gratitude whenever a new acquaintance doesn't reject you.
- 2 You're a bit nervous around new people, eager to make a good impression. This could be expressed as shyness or through "chatterbox" behaviors.
- 3 If you sleep alone, you sometimes suffer from insomnia. Perhaps you don't like silence when you're by yourself, and always keep a television on or a radio playing. Sometimes, when you're not paying attention, you talk to yourself or think out loud.
- 4 Sometimes when you're isolated (either all by yourself or surrounded by strangers) you have panic attacks—a sense of intangible, impending doom. Your skin flushes, your breath becomes rapid and labored, you sweat. Simply put, you show the signs of being in mortal danger, when there is no danger around.

### Isolation, Hardened

- 1-3 There are no really obvious signs of your experiences. Perhaps you're a little standoffish or curt.
- 4-5 You can be unthinkingly rude, breaking in during the middle of a conversation before someone's done speaking, scratching yourself in an indelicate fashion, or telling the truth when it isn't diplomatic to do so. (For example, you might blurt out

"Damn that's an ugly haircut!" instead of saying "Wow, that's a new look for you, isn't it?")

- 6-7 You lack patience with people who don't immediately understand what you're trying to tell them. Your natural inclination is to repeat the same explanations (which are obvious to you) over and over, or just give up. (This is just your first impulse; it can, of course, be overcome if you pay extra attention. In game terms, this means that your Charm or Explain skills aren't penalized any time you make a roll, but you might have a little bit of trouble in casual situations.)
- 8-9 Unless you're concentrating, you lack dialogue skills. You don't like it when people interrupt, but you frequently interrupt others. You also don't see the point of a lot of social conventions such as clothing, grooming, *etc.* You might still shave every day, but it all seems a little silly.
- 10 At some level, you not only don't care what people think about you: you can't understand how anyone could care. You are very aware that people are inherently alone, that we can never really understand anyone or communicate anything but the most rudimentary ideas and feelings. You know everyone is an island, in the final analysis. Especially you.

## Helplessness

A sense of control is crucial for feelings of safety, even when it's completely unmerited. Those who have been challenged by helplessness can lose their ability to gauge how "in control" of a situation they are: they may feel powerless when the situation is not completely lost, or they may ignore real impediments from a misplaced sense of capability.

### Helplessness, Failed

- 1 At this level you're fairly normal. Perhaps you're a little finicky or meticulous, trying to eliminate the possibility of something going wrong.
- 2 You have a tendency to get unreasonably nervous and pessimistic when small things go wrong. You may be irritated if a bus is just a few minutes late, or if your computer freezes up.
- 3 You have an intense dislike for surprises, even good ones. They remind you of the essentially unpredictable nature of reality, and that scares and annoys you.
- 4 You find it very difficult to trust anything. Your friends, your own abilities, even your memories could be false, waiting to betray you. You have a tendency towards obsessive-compulsive behaviors such as checking the door to your house two or three (or more) times every time you leave to make absolutely certain it's locked. You attempt to be prepared for every eventuality.

### Helplessness, Hardened

- 1-3 You don't have any major behavior or attitude shifts yet, just minor things. You tend to be pessimistic and fatalistic, perhaps.
- 4-6 Your fatalism has increased. When things go wrong in a big, bad way, or when trouble comes from a completely unexpected or unlikely source, you handle it with a remarkable lack of affect. (This is not necessarily incongruent with the behaviors of 2+ failed notches: it's perfectly possible to be freakishly calm about big things and freakishly upset about little things.)



- 7-9 **You have a boundless faith** in the ability of chaos to screw you over. You can easily believe that even the most suspicious of mishaps is simple random chance. (“So my brake cable snapped and my gas pedal got stuck down to the floor. What makes you think someone tinkered with my car? Shit happens.”)
- 10 **The distinction between** “intentional” and “accidental” is pretty much lost on you. Maybe you believe that everything is completely predestined, or maybe you believe that everything in the world happens due to chance. The one thing you find hard to swallow is the idea that we are the captains of our fates.

## Self

This is the most insidious and possibly most terrifying emotional stress of all. Other gauges measure how traumatized you are by things that happen to you: only this is the measure of how traumatized you are by your reactions to those things. To put it another way, the only thing you can ever really be 100% sure of is “I think, therefore I am.” The Self gauge measures how uncertain you are about the “I” in that statement.

### Self, Failed

- 1 **You don’t have any real kinks yet**, but every now and again you feel a sense of dissociation, an eerie moment when you feel alienated from your own character and motivations. “Sure, I know I’m Greg Stolze,” you might think, “but who’s Greg Stolze?”

- 2 **The “who am I?” moments come more frequently.** You tend to become introspective whenever someone mentions “truth” or “lies” or “promises.”
- 3 **Half the time your words and actions** feel oddly forced, fake, or rehearsed to you—as if, rather than yourself, you were an actor playing the role of you.
- 4 **You frequently feel** like you’re watching your every action from the outside. You have little or no sense of will or volition: it’s as if you’re a passive observer, along for the ride while your body goes through the motions.

### Self, Hardened

- 1-3 **There are few external signs** of your interior struggle: people may sometimes find you to be a little brittle or “phony”-seeming.
- 4-5 **Even when you’re telling the truth**, people often think you’re lying, unless you make a particular effort to act “natural.”
- 6-7 **You’ve lost a sense of connection** to those who were previously close to you. You can predict the actions of your friends, relatives, or lovers, but you no longer know exactly what you feel about them.
- 8-9 **Half the time, you only know you’re telling the truth** if you take a minute to think about it. Truth and lies aren’t nearly as important as they used to be—back before you quit lying to yourself . . .
- 10 **Life has been pared down** to the essentials for you: you no longer have opinions about music, food, or fashion. You’ve lost the ability to enjoy or dislike things, because there’s so little “you” there to interact.



*chapter seven*  
*magick*

**UNKNOWN  
ARMIES**



"THE MAGICIAN MUTTERS,  
AND KNOWS NOT WHAT HE MUTTERS."  
—ANONYMOUS

"IF IT WAS AN EXACT SCIENCE,  
THEY WOULDN'T CALL IT MAGICK."  
—DEREK JACKSON





**Adepts are people** who can make magick work. There's no great secret to magick—you just have to believe hard enough to make it happen. Adepts believe very, very hard. (As one sage put it, “a magician is just someone who lies so hard he can fool reality.”) That's why if you want to work magick, you have to make magick your obsession skill during character creation.

There are a lot of people who claim to be adepts, and claim to work magick. They may be right, in very small ways that don't really do anyone any good besides the owners of new-age bookstores. These people are not true adepts. Adepts understand magick in a way akin to a simple transaction, or a physical law: you put something into the system, and you get something out; you jump up, and gravity pulls you back down. False adepts approach magick in a fuzzy, emotional sort of way, and would probably reject any assertion that magick can be reduced to something so mechanical.

This is not to say that adepts are not emotionally tied to magick or that they do not respect it; if anything, they respect it more than pseudo-adepts because they know there are very real consequences to their magickal actions. But as a rule of thumb, the pseudo-adept is the guy in the coffehouse spinning tales to impressionable high-school goth girls of how he defended his sister against a magickal rape by the leader of a rival coven; the adept is the guy in the coffehouse reading the newspaper and noting every occurrence of a prime number.

## Laws of Magick

There's countless ways to do magick, but they're all based on three inflexible laws.

**The Law of Symbolic Tension:** All magick is based on some sort of paradox.

**The Law of Transaction:** What you get out of it depends on what you put into it.

**The Law of Obedience:** No school of magick is big on sharing its disciples.

Arcane enough for you? Here's a more lengthy explanation of the three laws.

The first law—**symbolic tension**—means that the magick is based on some sort of central irony or contradiction. Booze is a perfect example: it gives you freedom (from your inhibitions and worries) but it also enslaves you. It makes you more yourself and less yourself. More because all your personality traits get exaggerated (or revealed) when you're drunk. Less because you have less judgement—and because it eventually kills you. Booze binges are full of drunken “moments of truth,” revelations that seem life-changing at the time but that fade like smoke during the next day's hangover. Booze is the foundation of the Dipsomancy school of magick—Dipsomancers (also known as boozehounds) can only work magick when they're drunk, and they lose any stored power when they sober up.

Entropy magick—Entropomancy—is a simpler example. In order to get control over the universe, you have to surrender control of yourself. Or there's Pornomancy, practiced by the Sect of the Naked Goddess, where you slavishly worship and imitate a woman who was habitually pushed around and degraded. The flesh-benders—Epideromancers—gain control of the body by destroying it. Get the idea?

The second law—**transaction**—is simpler: there's no free ride. Magick is like a car, and it runs on a complicated fuel of psychic energy and that ephemeral quality called “meaning.” It's just like Isaac Newton's third law: what you get out of it is equal to what you put into it.

## Becoming an Adept

If you want to roleplay the process of becoming an adept, rather than already being an adept at the time of character creation, here's the basics of how it's done. Be warned that it takes a while . . .

At present, the only known way to become an adept is to find a mentor—someone who will teach you a school of magick. (A mentor must have a Soul stat of at least 65, and must know the school you want to learn.) There are no known books or other written texts that will do the job. (Though those gifted or lucky enough to create new schools of magick make it all up from scratch.)

Becoming an adept is a lot like Luke Skywalker becoming a Jedi in *The Empire Strikes Back*: lots of nonsensical advice, lots of baffling instructions, and then one day it all falls into place and your luggage floats above the ground. As a rule of thumb, assume that it takes about a year to become an adept, starting from scratch with your mentor. This assumes you're pursuing it part-time, on many evenings and most weekends. You really can't pursue it on a full-time basis; you need down time to assimilate what you're learning, and mundane daily-life time for your mind to integrate the new, expanded worldview that you're being taught with the humdrum world you live in (or, more accurately, *vice versa*).

In game terms, your obsession must be magick-related, and you cannot have a non-Magick obsession skill—Magick becomes your obsession skill as soon as you begin your training. (However, you gain no obsession benefits from either until you complete your training.) You also need to earn experience points by normal means to buy your magick skill points (and Soul, if you like). You buy points throughout the year, as often as you can. However, until you complete your training, any attempts you make at using the skill are governed as if it was an unskilled action (see p. 41) with the following exceptions: “relaxed” means that not only are you not in a tense situation, you must also have your mentor beside you; you make the check against your current magick skill, not the Soul stat; and you can ignore the 30% minimum requirement. Once your training is complete, you can use the magick skill just like any other adept, and the benefits of your obsessions kick in.

By and large, adepts are born rather than made, in terms of their intent. Magick is something they've been looking for their whole life, one way or another—it's not like deciding that you really ought to learn Microsoft Word because all your friends are using it. If you're playing a non-adept and want to become an adept, your GM needs to agree that it's appropriate for the character; if it's not, you should create a new adept (or wannabe-adept) character instead.

To put this in game terms, you need to charge up your esoteric battery before you can power a spell. There are three types of charges: **minor**, **significant**, and **major**. These charges are qualitatively different. You can build up a billion minor charges and not have enough juice for a single significant charge (though, paradoxically, you can turn one significant charge into ten minor charges, and one major charge into ten significant charges). Minor charges come from minor sacrifices or behavioral concessions and are used to create minor effects. Significant charges are from more meaningful actions and power more impressive effects. Major charges are the real deal. They usually involve tremendous effort, danger, and trouble to acquire, and they pay off with similarly impressive effects: a minor charge could light your cigarette; a significant charge could level a forest; a major charge could scorch a continent.

What you do to build a charge depends on your school of magick. The effects you get when you release the power also depend on your school. A number of schools are given here; feel free to join up or design your own. Just remember that your GM has final veto power over what constitutes minor, significant, and major charges and effects. (“What? Turning someone into a toad has to be a significant effect instead of a minor one? And I can’t have trimming my toenails as the sacrifice for major charges? What if I trim *all* my toenails and *all* my fingernails?” Bzzzt.)

(Incidentally, you can’t use your magick to generate more charges for yourself. Epideromancers, for example, couldn’t use their magick to damage themselves and then get a charge from the damage.)

Just so you know, if you try to use a minor or significant charge and fail your roll, you still keep the charge. If you fail with a major charge you not only lose it, you’re probably screwed, too. Have fun.

Charges don’t go away on their own. Once you’ve got a charge, it sticks around until you use it (unless you violate a **taboo**, described later). There’s also no known upward limit on how many charges you can have at one time. Adepts who have worked to build up stupendous numbers of charges—in the hundreds—often act rather crazed, maybe even delusional, but that may simply be evidence that you have to be crazy in the first place to build up so much magickal power without using it along the way.

A final component of this law is that there can be side effects known as **unnatural phenomena** which can potentially occur every time you work magick. They’re like ripples in a pond, and you can’t control whether or not they happen or what form they take. These effects are covered in the Unnatural chapter, on page 142.

The third law—**Obedience**—simply means that no one can learn two schools of magick. Studying magick isn’t like studying dance. You don’t just learn a set of skills; you dedicate yourself to a certain view of the universe and how it works. A sorcerer can’t blast someone just because he believes he has the power to do so; he also has to fundamentally believe that the blast *has* to be possible, that the universe makes no sense if the blast *couldn’t* occur. Being a magician doesn’t just affect you when you’re casting spells. You have to live up to the ideals of your school 24 hours a day, or

your power will abandon you. That’s why certain behaviors (known as **taboos**) can instantly drain you of your current store of charges. It’s also why you can’t follow two different schools at once; it’s as mutually contradictory as being a Moslem atheist. (If you ever do manage to learn a different school, you go permanently insane in all five stress gauges. Ta ta. Give your character sheet to the GM, who now has an insane sorcerer GMC to play with.)

## Casting Spells

Mechanics-wise, here’s how you cast a spell.

- You tell the GM what you want it to do. Unless it specifically says otherwise in the spell’s description, *any* spell takes a single round in combat.
- You roll the dice, flip-flopping as necessary or desired (since magick is always an obsession skill).
- If you roll a success, the spell happens and you lose the appropriate charge or charges. If you roll a failure, it doesn’t work and you keep the charge. (Unless you were using a major charge. If you screw up with that kind of Big Whammy, you lose the charge and *something* happens. Usually something really painful and unpleasant.)
- Spells can affect either you or someone else you designate, unless the spell’s description says otherwise.

There. That’s it. What, did you think you were gonna have to read some huge grimoire in Sumerian or something? You don’t need any crystals, you don’t have to chant or paint signs on the floor. You can do so if you want, but all it really takes is an effort of will. (There are exceptions to the “no chanting, no crystals” rule—they’re called **rituals** and they’re described a little bit later.)

Story-wise, there’s a bit more to casting spells. This chapter is chock full of spells for different groups, and everyone in that group can cast any spell described—provided the charge is paid. Magick is like money: spending it isn’t nearly as hard as getting it in the first place.

There are four types of spells: **blasts**, **formula spells**, **random spells**, and **rituals**. Blasts are the basic way that adepts hurt people with magick; they’re direct-attack spells. Formula spells are reliable old favorites that have been practiced and are well-known; every adept knows all of the formula spells for his school. (Most blasts are really formula spells, but they have their own special rules so we bracket them off for ease of reference.)

Random spells, on the other hand, are those you improvise in an emergency to do something very specific. A chaos mage might want to whip up a spell to blow out someone’s tires, or a pornomancer might want to divine someone’s deepest fear. There aren’t formulas for these, but you can still exert magick influence over certain effects specific to your school. Usually random spells are more expensive and less powerful than formula spells. On the

### An Important Reminder About Magick

Since your magick skill has to be your obsession skill, you *always* have the option to flip-flop your magick check rolls. This is of critical importance; our informal statistical analysis of this effect suggests, for example, that a 55% skill with the ability to re-roll is effectively equal to about a 79% skill. That’s a major difference, so don’t ever forget: adepts can always flip-flop their magick checks.



other hand, the best hammer in the world isn't going to do you much good if you really need a saw.

The last type of spells are rituals. These are spells that can be performed by any adept—and some by non-adepts. Something about *the actions themselves* is intrinsically magickal. (Often rituals are associated with archetypes, as described in Chapter 13.) They're usually *very* specific—for example, they might be useful against one certain type of unnatural creature, or even one specific ghost. They require all the chanting and the eye of newt and the pointy hats. Rituals are very specialized tools, and there aren't a lot of them around—most were destroyed during the medieval Inquisition.

The four types of spells are detailed in the following sections.

## Blast Spells

Adepts use blasts to injure other people. A given adept probably calls his blast by some other name—"blast" is a game-system term more than a game-world term. (Common names for blasts include "my mojo," "the big hurt," "the evil eye," and other slangy phrases; stuffed-shirt adepts might call their blasts "the Route of Pain" or "the Way of All Chaos," while street adepts might call their blasts "Big Johnson" or "I'm Gonna Git You Sucka." What does your adept call his blast?) Not all schools of magick offer blasts—mechanomancers, for one, don't have this option.

Most blasts only work against complex living organisms: people, dogs, birds, elephants, whatever. As a general rule, blasts have no effect whatsoever on objects such as doors, cars, concrete, or the common cold. For a blast to function, the target needs to have identifiable, functional, organic body systems visible to the naked eye. Blasts would not function against a clockwork, for example, or an incorporeal spirit. But if a spirit possessed a human, the blast would certainly work against the human host—the spirit, though, would be unharmed. Some supernatural creatures are affected by blasts, but some aren't. Each creature described in the rules has notes as to whether it is vulnerable to a blast.

Every school's form of blast has the same general gameplay effects, as described in the next two sections. Each school's blast manifests in a different way, however. Most of these differences are purely cosmetic; it doesn't make a difference in terms of mechanics if they hurt you by shrivelling your organs or by rending your flesh with invisible claws. (It does affect the way the victim looks when you're done, of course.) The various styles of blast are described in each school's description.

The Dodge skill has no effect against most blasts. Regardless of the Dodge check outcome, the blast still works normally. The only exception to this among the schools of magick presented in this book is the Epideromancy school, since it works by touch.

You cannot make multiple attacks with the Blast attack. It can only be one full-power Blast against one target.

An adept with a 85% or higher magick skill can create his own personal style of blast at no cost, at any time. Adepts often do this for intimidation value: a weird new style of blast makes it clear to those in the know that the adept in question is good at what he does. However, adepts can always choose to use their school's standard blast *or* their personal style of blast every time they cast one, since they might not always want to advertise their prowess to their opponents.

There are two types of blast—minor and significant—which do different amounts of damage and have different requirements.

## Minor Blast

Minor blasts usually fall under the category of minor magicks, meaning you only need to expend minor charges to power the attack. Roll your magick check as normal to execute a minor blast. If you succeed, you do damage equal to the total of the two dice you just rolled, added together. (It's like a martial arts attack in this respect, but there's no bonus damage for matches.) If you're willing to take a -10% shift to your check before rolling, you can add a third die and take the two you want as your roll. You can do this multiple times for one check, if you desire.

If you fail the attack check, you don't lose the minor charge. Nothing happens.

**Example:** Don has a Dipsomancy skill at 40%. Normally, he'd roll two dice (with the option to flip-flop, since Dipsomancy has to be his obsession skill) and try to get a 40 or less. However, if he's willing to drop his skill to 30%, he can roll three dice and assemble any two-digit number he wants from them to succeed. If he's willing to drop his skill to 20%, he can roll four dice, and if he's willing to go down to 10%, he can roll five dice—hoping one of them's a 0. In this instance, Don drops to 20% and rolls four dice. He gets 5, 5, 2, and 1—so he can assemble a 15 (a success) and do six points of damage.

If you go for a shift but can't assemble a successful number out of your dice, however, your GM gets to decide which numbers came up. So, if Don had gotten a 2 instead of that 1, the GM could have hit him with a 55—and therefore a sour-cherry effect (as explained on p. 83).



ROB NEMETH



## Man, Blast Really Bites!

At least, that's what some readers may be saying right now. In some ways, they're right—especially compared to taking a high Firearms skill. After all, you don't need to cut yourself or get smashed (either literally or figuratively) to use a pistol. However, there are advantages that magick blasts have over guns.

- You can use it in an airport, or a jail cell, or anywhere else you aren't allowed to bring a gun.
- You can't drop it, or lose it, and if you run out of ammo you can make your own.
- Most blasts can't be dodged.
- Blasts do not leave incriminating forensic evidence. Anyone who claims you killed someone with "magick" is going to get laughed out of court.
- Blasts can be customized, unlike gunshots.
- Every time you successfully use a blast on someone—even a minor blast—it's a rank-5 stress check against The Unnatural for the victim. Compare with a gun or knife, which is rank-1 Violence.
- Finally—and perhaps most important—sorcerers can learn to use guns; gunmen can't learn to use blasts. Maybe relying on blast is a lousy substitute for packing heat, but be careful not to compare apples and oranges. Guns can do things blasts can't; blasts can do things guns can't. It's always good to keep your options open—so can't we all just get along?

### Significant Blast

Significant blasts fall under the category of significant magicks, meaning you need to expend significant charges to power the attack. Roll your magick check as normal to execute a significant blast. If you succeed, the percentile number you rolled is the damage you inflict. If you take an extra turn before using your blast and do nothing but concentrate, you can roll a third die and keep the two you want. If you take two extra turns, you can roll four dice and keep two. You can't take more than two extra turns. These extra turns don't cost you any more charges (though some schools can spend extra charges to get extra dice without waiting). Again, if you roll extra dice (for whatever reason) and fail, the GM decides which dice to keep. If you take damage or fail a mental stress check during any round that you're spending in preparation for a significant blast, you have to start over again.

If you fail the attack check, you don't lose the significant charge. Nothing happens.

**Example:** Don casts a significant blast and takes an extra turn to prepare it. This lets him roll three dice, hoping to assemble something under a 40%. He rolls 4, 7, 6 and fails—but he doesn't lose his charge and doesn't get any bad results, it's just a simple fail. (If he'd rolled a 4, 4, 7, and 6, the GM could have the option of choosing the 44 and making it a matched failure, with a sour cherry as a result.) He tries again and takes three turns total to cast it. He rolls four dice this time—6, 5, 3, and 1. He sets his roll at 36, succeeds, and does 36 points of damage to his target.

### Customized Blasts

In some ways, blasts are inferior to hand-to-hand fighting (since you can't do multiple attacks) and firearms (since you usually have to get a significant charge to do damage comparable to even a small handgun). However, blasts are a more versatile weapon than either. By spending a little extra mojo juice, you use blasts in situations you couldn't get near with a gun or a knife. Although these customized blasts may require significant charges, they are still considered minor blasts for damage purposes.

**Long Distance.** If you spend a significant charge on your minor blast (in addition to the minor charge), you can target someone you can't even see. It doesn't matter if he's in Asia Minor and you're in the Yukon, you can whip the vengeful fire of your mighty mojo on him. You have to know your target well—know him by name, be very familiar with his face, have a good photograph or a piece of his clothes, *etc.* (Epideromancers can't use this ability.)

**Special Delivery.** You can booby-trap an item, person, or even a specific situation with a minor blast spell. This costs an additional minor charge, but the event that triggers the spell has to be appropriate to your school of magick: a boozehound could booby-trap a bottle of scotch, or have someone get blasted the next time they take a drink; a pornomancer could blast the next person to make love on a certain bed or stretch of beach; an entropomancer could whammy the next person to draw three aces from a particular deck of cards; a fleshworker could blast the next person to touch (or hit) him or her. There's no limit on how long the spell will wait until it goes off. The caster does have to handle the object or be in the place in question to set the trap, however. Furthermore, an area larger than a house can't be trapped in this fashion (at least, not without more than a minor charge).

**This Time It's Personal.** If you spend an extra minor charge, you can direct your minor blast against a specific body part. While this can't be used to increase the damage (so it does no good to target the brain or the heart) it can be used to keep your opponent from shooting his gun or running away.

### Formula Spells

These are simple, and are probably the spells you'll use the most. They all take one action to use, their charge costs rarely vary (unless your GM decides to make them more or less expensive, for whatever reason), and their effects are predictable. These spells are listed by school later in this chapter.

### Random Spells

Random spells are a troublesome grey zone when it comes to rules. A magician is, by definition, someone who can manipulate



reality. It would be a pretty piss-poor type of magician who could only follow the rules and do exactly what he was taught, right? Especially since this setting is based on the idea that at least half the magicians out there are kooks with highly idiosyncratic ideas about metaphysics. So we have random spells.

Every school of magick has an idea at its core. The core of chaos magic is entropy and randomness. The core of pornomancy is desire—both frustrated and fulfilled. People who use a given school can effect things related to that school's core idea (which is called a school's **domain**). Rather than provide an intricate structure of rules and counter-rules governing what can and can't be done by each school, we're leaving this largely in the hands of the GM. Each school has some explanation about how random spells from it can and should work, but a few guidelines hold true for all.

- **Random magick is harder.** Magicians should expect to pay more, both in the number and power of charges, to generate a random effect. That's the difference between working off a recipe and winging it.
- **Random magick is narrower.** If pornomancy didn't have a formula blast spell, you probably couldn't make a random pornomancy blast spell. Formula spells lend confidence, and therefore make it easier to stretch the boundaries of power. Random spells are unknown; therefore, they need to be closer to the heart of the magickal school's teaching. (However, this rule tends to break down with major charges. When you've got that kind of juice, almost anyone can do almost anything . . .)
- **Random magick is less predictable.** A GM is more likely to have weird phenomena (such as those described on pp. 144–46) happen around random magick than around boring old formula spells. This randomness is more likely regardless of whether the spell fails or succeeds.

In short, random magick is included to grease the skids and provide a rationale for sorcerers tweaking the flow of events and making things go their way. They're not a grab bag of unpredictable power and they don't allow a school to do things it normally couldn't. In fact, we think it's important enough to stress the limits of random spells that we're going to put them in a box nearby.

## Rituals

Rituals are powerful magick spells because they're independent: a magician from *any* school can use these, if they can learn them. Unfortunately for the spellcasters out there, the art of making ritu-

als is completely lost. No one knows how to make new ones (except possibly some really powerful demons), and 99% of the old ones were destroyed by history—the burning of the library at Alexandria, the black plague in Europe, countless sieges and wars, not to mention the Spanish Inquisition.

To complicate matters, for every real ritual that got lost, at least one ritual that *doesn't work* remains in recorded occultism. (Considering that 99+% of rituals don't do jack, it's no surprise that so many duds survived when the real thing got lost.) When you add in the bogus rituals that people have made up since the fifteenth century, you get a real needle-in-the-haystack situation. To complicate matters further, there are at least a couple rituals floating around that do have mystic effects—just not the effects advertised. Sometimes a crafty ancient sorcerer included a spell labeled “Turn Lead Into Gold” in his grimoire, when its actual effect is more like “Attract Astral Parasite.” Sometimes bad archaeology will mistranslate the spell's descriptive text. Then there are Trojan Horse spells: there are at least a dozen rituals floating around that were dictated by demons. They claim to bestow longevity, attract wealth, and give the caster supernatural abilities—the whole Faust shtick. What they *actually* do is invite demons from the other side into your body: the demons dictated these spells to gullible adepts, then took over. The spells remain because the possessed adepts made sure the rituals got transcribed to provide a steady stream of bodies for the demons to occupy.

That's why so few schools or adepts put much effort into ferreting out ritual spells. Each individual ritual has a 99% chance of being bogus. Of those that aren't bogus, half do something completely different than they say, and a lot of *those* are actually traps. As for that one half of one percent that actually work as advertised, you're just as likely to dig up a mystic cure for warts as something that turns you invisible or lets you speak to birds.

On the other hand, magicians are obsessive, pure and simple. There are some lone-nut dukes out there who do nothing but seek fragments of ancient wisdom with the fervor of lottery-ticket addicts who are always sure that *this* time it's going to pay off. Every once in a long while, it does. Then you get freaks of every description crawling out of the woodwork to steal the new ritual, which means that researching rituals is a lot like building a nuclear weapon in your basement: if you succeed, you're probably in big trouble.

Keeping all that in mind, here's how rituals work in UA. Like most magickal effects, they're divided into minor, significant, and major, depending on what type of charge they require from their caster. Player characters don't start out knowing any rituals (unless the GM is feeling nasty and wants to give every powerful adept in the world a motivation to hunt them) and can only gain them in

## The Limits of Random Magick

Nothing is pure. Even the personal chaos of random magick has rules, as follows.

**The spell costs what the GM says it costs.** Even if a similar effect cost a lot less. Even if you've done it *before* and it cost less. Even if you couldn't do it before and now you suddenly can.

**The GM decides if you can do it, and the GM's word is final.** Even if you could do it before and can't now. Even if you *really* think you should be able to do it. Even if the GM previously said you could.

**You can't do anything outside the abilities of your school.** It should come as no surprise that the GM decides what the abilities of your school are, and that these limits can change at the GM's whim.

**Remember:** if it was an exact science, they wouldn't call it magick.

the course of play. (Note that simply going through the motions of the actions described for each ritual won't make it happen; you've got to have access to the full ritual to learn it, not just the mumbo-jumbo that goes along with it.)

## Minor Rituals

Minor rituals are unique among spell effects, because they're the only spells that can be cast by non-spellcasters. That's right: Joe Sixpack and Jane Minivan can give these a try. All a character has to do is make a Soul roll that's under their Soul stat and above 30 while performing the ritual. (This does give most people a rather dismal chance of success, but it's better than nothing.)

Magicians simply spend the required charges and roll with no minimum, as if it was a normal spell in their school.

Avatars can use rituals as well. They do it just like ordinary people, but instead of rolling Soul, they make a simple Avatar roll. Unlike normal folk, they don't have to beat a 30.

## Snowblinding

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Ritual Action:** Take a pine cone and wrap some of your own hair around it, making sure to get it deep into the center of the cone. On the day of the first snowfall, burn the pine cone while walking around your home or dwelling in a counterclockwise direction.

**Effect:** The Snowfallen (see p. 154) cannot approach within a mile of a residence that has been Snowblinded until the snow has melted and a new snowfall comes along.

## Poison Ward

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Ritual Action:** Before drinking something, rotate the drinking vessel 360° clockwise while saying the word "sushem." Then rotate the vessel 360° counter-clockwise while saying the word "crehab."

**Effect:** If successful, this ritual negates the effects of any poisons in the cup. (This includes alcohol and other drugs.) It won't work on food, only on beverages.

## Seek the Lost Tome

**Cost:** 2 minor charges

**Ritual Action:** Copy a particular mystic sigil onto a piece of animal hide using all-natural vegetable inks. Burn the animal hide (it doesn't matter what type of fire) and mix the ashes thoroughly with a different type of ink, this one blue. Then copy the sigil again onto a piece of paper, with the mixture of ink and ash. (It doesn't matter what type of paper.) Wrap the paper tightly around an eagle feather, and suspend the feather and paper from a braided cord the length of all your fingers added together. The cord must have three strands of different material; it doesn't matter which materials, as long as they're different. Once the feather, paper, and string are prepared, swing them around your head three times clockwise, repeating the phrase "Ecom Etrubo" once per revolution. Then let the string go.

**Effect:** While performing the ritual, the user must think of a book that he once owned but no longer has. If the spell is successful, when the string is released the feather and string will land in a straight line, pointing in the direction of the book. If the book has

been destroyed, the feather and string burst into flames. If the spell fails, it goes in a random direction.

## Plague of Hiccups

**Cost:** 2 minor charges

**Ritual Action:** Harvest ten ripe olives on a night of moonless dark. Press them for their oil. Harvest ten apples by the light of the noonday sun, press them for their juice, and ferment it into vinegar. Add this to the oil. Suspend the mixture beneath an icicle and build a fire under it. Do not remove the mixture until it has begun to boil and at least one drop has fallen from the icicle into the mixture. Let the mixture cool, then drink it at sundown. When next you urinate, save the urine. Sprinkle it on the doorstep of the house of the spell's target, while whispering the words you wish to curse. The cursed word or phrase must have at least three syllables, but not more than seven.

**Effect:** When the victim of your spell speaks the cursed word or phrase, he is immediately struck with hiccups. These convulsions last anywhere from a few minutes to an hour. They eventually fade on their own, but any time the person speaks that phrase or word, the hiccups return.

**Example:** Dirk Allen wants to make B.D. Dover stop talking about him. Assuming he prepares the mixture correctly and sprinkles it while muttering his own name, the next time B.D. Dover tries to say "That Dirk Allen is a fraud of monstrous proportions," he's struck with hiccups midway through his sentence. Forever after, whenever B.D. Dover mentions Dirk Allen's name, he's overcome with hiccups.

## Angel of the Animals

**Cost:** 5 minor charges

**Ritual Action:** To put this spell on someone, you must have a part of their body in your possession—loose hair and fingernail clippings work fine. Grind the hair or nails up into a fine powder and mix it with two cups of buckwheat flour. Add two tablespoons of butter that were churned under a full moon from the milk of an all-white cow. Add yeast (any kind of yeast is fine) and a teaspoon of salt. Mix all these ingredients, let it rise (covered), and punch it down once. The second time it rises, knead it well and put it in a pan greased with the fat of an animal you hunted yourself. Lance the ring finger of your left hand and write a word on the top of the loaf. (It doesn't matter what word.) Put it in a stove at dawn, over a fire of sandalwood. Remove when it's brown and feed it to the intended target. When you wish the spell to take effect, say the word you wrote in blood.

**Effect:** If effective, this spell attracts all types of animals to the victim for a span of eight hours. The animals are not enamored of the person as a person, but as a location. They want to touch him, not obey him. When activated, the victim finds all types of animal life swarming towards him at top speed. Birds fly at his window and try to get inside to perch on his shoulders and arms. Cats, dogs, and squirrels surround him and climb on him. Flying insects cling to his face as crawling bugs go up his pants legs.

Most people panic when suddenly coated with wildlife from head to toe. Most animals fight back with a struggling human. They just know they want to touch him; it doesn't matter if he's alive or dead.





Though not directly harmful, this spell is often fatal. Those who struggle are torn apart by a hundred tiny teeth. Those who do not struggle often smother.

## Significant Rituals

### Scurvy Livestock

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Ritual Action:** Collect yellow phlegm from a sick woman who has at least one living child. Mix it with honey and wine. Take the resulting mixture into the fields of your enemy on a full moon night and boil it while chanting “shekaret tyveena, shekaret tyvancee” over and over, until the mixture completely evaporates.

**Effect:** The livestock possessed by the owner of that field will sicken—cows give sour milk, sheep get patchy, piglets fail to thrive. Some will die, possibly many if the spell works well.

(Sure, this doesn’t seem particularly impressive today. But in the Middle Ages it was one of the all-time greats.)

### Spellbreaker

**Cost:** 2 significant charges

**Ritual Action:** Take a live starfish and lace its five legs between the five fingers of your left hand. With your right hand, make the “fig sign”—a clenched fist with your thumb between your first and middle fingers. As you make this sign, clench your left hand and crush the starfish.

**Effect:** If successful, this removes the lingering effects of any spell that has been cast on you—within a few limits. It won’t get rid of creatures who were summoned by magick (such as demons, entropics, or astral parasites): the spell summoned the creature, but ceased when the creature was attached. It also won’t undo physical damage or death caused by magick. However, it could be used to undo the effects of Psychotrauma (page 102), Body Melting (page 95) or that pesky Plague of Hiccups (previous page). You can only use this spell on yourself.

### Lead Into Gold

**Cost:** 4 significant charges

**Ritual Action:** There are countless medieval alchemical recipes for turning lead (or other base metals) into gold. You can look them up in Agrippa, Lull, and Fludd, among other places. Make sure you find the ones that turn lead into gold rather than the ones that give you progressive brain lesions from inhaling mercury fumes.

**Effect:** As advertised, this spell turns lead into gold. Not in great quantities, as a rule: a lead coin might just develop a thin coating of gold over its surface. On the other hand, it doesn’t take many fishing sinkers to churn up some healthy profits with this spell.

### Summon Unspeakable Servant

**Cost:** 5 significant charges

**Ritual Action:** Kill a black bull at midnight when the moon is dark. Empty its body of entrails and keep it at body temperature until the moon is half-full and waxing. Then kill a black sheep when the moon is at its zenith. Empty its body of entrails, put the body inside the bull, and keep them at body temperature until the moon is

full. Then kill a black rooster when the moon is at its zenith, gut the body, put the rooster in the sheep and the sheep in the bull, cover and keep warm until the moon is dark again. At midnight during the dark of the moon, pluck out one of your eyes (either one), place it in the rooster’s body, put the rooster in the sheep and the sheep in the bull, and keep them warm for one lunar month. At that time (two months after you started the process), the spell is completed and your unspeakable servant will hatch from within the bodies.

(Note: The paragraph above describes the original ritual, which works only for female magicians. If a man wishes to summon an unspeakable servant, he must do the same things, only with a cow, a ram, and a chicken instead of a bull, a sheep, and a rooster.)

**Effect:** “Summon” is perhaps inaccurate, since this spell actually creates the unspeakable servant. (For more on unspeakable servants, see page 156.) The servant will obey its master in all particulars, and can sometimes continue to exist after the master’s death.

The type of servant you get (Lesser, Greater, or Abominable) depends on the sum of the dice when you rolled to cast the spell. If they add up to four or less, you get a lesser servant. If the sum is between 5 and 10, or if you rolled a low match (11 or 22), you get a greater servant. If the sum is higher than 10, or if you rolled 01, then you get an abominable servant.

On the other hand, if your ritual failed then it’s a darn shame about that eye.

There are rumors that there’s a variant on this ritual that lets you use someone else’s eye instead of your own, but so far all widely known experiments in that direction have ended with the servant controlled by the eye donor.

### Create Homunculus

**Cost:** 8 significant charges

**Ritual Action:** Blow a glass pint flask during the full moon using sand collected from under high tide. Masturbate into it at the dark of the moon, and vacuum-seal the flask using a magnet as the stopper, pointing the positive pole of the magnet into the flask. Bury the flask under a pile of horse manure deposited by a horse with hair the color of your own. After forty days, drill a hole in the stopper and immediately fill the flask with your blood, taken from the femoral artery. You should see a human-shaped blood clot form in the center of the flask shining with its own light. Once a week, refill the flask with your blood, as above. At the end of forty weeks, dissolve the flask using your own stomach acid. Do not expose the flask to light at any time during this process, and make sure that the flask remains at blood warmth for the entire period.

**Effect:** Assuming you’ve done everything right, you have created a miniature human being roughly the size of a pint flask, or of a classic twelve-inch *G.I. Joe* doll. This homunculus is effectively a smaller copy of yourself, the only difference being that his Body score is yours divided by five. Unfortunately, any damage the homunculus takes affects you as if it was five times that amount. Homunculi must obey any command their creator gives them, and can learn any skill their creator can teach them. Only very stupid adepts teach their homunculi anything at all about magick, since most homunculi are also born with the instinctive knowledge that they will be free upon their creator’s death. That damage-transfer thing is only one way, so it’s a good idea to make your first command to the homunculus, “Never harm me.” If you really want a miniature

version of yourself who knows all your secrets and hates you deeply, there you go. Enjoy.

## Major Rituals

If any major rituals survived to the present day, those who possess them are keeping quiet. The ritual that appears most frequently in gossip and speculation is called “Resurrection Body” or “The Philosopher’s Stone”—a spell that transforms the user’s body into an immortal, impervious, flawless vessel. A close second is “Summon Archangel.” Supposedly this spell allows a sorcerer to both call and command an “archangel”—not a demon, ghost, or spirit of the departed, but the greater immaterial spirits that command and control them beyond the veil. Many speculate that these “archangels” are what the demons call “the cruel ones.”

## Cherries

Like martial artists, people who specialize in magick can assign special perks during character creation that kick in when they roll successful matches while casting spells. Each cherry is tied to a specific match (11, 22, 33, *etc.*) during character creation, or when a character earns enough experience points to raise her magick skill to the next match level. Here’s a list of such bonuses. (Players and GMs are encouraged to pick or think up cherries that are specific to their school of magick.)

- **Brainstorm:** The GM tells you something totally unrelated to the situation at hand, but potentially useful in the near future.
- **Gotcha:** Get a +10% shift on your next roll.
- **Hard:** Get a free hardened notch against one mental stress of your choice.
- **Hunch:** Get a free hunch (*i.e.*, roll two dice and use them for your next roll).
- **Mojo:** Get a free +10% shift on your next magick roll.
- **Potent:** Get a free minor charge.
- **Solid:** Gain a free experience point.
- **Strong:** Your next initiative roll is an unmatched success, no matter what you roll.
- **Tricky:** You may flip-flop your next roll. (If you could anyway, or choose not to, this is wasted.)
- **Wild Card:** Change one of your cherry assignments.

## Sour Cherries

These are what the GM gets to do to people who make failed matches on sorcery attempts. The GM can pick one, or randomize

it, or permanently assign them in ways appropriate to the character or his school of magick.

- **Backfire:** A spell aimed at someone else affects you, or affects someone else *instead* of you.
- **Mojo Suckage:** Automatic -10% shift on next magick roll.
- **Sourpuss:** Change the character’s next cherry roll into a sour cherry.
- **Suckage:** Automatic -10% shift on next roll.
- **Vamp:** The character gets no more cherries until sundown or sunrise, whichever is next.
- **Wacked:** An astral parasite latches onto you or someone involved in the magick.
- **Weak:** You lose your charge even though the check failed.

## Schools of Magick

There are many, many different schools of magick. When you get down to it, any action can be magickal if undertaken in a magickal manner. In other words, if you approach an action with ritual intent and really believe in its power, you can make something magickal happen. If you’re obsessed with a certain legendary action/sci-fi movie released in 1977 and followed up by sequels, you could build a school of magick based on elements of the film.

Schools of magick are not organizations. They are not bureaucracies, allegiances, factions, or anything else of the sort. They are styles, paths, ways of making magick happen. Two people who practice the same school of magick aren’t necessarily allies; if anything, owing to the scarcity of materials needed for the more potent forms of magick within each school, they’re probably enemies or at least competitors.

Members of a given school of magick don’t even necessarily see the world in the same way. These schools are not holistic systems of belief. Their function is very narrow. Members of a given school are rarely dumb enough to think that their way is the only way that works—though they often view other schools as variations on a fundamental truth only *they* really understand.

As an analogy, consider the colors of automobiles. People like different colors on their cars for different reasons. But in the end, no matter what color the car is, it still gets you where you’re going. The different schools of magick aren’t that cosmetic—they really do cause different things to happen, and no school of magick can do everything that another can—but it’s still a good comparison.

A sampling of schools of magick follow. Any adept can create his own school of magick without any trouble—but of course, he has to set out to do so before learning any other school, lest the Law of Obedience come into play. To design your own school for

## Mancy, Magy, and Urgy

Technically, the various schools of magick—dipsomancy, pornomancy, *etc.*—should actually be written out as dipsomagy, pornomagy, and so forth. The suffix “-mancy” refers to magickal divination, whereas “-magy” means more general forms of magick. Even more technically, a more etymologically correct suffix would be “-urgy,” giving us dipsourgy, pornourgy, *etc.* Regardless, “-mancy” is what passed into common currency among the new wave of adepts, and the occult underground is stuck with it—the way normal folks are stuck with people who use “orientated” when they should use “oriented,” or who use “literally” when they shouldn’t use anything at all. Old-school occultists and scholars tend to make a point of using either “-magy” or “-urgy,” which makes novice adepts look at them funny. Life goes on.

a new adept character, you'll need to consult with your GM. Guidelines are given at the end of this chapter.

## Cliomancy (History-Based Magick)

Easter Island. Gettysburg. *La Tour Eiffel*. The Bikini atoll. What do these places have in common? Simple: you've probably heard of all of them.

The motive force behind magick is meaning. It is meaning that propels mortal people into the Invisible Clergy. Once there, meaning resonates downward into the human cosmos, where those avatars who act out roles partake in the power of the archetypes.

Meaning is not limited to individuals, however. Places have meanings too. Everyone knows what you're talking about when you mention Dealey Plaza, or Gettysburg.

Cliomancy is the magick art of harvesting meaning from places of importance. It is more popular in Europe (which has more than its share of famous places), but there are a few U.S. cliomancers lurking around Boston, Hollywood, Washington D.C., and other areas that loom large in the popular consciousness.

Here's how Cliomancy works. Famous locations act like magnets, pulling in the attention of countless people every day. Someone in Kansas reads about Marilyn Monroe dying and thinks about her home at 12305 Helena Drive. Someone in Paris makes a joke about the Kennedys having her murdered. Someone in Australia uses her death as a metaphor. All these stray patches of attention and thought form a fog of mystic energy that collects around the site of her death. A Cliomancer who goes to 12305 Helena Drive can collect and use that energy—if no one else has gotten to it first.

Boozehounds enviously guard their historic cups and bottles. Cliomancers are just as jealous when it comes to staking out their gathering sites.

Because it is a subtle style without a lot of flashy effects, some occultists look down on Cliomancers. (A rather derogatory slang term for them is *cobweb farmers*.) These hotshot magi often fail to appreciate the degree to which subtlety can be a strength, not a weakness.

Cliomancy is said to be the oldest of all forms of magick, going all the way back to ancient Atlantis. Some Cliomancers even claim to know fragments of the Atlantean language. It is whispered that there are immortal Atlanteans still living in the world, and that they sometimes make themselves known to Cliomancers. These Atlanteans expect to be given "harvesting rights" at crucial sites for a week by any Cliomancer to whom they identify themselves. Cliomancy has its share of phony Atlanteans taking advantage of the gullibility of their fellows, but there are dire rumors about the real Atlanteans surfacing to punish fakes.

**Cliomancy Blast Style:** Cliomancers have no blast.

### Stats

**Generate a Minor Charge:** You can gather a minor charge once per day at the location of a widely known event, as long as the place itself isn't famous. Marilyn Monroe's death is a well-known event, but her house isn't a giant tourist attraction. Graceland, on the other hand, is a celebrated location in its own right.

The event tied to the location has to be something that a majority of adequately educated people know about. Most people know that Jack the Ripper killed prostitutes, but only people who

bother to look it up know exactly where he did it. A site of one of his murders would be worth a minor charge. Similarly, the jail cell where Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*, the patent office where Einstein came up with the idea of relativity, or the place where Rasputin was born could all be harvested for minor charges.

**Generate a Significant Charge:** To yield a significant charge, a place has to be famous in itself. The OK Corral, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Number 10 Downing Street, Kitty Hawk—all these places generate at least one significant charge per day, sometimes more. However, famous sites like this also draw Cliomancers like flies on rotting meat. If you're the fourth Cliomancer in a day to try and harvest the White House, you might only get minor charges, because it's only had time to draw in an hour or two of meaning mojo.

**Generate a Major Charge:** To get a major charge, you have to be the first person in ten or more years to harvest a famous place. The first Cliomancer who got to Machu Picchu got a major charge, as did the first one to Ayers Rock. Everyone since then has had to be satisfied with significant charges. (The moon has one ready . . .)

**Taboo:** The taboo for Cliomantic charges is a time limit. You can only hold them so long before they dissipate. If you don't use a minor charge or significant charge within a month, it goes away. (Unlike other schools, you don't lose all your other charges with it, however.) You might be able to hold a major charge longer if (for whatever reason) you wanted to.

**Random Magick Domain:** Cliomancy focuses on commonality. It is powerful magick for dealing with things that "everybody knows" or for influencing events that "could happen to anybody."

**Starting Charges:** Newly created cliomancers have four minor charges. The player also needs to pick out the spot he's charging from and talk it over with the GM.

## Cliomancy Minor Formula Spells

### Trivia

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** This is a minor information spell. By casting it, you can learn any published fact that isn't actually secret. Want to know the shortest sentence in the bible? One charge. (It's "Jesus wept.") Need someone's phone number? One charge—as long as it isn't unlisted. Basically, anything you could look up in a dictionary, encyclopedia, phone book, anything you could find in a good library or on the internet—any information that there has never been any effort (however slight) to conceal—can instantly be accessed by this spell. On the other hand, there are things that can be found in a library that you *can't* get with this spell. For instance, if someone had their phone number unlisted in 1998, but not changed, you could find that number in a 1997 phone book. You couldn't get it with the spell, though, because it's been removed from the realm of public information.

In some cases, this information may be complex: for instance, calling up a map of downtown Chicago or finding out how to file your income taxes. With dense and complicated information like that, it stays in your brain for about half an hour, but at any point during that time you can refer to it.

### Familiar Face

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** When you cast this spell, pick one person you can see. The

spell makes that person feel like they've met you somewhere. They won't be able to put their finger on it particularly, but it's a powerful feeling of *déjà vu*. This is a good spell for getting people to ignore your presence in an otherwise "restricted" area, and can also be used to reinforce a good line of patter. ("Excuse me miss . . . what high school did you go to? I knew it! I sat next to you in, what was it, physics? English? Yeah, Mr. Gillis. Were you the one who always wanted to see my notes when you'd been sick? Yeah! Your name is on the tip of my tongue . . . can I buy a drink? For old times' sake?")

### Common Knowledge

**Cost:** 2 minor charges

**Effect:** When you cast this spell, pick one person in your immediate vicinity and one skill that person has. You may now use that skill as if you were that person for the next five minutes (if you're out of combat) or the next five combat actions if you're fighting.

**Example:** You know your buddy Cage is a good man in a fight, so when you see a pack of creepy bikers pulling out chains and switchblades you cast this spell on his Street Fighting skill. Instead of your own wimpy 15%, you now have a skill of 55%. Furthermore, since Street Fighting is Cage's obsession, *you* can flip-flop rolls while borrowing it.

The only skills you cannot borrow with this spell are mystic skills such as Avatar skills or the knowledge of a school of magick.

### You Remember Now

**Cost:** 3 minor charges

**Effect:** When you cast this spell on someone, you can plant a false memory in their mind. There are a couple ways you can do this: you can implant a vague and general type of knowledge ("We worked together a couple years ago.") or you can implant one very specific memory of a single event ("You and I had the best one night stand ever."). What you cannot do is create a string of associated memories or a detailed history. You might make someone remember a wedding ceremony, but you couldn't implant a whole courtship and marriage.

In any event, the memory is temporary. It fades within 2-5 hours and will certainly vanish after a night's sleep. It should also be noted that memories that make *no sense* can sometimes be picked out as fake. For instance, suppose you give someone the memory of rear-ending your car a year ago. If that person was in prison a year ago, they're going to be darn sure they weren't out getting into a fender-bender. It's also possible to give people really horrific false memories (sort of like an Entropic; see p. 150) just to mess with their heads. In either case (horrific memories or obviously false ones) the target has to make a rank-3 Self stress check due to cognitive dissonance.

### Past Sight

**Cost:** 3 minor charges

**Effect:** This spell allows you to have visions of the past events at your current location. You can pick the event either chronologically ("Show me what happened here yesterday at five in the afternoon.") or circumstantially ("Show me these stones being raised," if you were at Stonehenge or "Show me what happened here when

Malcolm X was shot," if you were at the Audubon Ballroom). The caster can watch up to an hour of "detailed history" in which every word spoken and every action taken can be perceived as if he was there, or the history can be "compressed" into a silent overview of events. It's not like seeing a film in fast forward: it's more like having seen the event from a distance, so that your mind can comprehend the entire sequence of events all at once. Compression gives you a greater sense of history, but with less detail.

### Gnostic Gossip

**Cost:** 3 minor charges

**Effect:** When you cast this spell, pick someone (by name—you can't specify, "Whoever it was that keyed my car.") and select a rumor you wish to attach to that person's name. The rumor must be a single sentence, and you have to be able to say that sentence with one breath. If the spell is successful, everyone who knows that individual personally seems to remember the rumor. They may not believe it, but they'll have heard it from "a friend of a friend."

Even if the target of this spell has a common name, the rumor only gets attached to the particular Bill Jones or Jenny Smith that you've picked as a victim.

It's also possible to cast this spell on yourself, if you want to spread some disinformation. (This spell is in high demand for people who want to fake their own death.)

## Clomancy Significant Formula Spells

### Instant Zen Master

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** Like the Dipsomancy spell God Looks Out For Drunks, this spell allows you to use your Clomancy skill in the place of any other skill, including the ability to flip-flop rolls. There are some important differences, however. For one thing, Instant Zen Master lasts longer: you have five actions' worth of skill if you use it in combat, and about a half hour of skill if you use it in a relaxed situation. On the other hand, it is narrower: you can only use it to enhance a skill you already have. If you don't have a skill like "Safe-cracking" or "Cheat at Poker," this spell won't give you one. One advantage, however, is that you can sometimes cast this spell for one *minor* charge—if the charge was gotten in a location germane to the skill you're replacing. For instance, if you gained a minor charge from the street where Ronald Reagan was shot, you could use that minor charge instead of a significant charge if you were trying to shoot someone. If you harvested a minor charge from the bar where the Beatles played their first gig, you'd be able to use that particular charge to boost your Play Guitar skill.

### Urban Legend

**Cost:** 2 significant charges

**Effect:** This is a bigger, badder version of Gnostic Gossip. Gnostic Gossip only affects people who already knew the target. Urban Legend affects *everyone*. If you cast an Urban Legend that Eugene LaRue likes nothing better than a pipe of crack and a good spanking, people who've never even *met* him are going to have that ugly story lurking in the back of their minds. The first time they meet poor Eugene or even hear about him, they're going to think, "Wait,



I heard something about this guy . . . isn't he the rock-smoking flagellant?" (Like Gnostic Gossip, this can also be used to create *good* rumors. Cliomancers often cast it on themselves to create reputations for being powerful, knowledgeable, magnificent lovers, *etc.*)

Again, you must know your target's name to cast this spell, and again the rumor has to be one sentence you can say with a single breath. Similarly, the spell only affects one specific individual, no matter how many people share the name.

Unlike Gnostic Gossip, this spell can be used on named groups. "Yeah, I heard that the Trilateral Commission is actually a front for a cult of cannibal satanists!" "They won't let you into The New Inquisition unless you swing both ways." "Bullseye Technologies is a really sound investment." Of course, the better-known the group is, the less credence people are likely to give to a strange rumor. People hear so many things about "the U.S. Congress" every day that an Urban Legend about them is likely to be soon forgotten.

### Everyman

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** This spell effectively casts Familiar Face on everyone you speak with for the next twenty-four hours. As soon as you draw someone's notice, they think they know you from somewhere. Furthermore, this recognition is slightly positive, instead of the neutral *déjà vu* of Familiar Face. People feel like they not only know you, they always had you pegged as a decent type. This doesn't mean everyone you meet is willing to go out on a limb for you—but they probably give you the benefit of the doubt.

### House of Mirrors

**Cost:** 2 significant charges

**Effect:** When you're in a fight, you can use this spell to make yourself much more difficult to hit. Basically, your attacker becomes mildly disoriented and perceives everyone else in the fight as being you. His chances of getting the real you decrease, depending on how many people are in the fight.

**Example:** Pierre the Cliomancer and his two chums get jumped by a group of four thugs from the True Order of Saint-Germain. Pierre casts House of Mirrors on himself. Every TOSG thug who tries to shoot him has only a 1 in 6 chance of targeting the real Pierre; he's just as likely to hit one of Pierre's buddies or even one of his fellow thugs. If Pierre had been alone, the chances of hitting him would be 1 in 4—each attacker would actually have a greater chance of hitting one of his own allies.

Everyone who declares an attack on someone protected by this spell rolls randomly to see who he *actually* attacks. The more people are involved in a fight (on both sides), the more protection House of Mirrors offers; it's especially powerful when you're outnumbered. The downside is that it offers no protection in a one-on-one fight, unless there are bystanders nearby.

This spell lasts for five combat rounds. It can be extended by two rounds for every additional significant charge spent on it. These charges can be added in the middle of a fight, but doing so takes a combat action. Finally, it is possible to cast this spell on other people.

### I Believe The Lies

**Cost:** 3 significant charges

**Effect:** Here's a power widely ascribed to extra-terrestrials, social workers, and Satanists: the power to implant false memories. This spell works a great deal like You Remember Now, only it's permanent and much broader in scope. With this ugly baby you *can* make someone remember a fairly lengthy friendship with you, complete with in-jokes and shared secrets. Naturally, it takes some preparation and scripting to make this convincing; but even an unconvincing, illogical, or downright *weird* string of fake memories can be useful. ("You clearly remember being raised on the planet Mars by your true parents, Jim Morrison and Cleopatra . . .") Having a load of obviously false and deeply strange stuff pumped into your brain is disorienting. If someone realizes that false memories have been put in them, it's a rank-8 Helplessness challenge. (After all, if those memories are fake, how can one trust *any* memories? Indeed, powerful Cliomancers are known to double-dip this spell, putting in one layer of bizarre, crude, and obviously false memories to draw attention away from a much more subtle and tricky string of *plausible* fakes . . .) Additionally, if these memories are deeply contrary to the target's self-image (like giving a lifelong pacifist memories of committing atrocities in Tehran at the behest of Saddam Hussein) it can be a Self challenge as high as rank-8.

### Forget It

**Cost:** 4 significant charges

**Effect:** The "brain rinse" has become a staple of conspiracy theory. Supposedly this is a chemical or treatment that selectively erases memories. While no one can say for sure if the U.S. Army, the Trilateral Commission, the Greys, or the Freemasons actually have this technology, it is an option available to Cliomancers.

Forget It can be used on short-term or long-term memory. If you cast it on short-term memory, it simply prevents events from going into long-term memory.

**Example:** Pierre the Cliomancer sprints past the security guard at a very exclusive building. The guard immediately stands and chases him. As Pierre ducks around a corner, he casts Forget It on the guard and empties out his short-term memory. The guard stops, wonders why he's standing up, decides he's yawning and stretching, and goes back to his post.

Forget It can also erase specific short events or small pieces of information from someone's mind. People tend to remember events as "scenes"—the drive to work is one image, your first hangover is one image, the Christmas you got that set of lawn darts you'd always wanted, *etc.* This spell can erase one scene; it can't be used to wipe out a series of connected memories. In concrete terms, you can make someone forget their wedding night, but not their 20-year marriage. It can also erase specific pieces of information—nice for making someone forget your name, or the password to their email account, or how to cast one of their spells. Information that is fundamental to someone's sense of self cannot be erased with this spell. You can't make someone forget her husband's name (or her own), or where she lives.

The loss is permanent in the case of images, unless the memories are restored with magick. In the case of information, the knowledge is lost until it's relearned—and generally relearning goes pretty quick. If you make Kim Xiang the black belt forget how to do the Monkey Dodge she practiced in the dojo for ten years, it's not going to take her another ten years to remember it again.



## All is Known

**Cost:** 5 significant charges

**Effect:** Ever wanted to suck a secret right out of someone's brain? With this handy spell you can—but at a cost. When you cast this spell, the secret is no longer a secret. It's dumped right into the collective unconscious. At the same moment you pry the secret out, everyone else in the world knows it, too. The hidden information is instantly transformed from the private thoughts of the victim into an Urban Legend.

99.999+% of the world's population isn't going to care, or even notice. For instance, if the thought "the combination to Rita Becker's safe is 30 left, 98 right, 51 left," crossed your mind, it would barely register. You don't know Rita Becker, you don't care about her safe, so why should you remember? If (on the other hand) you *do* know Rita Becker—specifically the particular Rita Becker the spell was cast on—you now remember her safe combination. Maybe you think she told you once, or you saw her open the safe or saw it written down. That part will be foggy, but you'll know for sure what the combination is, as will everyone else.

This can be particularly damaging if the secrets are of a more personal nature, of course. No one's going to want *everyone in the world* to know that he helped finance a soft-core jiggle flick. If you don't believe us, ask Phil Gramm. Perhaps most dangerous of all, you can use this spell to broadcast someone's true agenda to the world. What would happen to the True Order of Saint-Germain if Randy Douglas's true motives and beliefs were to become known?

About the only limit on this spell is a targeting restriction: you have to touch your target to make the spell work. Incidentally, the victim of the spell feels nothing. Until someone tells her, she has no way to learn that her secrets have been spilled.

## Clomancy Major Effects

With a major charge, you could rewrite history—not what happened, but (more important, perhaps) what everyone *believes* happened. "Hitler won the war" is probably out of reach, but a major charge could make it "common knowledge" that someone named Dirk Penobscott came up with special relativity—that Einstein guy just took all the credit. It would also be possible to learn just about any piece of information.

## Dipsomancy (Alcohol-Based Magick)

Alcohol opens the mind and enables a free flow of personal energy. This flow can be rather chaotic, but at least the gates are open. As a result, dipsomancers use alcohol to unlock their magickal energies. The slang term for dipsomancers is **boozehounds**.

The nice thing about being a boozehound is that it isn't hard to cop a buzz—that is, to acquire a mystic charge. Liquor is common almost everywhere except for Islamic states and backwater American counties on Sunday. The drawback to this (in addition to the drunk penalties listed on p. 137) is that you lose your charge as soon as you sober up; you can *only* work magick while intoxicated. However, this does mean that you don't take the drunk penalty for using your magick; you only take it on everything *else*.

Although it is pretty easy for boozehounds to generate minor charges, it's not a school of magick to undertake for the sake of easy power. The vast majority of boozehounds are alcoholics, get-

ting drunk even when they *aren't* trying to work magick. And of course, a drunken adept isn't the most reliable of allies. But if you're up for the challenge, bottoms up!

**Dipsomancy Blast Style:** It's a poltergeist effect. Loose objects in the area will fly at the target at a high rate of speed. As a general rule, the smaller and lighter the object is, the faster it goes. So a chair is going to move about as fast as it would if a strong man tossed it; someone's car keys are going to move like they were shot from a cannon; a handful of dust will go very fast indeed, providing an unpleasant "scouring" sensation.

This is one of the few blast styles that can target inanimate objects, and it doesn't do much good against really strong stuff like metal or heavy-duty plastic. Thin glass might be broken or a wooden door knocked down, but nothing too spectacular. Just remember that a minor blast is like a really strong kick and a significant blast is like a gunshot.

Because like attracts like, this blast works exceptionally well on people who've been drinking. For every 10% of alcohol-based impairment the victim is suffering from, you can roll another die of damage. So if you work this mojo on someone who's at 30% alcohol impairment, you can roll three more dice and add that to the total. (**Example:** If you roll 3, 2, and 8, you can add 13 points of damage.) This extra damage is added to both minor and significant blasts.

## Stats

**Generate a Minor Charge:** Drink a beer, a glass of wine, or a shot of whiskey. You *must* suffer an impairment penalty (p. 137) from the drink to get a charge off it; no penalty, no charge.

**Generate a Significant Charge:** Have a drink of booze out of some kind of historically significant or potent vessel: the coffee cup JFK drank from during the Cuban Missile Crisis, the sacramental chalice of a Borgia pope, whatever. Unfortunately, this has to be *your* item; you can't voluntarily share it with another boozehound. If you *give* your vessel away, you can *never* get a significant charge from it again. If it's taken from you by force (or the threat of force) you *can* use it again if you recover it. Beginning players don't start out owning one of these beauties. (As with minor charges, you must take an impairment penalty from a given drink to get a charge off it.)

**Generate a Major Charge:** Drink a unique liquor: the remnants of the Cask of Amontillado from Poe's story (you think he made that up?), the archaeologically preserved honey mead used for Dionysian ceremonies in ancient Greece, the remnants from Elvis's last bottle. (No impairment penalty is needed to get this charge.)

**Taboo:** Sober up. Any time your impairment from alcohol hits 0%, you lose any charges you're carrying.

**Random Magick Domain:** The essence of dipsomancy is transgression: it's all about breaking the rules. When you drink, you lose inhibitions. A dipsomancer is simply someone who's learned how to extend this warping of his interior experiences out into the world around him. In short, dipsomancy is about doing what is normally impossible. This makes it very versatile for random magick. The biggest limit is that it can't make the *possible* happen. With dipsomancy you could levitate a car over your head, but you couldn't convince someone to change her mind. You can do big, blatant things but not little, subtle changes.

**Starting Charges:** Newly created dipsomancers have no charges, but they're as close as the nearest bar.



on this spell, it lasts an additional round and gives an additional -10% shift on all affected rounds. (You can use a maximum of five minor charges on this effect.) So if you spend five charges, people take a -50% shift until the end of this round and for the next four rounds. You can still act normally while this spell is in effect—that is, it takes one action to work the spell, but your next two (or whatever) actions are normal while the spell is protecting you.

## Dipsomancy Significant Formula Spells

### Now I See...

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** You have a brief, blurry vision of a person, place, or thing familiar to you. The vision lasts for about thirty seconds, and you see exactly what is happening to that individual or item, or at that location, at the moment you're having your vision. For an additional significant charge you can hear what's going on, too. Each additional thirty seconds of spying costs a significant charge.

### Just a Harmless Drunk

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** You can't be seen for fifteen minutes. This isn't "invisibility" with all its associated hassles. You still appear in photographs, you still have a reflection and you can still look at yourself. (Can you imagine trying to go up a flight of stairs silly drunk *and* unable to see where you're stepping?) It just means that people don't pay attention to you. You become an insignificant feature of the landscape, like a discarded gum wrapper in the vacant lot of their consciousness. This means people are at a -30% shift to hit you in combat with guns and hand-to-hand attacks (-50% if you don't move and remain quiet). If you're just moving around and people aren't in a highly charged, life-or-death conflict, they have to make a Notice skill check to even realize you're there. Furthermore, this Notice roll is made at a -40% shift if you're walking around, or a -60% shift if you're staying still and making some effort at concealing yourself.

Oddly enough, this spell's "don't pay attention to me" effect doesn't cover mirrors or video cameras; people who see your image or reflection respond normally. Beware of savvy marksmen with hand mirrors or camcorders.

### God Looks Out For Drunks

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** You can use your Dipsomancy skill instead of any other skill for one action. You can still flip-flop results, and you don't take the drunk penalty. Just to be clear: if you do this in combat you spend one turn making the spell, and can make the switch on your *next* turn.

### The Big Whammy

**Cost:** 2 significant charges

**Effect:** This is the significant blast. It operates like the Lil' Whammy, only it does significant blast damage. If the check succeeds, you can add another die of damage for every 10% of alcohol impairment on the part of the target. (This is damage only, added once a successful roll has been made; this die cannot be used as part of the success/fail roll and does not count for matches. It's strictly a *bonus* to the

total, not an additional die on your attack check.) Furthermore, for each extra significant charge you spend, you can roll another die without spending an action pumping up the volume.

**Example:** Dirk Allen spends four significant charges to whip The Big Whammy down on an irritating pornomancer who thought she could take advantage of him while drunk. (Foolish, foolish woman.) He rolls four dice and gets two 5s, a 4 and a 9; he can arrange these into any successful pattern he wants. While tempted to make a 55 and get a cherry, he decides to assemble a 59. But wait! His target has *also* been drinking; she's had four drinks, so she's at -15% impairment. He can roll another die and add that to the damage. He gets a seven, and that added to his successful attack of 59 makes his total damage to the poor woman 66 points. This hurts her bad, but he doesn't get his 66 Cherry because he actually *rolled* a 59.

**More Complicated Example:** It's just not Dirk Allen's night. While he's staggering out of the bar where he wasted the ill-advised pornomancer, her besotted boy-toy comes after him with a tire iron. Dirk has four significant charges left, and decides to spend three on a Big Whammy for this punk. However, because he's really angry, he waits one turn to pump the spell up a little more. On his second turn, he lets it rip. He again rolls four dice: two normal, one for waiting, and one for the extra charge. He rolls 2, 3, 6, 7 and is able to put some big hurt on the attacking punk. Had the punk also been a drunk at, say, 10% impairment, Dirk could have added another die to the damage total.

### Soul Sipping

**Cost:** 2 significant charges

**Effect:** Soul Sipping is a particularly nasty type of magickal vampirism. If you're going to use it on a material being, you have to actually get your mouth on them. (In combat, this is a Martial Arts or Struggle roll that does no damage). If you can get your lips in contact with their body (even if it's through cloth) you can cast the spell; if the being is incorporeal, getting your lips against (or even into) their visual manifestation—or their host body, if they're possessing someone—is sufficient. (In combat, if you roll the successful attack, you can cast the spell the same round as a free bonus action.) Note that while a Blast attack against a possessed human only affects the human host body, Soul Sipping on a possessed human only affects the spirit itself. If the spell succeeds, you consume part of their spirit. What this means depends on who (or what) you're attacking.

If your target is a sorcerer, you can suck off one significant charge (or up to five minor charges, if that's all they've got). They lose it, you've got it, and you didn't even have to increase your drunk penalty. Yum!

If your target is a normal person, you can decrease their Soul stat by 20 points for half an hour. If you reduce their Soul to 0% or below, they pass out and can't be awakened until the half hour is up. You don't gain anything from this form of Soul Sipping. You can use this against sorcerers instead of stealing charges; keep in mind that if their Soul score drops beneath their skill at magick, their magick skill drops as well—after all, you can't have a skill higher than its stat.

Finally, you can use this against immaterial beings like ghosts, demons, and entropics. Every time you do it, you reduce the victim's Soul by the result of your roll. (If you rolled a 25, you reduced its Soul by 25 points.) If you zilch out a spirit's Soul, it's "dead" (or gone, at least) and you've consumed it. You can pick any ability that



spirit had and gain a skill in it at 10%. If the skill is supernatural, you have to spend a minor charge every time you want to use it; however, you can still raise it with experience points, like any other skill. Unfortunately you probably won't suck off many skills this way, since most spirits run away the first time someone injures them.

### Astral Walk

**Cost:** 3 significant charges

**Effect:** You leave your body and roam the astral plane until you wake up sober—typically about eight hours. You *cannot* leave the astral plane until your body sobers up. While you're astral, you can see the physical world (though living beings appear only as auras), you can move through solid objects or beings, you're invisible to normal people, and you can interact with astral beings you encounter. Unfortunately, you can't hear what's going on in the real world (though you can "hear" astral creatures just fine—it's a form of telepathy) and you see living beings only as their auras—making it pretty difficult to recognize both your friends and your enemies.

The drawbacks to astral walking are considerable: the Dipsomancy blast does not work on astral beings, so if you get in a fight you'd better be soused enough for some soul-drinking (described earlier). Perhaps worst of all, there's no such thing as "astral booze," so there's often a very dangerous lag time between when you're done with your astral business and when your body becomes sober (breaking your taboo and draining all your charges), pulling you out of the astral plane. Naturally, there's no way to prematurely wake up and exit the astral plane.

### Ghost Vintage

**Cost:** 4 significant charges

**Effect:** This spell allows you to capture immaterial spirits and imprison them in a bottle of liquor. This works on demons, astral parasites, and entropics; you can also use it on a dying person to keep their soul from going to its ultimate reward (or punishment). In order to do this, you have to be on hand and cast the spell the same turn the person takes enough damage to expire. (Naturally this is easier if you're arranging their death . . .)

At any time, you can release the spirit in the bottle by opening it (or breaking it) and pouring the liquor out. The spirit will also get free if anyone else does this.

Unlike most formula spells, this does require you to have a specific item to cast it—you need a bottle of booze, at least half full, to hold the ghost. For most dipsomancers, this isn't a problem.

For the purposes of Soul Sipping, any spirit trapped by this spell is considered a ghost. However, it can't run away from multiple Soul Sipping attacks, making this a very handy way to completely hose a spirit through repeated Soul Sipping attacks. Corrupt

boozehounds are notorious for murdering someone just to capture their soul in a bottle of booze and then Soul Sipping their skills until the soul is depleted and can be released to the afterlife.

### Dipsomancy Major Effects

Forcibly exchange bodies with someone else, move a group of twenty people to any location in the world, raise the dead (hideous half-living creatures only) . . .

### Entropomancy (Entropy-Based Magick)

In order to gain control over synchronicity and induced coincidence—the statosphere, in other words—you have to surrender deliberate control over predictable aspects of your life (and endure nicknames like "trauma magnet"). In other words, to build charges you have to take risks and relinquish control over certain moments of your life. Entropy magick appeals to daredevils, extreme sports fans, and suicidal lunatics. The slang term for entropomancers is **bodybags** or **chaos mages**.

On the plus side, you can usually carry your charges until you need them, and you get the charge whether your risk succeeds or fails. On the downside, you can't get a charge from an action that you didn't initiate (so you don't get a significant charge because someone tried to do a drive-by on you) or if you used magick to influence the outcome. It has to be a deliberate and genuine risk.

Entropomancers are often real freaks in combat. If they get in a fight, they're liable to jump in front of guns or knives and risk getting hurt just to generate the charge they need to take out whoever they're facing. As a result, an entropomancer in combat can often generate enough magick to win the day—unless they die first, which is a distinct possibility. Experienced enforcers clue in pretty quickly to bodybags and will avoid attacking them if possible.

**Entropomancy Blast Style:** The surface of the victim's body erupts with a bunch of small injuries, often in the shape of words, symbols, or pictures. If the blast is fatal, they literally explode. (Being caught in such an explosion doesn't cause any damage, but is certainly distasteful and possibly merits a stress check.)

If a chaos mage makes a successful minor blast, he can gamble to increase the damage before it's resolved. To gamble, roll a die. If it's even, you add that much damage to the blast. If it's odd, the blast does *no* damage, but still costs the charge. Up to five dice can be added in this fashion. You can add them one at a time, too, but if any one of them turns up odd, you have to stop there.

**Example:** Neal the bodybag whips a blast at Cage. He succeeds with a 21—three lousy points of damage. He decides he's going to try to pump it, so he rolls another die. It's a four; now he's done seven points. Better, but he's feeling lucky and rolls again. This time it's a seven, so Cage takes *no* damage from the blast.

## Will the Real Chaos Mages Please Stand Up?

There's a real-world style of magick-working known as **chaos magick** that has nothing to do with entropomancy or the chaos mages of the occult underground. Chaos magick is a johnny-come-lately style of Western magick that more or less does what voodoo has been doing for 300-plus years, drawing together a variety of personal and cultural symbols into an anarchic, idiosyncratic non-system. The overlap of slang between "chaos magick" and "chaos mages" annoys some people. In fiction, it's easy to avoid confusing, overlapping slang like this—but in the real world, language is a virus beyond human control and things like this just happen. Much like the -mancy/-magy/-urgy controversy addressed earlier in this chapter, adepts just deal with the chaos issue in whatever way makes them happy.

## Stats

**Generate a Minor Charge:** Risk a significant amount of money, a minor injury, or humiliation.

**Generate a Significant Charge:** Intentionally and *pointlessly* risk grievous injury or death. Starting a fight you were planning to get into anyhow doesn't count, but jumping in front of an assailant or offering no resistance and no basic dodging during a combat round does.

**Generate a Major Charge:** In addition to risking your own life, deliberately put at least ten lives in danger of dying in vain. Incidental innocent bystanders in a high speed chase don't count for this purpose, because that's not a ritualized context. Staking ten people's lives on the flip of a coin, plus your own, is more like it. Another way to get a major charge is to gamble with the life of someone you love, in addition to your own.

**Taboo:** Get someone else to take a risk you're unwilling to take. If you stick one of your buddies in the front line while you hang out "guarding his rear," you'll lose any charges you're holding. This also prevents you from callously gambling with other people's lives from a position of safety.

**Random Magick Domain:** An entropomancer is the master of coincidence. Need a lighter? Someone just happened to drop one the first place you look. Want to get away fast? Just happens to be a cabbie on crystal meth coming 'round the corner. In a tight spot? Well for *you* there always is a cop around when you need one.

**Starting Charges:** Newly created entropomancers have four minor charges.

## Entropomancy Minor Formula Spells

### Taste of Chaos

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** The target of this spell has a -10% shift on the next action they roll for. For each charge you spend, you can lower their skill by another 10%.

### The Evil Eye

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** This is the entropomancer Blast spell. It simply rips up the surface of the target's body, often creating letters or other designs (as described earlier). It's possible to gamble with the Evil Eye for extra damage. After you roll to see if it's successful, you can choose to roll another die. If it's even, that damage gets added. If it's odd, the spell does *no* damage and you lose your charge as well. You can choose to add up to five dice in this fashion, even adding them one at a time once you see the result of the last roll—but any odd roll kills the effect immediately.

### Pierce the Veil

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** This summons up a demon, who speaks to you telepathically. Demons and the rules for summoning them are explained in detail on p. 148. Keep in mind that this spell does *not* give you any power over the spirit you called, nor any way to get rid of it if things get out of hand. Instead, the significant entropomancer spell Cage for the Dead is used to control the demon.

## Fortune's Fool

**Cost:** 2 minor charges

**Effect:** This spell lets you re-roll a failure you just made—even a matched failure or a BOHICA. If you do it in combat, it does *not* take an action.

**Example:** It's Neal the bodybag's turn in combat. He shoots at someone and misses. He can cast this spell and roll for it as part of that same action; if he succeeds at the spell, he can re-roll his gunshot before the next action in the round.

This is a powerful spell, but there are some restrictions on its use. It can't be used to re-roll a failed Fortune's Fool spell. (In the example above, if Neal's spell failed then he couldn't use another spell to react to the failed spell that was itself a reaction to the failed gunshot.) You can't make more than one re-roll; if Neal successfully casts the spell, re-rolls, and fails *again*, he can't try the spell again. Finally, you can only use it on your own screwups; you can't cast this spell on anyone else.

## Bulletproof Chutzpah

**Cost:** 2 minor charges

**Effect:** This defensive spell works only on physical attacks; it can't protect you from magick. However, any punch, kick, gunshot, bite, slash or attempt to run you down with a car has a flat 50% chance of failing as long as the spell is in effect. If someone successfully hits you, roll one die; if it comes up even, the damage from that attack is reduced to a big zero. You cannot cast this spell on someone else.

The spell lasts a number of rounds equal to the ones place on your roll; so if you roll a 26, it lasts 6 rounds. If you roll 45, it lasts 5 rounds, *etc.*

While you have this particular mystic shield up, you can't gain any more charges, so handle with care.

## Double or Nothing

**Cost:** 3 minor charges

**Effect:** You add a bonus to your next roll equal to the roll you made to cast this spell, rounded down to the nearest tens place. If you succeed at this spell by rolling a 19, you get a +10% bonus. If you succeed with a roll of 41, you get a +40%. If you spend an additional 2 charges, you can cast this on someone else in your line of sight.

## Entropomancy Significant Formula Spells

### Killing Stare

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** This is the entropomancer significant blast. Unlike the Evil Eye, you can't gamble to add extra damage. On the other hand, since it only costs 1 significant charge you shouldn't really need to . . .

### Long Distance Call

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** Think hard about someone. Pick up a phone. Dial 1 and then the first ten numbers that come into your head. The phone closest to the person you were thinking about will start to ring, be



FELIPE ECHEVARRIA

it cell phone, phone booth—whatever. If there isn't a phone within earshot, the spell will fail, but you won't lose your charge.

### Cage for the Dead

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** This spell allows you to control a summoned demon, as explained on p. 149. Keep in mind that demons are contrary little bastards and will do their best to screw you over on general principles—even when they don't have anything to gain by their treachery. In other words, phrase your requests with great care.

### Luck of the Damned

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** Reduce all damage just inflicted on you from one source to zero if you can come up with a coincidence that would explain the failure. "The bullet was a dud," works. "The gunman had a cerebral hemorrhage before pulling the trigger," doesn't. The GM can veto outrageous coincidences, of course. This cannot be used to avoid the consequences of charge-building risks.

### Edit the World

**Cost:** 2 significant charges

**Effect:** History changes slightly. This spell can only effect events since the last sunrise or sunset (whichever was more recent). Some entropy adepts explain this by saying that there are an infinite num-

ber of alternate universes, and that they just hopped over to the one where, for example, they remembered to throw their shotgun in the trunk this morning, or where they won a new bike in a lottery. Other adepts say that history is a weak fabric, thanks to entropy, and if you pull the right threads in the here-and-now, you can unravel ones in the recent past. This can't be used to bring back the dead or win millions (or even thousands) of dollars—those are major changes (for you at least), but it can be used to "undo" damage—you can gain back wound points equal to your roll. Your GM decides what incidents you can tweak with this power. As a rule of thumb, changes that would have a cascading effect on the time since the change are less likely to be acceptable than changes whose consequences are still in the future at the time that you work the magick. Retroactively remembering to throw your shotgun in the car this morning would be okay if you wouldn't have used the shotgun from then until now anyway, but not okay if you were in a fight an hour ago and would have had your shotgun present.

### I Win

**Cost:** 2 significant charges

**Effect:** This spell allows you to retroactively adjust your skill level to whatever you just rolled for the purposes of that action. In other words, you can take a failed roll and make it a success without changing the roll. It can be done as a reaction to a failed roll in combat without changing the order of initiative.

**Example:** You're in a fight and just tried to karate-chop someone. You rolled a whopping 78—definitely a failure. However, you

decide to cast “I Win” on that karate chop. Now that 78 was a success, doing 15 points of damage. Next round, your fighting skill returns to what it was before. (*Love those 99s!*)

### On A Roll

**Cost:** 3 significant charges

**Effect:** You simply become unbelievably lucky for one day. Every single skill and stat you have has a +10% shift for 24 hours.

## Entropomancy Major Effects

With a major charge you can change history in a pretty significant fashion—win the \$20 million jackpot, avoid the ambush that killed your friends, prevent that drunk driver from killing your dad so that you mom never married the guy who used to beat the crap out of you . . . the mind boggles. Generally, the farther in the past the change is, the harder it is to pull off, and also the more drastic the repercussions it has on the present. So no one is going to make Hitler win the war. (At least, no player character is.) One area that cannot be affected by this power is ascensions that have already occurred at the time that you work the magick: they’re permanent. Any attempt you make at changing history involving ascensions will be warped just enough to still allow the same people to ascend at the same times and with the same archetypes as they did originally.

## Epideromancy (Flesh-Based Magick)

We don’t really live in the world. We live in our skins. They are both our barrier and our doorway: we perceive the world through our skin, while at the same time it separates us from everything around us. Those who are masters of their flesh control this barrier and this doorway, and shape it to their will. Epideromancers are known as **fleshworkers** or **flesh mages**.

The price of mastering the flesh is paid in pain. No pain, no gain is an immutable rule to those who would command the flesh. Some fleshworkers view this as a distasteful necessity and endure it with narcotics and stoicism. Others relish it and insist that pain is a path to deeper truth.

Many fleshworkers (but not all) use conventional means to modify themselves for purely aesthetic or psychological reasons—tattoos, piercings, cicatrization, branding, *etc.*

Naturally, fleshworking’s healing abilities can’t be used to undo the damage that was used to build charges. It can only heal “foreign” damage—injuries that have no symbolic significance and were not self-inflicted.

**Epideromancy Blast Style:** Fleshworkers blast people by warping their body. They can slap you and tear half the skin off your head in the process. They can punch you in the gut and make both your thumbs fall off. They can grab you by the arm and just pull off a fistful of meat. They can . . . well, you get the picture.

The down side of the epideromancer blast is that you have to touch your victim. You can combine this with a hand-to-hand attack, or you can just try to touch him in combat without really *hitting* him. If you combine it with a hand-to-hand strike, first see if the punch or kick worked; if it did, they take that damage and *then* you can roll to see if your blast went off *too*. If you just try to hit someone without really hurting them, you still roll your hand-to-

hand attack, but give yourself a +30% shift to hit, since it’s a lot easier to just touch someone than to injure them.

While this makes your blast one of the few magick attacks that Dodge will work on, there’s an upside: you can pick where the blast damage goes, meaning you can break (or at least injure) a leg, or make someone drop a handgun.

One final note: you can only combine a blast with a concentrated attack. If you split your fighting skill up between several opponents, or attack one person more than once (as explained on p. 60.) you cannot add the spell to the attack; your concentration is simply too fragmented.

### Stats

**Generate a Minor Charge:** Give yourself a small injury—3 points minimum. (Just assume that someone who hits himself with a hammer or cuts himself with a knife gets 3 points.)

**Generate a Significant Charge:** Hurt yourself deliberately—roll two dice and take the total in wound points. (If you roll a 47, you take eleven points.) If you roll a match, add another 3 points of damage.

**Generate a Major Charge:** Permanent harm, such as the loss of a hand, nose, both ears, an eye, *etc.* This will definitely cause some change in your stats or skills. Alternately, you can arrange for some incredible torture that leaves no outward sign but that permanently weakens you, such as drinking acid. In this case, roll and take the damage as it comes up—if you roll a 45, you take 45 points of damage. You can’t flip-flop this roll, but the GM can at his discretion. You can’t heal these points *per se*, but you can increase your Body stat with experience points to gain wound points again; this represents you improving the remaining parts of your body, not replacing what you cut off. Your wound points cannot naturally go above your Body stat minus the points you lost to get the major charge, however. (Discuss your particular ceremony with the GM; you may be able to negotiate for loss of Mind, Body, Speed, or Soul instead of wound points.)

**Taboo:** If you ever let anyone else modify your body, you lose all the charges you’re holding at that time. This covers everything from seeing a doctor or a dentist, to having your ears pierced, to getting a manicure or a haircut. (Most epideromancers schedule their beauty salon appointments for when they plan to be “empty.” Or they just do it themselves.)

**Random Magick Domain:** Fleshworkers can change bodies, and do nothing else. It is, in many ways, the most pragmatic and down-to-earth style. There’s no ephemeral philosophy here—just effects on flesh and blood and bone. This school works on animals as well as people.

**Starting Charges:** Newly created epideromancers have five minor charges. No, they aren’t presently wounded.

## Epideromancy Minor Formula Spells

### Warping

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** The epideromancer minor blast is called Warping. You have to touch your target to use this spell. (In case you’re wondering, it doesn’t have to be skin-to-skin contact; as long as you touch her clothing, that’s close enough.) You can combine this with a hand-to-hand attack (as long as you didn’t split up your fighting skill, as



explained earlier) by making a successful attack roll and then rolling for the Warping right away. Alternately, you can just touch your target; if you try this, give your Struggle (or whatever fighting skill you use) a +30% shift and then roll for Warping, but the only damage from the attack is what you do with the spell.

Any successful Warping spell can be directed at a specific body part, so you can make someone fall over or drop their weapon—no matter what body part you touched or struck.

### Regeneration

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** When you cast this spell, roll a die. The target of the spell gains back wound points equal to the number you rolled. You can use this on someone else to restore any type of damage, no matter the source—magickal or mundane. If you use it on yourself, you can only restore damage that someone *else* did to you; you can't heal self-inflicted damage that was used to build charges.

### The Flesh is My Servant

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** You get a Speed or Body shift of +10% until the next time you sleep. If you choose to ramp up your Body, it does *not* give you extra wound points. It does not work retroactively—only rolls you make after successfully casting The Flesh is My Servant are affected.

### Relentless Will

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** This spell negates the need for sleep for one night. You'll feel perky and refreshed for the next 16 hours, and okay for eight after that.

### The Mirror Lies

**Cost:** 2 minor charges

**Effect:** You can change your appearance until the next time you sleep. This is cosmetic only: skin, hair, and eye color, plus minor changes in height or features. This is not good enough to duplicate someone else, unless you already resemble them. You might generate a superficial resemblance, however, or pass for him from a distance.

### Greater Warping

**Cost:** 3 minor charges

**Effect:** The normal Warping spell simply does damage, which will eventually be healed. Greater Warping doesn't damage a body; instead, it distorts it. For example, Greater Warping could be used to seal someone's mouth and nose shut, or cause their eyelids to grow together, or meld their arm to their side, or stick their feet together. It doesn't do wound point damage; neither will these changes right themselves naturally (though they can usually be corrected with surgery). You can add Greater Warping to a hand-to-hand blow, or simply touch your target and make it happen, just like the regular minor blast. The area of effect is roughly equal to your palm.

If you seal over someone's mouth and nose, they begin to smother until some opening is made through which they can breathe. As mentioned in the rules for strangling (p. 62), a person



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can go without oxygen for a number of seconds equal to their Body score. After that, they must either breathe or pass out, with death following soon after.

## Epideromancy Significant Formula Spells

### Body Like A Still Pond

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** This powerful defensive spell allows your body to flow and re-form in response to damage. Bullets pass right through you with barely a ripple. Knife cuts seal up as quickly and seamlessly as when you drag your finger across the surface of a pond. (Note: just seeing this happen is a rank-3 Unnatural stress challenge.)

In game terms, this means that every physical attack made on you does damage equal to the number on the tens die—from 1 to 10 points. Someone rolled a 54 and shot you? You take 5 points of damage. Someone came at you with a chainsaw, rolled 05 and should have done 24 points of damage (10+5+3 for being big +3 for being heavy +3 for being sharp)? It did 10 points of damage because they rolled a 0 on the tens die.

This spell starts the round it's cast, but does not affect attacks made on you by people who got higher initiative that round. (So if someone shoots you and you cast Body Like a Still Pond later that same round, you still take the damage from the gunshot.) It lasts two rounds past its first round, for a total of three (or more like two and a half if you got bad initiative), but you don't have to concentrate on the spell past the first round—once it's cast, you're done.

### Face Shift

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** With this spell, you can permanently change one aspect of your appearance—gaining or losing up to three inches in height, changing the shape of your mouth or nose or eyes, changing the color of your eyes or skin or hair, and so on. Needless to say, finger or retinal prints are a snap. You can also use this to gain up to thirty pounds (if you're willing to sit down with that much food at a single go) or lose it (if you have somewhere to dump the resultant mass).

If you have a skill like “Adorable” or “Fresh-Faced Good Looks” you can permanently increase or decrease it by 5% every time you use this spell. However, you can never increase a good-looks based skill beyond your Soul stat with this spell—even if the good looks are based on Body. That's because someone with a Soul of 30 just doesn't have the aesthetic sense needed to imagine the beautiful face needed for Drop Dead Gorgeous 45%.

### Body Like Iron

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** When you cast this spell, you permanently gain three more wound points. This does not increase your Body stat. You can use this spell to increase your wound points past your Body score—in fact, you can ultimately have up to 250 wound points, but after that this spell is no longer effective.

If you cast this spell while injured, it does not heal your injury; the injury just matters slightly less because your body is tougher.

You can only use this spell on yourself.

### Preternatural Prowess

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** This spell can be used (only on yourself) to permanently increase either your Body or your Speed by 5 points. If you use this to increase Body, there is no resultant wound point gain. Neither Body nor Speed can be increased beyond 85% with this spell.

### Body Melting

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** Warping's ugly big brother is Body Melting, the epideromancer's significant blast. It works just like Warping, only the damage is lots, *lots* worse. Use your imagination, you sick puppy.

### Chameleon

**Cost:** 2 significant charges

**Effect:** You can turn yourself into a duplicate of someone for twenty-four hours, not including voice, memories, skills, or mannerisms. If you have a part of their body (even just a hair or fingernail sample) this lasts for 168 hours (seven days). You can stop the effect at any time, but if you stop it, you can't activate it again without spending the charges and starting from scratch. It takes about ten minutes to work a complete Chameleon change.

### Withering

**Cost:** 3 significant charges

**Effect:** Like Warping and Body Melting, you must touch your victim in order to cast this spell on him. If you succeed, you can permanently reduce the target's Body or Speed by an amount equal to the total of your roll. That is, if you succeed with a 45, you reduce the score by  $4 + 5 = 9$ . If you succeed with a 19, you reduce it by  $1 + 9 = 10$ . You can also use this on skills that are based on Body, Speed, or appearance. (For example, if you give someone a hook nose, it decreases their Charm skill, even if it's Soul-based.) It doesn't mean you can decrease both Body *and* one of the target's body-based skills; it's either/or. However, a loss of Body does mean a loss of wound points. Also, remember that no one can have a skill higher than the associated stat. If you use this on someone who has Firearms 55% and you drop his Speed to 52%, his Firearms score drops, too.

### Master of the Flesh

**Cost:** 5 significant charges

**Effect:** When you cast this spell you permanently increase your Body, Speed, or wound points by X, where X equals the total of the dice you rolled to cast this spell. (If you succeed with a 12, you only get a 3 point increase; if you succeed with a 49, you get a 13 point increase). Increasing Body does not increase wound points; increasing wound points does not increase Body. Using this spell, it *is* possible to raise Body or Speed above 85, but it's still impossible to get more than 250 wound points. You can only use this spell on yourself.

### Epideromancy Major Effects

Completely and permanently redesign your own body—or someone else's. (You still cannot repair damage done to generate Epi-



deromancy charges.) Regain lost youth. Gain the ability to switch genders at will without spending a charge.

## Mechanomancy (Clockwork-Based Magick)

Clockworking (mechanomancy) is one of the few old-school forms of magick that still function today, and it's only because our modern world is so heavily industrialized and mechanical itself. Long after the last true heir to Simon Magus was gutted by the Spanish Inquisition, **clockworkers** still keep at it. Clockworking is seen as a quaint and impractical school of magick, and few new adherents follow it. Most clockworkers are crusty old guys from Europe, though there is a little-known tradition in Asia, particularly in Japan.

This painstaking and intricate pseudo-science allows the adept to create old-fashioned mechanical devices capable of wondrous feats that would not be possible without magick. Clockworks cannot use any mechanical innovation that was not common by the late 1800s—transistors, vacuum tubes, and nuclear power, for example, are all out of bounds. But then again, that's what the magick is for.

Clockworking takes time—experiential time. For minor constructions, it just takes an investment of your current attention. For more important stuff, you have to give up bits of your future or past.

Clockworks are fairly sturdy creatures. Firearms attacks made against clockworks do damage as if they were hand-to-hand attacks. (Hand-to-hand attacks do their normal damage.)

**Mechanomancy Blast Style:** Blasts are not available to mechanomancers, though it's not hard to build clockworks that can kill people pretty fast. Unfortunately, being attacked by a clockwork does not create an Unnatural stress check (though a rank-2 Violence check may be in order.)

## Stats

**Generate a Minor Charge:** Spend a day working on the darn thing.  
**Generate a Significant Charge:** Give up a minor memory from your past—perhaps a pleasant sunny day, or a high school dance if you're building something fun or useful. Maybe the memory of getting beat up in grade school for something monstrous and violent. This can have minor repercussions on Mind, Soul, and sanity, as determined by the GM. (If it's Mind or Soul that's getting risked, roll the appropriate stat; if you fail the roll, you lose 2-3 points, at the GM's discretion. If it's sanity, make a Mind check against whichever madness meter the GM thinks appropriate for losing the memory in question.)

A safer way to generate a significant charge is to get a non-mechanical object that has mystic or historic significance—a bugle from Little Big Horn, a ring that belonged to Rasputin—and work it into the gizmo. Note that the object and the gizmo must be thematically related; Rasputin's ring might be good for surviving damage or mesmerizing people, but it wouldn't be much good for any activity not immediately connected to the Russian monk. Similarly, the cavalry bugle would be good for a musical creation or to help your allies in combat, but it wouldn't help you to fly.

**Generate a Major Charge:** One way to generate a major charge is to give up a major memory or string of memories. This would be like forgetting a spouse, a sibling, or a parent. This is dangerous; it's our memories that define our personalities, so giving up valuable memories can cost your Mind, your Soul, or your sanity, at the discretion of

the GM. (For Mind or Soul, roll against that stat; if you succeed, you only lose the total of the dice from the stat. If you fail, flip-flop the dice and lose the percentile result. So if a 45 is a success, you only lose 9 points. If it's a failure, though, you lose 54 points, which is probably going to leave you totally gone. On the other hand, if you fail with a 71, you only lose 17 points. Fickle, eh?) If it's sanity, you automatically mark off one hardened notch *and* one failed notch on the appropriate Madness meter; if you're already callous or crazy on that gauge, the GM chooses another related madness meter and you mark the notches on that one instead.

A much safer way to get a major charge is to obtain a complete, historically significant, and still-functional piece of machinery (as opposed to a non-mechanical object)—like the original cotton gin, the complete French guillotine that took off its inventor's head, Lee Harvey Oswald's rifle, *etc.* The restrictions described earlier under using significant charges with items apply here, too.

**Taboo:** Incorporate any piece of machinery in common use during the late 1800s or later. Any clockwork with a telephone or a laser built in, for example, automatically fails to function.

**Random Magick Domain:** Clockworkers can only build effects into machines—specifically, their own hand-built machines. A clockworker can't build you a mechanical arm, unless he was working together with a fleshworker.

**Starting Charges:** Newly created mechanomancers have previously created clockwork creations worth ten minor charges or one significant charge, assuming they've been practicing mechanomancy for a year or so. More-experienced mechanomancers might start the game with considerably more, subject to the GM's discretion.

Mechanomancers don't really “cast spells” the way other schools do; they build things. So instead of giving you a list of “standard” clockwork machines (as if there was any such thing), what you've got is kind of a shopping list explaining the rules for construction. These are guidelines; if you want to add an effect that isn't listed here (like “shoots fire”) talk it over with your GM, and remember the GM's decision is final.

## Mechanomancy Minor Effects

**1 Charge:** Build a small object (the size of your forearm or smaller, weighing 10 pounds at most) capable of obeying one simple command X words long. X equals the total of the two dice you rolled to build the thing; if you rolled a 22, you can have a 4-word command.

The object has 60 points to split up between wound points, Speed, and an attack skill (if it's an attack device). The device always fails Speed tests for initiative. Clockworks of this type are one-trick ponies; they can only do a single function, though often in a fashion that “normal” machines cannot. If it isn't meant to hurt people, it can only serve some sort of amusement or vaguely sensible but minor utility function, like a product from the *Sharper Image* catalog. It might sharpen pencils in some over-elaborate but interesting fashion, for example, or wash and put away dishes, or fold laundry and store it in closets and drawers.

For each additional minor charge you spend on the object, you can make it about 3 pounds heavier, proportionately larger, and divide another 10 points among wound points, Speed, and its attack skill. Objects built with minor charges can never exceed a skill of 50%, Speed 100%, or 80 wound points. Damage from its attacks are resolved like Martial Arts attacks: roll to hit, and if suc-

cessful add the two dice together to get damage. Minor clockworks get no bonuses from matched successes, but the GM can choose to rule that a matched failure results in a breakdown or other catastrophic failure. It is also possible to build clockworks of this type that fire guns, but only as long as that is their sole function. A clockwork that shoots cannot reload, though a parasite “reloader” clockwork might be built to do so.

### Mechanomancy Significant Effects

**1 Charge:** Build an object that looks like a human being and is capable of obeying one simple command at a time. It can speak, but only to repeat what it’s been told to say. Divide 120 points among wound points, Speed, and attack ability. When determining initiative, always consider this type of clockwork to have rolled its Speed stat exactly. All damage done from its attacks are resolved like a Firearms attack with no damage cap.

For each additional significant charge you put into such a simulacrum, you can divide an additional 20 points among wound points, Speed, and attack ability. It can never exceed a skill of 70%, Speed 110%, or 160 wound points. The object cannot have any useful skill other than a combat skill, though it can serve a basic entertainment function such as dancing in a set pattern.

**1 Charge:** Build an object that looks like a human being and has a single general non-combat function. It can perform this function with some creativity and is capable of limited learning. It has a skill at its function equal to the roll you got when building it.

You can divide 100 points among wound points and Speed for this simulacrum.

For each additional significant charge, you can divide another 20 points among wound points and Speed, or you can roll another die for your success and pick among the dice rolled to assemble your result. For example, let’s assume Hans has Mechanomancy 55% and wants to make a machine that will translate Latin for him. He puts three significant charges into building this thing and uses the extra two charges for more dice. He rolls two dice for the first charge, and adds another die for each additional charge. That’s a total of four dice. He rolls 9, 4, 3, and 0. Picking the 4 and the 9, he now has a clockwork with 49% Translate Latin skill.

These simulacra can never exceed Speed 110% or 160 wound points. That’s as good as they get.

For either of the above, you can make it look like an animal instead of a human, or even an inanimate object or normal machine. If you opt to give it a unique form—that is, it looks like nothing but a clockwork monstrosity, and could never pass for a natural item or being—you can give it an extra 20 points to divide among its attributes, and another 5 for every additional charge you add.

### Mechanomancy Major Effects

For all intents and purposes, you can create life—possibly even a facsimile of a deceased loved one so realistic that no one can tell the difference. Such creatures are created like player characters, only with 380 points to divide among Mind, Body, Speed, and Soul.

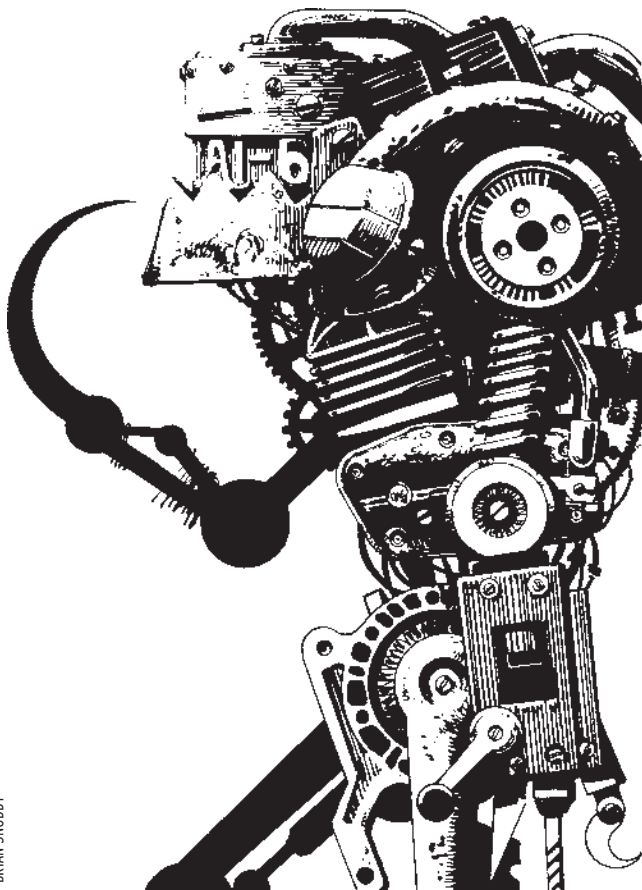
### Plutomancy (Money-Based Magick)

Money. Is any concept more pervasive in today’s world? No longer a mere medium for the exchange of goods and services, money has become a rationale for political systems (capitalism) and even philosophical ideologies (libertarianism). The amount of time the average person spends pursuing health, sex, happiness, religious salvation, or personal fulfillment is dwarfed by the time spent chasing the almighty dollar.

Plutomancy is a small and obscure school of magick. After all, the people most fixated on finance tend to be the most pragmatic thinkers, unwilling to cling to superstition or “gut feelings.” But there are a few who know. There are a few who have seen that money isn’t about fast cars and big houses. A few who have watched the dance and ebb of stock exchanges, have seen the flow and flux of currency and trade, have seen beyond what money is *for* to what it *means*. These few, who love finance for what it is and not for what it can do for them, know that money is a metaphor for universal transformation. After all, everything can be bought, and everything can be sold. Everything has its price, and that means that the essence of all things is reflected in money.

Plutomancy is focused on acquisition, but not always physical acquisition. Money is sought for its intangible benefits, for its invisible leverage. Plutomancers feel, in their innermost hearts, that each dollar obtained makes them greater, somehow. If only they had enough money, they could acquire the universe.

The central paradox of Plutomancy is that it demands asceticism of its followers. Though they become wealthy, Plutomancy demands that they live like paupers, hoarding their money instead of spending it. After all, if you spend it, you no longer have it, and the essence of Plutomancy lies in the having.



BRIAN SNOODY

The slang term for Plutomancers is **warbucks**.

**Plutomancy Blast Style:** A Plutomancer doesn't hurt you, he makes you hurt yourself. This school's blast makes you deliberately injure yourself with whatever is convenient. Under the influence of Plutomantic blasts, people have shot themselves, broken television screens on their heads, jumped in front of cars, and put blowtorches against their own temples.

## Stats

**Generate a Minor Charge:** Get \$100, but less than \$1,000, all at once. Note that being paid \$50 by two different people wouldn't work: it does not have the same significance. If seven different people each paid you \$200, it would yield seven minor charges. If, on the other hand, those same seven people paid you the same amount, but broke it up in to payments of \$100 each (with at least a day between each payment) you'd get fourteen minor charges. Funny stuff, huh?

It's also important to note that *no* charge can be generated from money you summoned with magick. There are no zero-sum spells. Furthermore, you can't get charges from money that you accepted as payment for *doing* magick; that puts the magick in the service of the currency, when it should be the other way around.

**Generate a Significant Charge:** Get \$1,000 or more all at once, as long as it's not enough money to make a major charge. As you might expect, you get two significant charges if two people each give you \$3,000, four significant charges if four people each give you \$1,500, and only one charge if one person gives you \$70,000. It's not the sum that's important as much as the act of giving. The delay is longer with significant charges, though: if the same person is going to give you two significant charges, they count as a single payment if the money all comes within the same week. If your payer waits seven days between payments, then it's two charges.

**Generate a Major Charge:** Acquire a hundred million dollars (or more) in one lump sum.

**Taboo:** Spend. Any time you spend more than \$1,000 on a single item, service, or payment of any sort, you lose all the charges you're carrying. (This is why so few Plutomancers own ritzy homes—they want to keep their monthly house payment below \$1,000.) A bill for several items that totals more than \$1,000 qualifies as a charge-buster, even if the individual items each cost less than \$1,000.

**Random Magick Domain:** Plutomancy is about acquisition. You can use it to call physical objects to you (through happenstance, not telekinesis), or even intangible qualities like luck, strength, or information. It is not good for control or transformation and you can't get rid of things, but if you want to bring something towards you, Plutomancy is a good bet.

**Starting Charges:** Newly created plutomancers have four minor charges.

## Plutomancy Minor Formula Spells

### Malfunction

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** This spell lets you really screw with any machine that directly handles monetary transactions. You can buy some books on the internet and never get a bill because you've mojoed the store's computer. If you're low on cash, you can stick your library card or

a piece of chewing gum into an ATM and make a withdrawal of up to \$1,000 from a random account. (No, you cannot get charges from money you steal with magick.) Careful with that, though: this spell doesn't disable the ATM's camera . . .

If you're a real spendthrift with your power, you can use it to get free cab rides, free phone calls, and free colas from vending machines.

For some reason, a single use of this spell can never provide more than \$1,000 worth of value or merchandise.

### Economic Forecast

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** To perform this spell, you have to look at the money in someone's wallet. By examining the serial numbers that appear on the bills, along with their order and condition (are they rumpled and grungy, or crisp and new?) you can get glimpses into the future of the wallet-holder. These are vague predictions—like a fortune cookie, only you're just as likely to hear "soon blood will spatter your body," as, "June arrives, bringing good fortune." This cannot give names, or specific information—although the numbers can often be startlingly precise. An economic forecast could tell you, "Look out at twelve o'clock," without telling you AM or PM or which day of the week—or even if that meant a direction instead of a time.

### Bargain of Pyrrhus

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** When you cast this spell, the next attack on you automatically hits, no matter what your opponent rolled. If someone with a 10% Handgun skill rolled a 39 while shooting at you, you take 39 points of damage. But your opponent automatically takes the same amount of damage. Unfortunately, you can't cast this spell on anyone but yourself.

### Fiscal History

**Cost:** 2 minor charges per minute of operation

**Effect:** While this spell is in effect, you can touch any object and have a brief vision of its owner. If you hold it a little longer, you can see each time it's been exchanged—bought, sold, stolen, or found. Want to know who was shooting at you? Cast this spell over a shell casing. Hold it a little longer, and you can see who your shooter bought his ammo from. Want to find your buddy's car in a dark parking garage? Cast this spell and start touching cars until you see her face. (Each iteration of ownership takes thirty seconds to witness.)

There's a rumor that this spell can be thwarted if the object is handled by its owner through a crisp, new bill up to a week before the spell is cast: so if your mystery shooter had held his bullets in a brand-new twenty before loading, it might make this spell harder. (If your GM decides to have this superstition work, it might force you to discard rolls under 20 or even 30 while using this spell.)

### I Know Your Price

**Cost:** 3 minor charges

**Effect:** When you successfully cast this spell on someone, you can ask the GM what would make that individual willing to voluntarily perform a certain action. For instance, you could ask, "What would

it take to get The Freak to forgive Dirk Allen?” and get the answer “Immortality.” The question “What would it take to make this person kill somebody?” can reveal a lot. “Danger to his friends,” indicates one thing about someone’s personality. “A hundred bucks and a steak dinner,” indicates something completely different.

Note that this spell reveals what makes someone *willing* to perform an action: in an abstract sense, what they want to acquire to buy their willingness. So if you ask “What will make Rebecca DeGoule jump into a sewage treatment tank?” you won’t get an answer like “Being set on fire.” Sure, setting almost anyone on fire makes them willing to jump in something disgusting. But there’s a difference between doing something because you’re willing, and doing it because you’re compelled to do so. (Being on fire counts as compulsion.)

### Mercenary Will

**Cost:** 4 minor charges

**Effect:** This is the Plutomancy Minor Blast. When you cast it on someone, you temporarily override their willpower and make them hurt themselves. In most circumstances, this could mean stomping on their own foot, slamming their hand in a door, or head-butting a wall. If there’s something really dangerous nearby, however (like the third rail in a train station) the potential damage is much greater. (For this spell, “really dangerous” means “can injure you just by touching it.” A mirror isn’t “really dangerous” even though someone could break it and slash their own throat with the shards.)

If your victim is holding a gun, it’s possible that you can make him shoot himself.

That’s the up side of this spell. If you’re in a really dangerous setting (busy street, construction site, burning warehouse) or if your target has a gun in his hand, this spell does damage like a significant blast: the result of the dice instead of the sum. If you rolled a 37 against a gun-toting enemy, you just did 37 points of damage instead of  $3 + 7 = 10$ .

The down side is that people have that pesky free will. Anyone who has this spell cast on him can choose to make a Soul roll to refuse the command. However, making the Soul roll causes the target to lose his next combat action. Furthermore, making the Soul roll is a rank-4 Self challenge, on top of the rank-5 Unnatural check for being attacked by magick, because the target is essentially fighting his own sudden desire for harm.

## Plutomancy Significant Formula Spells

### Fortune’s Wheel

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** This spell allows you to make big, general predictions about groups, trends, nations—even whole economies. Like Economic Forecast, it can be maddeningly vague and uselessly exact at the same time: you might know that Alex Abel’s company is going to lose \$7,425,871.52 in the next eight months—but you won’t know how, or how to stop it. (Also, no prophecy is written in stone: the universe is far too chaotic for that.) You might be able to see that the True Order of Saint-Germain is terribly threatened by someone who wields the powers of fire and rebellion, someone who brings the wrath of countless ages, someone who’s five feet eleven inches tall and thirty two years old—but you wouldn’t get a name or an image.

### Bankrupt Will

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** This is the Plutomancy significant blast, and this is where you get people *really* hurting themselves—sticking their knives into light sockets, jumping out of windows, poking themselves in the eye with car keys, *etc.* If the spell is successful, it does significant-blast damage, the victim loses his next action, and unlike the minor-blast version it cannot be countered by a Soul roll. It doesn’t give the extra Self-based stress check of the minor blast, however: it generally happens too fast for the victim to get a real sense of self-betrayal.

### I’m The Man

**Cost:** 2 significant charges

**Effect:** For the next half hour, everyone who sees you perceives you as their boss. This doesn’t mean they see you as a vague authority figure: if that guard at the military base takes her orders from Colonel BoDean, she thinks *you’re* Colonel BoDean. If a secretary at the law office has his checks signed by Wally Schlegel, he sees you as Wally Schlegel. The only people immune to this spell are the self-employed, the unemployed, the independently wealthy, and avatars of the Masterless Man.

When you speak, those enchanted by this spell will hear your words exactly, but in the boss’s voice. So if the guard asks for a password, she won’t hear what she’s expecting. She’ll hear Colonel BoDean saying “I forgot.” The other danger is when you’re in the presence of two (or more) people with different bosses, since they’ll each react as if you’re a different person. Finally, if you’re in the presence of the *real* boss, the spell dissolves—so just hope that Colonel BoDean or Wally Schlegel doesn’t walk by while you’re bamboozling their underlings. On the other hand, if you enter the underling’s presence alongside their boss, they perceive you as someone completely different—possibly their boss’s boss.

This spell can be extended by fifteen minutes for an additional significant charge. You can add this charge at any point during the spell’s duration, and it doesn’t require a re-roll.

### Devaluation

**Cost:** 2 significant charges

**Effect:** This spell causes physical objects to corrode and decay. A wide variety of damage is possible with this spell: you could make a car’s wheels blow out, or its windshield explode, or you could just make an axle rust until it snaps. You can use this to rot ropes, blow apart doors, and snap handcuffs. As a rule of thumb, you can wreck any solid, non-living object that weighs fifty pounds or less. If the object has moving parts or electrical components, it’s much easier to ruin it. You can ruin anything mechanical or electrical the size of a van or smaller with this spell, so a car would be no problem but a hundred-pound marble statue would be out of your reach.

One effect you can’t create with this is making something simply vanish. You can’t create or destroy matter with this spell: only perform a limited transformation, making it less valuable.

### Washington Speaks

**Cost:** 2 significant charges

**Effect:** To cast this spell, you have to write your name somewhere



on a piece of legal tender. It has to be a \$20 bill or less (in value), but other than that the denomination doesn't really matter. After you sign it, create a mental picture of a person you want to spy on, then spend the money and roll the dice. The bill will find its way to the wallet of the person you envisioned within a number of days equal to your roll (if you succeeded, of course). How long the bill stays with him or her is up to the GM—generally it's a week at the most (after all, how long does ten bucks last in *your* wallet?) Once your target has spent the money, the bill will return to you in 2–20 days. When you get the bill back, you can concentrate on the bill and have a vision (complete with sound) of what your target was doing any time that he had the bill with him. So you could spy on his business meeting or hear what he said on his cell phone in a cab—but if he went to the gym and left his wallet in his locker, you wouldn't be able to spy on him for that span of time.

Many people in the occult underground carefully scrutinize any bill they get for signatures, and then spend the money immediately (or just get change) if they find one. This has led many plutomancers to simply sign every bill they get their hands on to create decoys. Others have had their name legally changed to something like “Fred Loves Kathy,” so their name on the bill doesn't look like a name. Still others write with the aid of a microscope and a surgical laser.

### Pluto's Curse

**Cost:** 3 significant charges

**Effect:** You can only cast this spell on someone with less money than you. The spell automatically fails against people with more money because their mojo leverage is greater—at least for Plutomancy. You also have to know your target—either know her personally, or be able to see him when you cast the spell.

When successfully cast, this spell makes someone poor. They start losing money in a geometric progression, starting with one penny the first day the spell is cast. The next day, they lose two cents. Four cents the day after that.

Not very threatening, is it? Keep doing the math. One month after you cast the spell, your victim loses \$5,368,709.12. That's in addition to an identical sum that he's cumulatively lost over the last thirty days. Since it doubles daily, this spell could bankrupt the entire United States in something like fifty days. (If it worked on countries, that is. Lucky for countries, it doesn't.)

Now, while the losses from the first week can be chalked up to carelessness and sofa cushions, the bigger sums take a little more doing. These losses might be due to robbery, fraud, bad investments, or something similar. This spell always finds an excuse to apply chaos to the victim's finances.

The spell only works on pure money, such as cash and bank accounts. It can't make the victim lose cars, houses, jewelry, shares of stock, and other things that have to be converted into money before they can be spent. Most clueless victims of Pluto's Curse liquidate their resources for cash once their funds run low, so of course that fresh cash gets zapped, too. Those in the know immediately start *buying* things when they realize the nature of their curse. Then when the spell quits, they can sell their new purchases and start over. (The stock market is a very convenient shield against Pluto's Curse.)

Once the victim's cash hits zero, the spell stops working. The only difference between casting this on a pauper and Adnan Kashoggi is how long it's going to take to leech the victim dry.

### Devil's Deal

**Cost:** 5 significant charges

**Effect:** This powerful spell lets you bargain for someone's obedience—whether they want to give it or not.

Devil's Deal has two parts. When you first cast the spell, you immediately know what your victim wants more than anything in the world. It could be something intangible (“I want a long, safe, healthy life for me and my family”), the completion of an idea (“I want to write the next great American novel,” or “I want to have Jerry Seinfeld's baby.”) or something concrete (“I want the Hope Diamond.”).

Knowing someone's innermost desire is powerful enough. If you give it to them, it's even greater. (Granted, some wishes may be beyond even a powerful magician's ability: all the tutors, editors and literary agents in the world aren't going to get the next great American novel out of a hopeless hack.)

If you arrange, one way or another, for your victim's dream to come true—be it by handing over the Hope Diamond or setting up a night with Jerry—you can compel the victim to complete one task for you. This can be as simple or as complicated as you want it. It could be anything from, “Give me the launch codes,” to “Negotiate a lasting peace in the Middle East.” Your victim must then work at your task until it is completed. He can take time out to rest, eat, *etc.*, but he now wants that goal with the same intensity that he formerly wanted the goal you fulfilled. Every time he does something directly contrary to the goal, it's a rank-10 Self challenge.

### Plutomancy Major Effects

Call any object in the world into your possession. Dictate the world economy for a day. Bring yourself (through “coincidence”) into the presence of any person alive.

### Pornomancy (Sex-Based Magick)

If you've hit puberty, you'll understand why sex can be a powerful magickal force. Sex reaches down beneath our consciousness and grabs hold of our urges, triggering desires, unlocking secrets, and allowing us to express ourselves in very personal, primal ways.

Pornomancy uses sex to generate magickal power. It's not a very destructive school of magick—a minor blast is only possible with a significant charge, rather than a minor one—but instead serves to grease the wheels of reality in a useful fashion. The primal magickal energy of sex makes things go your way, because you're more in tune with your true self and with the statosphere.

This school is generally more subtle than Dipsomancy and a bit easier to control. It takes more time and effort to build up a charge, but once you've got a charge you can hold it until you need it. The slang term for pornomancers is **love pirates**.

Pornomancers only exist by means of the Sect of the Naked Goddess (p. 16)—Daphnee Lee was the first pornomancer. A given pornomancer must either be a member of the sect, a former member of the sect, or have a mentor who is/was a member of the sect.

**Pornomancy Blast Style:** A pornomancy blast doesn't really hurt you; you just *feel* intense, agonizing pain ripping through your entire body. Doctors won't be able to find any tissue damage, (meaning damage from a pornomancy blast cannot be healed by medical science!) but that doesn't make the loss of wound points any less.

Furthermore, your body continues to believe it's being hurt—so unless you get magickal healing, those wound points *never come back*. If a pornomancy blast kills you, the coroner will probably scratch his head and eventually write down “heart failure.”

Luckily, it's not at all easy for pornomancers to hurt people; even a minor blast takes a significant charge. However, if you happen to be having sex with the pornomancer at the time, it can be turned into a *significant* blast. This opens up the irritating possibility of your love-pirate nemesis killing you with a charge that you helped her generate.

## Stats

**Generate a Minor Charge:** Perform a consensual tantric or Naked Goddess sex ritual lasting one to two hours.

**Generate a Significant Charge:** Re-enact a scene from a Naked Goddess porn flick with people who look like the other actors from the film, on a set that looks very much like the set from the film in question.

**Generate a Major Charge:** Re-enact something from the Naked Goddess's life or films that *no one* has ever re-enacted before. (This is why members of the Sect of the Naked Goddess spend so much time hunting down and interviewing her ex-boyfriends, relatives, high school pals, *etc.* The re-enactment has to be *exact*, down to having sex with the same people in the same place.)

**Taboo:** If you ever have sex outside a ritual context, you lose all the charges you're carrying. Real shame about love, isn't it?

**Random Magick Domain:** The Pornomancers are all about desire—desire fulfilled, promised, and frustrated. Their power works by creating and enhancing affinities; it's powerful magic for guidance, coincidence, and persuasion. It's considerably weaker when it comes to making physical changes in the world.

**Starting Charges:** Newly created pornomancers have four minor charges.

## Pornomancy Minor Formula Spells

### You Know You Want It

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** This spell allows you to mess with the mind of your listener, by making your arguments seem reasonable and desirable. Here's how it works: after you cast the spell, the next social interaction roll you make (meaning skills like Lying, Charm, or Sell Freezers to Eskimos) is at a +20% shift.

### The Armor of Desire

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** The next person who tries to attack you has to make a successful Soul check to do so. Even though he rationally knows he ought to shoot you or beat your brains in, he somehow really doesn't want to. If he makes the Soul check and damages you, it's a rank-4 Violence stress check. If he fails the Soul check, he not only loses his action but has to make a rank-4 Helplessness stress check.

### Tough Luck

**Cost:** 1 minor charge

**Effect:** You can force anyone to re-roll a successful roll they made. This means you can't use it on anyone who got a higher initiative than you; but once it's your chance to go, you can cast Tough Luck and then hold it in abeyance for the rest of that round until you see a roll you want to mess with. If you don't use it the round you cast it, you can wait and let it go on your next round—but you can't do anything else this round, or for as long as you hold it. Should the combat end before you release it, it's wasted and the charge is lost.

### Smooth Move

**Cost:** 2 minor charges

**Effect:** You can cast this spell at any time to flip-flop a roll that you just made. This spell can be used as a reaction—that is, if you decide to use it in a fight, it does not cost you an action.

**Example:** Cindy the pornomancer has a Struggle skill of 30%. While slugging it out with a teenaged satanist, she rolls a 71 on her combat action—a clear miss, assuming she can't flip-flop the roll under normal circumstances. However, Cindy casts Smooth Move on her attack to flip-flop it. It is now a success, and the attack goes off successfully without her having to take an additional action.

### Mind and Mouth Go North and South

**Cost:** 3 minor charges

**Effect:** When you cast this spell on someone, their skill at Lying drops to 0% for the entire duration of their conversation with you. They find themselves either telling the truth or clamming up completely. They can't even have recourse to half-truths (like saying “Joanie said she wanted to *kill* me!” when Joanie had in fact said “I'll kill you for setting up this surprise party”), dilute truths (like saying “Sam's real interested in the investment” when Sam said “The investment is interesting but I can't spare the capital right now”), and truth presented in a manner calculated to deceive (like saying “I honestly believe this legislation will grow the industry,” when you privately believe it will only grow your segment of it).

### Dazzle

**Cost:** 3 minor charges

**Effect:** When you successfully cast this spell on someone, he loses his next action and stands there doing nothing—not even really thinking. He cannot make any skill rolls, including Dodge, though normal rolls still have to be made to hit him in combat.

If you use this spell on someone in combat, it costs him his next action, but he snaps out of it quickly because, after all, it's a dangerous situation. If you use it outside of combat, it distracts someone for about thirty seconds; they'll just stare off into space and generally ignore any non-threatening stimuli. (Note: a woman walking by is a non-threatening stimulus. A woman walking by openly carrying a gun or a machete is not.)

## Pornomancy Significant Formula Spells

### Number Nine

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** Your basic love spell—or rather, at least a *lust* spell. If the spell works, your victim immediately wants nothing more than to

have sex with you, regardless of their usual sexual orientation, personal tastes, and other feelings about you. If someone hates you or is disgusted with you, this spell does not replace those emotions; they simply experience a radical conflict of emotions. If you refuse to gratify their urges (or if you say yes, in some circumstances), it may cause stress checks against Self or Helplessness.

### The Smouldering Glance

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** If you have a Soul-based skill like Sexually Alluring, you can permanently increase it by 5%. If you don't have such a skill, you can gain it at 5%. However, you can never raise this skill above 72% with this if you're a woman—that's the rating the Naked Goddess had. If you're a man, you can't take it above 66%—the score of the Naked Goddess's most frequent co-star.

This skill doesn't really have much to do with looks; it's more about attitude and flirting and how you carry yourself. It doesn't make you look good. It makes you look good in the sack.

### Defeat Yourself

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** You can cast this spell at any time to turn any successful roll you witness into a simple failure. The person making the roll has to be in your line of sight. If you do this in combat, it does not count as your action for that round, *and* you can use it even before your initiative turn comes around, or after. (Some pornomancers refer to this spell as Klutz Hammer, but Daphnee Lee insists that Defeat Yourself is the proper name.) Whatever its name, this spell cannot be used on major-level magicks of any sort.

### Synchronicity

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** A rather strange effect, Synchronicity puts you where you're "supposed" to be. It could be the time and place where a friend of yours is going to need help. It could be just the right spot to take care of a great opportunity (or at least, become aware of it). It could place you in a restaurant just as your two worst enemies meet to plot your downfall.

It is not teleportation. You spend the charge and leave it to the GM to decide where you're supposed to be and to provide a rationale (no matter how flimsy) to get you there. (Your GM may ask for your help or advice on getting you to a certain place.)

Note that just because this puts you where you need to be, it doesn't mean you'll be equipped to handle what happens. It pays to be prepared at all times, because you never know when the Goddess is going to lead you into trouble . . .

### Psychotrauma

**Cost:** 1 significant charge

**Effect:** Psychotrauma is a good name for the pornomancer minor blast, since the damage is all in the victim's mind (as explained earlier). It doesn't make him any less dead if it kills him, though. As explained above, if you're actually having sex with your target, you can make this into a significant-damage blast.

### Paralysis

**Cost:** 2 significant charges

**Effect:** It's just what it sounds like. The target of this spell is motionless and unable to move, other than involuntary movements like breathing, blinking, and small adjustments of balance. The target can't move until the spell's caster permits it, until he's been frozen for two hours, or until he successfully overcomes the spell. Overcoming the spell requires a Soul roll, and any result under 40% is discarded. (Sorcerers who attempt this roll can flip-flop their Soul rolls; otherwise, tough luck.)

In combat, breaking the spell can be attempted once per round. (Incidentally, paralyzed people take their actions last in a round.) It is still possible for paralyzed adepts to cast spells (instead of trying to break the paralysis), but any paralyzed person is considered motionless for the purposes of pointblanking rules (see p. 61). It's a bad scene.

### Inner Torment

**Cost:** 3 significant charges

**Effect:** This spell is a direct attack on the target's soul and sanity. The caster picks one of the five mental stresses when the spell is cast, and (if successful) the target has to make a stress check. The rank of the stress check is equal to the number in the ones place of the roll. (If you roll 23, it's a rank-3 challenge. If you roll 19, it's a rank-9 challenge.) If the victim fails the roll, he still gains a failed mark and freaks out, but a successful defense against Inner Torment does *not* give a hardened mark in that gauge.

### Pornomancy Major Effects

Arrange to have every practitioner of a school of magick show up in the same place at the same time "by accident." Make yourself as popular and famous world-wide as Stephen King, regardless of talent. Undo the effects of one spell (even one that killed someone) . . .

## Creating New Schools

If none of the schools presented in this rulebook float your boat, you can always make up your own school of magick. The rules that follow are for players, GMs, and any other do-it-yourself Hermes Trismegistuses out there.

*Caveat Emptor* though: these rules are really flexible and put a lot of design power in the hands of players and GMs both. Use them maturely. Players should design their school in concert with the GM, so that you build something that fits into the game, instead of something that warps the game to fit around it. GMs should design new schools to challenge the PCs, not just to push them around or give them insurmountable obstacles. This should be self-evident, but every time a system provides this kind of creative input, it's open to abuse from power-mad GMs and players alike. All we can do is encourage you to exercise caution and discretion. A player who fools his GM into letting him make an uber-powerful or ultra-versatile school of magick makes his magick the center of the game—at the expense of the GM's plot and the development of character. A GM who uses these rules to make up powerful schools of magick had better expect the PCs to try the same trick—but an arms race based on dinking the rules isn't really what this game is about.



Enough about the wrong way to use these rules. The *right* way to use them is to create new, innovative, truly unique expressions of your ideas. You shouldn't have to use these because "the schools here aren't damaging enough"—you should use them because you had a great idea ("Magick based on the paradoxes of identity.") that we weren't smart enough to figure out.

## Rule #1: GM Veto

This may seem obvious, but we're going to play the GM king card one more time. Your GM knows better than anyone else what is likely to come up in the course of play, which means that she has a better idea of what's going to wreck everyone's fun. An effect that may seem completely innocuous to you may be exactly the right monkey-wrench to ruin the GM's plans.

Furthermore, your mileage may vary from game to game. One GM may like your style of magick just fine; another may insist that you change it radically. Here's the thing: they're *both* right. Campaigns are different, they have different styles and different needs and, consequently, different vulnerabilities.

To sum up: when the GM says no, it means no.

## Rule #2: Paradox

As we've said, every school of magick is based on a symbolic tension or a central contradiction: Plutomancy requires you to acquire money, and forbids you to spend it. Pornomancy requires you to have sex, but forbids you to have sex for the normal reasons (love, fun or reproduction).

Your school needs one of these too. Ideally, it should take a warped reflection of everyday concerns (money or booze, for example) and put a mystic and philosophical spin on it. These ideas are very abstract, and they're supposed to be. Magick is all about finding the underlying laws of the world, and using those laws to manipulate the invisible powers of reality.

## Rule #3: Taboo

A taboo is something that is anathema to your magick style—something that contradicts or defiles its major precepts. It should come as no surprise that these taboos are often intimately connected to the way "normal" people see or do things. Normal people stay sober, see a doctor when they're sick, and generally try to use the best and most modern technology when they build something. Those are the logical things to do. But logic (at least reasonable, mundane, everyday logic) has little place in magickal thinking. The three things mentioned are taboos to the boozehounds, fleshwarper, and clockworkers because of their symbolic meaning, not their logical effects.

That's the esoteric, fancy-pants side of picking a taboo. For game balance, your taboo should also be a headache for you to avoid—either from a practical standpoint (most drunks sober up *eventually*) or a character standpoint.

Taboos give magick teeth. They're part of the price of admission. If magick was just a free ride, all gain and no pain, everyone would do it. But when you have to pay a price, and that price is normalcy—well, a lot of people want off that ride fast. Would you be willing to obtain mystical power if it meant you could never bathe again?

## Rule #4: Charges

The other price of admission is paid in charges. Some schools have easy ways to get charges, others are more difficult. All of them, however, require behavioral concessions from the sorcerer. You can never get a charge through an accidental action, and you can never use magick to perform whatever it is you do to get charged up. (Some cherries let you get free charges, but that's a special case.)

Minor charges require minor concessions, obviously. Significant charges require a lot more, and major charges—those should always be insanely difficult to generate, and usually risky as well.

As a rule of thumb, a non-textbook magician, when starting out, should be able to generate a minor charge a couple times a day—more often if the school's taboos are particularly harsh, less often if they can hold charges a long time. If a starting magician can get a significant charge *at all*, it should be rare—once a week or even once a month. Major charges? Probably once in a lifetime.

## Rule #5: Random Magick

Once you know how you're paying for effects, you can start thinking about the kinds of effects you want to buy. This should be closely tied to your paradox, your taboo, and your charges. It's often a good idea to have a single word that sums up what your magick revolves around: "acquisition" or "desire" or "the body" are examples from the schools we built.

Keep in mind that what your magick *means* should determine what it can *do*. You can go the other way 'round, of course, but it's much less likely to produce anything really original.

## Rule #6: Formula Spells

Now that you know how your magick works and what it does (in general), you can come up with what it does specifically. Write up about five minor and five significant formula spells for your school of magick, making sure your GM agrees about effects, costs, and particulars. (Yes, the rulebook schools get more formula spells; but you have to pay for having your school tailor-made.)

## Rule #7: Balance

This is the trickiest, yet most important part. While many of you out there are going to want *your* school of magick to do everything better than all the others, it's just not allowed. Otherwise a game of challenges becomes a boring game of inferior opponents, straw men, and paper tigers. You might as well watch television.

A balanced school may have advantages, but it pays for them with drawbacks. We can't give you rules for balance: it's something you feel more than something you know. All we can do is offer examples and guidelines.

Dipsomancy has some big advantages: it's easy to get charged up, and it's very versatile. These are paid for with big flaws. It's also easy to *lose* charges, and the more charged up you are, the more penalties all your other skills take.

Similarly, fleshwarping has big advantages: you can hurt people real bad, heal people real good, and you can be the prettiest boy on the block when you're not shoving pins under your fingernails. The downside is that you're going to be injured almost constantly, and there's not a lot you can do about it.



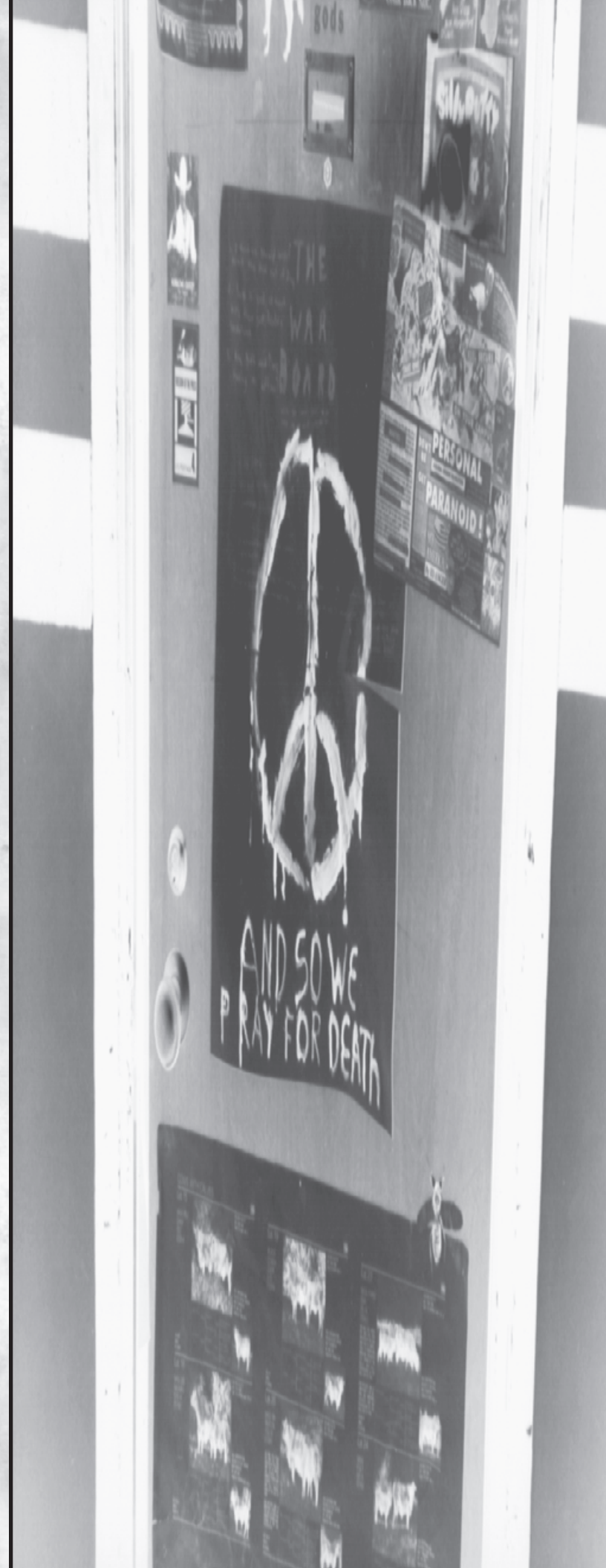
# *chapter eight* *playing the game*

## UNKNOWN ARMIES



"THE DEVIL DIVIDES THE WORLD  
BETWEEN ATHEISM AND SUPERSTITION."  
—ANONYMOUS

"YOU HEARD THAT OLD SAW ABOUT 'LEAD, FOLLOW, OR GET OUT  
OF THE WAY?' WELL I'M TAKING CARE OF THAT FIRST OPTION,  
SO YOUR CHOICES JUST GOT A LOT SIMPLER."  
—RANDY DOUGLAS



# LEGACY

▲ 66 The address for her mom's checks was a store front about four miles from her motel. Renata had thought about going straight there, but she was so tired, more tired than she thought she could ever be, and she'd already paid for her hotel room. The next morning she had a stale donut off the platter by the check-in and set off walking.

She was tired and hot again by the time she reached the right street. It didn't look like a residential neighborhood—there weren't houses, just fast-food joints and check-cashing places and second-hand stores.

*Just a few blocks farther*, she thought, and then she saw Eugene LaRue.

He was in a beat-up old car, not far from the address Hiram had given her. He was slouched back in the driver's seat, eyes closed and mouth open. Her heart started to beat faster as she got closer. His window was rolled down, and her stolen knife was out of her backpack and in her hand before she even knew what she was thinking about.

She had to hold the knife in her left hand to get it in the window and at his throat, and she had to move quickly because he woke up as soon as she got between him and the morning sun.

"Don't you *move!*" she hissed at him. His whole body locked rigid as he looked down at the knife.

"I don't have . . ." he started, then looked up at her, and his eyes got even wider.

"Holy . . ."

"Listen to me, prick. Put your hands on the wheel, where I can see 'em. Real slow, you got it?"

"Yeah, I got it. Shit you're, what was it, the name that sounds like tap-dancing? Renata Dakota?"

"That's right, and if you make one false move I'll slit your throat."

"Uh huh. So what exactly *is* a 'false move'?" Even with the knife at his neck he managed to look kind of smartass-ish.

"Just shut up." Renata unlocked the door behind him and opened it. Then she stood there for a moment.

"Look, you're going to have to take the knife away if you want to get in the car, which is smart 'cause even around here someone's going to notice you pointing that thing at me eventually . . ."

"Shut *up!*" She got the pepper spray out of her pocket and very carefully put it in her left hand as she took the knife with her right hand.

"Know what this is?"

"Capiscum pepper spray, I'm guessing, unless you've got chemical mace instead."

"That's right." She took a half-step back from the car, keeping the cannister pointed at his face. "You move at all, I'll spray you and *then* stab you, got it?" As he said "Yeah," she darted around the door and got behind him.

"Ow, dammit!"

Renata gasped as she saw blood welling out of the back of his neck. She'd accidentally poked him when she got in the car.

"Ohmigod, I'm sorry!"

"Jesus, what did I ever do to you?" He'd automatically put his left hand to the back of his neck and turned to face her, and he looked mad as hell.

"Put your hands up," she said, but she knew she said it weak, and she could feel herself shrinking back from him—back from what she'd done to him.

"No, *you* put your hands up," he said, "And if you mace me I'll just open fire. I don't think I'm likely to miss at this range."

There was a little black gun in his hand, pointing at her. Her eyes got wide, and she slowly raised her hands.

He said nothing for a moment, then reached back with his bloodstained left hand and carefully took the knife and the pepper spray.

"You try anything and I'll scream," she said.

"Jesus, you're lucky *I* don't scream," he said. "I'm the one stabbed by a runaway in my own damn car."

"I'm not a runaway!" she said. Then, before she realized she'd thought it, she asked him "If you have this car, how come you took the bus from Chicago?"

He drew breath to answer her, and then laughed.

"You don't quit, do you? I suppose I shouldn't be surprised if you're Duane Regis's daughter."

"I'm Fred Dakota's daughter!"

"Is *that* what he's calling himself now?"

# FOUR

**So far, what you've got** is a lot of background. Hopefully it's interesting background, but it's really pretty hollow until one final, critical element is added—your character. We don't mean to put a lot of pressure on you here, but the whole point of all this intricate stage dressing, all these quirky characters, all this elaborate metaphysics—it's all there to support and enhance stories about your character. So don't let us down.

If you're new to this (or even if you're not) you may still be a bit at sea about the point of the game. So okay, there are all kinds of weird folks running around doing strange, scary stuff, and joining the Invisible Clergy sounds pretty cool . . . but what, immediately, do you want to do?

As in real life, the answer is up to you. A lot of games start you off in preset circumstances that provide some structure, goals, allies, and adversaries right off the bat. For instance, you might start out as a government agent; this gives you goals (complete your mission), allies (the guy who gives you your cool gadgets), and adversaries (terrorists, greys, the Democratic Party). In *Unknown Armies*, you get the same kind of structure, only this time, you all pick your structure and goals together instead of being pitched them by your GM or game designer. This gives you a little more responsibility, and it's a little more challenging, but it also gives you a lot more power over the direction of the plot—so pick with care.

## Portraying Your Character

If you've followed the instructions in the Characters chapter, you should have a fairly good outline of your character's personality. However, this outline is probably pretty ephemeral right now; when the game sessions starts, you'll have to demonstrate that abstract personality in concrete ways. It doesn't matter how many times you wrote on your character sheet that your character is fearless—if you always have him run away from fights, he's going to be a coward. Here, then, is some friendly advice on how to take the next step: integrating your character into the story.

## Your Goals

A good starting point is your character's personal goals. These are *not* necessarily the goals of a group dictated by your chosen narrative structure. For example, if you've chosen the "New Inquisition" structure, your group goals are dictated by Alex Abel and may well involve tremendous personal discomfort for your character. Unless you're playing a masochist, you probably don't have "tremendous personal discomfort" as a goal.

Personal goals are what your character wants, above and beyond the wants and needs of the group. These may be selfish, altruistic, or indifferent. They may coincide with the group goals (very likely for reality cops) or the group may just be a stepping stone. ("Yeah, this Abel clown got me a new identity, but I'm cheeing it as soon as I can figure out a good way to scam . . .")

Consider carefully what your character wants. Power? Wealth? Pleasure? What would he be willing to do to reach his goals? What would make him hesitate? If something would stop him from pursuing his goal, is that indicative of another goal?

In addition to stating the goal ("I want to make a million dollars!"), set down *how* you're going after that goal. ("I'm trying to set up a big bank heist, and figured that Abel's flunkies would have the skills I need.") This not only gives you concrete reasons for the

choices you make—it gives the GM opportunities to build plots around your character.

Something important to keep in mind is that your goal as a player is likely to be quite different from the goals of your character. For example, let's suppose your character's goal is to get revenge on the stoolie who sold you out. If you just happen to be put in a jail cell with the stoolie while he's on a serious heroin nod, your *character* can throttle him and achieve his goal. But that's not much fun for the *player*. It's not challenging. Now, suppose instead the stoolie entered the Witness Protection Program and has vanished off the face of the earth. If you have to hunt down the agents who erased him, and get them to talk by tricking, blackmailing, or intimidating them, and then you have to find the actual *guy*, and *then*, after months of toil and effort he gets away . . . well, isn't that a better story? The character is going to be frustrated as hell. The player may be too, by association. But the player will also be intrigued and entertained and hooked into the story.

In other words, the character will always want that which makes the pursuit of his goals easier. The player (and more importantly, the GM) must take a long view and realize that the pursuit and the conflict matter *more* than the goal. (Trust us, nothing tanks a game faster than players who get everything they want right away.)

## Your Obsession

A character's obsession is critical. When his brain is idle, it will eventually work its way back to the obsession. Even when the character is thinking of something else, he's likely to find a way to tie it back into his obsession, or think of it in terms of his obsession.

Your obsession may well be linked to the goals of your character and group, but it's not as concrete and tangible as a goal. If making a million dollars is your goal, you may eventually achieve it. If you're obsessed with wealth, you'll probably *never* have enough.

The goal is what your character is planning and doing. Your obsession shows how your character understands the world.

Some examples may clarify. Let's examine our beloved Cage once more. His obsession is "toughness." Not only does this infuse his goals ("I want to get stronger and more dangerous."), it colors the way he sees every situation. If he sees two people compromise on something, he'll think "Neither of them was *tough* enough to make the other cave." If he sees a hated enemy manage to drive away with three slugs in him, he'll be mad—but he'll also be grudgingly impressed that the enemy was *tough* enough to gut it out. Even something as simple as buying a car can be revealing. Cage will look for a truck that can take a lot of punishment—and also one that *looks* tough.

Now put another character with a different obsession in the same circumstances. One of Cage's associates is a Capricorn-type obsessed with wealth. When he sees the compromise, he thinks "Ah! They're acting like businessmen. They must be reasonable people." When he sees the enemy get away injured, he gets upset that all his effort (which is an abstract sort of capital) had no payoff. Then he starts calculating what he'll have to "invest" to hunt the guy down again. Finally, when looking for a car, the Capricorn may simply pick the cheapest car—or he may choose a flashy BMW as a status symbol to display his wealth.

We hate to use big phrases like "ideological framework"—but that's really what your obsession is. It's the lens you see the world through, the principle you organize your life around, and the key that decodes all the input you get from your five senses.



## Your Passions

You, the player, may have different goals than your character does. This split gets even wider when it comes to Passions.

Passions represent what your character feels strongly about—regardless of his rational decisions. He may try to reason them away, keep them down with willpower or tranquilize them with drugs, but these are only short-term solutions. The passions will always come bubbling up, no matter what.

This is not fun for the character because it takes control away from him. It *is* fun for the player, because it makes the character more real and more human (and because the player picks the passions). Passions provide internal conflicts, such as when your head says you have to do one thing (run across the carpet of spiders to save your buddies) while your heart says the exact opposite (“Eeek! Spiders! Get away!”). Internal conflict has no place in wargames and had little place in early roleplaying games. However, a game centered on character begs for them, and passions are there to fill this need.

This doesn’t mean that you have to obey your passions every time; it just means you have to pay attention to them. When your passions come into the picture, the emotional ante has just shot up. Regardless of whether you follow your emotional impulse or defy it, it’s inherently an important action.

To put it another way, your Passions represent the easy way out for you (that’s why obeying them gives you a way to fiddle rolls to your benefit). They keep you in character. Going against them is hard—so it had better be worth it.

Be forewarned: if your GM is worth his weight in polyhedral dice, he’ll be looking for situations where your passions will work against your character. Don’t take it personally. He’s trying to give you, the *player*, a good time, by giving your character a hard time.

## Madness and Callousness

This is a topic to deal with carefully. There’s little in the human experience as inherently dramatic as madness. It’s intense and scary, and in roleplaying games there’s always been a temptation to make light of it for that very reason. We’d like to encourage you to avoid this as much as possible. For one thing, playing a “fun” lunatic is certainly unrealistic, since madness is (basically) a desperate defense taken by a mind under attack from input it can’t handle. This is not a happy, fun battle.

This may seem out of place in a game that *is* supposed to be fun. Again, we’d like to invoke the important split between player and character. Your character shouldn’t be enjoying the process of falling into insanity. But the player has a layer of detachment: it allows you to watch in fascination without having to suffer the maddening input.

Why would people want to play an insane character? Probably for the same reasons people like to ride roller coasters. There’s a kind of excitement and catharsis—the thrill of feeling endangered without being in danger. This is similar. If your character goes insane, you have an opportunity to observe mental collapse without collapsing. Naturally, the more effort you put into identifying with the process, by *taking it seriously*, the more you’ll get out of it.



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That's why you, the player, get to decide how your character freaks out when he fails a check. If you think about it, the options to freeze, flee or frenzy allow good survival options, as well as being realistic character options. You should also choose carefully if you get stuck with a permanent form of madness. Pick one you think you'll be able to play convincingly and well. If you're unsure of your acting abilities, pick something that only comes into play infrequently, like blackouts. Just be ready to act out the confusion and panic of unexpectedly finding yourself in a new place.

Don't pick something just for shock value, and for pete's sake don't pick something because you think you'll be able to turn it into an *advantage*. Insanity in UA is not meant to be window dressing. It's a chance to change and grow your character. Just as your GM is going to put you in situations where your passions will give you trouble, he'll probably craft circumstances where your insanity will endanger your life. Deal with it—but you (the player) should remember that a GM is doing a *bad* job if he puts you in a situation you don't have a fair chance of escaping or surviving, regardless of your mental state.

That should do it for madness. Now let's look at the opposite situation, complete callousness.

The idea of becoming emotionally bulletproof is a seductive one. However, we believe most players would find a completely hardened character limiting—and not just because of the rules against ascending or using your passions when you're completely hardened.

Simply put, being callous cuts off options. If your character has become that inured to emotional input, a wide range of role-playing choices become kind of pointless. Sure, he won't be scared when a slaving bogeyman jumps out of a corner. On the other hand, he won't be pleased when his friends throw him a surprise party. He won't feel triumph if he attains some long-sought goal, because he's become so emotionally insulated that he can't feel anything—with the possible exception of frustration.

Make no mistake about it, being cut off from your feelings is frustrating. (Of course, you have to be used to frustration and loneliness if you've maxed out your Isolation and Helplessness meters.) Imagine it this way: you only have so much "fuel" for various feelings. By the time you've reached the point of utter callousness, your emotional gas tank is used up. Nothing seems worth it because you know there will never be any real payoff—no pleasure, no sensation of success, no satisfaction in the warm congratulations of your colleagues. It's all lost its meaning. You're quite thoroughly burned out.

Such burnt-out cases can be fun to play for a while, though they're unpredictable. (Since nothing is going to make you feel anything anyway, what's to *stop* you from selling out your friends or giving up when the going gets tough?) After a while, though, you're probably going to want to head into therapy to erase those last few hardened marks.

If you decide to play a burnout in therapy, there's two ways you can do it.

The wrong way is to sit down and roll dice until you get the result you need.

The right way is to dig in to the drama of therapy sessions. Every hardened point you got was the result of a terrible trauma—now's your chance to reveal what your character felt and thought when all those hideous things were happening. (One cool way to include other players is to set up a group therapy session and have them take the roles of others who've had similar traumas. Heck, their regular characters might even want to join!) Not only is this dramatic and inter-

esting, it gives you an opportunity to relive and examine your character's past in the game—discussing things you were proud of or things you wish you'd done differently. *Then* you roll the darn dice.

## Character Interactions

Conflict is central to fiction. No one wants to read a book or see a movie about a character who never does anything—or one about a character who does everything and never has any trouble with it. It's boring and hard to identify with. (When was the last time you tried something important and everything turned out perfect?) Uncertainty, danger, and opposition are what makes a story gripping. In UA stories, conflict is generally a good thing.

But not always.

We'll give you an example with Phil's character, Cage. His rage button is people who challenge his position as neighborhood tough guy. Let's suppose that another character in the group does just that – makes some crack that puts Cage's manliness in doubt. ("Aw, I bet you still sleep with yer teddy bear.") Phil now has a choice. He can stay in character and take exception, or he can suck it up in the interests of group harmony.

If Phil decides that Cage is going to have to discipline his companion, that can provide conflict between those characters, and may make the game a lot more interesting for a long time. However, if those two players get into a rivalry (which is perfectly in character!) it may ultimately *harm* the game by taking time, attention and dramatic impact away from some other conflict that the GM was carefully constructing for the whole group.

What Phil *should* do depends on the situation. If a conflict between characters comes up in a fairly slack or relaxed part of the gaming session, it's probably okay to pursue it for a while, until the other players seem to be getting bored with watching (or trying to head off) the argument. However, if the remark was made right before the intrepid band is about to kick in a door and get the drop on a pack of cultists up to some sinister ceremony—well, that's probably not the time or place to deal with a small, character-based conflict. Doing so would steal the thunder from the immediate, big, plot-based conflict.

Bickering between player characters can be a *lot* of fun, and it can add realism, character and personality to a session. As long as you don't let it get personal between players (but you knew that, right?) and as long as you don't let it get in the way of the plot, you should be fine. For a good rule of thumb, ask yourself the following question: "Am I going to slow down the plot for everyone by taking up a personal conflict?" If the answer is yes, you may want to ignore it. (For now, at least. Imagine the game session described above, winding down. Cage and his fellow Inquisitors are spattered with blood—their own and that of the cultists. They had a hard fight, but they won, and they're a step closer to figuring out the big mystery. *Now* Cage turns to his colleague and says "So what did you mean by that 'teddy bear' comment, punk?")

The same goes with GM characters. Your character will be known by the actions he or she takes, and the most revealing actions are interactions with other people. Always make an effort to react in character. Again, Cage and Phil provide an example. The characters are walking down the street when a homeless man hits them up for change. Phil may be a real softy who gives to the downtrodden. But to Cage's street-Nietzsche philosophy, a whining bum is a pest at best.



React to GMCs in character, but remember to consider the plot before engaging in conflict that doesn't advance the plot. We're not saying you shouldn't get into arguments just for the fun of it—but you probably shouldn't do it all the time.

Not all interactions have to be conflicts, either. A lot of character development can be done in mundane settings—imagine Cage on a date. Filmmaker Quentin Tarantino is a master of this technique. The discussion of hamburgers in *Amsterdam* from *Pulp Fiction* and the conversation about tipping in *Reservoir Dogs* both establish character, and they're entertaining as hell. More importantly, they actually *support* the plot instead of impeding it, because of their timing. They establish character before the action takes place, and that makes the action more meaningful.

Maybe we can get away with revealing a GM trick here. GMs usually have a big climax figured out for each game session, and a variety of ways for the PCs to get there—usually involving lesser and different challenges. This provides a sort of rhythm to a game session. Events (meaning GM-defined conflicts) occur between periods where the player characters are making plans, figuring things out, discussing options, and plotting their next move. Event-discussion-event-planning-event-figuring things out . . . and then the big climax.

If you're in the middle of an event, it's *not* the time to start riffing on character development. Events are when your character development should be paying off. In the aftermath of events—that's the time to develop and reveal what makes your character tick.

## Investigations

A major, *major* part of most UA games will be investigating. After all, the game's about mystery and uncertainty.

The question is, how do you do it? After all, the chances are pretty slim that most gaming groups will have a cop, P.I. or investigative reporter. This is alleviated somewhat by dice mechanics, but it's going to be a pretty dull session if everyone just rolls their Solve Mystery skill until they succeed. To use an investigation skill, *you*, the player, have to maneuver the character into a situation where the skill can be applied. Like it or not, you're going to have to make decisions. So, here's a number of ways you can get information.

## Social

The simplest way to find out about something is to *ask*. Find people involved and start asking them questions. Of course, "asking questions" is a simple description of a complicated task. You have to present yourself as someone they want to talk to. If you're from an investigative TV show, you can hold out the dangly carrot of a daytime TV appearance—that'll get those nosy neighbors talking a mile a minute. If you're a well-armed thug, you can threaten to break bones. If you're a government agent (or can convincingly pose as one), you can do the same thing, or threaten them with a subpoena, or appeal to patriotism. Another surprisingly effective tactic is to simply be friendly and curious—it's surprising what people will let slip.

But what if you're investigating something that happened a long time ago? Then it's time to hit the library and city hall. Historical events are surrounded by documents and papers. Property transfers and blueprints are on file, as are requests for building per-

mits and tax information for some big corporations. Don't forget newspaper archives, either. More and more, these are being cross-indexed on computer to make searches easier. It's also possible to hire a service to scan newspapers for you and clip copies of articles on subjects of interest to you. (For example, "Send me every article that mentions Daphnee Lee or Dirk Allen.")

Then there's the wonderful world of computers. If you're a hacker (or can hire one—no, scratch that, if you can *find* and hire a *real* one) there's a tremendous amount of information available. Credit records, psychographic profiles (constructed by credit-card companies based on your purchases in order to target-market you to catalogue companies), even medical records can be ferreted out by a clever computer abuser.

## Physical

It's increasingly hard to do anything significant without leaving detectable evidence. Fingerprints are on everything. Microscopic skin flakes on clothing or under fingernails can be identified by DNA. You can't get money without leaving a paper trail. Heck, half the time you can't *spend* it without getting a receipt of some sort.

One way to get information on a person or action is to go to the scene and look for physical data. Heard there was a demon-summoning ritual out in the woods? Hey, maybe you could *go out in the woods!* That might turn something up. (Don't go at night.)

Surveillance is an option for characters who don't mind sitting in cars, peeing in bottles, and being really bored. (Lucky for you that this is a game—you can fast-forward right to the good parts.) This can let you see who comes and goes, and where they go when they leave (assuming they don't spot your tail and shake you in an exciting car chase). That's without using shotgun microphones to listen in (a good shotgun mike can pick up the sound of a gentle fart from across a football field), telephoto lenses to look through windows, thermal imaging gear to look through walls . . . the mind boggles. Be warned, however: an increasing number of states are passing "stalker laws" that make it illegal to keep someone under surveillance.

Then there's the hallowed tradition of "garbology"—stealing the trash of your surveillance target and going through it piece by piece looking for receipts, letters, addresses on matchbooks, and so on. You never know what you'll find under those used condoms and discarded pizza boxes.

Then there's the final step: breaking and entering. This is illegal, natch, and can be tricky if your target has the money for alarms, big dogs, and armed response goons, to say nothing of metaphysical protection. On the other hand, once you're in—well, that's where all the goodies are kept. A man who stole Alex Abel's day planner would have a resource of nigh-unlimited potential.

## Metaphysical

Hey, what's the point of spending your life pursuing esoteric mystical wisdom if you can't use it to dope out people who tick you off? A few schools of magick may just up and let you have visions, which can be used to spy on the past, present, or even potential futures. Others focus on coincidence and let you simply be in the right place to learn what you need to know. And if all that fails, you can take the big risk and have a chat with a restless dead soul.





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## Putting it Together

Now you've got a few ideas on how to go about getting clues. More will probably present themselves in the course of play. It's up to you, however, to interpret the clues you get. A real wimpy GM might let you make Mind checks to put it all together, but that's *really* the easy way out. Every bit of information you gather makes the puzzle a little easier—but it's you, the player, who has to assemble the pieces. No roll should let you do that. (If you're really stumped, you might squeeze a clue out of the GM by begging for a Mind check. On the other hand, your GM might take the Raymond Chandler way out and have a gang of goons break down the door, guns blazing. Once you've subdued them, they provide more clues, since you *must* be getting close . . .)

## The Claws of the Tiger

Imagine you and three of your worst enemies are in a room together, and your enemies all hate each other, too. Pretty scary and chaotic, huh? Now imagine that there's a sleeping tiger on the floor between the four of you, and you can't leave the room.

Pretty quiet? Not one bit less tense, though.

That's the situation for the occult underground. There's all kinds of groups out there, ranging from big and powerful to small and misled. Or big and clueless, or small and powerful. The weak ones want what the strong ones have. The strong ones aren't big on sharing. The small ones want to be big, and the big ones want to be unobserved. Almost every group has a reason to

think the other groups are evil, deluded, dangerous, envious, or simply annoying.

Then there's the tiger, snoozing on the floor. Every once in a while, its nostrils flare, scenting fresh meat. Sometimes it yawns, revealing a set of death-chisel teeth that any carnivore would be proud of.

The tiger is the clueless general public. Right now, the public hears about magick and thinks of David Copperfield. But if anyone gets too careless, the tiger is going to wake up, and all the occult groups put together couldn't stop the public from making them all into tiger snacks.

That's how it's been for a long time. People had beefs, but things were settled quietly and, more often than not, without lethal intensity. (The cops are the teeth of the tiger.) Every occult group disagrees with the others, but they all have common cause against public awareness.

Enter Alex Abel, with a ton of money and a box of firecrackers. The possibility of the tiger awakening is now dramatically increased.

Some people want Abel put down like a mad dog in the street—but who's got the balls to do it?

Others are putting on their running shoes, figuring that when the tiger wakes, they don't have to outrun the tiger—they just have to outrun the slowest occult group.

Still others are figuring out how to put their enemies in the tiger's jaws—or in front of Alex Abel—while staying safe themselves. It'll be tricky, but the potential payoff is huge.

Enter your characters. They're going to have to deal with all these paranoid power groups—not to mention the tiger itself. You'll need to pick your allies carefully.



## Making Allies

There are two ways to judge which group(s) you want to work with. One is common interest. The other is common sense.

If you judge alliances by common interest, you'll wind up fighting on the side of like-minded people. This has the advantage that you'll probably trust each other because you believe in the same things and have the same goals. Backstabbing is marginally less likely among those who see eye-to-eye.

On the other hand, you may want to choose alliances based solely on what you can get out of it. It's like what President Lyndon Johnson said about working with J. Edgar Hoover: "I'd rather have him inside the tent pissing out than outside the tent pissing in." Sure, you may wind up fighting alongside whacked-out psychopaths; but frankly, whacked-out psychopaths can be pretty good in a fight.

Once you've decided which alliance you *want* to make, there's still the matter of making it. What do you have to offer them? How are *they* making their alliances?

Many people in the occult underground are stone paranoid freaks; however, this does not mean they can't be dealt with. It just means you have to play to their fears and delusions. After all, lots of sorcerers are pretty deficient in the social-skills department. While you and I were practicing for job interviews and making small talk at keggers, they were in the basement reading dusty tomes of lore and sacrificing chickens. So a general rule of thumb is: Paranoid? Probably. Sophisticated? Not necessarily.

(Incidentally, this is part of the reason Alex Abel has become so threatening so quickly. While the adepts out there look down

their noses at him because he has no "mystic wisdom," they ignore his ability to build coalitions, make plans, organize people into coherent groups, and *get things done*. A lot of the people who think Alex Abel is "no threat" are living in slums on incomes around \$10,000 a year. Sure, they can pierce the walls of cosmic illusion, but they still have to scramble to get their rent checks paid.)

## Losing Allies

A final thing to consider is the eternal issue of *betrayal*. At some point, you may decide that your allies are costing you more than you're getting. You may decide to terminate your association. This may be easier said than done, however; divorces in the occult underground are even messier than usual. One possibility for a breakup is to convince them that you no longer have any value to them. Goof up a few missions and they'll be anxious to get rid of you. Just make sure you don't try this tactic when they could get some concession (even goodwill) from a group of your enemies if they Judas you.

Another separation option is to screw them over. This can have a nice payoff, but it's not something to do lightly. If you decide to betray an ally, make sure you do it thoroughly. If you hurt them, they'll be vengeful—but if you cripple them, it doesn't matter how mad they get.

Hm, is that everything? You'll probably die without allies . . . you'll get new enemies no matter who you ally with . . . your allies will always see you as a tool for their own gain and you should return the favor . . . someone who betrayed others for you is more likely to betray you for others . . . oh yeah, one more thing.

Have fun!



FELIPE ECHEGARRIA

▲ 50

3/19 - APPARENTLY 'THE SORCERIST' WAS ORIGINALLY FILMED IN GERMANY BY GUNTER LORENZ, WHO WAS SOME KIND OF FLIPPED-OUT "ART-HOUSE" PORNOGRAPHER (C.F. "CAFE FIESH" AND "DR. CALIGARI"). AMERICAN DISTRIBUTORS FOUND THE ORIGINAL (WHICH WAS TITLED SOMETHING LIKE "THE TEMPTATION OF FATHER L." ONLY IN GERMAN) TOO WEIRD OR CREEPY, SO THEY HIRED HER TO SHOOT SOME MORE SCENES AND PATCHED IT ALL TOGETHER. I'M LOOKING FOR THE ORIGINAL GERMAN VERSION, BUT NO LUCK. THIS COULD BE IMPORTANT: IT MIGHT BE THE FIRST FILM (HOWEVER "DILUTED AND COMMERCIALIZED") TO THE OCCULT INTER WORK.

Bridal Whorehouse—Winner of the Golden Stallion award for best adult film of 1994! Wick Diepper and Earnest Johnson both appear in this star vehicle for. Directed by German genius Gunter Lorenz, and with music by Danny Krak! Pagan Video, \$44.95.



4/1 - APRIL FOOL'S FOR ME, DAMNIT! WHERE'S HER NAME? DID IT JUST GET SUCKED OUT OF THE TEXT WHEN SHE ASCENDED? I TRIED TO ORDER IT AND THEY WERE ALL OUT. I'VE GOT TO BE ON THE RIGHT TRACK.

4/16 - I DON'T BELIEVE IT. I CALLED TO SEE IF THEY HAD A NEW VERSION READY, AND THEY SAID, "OH, THE NAKED GODDESS EDITION?"

4/19 - NO NAME. NO NAME. IT SAYS "THE NAKED GODDESS" RIGHT ON THE COVER, AND THE CREDITS WERE READY TO PUT HER TITLE IN PLACE OF HER NAME. HOW HIGH DOES THIS GO? HOW MUCH POWER DO P.L. AND HER COLLEAGUES HAVE TO BEND REALITY TO THEIR WILL?

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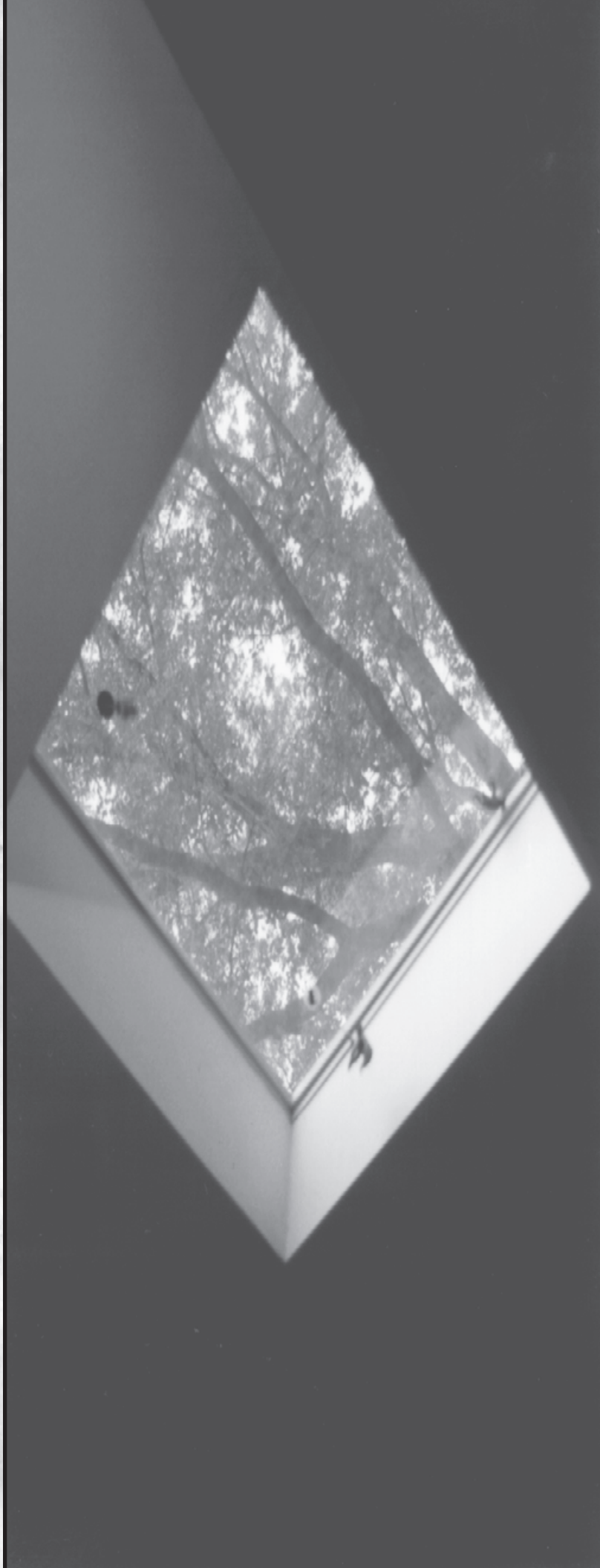
*chapter nine*  
*campaign creation*

**UNKNOWN  
ARMIES**



"TO DIE FOR AN IDEA IS TO SET  
A RATHER HIGH PRICE ON CONJECTURE."  
—ANATOLE FRANCE

"GOD HAS A PLAN.  
ME, I'M MAKING IT UP AS I GO ALONG."  
—FATHER JOSE CARILLO



**More than any other** kind of game, roleplaying games give you flexibility: you play the way you *want* to play. This is a tremendous advantage (since you can tailor what you're doing to your players, tastes, and schedule) but it does require just a bit of forethought. This chapter covers the major elements of an *Unknown Armies* campaign, giving you clear guidelines on how to apply that forethought and make your game run smoothly.

## Campaign Types

To start with, what kind of campaign are you running? Will it be a single session, an occasional series, or a long-term story?

### One-Shot

The easiest type is probably the one-shot. This means your players are going to design characters for one session, run through it, and be done. It's the disposable story, best for shocker-ending plots, stories that require player characters who *aren't* much fun for long-term play (co-designer John Tynes once wrote a one-shot for a different game where the characters were all escaped psychopaths), or stories where there's a real good chance of everyone croaking at the end.

One-shots are good because they're quick, easy, and disposable. If you're running a one-shot, you're much more justified in just handing the players a narrative structure, or even generating the characters yourself. (This is how it's usually done at game conventions when there isn't time for everyone to lovingly detail a character.) Since the players are only going to "be" these people for a night, they don't have to get too deep into character.

The limitation of one-shots is that they're short and you *don't* have a chance to develop the characters—which is, after all, the prime focus of this game. Other types of campaigns take more effort, but are consequently more rewarding as well.

### Picaresque

The standard roleplaying game is picaresque (or serial) in structure: story arcs with a beginning, climax, and resolution get played out in order. Each builds on the other, the way *The Empire Strikes Back* built on the characters and situations of *Star Wars*. In this standard structure, the players generate characters, and the GM throws plot hooks at them until they bite on one. Then the GM develops that plot until the characters reach some kind of culmination and *denouement*. After that, the process begins again until everyone agrees to call it off.

### Goal-Oriented

A more focused variant of this structure is a goal-oriented campaign. In this, the players pick a narrative structure with a group goal. This can be simple ("We're goons from Alex Abel and we've been told to assassinate Randy Douglas.") or more complicated ("We're cultists and we're going to take over the world. That's right; the whole world." "One of us is going to ascend to the Invisible Clergy as the representative of some peaceful and positive aspect of human nature.")

On the one hand, this player-defined goal is easier because you don't have to motivate the players. Furthermore, plot becomes easier, too; instead of pitching plotlines to them, you just have to react to the actions they initiate.

On the other hand, this is harder because you can't prepare nearly as much. You have to be able to roll with the punches and come up with plot structure on the fly. In other words, you have to make it up as you go along and keep it internally consistent. The way to do this—the *essential* thing to do—is make sure you know what general action the characters are planning to do next. Take your world-conquering cultists; just how do they plan to do it? By seducing and brainwashing world leaders? Robbing banks until they can fund a private army? Hypnotizing the TV-narcotized mob with demagogic appeals to their most venal urges? All are good approaches, but once you know *which* they're going to do, you can concentrate on that without worrying about the others. If they aren't sure how they're going to do it, you can come up with stories to motivate them, either by holding out a carrot ("Word on the street is this guy named Kenneth Hite in Chicago has a fairly complete list of the historical persons who've ascended to the Clergy.") or pulling out the stick ("The door bursts open, revealing four guys in raincoats, surgical masks, and rubber gloves. They've all got guns. What are you doing?").

These kinds of campaigns also tend to get easier as they go along, since you can simply sit back and vibe off the repercussions of the last thing the characters did. ("Hm . . . Cage did take damage going over that barbed-wire fence while scouting out the True Order of Saint-Germain compound in Idaho. If he bled inside the building, they might try to get a corrupt cop to identify him by DNA typing. Or, hey, what if the *sheriff* is a member of the Order?") It's important for the players to keep their eyes on the prize and always, *always* give you some kind of warning about what they're planning so you can brace yourself. It's important for you to try to distract them, and to slow them down with plenty of red herrings, emotional entanglements, and vengeful GMCs that they would have sworn were dead . . .

## Play Styles

Because it's built around character, UA is designed to be flexible and support a lot of different styles of play. Want to run a creepy, edgy, surreal game in the style of *Twin Peaks* or *Jacob's Ladder*? We can do that. Want something like "John Woo directs *The Exorcist*?" ("Okay, as her head spins around, spewing soup in slow motion, Chow Yun-Fat jumps through the puke with a gun in each hand and shoots her eight times in the chest!") That can be handled as well. You can even run a sort of "yo-yo" campaign where moments of stark terror are interlaced with moments of humor. (If you do this wrong, the horror and the jokes grate on each other and each gets lessened. If you do it right, the contrast makes the humor hysterical—and the fear equally hysterical.)

The style of play you use is up to you, and like most matters of style it can be hard to define. *Film noir* has been around for decades, and the heavy-duty critics still haven't been able to pin down just what it is. The Supreme Court still hasn't found a universal litmus test for pornography, either. This means (unfortunately) that we can't give you checklists for different styles. "For surrealism, use rules A, D, and F. For gritty, *noir*-style play, use rules A, C, and G." There's no recipe.

However, it's far from hopeless. You may not be able to *explain* the style you want—but you know it when you see it, right? You can't explain it, but you can demonstrate it.

Before you start your campaign, decide on a style: a feeling and a mood. Keep this mood in mind at all times while running the game.

## A Time for Everything

Alfred Hitchcock once said that if you have interesting characters, you don't need to plan out a plot—one simply suggests itself. With that in mind, you probably shouldn't plan out too much before your players create their characters. Otherwise, you may wind up trying to shoehorn characters into inappropriate stories. For example, suppose you're a big fan of the old TV series *Kolchack: The Night Stalker*. You think it would be way cool to run a campaign based around a few reporters and photographers who are on the "Grisly Crime" beat for a tabloid paper. You've suggested it to your three players, and they all sounded happy with it. You've already got a title for the campaign in your head ("Enquiring Minds Want To Know")—but then when the players show up for the first session, one of them brought his girlfriend along, and she says "You know what would be a *really* fun group? If we were all one big inbred, creepy family that follows some weird religion!"

To your dismay, all the other players get maniacal gleams in their eyes. "Yeah, I want to be the guy who was raised by wolves!" "Oooh! Oooh! I dibs the inbred mutant freak!" "Does anyone mind if I'm the psychotic patriarch who leads the religious ceremonies?"

This is the time of decision. The moment that separates the good GM from the bad one (meaning, the campaign that survives from the one that dries up and blows away). What do you do?

Say: "No, you're reporters on a grisly crime beat and the game is called 'Enquiring Minds Want To Know.' You're going to need at least one reporter and one photographer . . ."

Say: "Cool! We can call it 'Banjo Music Aversion Therapy!' Anyone want to rent *Deliverance* this weekend? Or is this more a *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*?"

If you're the smart GM, you picked option 2. Sure, they just tanked your plans; but if you'd tried to force them to play the setup *you* want, then you'd be tanking *their* plans. Players hate that; as the GM, you already have a staggering amount of power to influence the game (far beyond what any individual player can do) and it behooves you to use that power to give the players the game that *they* want to play.

You may be disappointed that you didn't get your *Kolchack* game; but keep an open mind. Players who are pumped up and enthusiastic are going to make your job a *lot* easier—and why should they be the only ones to enjoy the thrill of an unexpected plot twist?

It's more important than remembering exactly how many charges this spell costs or how armor-piercing rounds do damage. It's hard to explain because it's all right-brain, intuitive, and ephemeral, but if you concentrate on the *feeling* you want to recreate, you'll be much more able to do so. Read a book that scares you. You're likely to pick up some pointers about pacing and description and themes, but focus on the emotional response. If you can keep that gut-wrenching sensation intact while you're running your game, that emotional engagement will do more to help you communicate horror (or excitement, or thrills) to your players than all the rules and professional advice we can give you. (Though of course, those help too.)

Yes, we're actually encouraging you to "get in touch with your feelings," but sappy as it sounds, it works. Getting scared, and then figuring out *why* you're scared and brainstorming how to use that on your players, really is the best way to scare the hell out of people.

## Narrative Structures

A narrative structure explains why the characters are working together and what their common goals are. By helping to define the group, it also helps to define the relationships the group has with other characters and groups they'll meet in the course of play.

Five narrative structures are described here. The narrative structure might be chosen by the GM, or it might be chosen by mutual consent of the players. You're welcome to define your own narrative structures. If so, we recommend that you write them up in the same format as those presented here so it's clear to all the players.

### The New Inquisition

**Quote:** "Break into Castle Neuschwanstein, find the secret caverns beneath the sub-basement, get past the undead guardians,

solve the Riddle of the Three Mirrors, bypass the death traps, retrieve the Spear of Longinus, get out, avoid the freelance enforcers waiting at the hotel, bluff the Sect of the Sixteenth Kingdom into thinking the skinheads got the spear before we got there, and bring it back before the solstice? No problem. But I'll need some more plastique."

**Summary:** Like an occult version of the French Foreign Legion—or the KGB, if you prefer—only it's a private organization funded by an eccentric billionaire.

**Goals:** Your group follows its orders—going on assignments to investigate, infiltrate, disrupt, or assassinate depending on what you've been told to accomplish.

**Good Things:** Plentiful resources (you've got the money, the tools, and the talent to get the job done); simple plot hooks (you're told what to do); travel, excitement, a fat paycheck, and if you're on the run they'll erase your old identity and give you a new one.

**Bad Things:** You're rubbing shoulders with a lot of dubious hard-cases: ex-mobsters, ex-spies, ex-drug dealers, even some ex-journalists. (The New Inquisition hires a lot of scum.) You're very expendable and very replaceable. You may have to do terrible, violent things. The leader of the New Inquisition, Alex Abel, doesn't always tell you everything you need to know before a mission. And what is he really after, anyway?

### Magick Cabal

**Quote:** "We follow the Way. Join us, and pierce the veil of cosmic mystery. Cross us, and experience the pain of my foot in your ass."



**Summary:** CNN would call you a cult. (Maybe they have.) You're all following a similar belief system, getting deeper and deeper into the occult underground. Your belief system might be very specific and intricate (you're all followers of Aleister Crowley/Kenneth Grant's teachings) or it might be pretty generalized (you're all after personal enlightenment and inner peace). Whatever your beliefs, you're certain that magick is the way to actualize them.

**Goals:** Varies depending on the focus of your cabal, but in general you're trying to do what any small religious group does: improve yourselves, gain power, be true to your beliefs, oppose your enemies, and recruit new followers. (Your specifics and priorities might vary.)

**Good Things:** Devotion brings clarity. You know where you stand and who stands with you. You're loyal to each other. You've got clear goals, and they aren't dictated by someone else—you've chosen to be here.

**Bad Things:** People assume the worst about your group—that you brainwash people, that you just want free sex, that you just want free money, that you're all going to commit suicide, that you're all going to commit murder. (Maybe they're right?) You have a hard time being taken seriously by non-occultists. You have a hard time being taken seriously by occultists who really know the score and who assume you're another bunch of crystal-waving tree-huggers. (Maybe *they're* right?) There are tens of thousands of magick cabals across the world, and most of them think you're wrong and are out to prove it. Also, internal politics and in-fighting could weaken your cabal.

## Circle of Friends

**Quote:** "Damn it, Howard, I *told* you not to go to that ritual in the park with those OTO freaks. Dave's still got an astral parasite stuck on him from your *last* ritual and Lana and Ted won't be off work from the Quik-E-Mart for another six hours to help get him clear. You saw God? Howard, we've got more important things to worry about!"



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**Summary:** No formalities here—you're just a handful of friends. Odds are good that only a couple of you are really into the occult underground at first, but the rest of you will get pulled along when your friends start needing your help.

**Goals:** You each have your own personal goals, but as a group, you're just concerned with hanging onto the ride of life and taking care of the people who mean the most to you—your circle of friends is the most important thing in your world. At some point, you might choose to formalize your association in some way, perhaps becoming a magick cabal or a bunch of reality cops.

**Good Things:** Friends are there for each other—you're all going to stick together come hell or high water. You know each other well and trust each other completely.

**Bad Things:** Sometimes friends piss each other off, or worse. You probably don't have the range of skills and experiences that formalized groups do. No one is going to take you seriously. Since you all probably live real lives outside of the occult underground, you're more vulnerable to those who would hurt you.

## Reality Cops

**Quote:** "I just heard that Basil is back in town. If he's still up to his old tricks, odds are good that he'll have a half-dozen teenage Satanists living in his basement inside of a week who all think he's the antichrist and his word is law. We've gotta run that bastard out of town, and fast, before he hurts more kids."



**Summary:** You just can't help but get involved in situations where you think you can do some good. You've formed a pact to work for some particular cause, and whenever one of you stumbles onto something that relates to your pact, you call everyone else in to help out on an *ad hoc* basis. In other situations, you might have been a pro-environmental group or a political action committee or served on the local PTA or city council; but you know enough about the occult underground to know that reality needs your help in ways that most people don't understand. You're freelance do-gooders with a taste for the weird.

**Goals:** You've got some sort of an agenda, probably along the lines of "help people in trouble," or "stop psychos from screwing up the world," or "destroy all monsters." You've got your group view of the way things ought to be—reality—and you're dedicated to enforcing it.

**Good Things:** Your motivation is clear—protect your view of the way reality should be. You know that the occult underground can mean trouble for the world at large, and it's also a bit short on heroes. Since you've got a definite agenda, plot hooks are pretty simple.

**Bad Things:** You're a bunch of dilettantes and meddlers without a real power base. You're idealistic and could be manipulated by those more cynical than you. Since you aren't after power (the way most people are), you may not have what it takes to survive when you tick off the wrong people.

## Occult Investigators

**Quote:** "Matthias! I found it! We were right. There *was* a secret chamber in Abel's study. I bet the Naked Goddess tape is here. Hand me that flashlight! Matthias? Matthias! *Glurk—*"

**Summary:** The world is a dark and scary place, full of bad mojo and things that go bump in the night. Your group is trying to figure out just what the heck is going on in this so-called "occult underground" and whether it's dangerous to the world at large. You might be a secret government task force, you might be the staff of a paranormal-investigation television show or magazine, or you might just be a bunch of would-be Van Helsing's out to stop the Draculas of the modern world.

**Goals:** Find out as much as you can about the occult underground. When you find something ugly going on, expose it or stop it or both. Don't get killed. Don't turn to the dark side, whatever that is.

**Good Things:** Your curiosity is a good reason to get involved in things. You expect the worst, and are pragmatic about the threats you face so you're well-prepared. You aren't likely to get suckered.

**Bad Things:** You don't know what's really going on with the occult underground. Your actions might backfire and get you in trouble with the authorities. When you gaze into the abyss, the abyss gazes into you; when you battle monsters, you can become a monster.

## Themes

Styles of play are fuzzy, abstract notions, and most often you can express a style of play just by naming a couple of movies or books

that feel right, somehow. Themes are more specific. These are sort of directed elements in a play-style, but whereas any given scene might be readily recognizable to players as being part of your style of play—a shootout in a darkened, ramshackle house with blood-stained walls, a comical car chase through a shopping mall—themes are not so easily observed in individual moments and scenes. They are likely to remain inscrutable until the story or campaign is well-advanced; then, stepping free of the trees, the players can at last see the forest.

(Themes are primarily useful in ongoing campaigns, rather than one-shot stories. We'll assume you're building a campaign for the rest of this section. You can still use themes in one-shot stories, but they'll be considerably abbreviated and simplified than in the examples that follow.)

When you are creating your campaign, try to choose a major theme, and then a couple of minor ones as well. Themes can be positive as well as negative. Typical themes in UA might include:

- **Alienation.** In large civilizations, it is not uncommon to somehow feel apart from everyone else—the old sensation of feeling alone in the middle of a crowd. It goes beyond simple melancholy, however. A sense of alienation can be omnipresent, extending into every area of daily life. Sitting behind your desk, the chatter of your co-workers sounds filtered, as if you are observing from behind a two-way mirror. Perhaps you and your allies feel alienated as a group; no one understands you, and the normal world persecutes you.
- **Caring.** Nothing matters so much as goodwill to our fellow humans. No matter the consequences, no matter what comes, always care for those around you, and for yourself. Offer support to those in grief. Do your best to understand the people that you meet. Love thy enemy.
- **Decay.** The world is falling apart. Buildings crumble. Even the newest, shiniest skyscraper exudes the stench of corruption and payoffs. A compromised architect's broken dreams and the soundless screams of a thousand office-workers contemplating suicide merge into a canvas of sorrow. Governments are a sham. Laws are so burdensome that everyone is a criminal. Hatred and intolerance spill into the streets. The rich get richer and more debased. The poor get poorer and more desperate. The environment is deteriorating. Food supplies are dwindling. The lights are going out.
- **Heroism.** One person can still make a difference. It's not just the movie action hero who stops the bomb and blows away the terrorist; each of us, in our daily life, can embrace heroism and do our part to make the world a better place. Challenge lies. Fight oppression. Reward initiative. Be a hero to those around you, until we live in a world full of heroes.
- **Perversion.** Our cherished ideals are undermined by base human perversions, primal motivations that we are powerless to control. Sadistic violence, rape, child molestation, emotional abuse—once we could pretend that such behaviors were aberrations from the norm. The truth is that the only thing preventing each of us from embracing perverse evil is that we're too timid or too lazy.
- **Transcendence.** There is a larger world than that which we see every day, and we should aspire towards that larger world. Belief in more than we can see in everyday life is critical to the progress of humanity. Whether it's through Catholicism, Bud-



dhism, meditation, the Invisible Clergy, or the power of positive thinking, it is critical for each of us to seek a higher power and a higher purpose, to accept that concrete and bricks do not a cosmos make.

In your campaign, your major theme should be reflected not just in your plotlines, but in your characters. In fact, it's not a bad idea to choose a single character or group who represents the major theme. It might be the PCs. It might be someone else. Regardless, you should do your best to filter the actions of that character or group through the major theme you've chosen.

Minor themes, on the other hand, should not be so simple. Minor themes should turn up in a variety of places, from a variety of sources. A throwaway GMC is as likely to represent a minor theme as anyone else. Minor themes should give contrast and context to the major theme.

## Practical Thematics

That's all pretty fancy, but how do you use it? It's important that this not be fuzzy; you should have a firm grasp on the themes of your campaign because they will add strength and color to everything that happens by unifying the many disparate threads of play. Let's take a look at several examples for both major and minor themes and see if we can explain this better.

### Major Theme Examples

Here are two examples of major themes. Both examples will focus on Alex Abel and his New Inquisition as the primary representative of our major theme, but in each case the theme will be different. Pay attention to how greatly the same set of characters (Abel and the TNI) can be altered simply by applying a different theme.

#### Alienation

For our first example, let's choose the theme of *alienation*. (You might well make up one on your own, but let's just stick with one we've already explained for this example.) You've got a good idea of what "alienation" means, and you believe it'll work well in the campaign you have in mind. But how to apply it? You know that Abel and the TNI will be the principal opponents for the PCs, and will represent alienation. You'll use this theme in two ways, internal and external.

**Internal:** This governs how Abel and his representatives see themselves. In our example, Abel's sense of alienation means that he feels cut off from normal people, and he instills this notion in his recruits. As you set up your campaign and the GMCs who populate it, you should avoid giving Abel's crew families and friends. Abel will cut them off from such people. Moreover, he may choose to house them in some sort of compound away from populated areas, so that they have minimal interaction with ordinary people in their daily lives. Abel himself might live in some sort of heavily-fortified mansion or even a bunker. Abel's crew will not trust anyone they come in contact with who isn't part of the New Inquisition, and neither will Abel; any alliances they make will be temporary and exploitive, or even out-and-out deceptive.

**External:** This governs how Abel and his representatives deal with the PCs directly. We already know they aren't going to be trust-

worthy, since the Inquisitors see the world from an "us vs. them" perspective. But when they begin mixing it up with the PCs, how will the theme be expressed? Look again at the description of the theme we presented earlier. Abel will want the PCs to feel this way, to feel this alienation, since from his perspective it's a way to weaken the PCs. This means, for example, that his agents will work to turn others against the PCs. They might plant clues for the police to follow up on, they might spread rumors to other cabals that the PCs are dangerous, they might harass or somehow drive away the PCs' family and friends, and so on. Their goal will be to induce and amplify a sense of alienation in the PCs, making them alone and friendless and therefore weak. The irony, of course, is that Abel does not see how he himself suffers from the same weakness.

#### Caring

This time around, we'll use the theme of *caring*. In this example, Abel and TNI will not be the opponents, but rather will include the PCs themselves; the players will take the roles of Inquisitors in the TNI.

**Internal:** Among themselves, Inquisitors can express the theme of caring in a basic way—never leave a man behind. No matter what, you don't abandon your buddies. If one of them is in trouble, you'll move heaven and earth to help her out. What about Alex Abel? He's still hungry for power, but it's because he cares—he cares too much, in fact. He spends his night sleepless, sweating with worry over every life on earth and living in fear of those who would ascend to the Invisible Clergy as negative archetypes. Abel desperately wants to join the Clergy, to represent the best that humanity has to offer, and as his representatives, you're desperate to do anything you can to help him succeed for the good of the planet. The danger, of course, is that that very desperation may be self-defeating; if you are willing to do anything—*anything*—to save the world, have you really saved it?

**External:** Abel (and the PCs) will pursue legitimate alliances, but there is a larger agenda. Those who genuinely agree with Abel are welcome, valued allies, but Abel will always be wary—are they deceiving him? Can they really be trusted? The PCs will be caught between a desire to trust their allies and an inborn need to watch them closely in case of corruption. Likewise, allies will be seen as tools, used to ferret out others who are aspiring to join the Clergy as a negative archetype. If one of these individuals is discovered, allies be damned—Abel and the PCs will sacrifice them readily if it means stopping the ascension and the resulting karmic darkness that will result.

### Major Theme Reversals

Now that we've spelled out two examples of major themes, one with the TNI as an enemy and one with it as the home team, let's revisit them. Reverse the situations.

Go back and look at the alienation example, but this time assume that the TNI is the PCs' home team. Now they're on the inside of alienation. You'd express this by having others persecute them and betray them at every turn, every game session bringing further evidence that Abel's sense of alienation is justified—you really *can't* trust anyone, it really *is* us against the world.

Now take another look at the caring example, and this time put the TNI in the role of villains. Abel is so desperate to help, to



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care, that he's willing to make terrible sacrifices for the sake of a greater good. He's like a flawed saint, gone too far, who now has to be stopped.

Two GMs can take the world of UA, each slap a different major theme on it, spin them around, and end up with radically different campaigns—*without* major alterations to the source material. (You can even take the same theme, apply it in two different ways, and still come out with radically different campaigns.) The core information on Abel and the TNI didn't really change in the above examples; applying the themes just colored that information in different ways.

## Minor Theme Examples

Minor themes are different from major themes. They work on a smaller scale, and tend to be more improvisational. Minor themes work best when you explore them through throwaway GMCs and minor situations, but the fact that they recur gives them power and also helps to add more color and strength to your campaign. For our examples, we'll take a simple situation and filter it through two different minor themes.

### The Bar Interrogation

The PCs have entered a bar to find some throwaway GMC named Ricketts Jackson and shake him down for information. The guy is a low-grade sleazeball, a bagman for the local mob and a dabbler in the occult. He knows where to find Jimmy the Squid, another sleazeball. Ricketts isn't a dangerous man; he's just another loser making his unsteady, ill-advised way in the world. He doesn't really

want to tell the PCs where Jimmy the Squid is, but he's not that fired up about it.

**Decay:** Ricketts will spill the beans, but only if the PCs will do him a favor. There's a tough-looking guy in the bar who, Ricketts says, is just waiting for him to leave so he can jump Ricketts in the alley. If the PCs can get this guy to leave—any way they can—Ricketts will tell them where Jimmy the Squid is. Mayhem ensues. The tough-looking guy turns out to be a corrupt undercover cop here to shake Ricketts down for his weekly payoff of cocaine. The cop is drunk and high and will whip out his gun at the slightest provocation, but if he can help it he won't reveal that he's a cop while in the bar.

**Transcendence:** Ricketts is resisting interrogation and being noisy about it. Another patron walks up. He's a handsome but streetwise-looking man in his early thirties. He attempts to intervene in the situation and get the PCs to leave poor Ricketts alone. The man is a lifelong resident of this seedy neighborhood, a reformed drug dealer, and a volunteer at the local homeless shelter where Ricketts crashes three nights a week. He's spent months getting to know Ricketts, trying to help him out of his miserable life and walk a higher road. He's a good guy, not preachy and not superior—just a regular joe whose eyes were opened. If the PCs can convince him that it's for the best if they find out where Jimmy the Squid is, the guy will persuade Ricketts to tell them. Ricketts will then cooperate, having been reminded by his friend that there are higher issues at stake than gangland loyalty.

## Working with Themes

Once you've chosen the major and minor themes of your campaign, write them down along with how you would describe each one. Then under the major theme, make notes as to which characters or groups will represent that theme. For the minor themes, you might want to pick a couple of minor characters who can represent them, or else just make up a couple of simple GMCs on the spot that fit the minor themes. You may not even end up using those GMCs, but having a couple of concrete examples will help you improvise the use of your minor themes during play.

## Plotlines

The bulk of the GM's job is building plotlines. These can be long or short, complex or simple, serious or trivial. That's up to you. What all plots have in common are **hooks**, **rising action**, a **climax**, and **repercussions**.

## Hooks

The hook is what gets the characters interested in the first place. A beautiful woman slinks into a detective's office and asks him to find her missing sister. A young artist hears strange music, accompanied by cries that might be laughter or might be screams, from the room above her apartment. A professor inherits a dusty old manuscript written in a language he doesn't understand.

A good hook gets the players interested; it makes them *want to know*. That's not to say that every character will bite on every hook. The detective might say, "Didja look under the bed?" The professor might decide to concentrate on getting a government grant instead. You have to try to hook your players in, but also be

prepared for them to ignore a hook or respond to it in a less-than-obvious way. (“Sure father, I’ll join the dark side!”)

There are three main ways to put interest into a hook. The two easiest are the carrot of self-interest and the stick of self-preservation. If the detective thinks the beautiful woman will pay him handsomely (or hop in the sack with him) if he finds her sister, then he’s motivated—that’s self-interest. If the professor learns that the manuscript’s last owner was strangled, and that a tall, thin man with one blue eye was asking the executor of the will what happened to it, he may start to feel a little jumpy—that’s self-preservation. The third way to make a hook interesting is to just make it so bizarre that the player (or character) is driven to find out more by curiosity. (For example, the young artist knocks on the upstairs neighbor’s door, and it’s answered by a man who looks *exactly* like Elvis—the young, virile Elvis.)

## Rising Action

Rising action is what happens next. Just as a hook captures the player’s interest, the rising action feeds and increases it. Now, just as you could hook someone with threats, promises, or interest, you can *keep* them hooked with any combination of the three. (This is an excellent, *excellent* place to use passions.) It also may be a good idea to change motivations every so often. The professor tracks down a linguist, who tells him the book is about attaining immortality (threat switches to promise). The detective discovers his beautiful client took out a big life-insurance policy on her sister—she now becomes the prime suspect (promise switches to interest). The young artist’s neighbor “El” is seen hauling a mysterious, corpse-sized bundle down the stairs late at night (interest switches to threat).

One function of rising action is to change the character’s certainty level, by either giving her more clues or more questions. The young artist follows “El” and finds out he’s the lead singer for a band called “Elvis Alienation” which plays industrial/ambient covers of Elvis Presley songs. This explains the weird sounds coming from his apartment; she’s had a question answered. The professor is attacked by two men with pierced upper lips, and is only saved by the Man With One Blue Eye; now he’s wondering who the two goons were, and about the guy who saved him. The detective discovers the sister’s dead body, and an eyewitness says that it was a dumped by a skinny guy in a stocking cap; now one question’s been answered (“What happened to the sister?”) but another has arisen (“Whodunnit?”).

Every story needs some rising action, but how much depends on your taste and the needs of the story. If you want, you can have comparatively little rising action, which makes for a quicker and simpler plotline. If you include a great deal of rising action, it makes for a longer and more complicated plotline; lots of questions get raised, and answered, but they only lead to more questions. If handled correctly, this can continually ratchet up the emotional intensity, making the eventual payoff significantly greater. However, be careful not to try to drag out a plot too long. Your players will get bored or frustrated if they feel like they haven’t been making any progress.

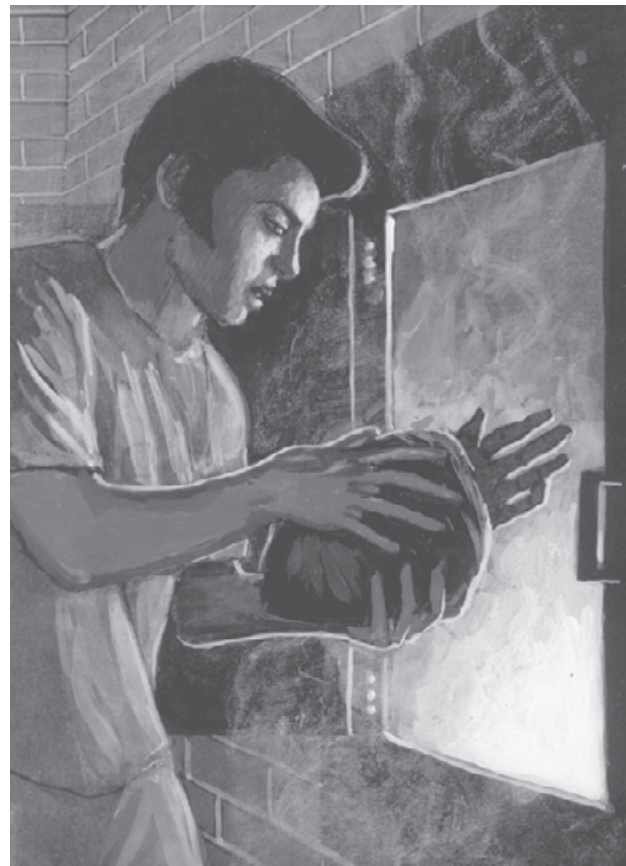
## Climax

When the characters have gotten enough information from rising actions that they can take decisive action, it’s time for the story to

reach its climax. The climax is when (one way or another) the story gets resolved. The detective discovers that his beautiful client disguised herself as a man in order to kill her sister, and hired him because the police were too dumb to find the body so she could get the insurance; he confronts her, and they shoot it out. The professor learns that the Man With One Blue Eye is the Comte de Saint-Germain, who thinks the book contains secrets that could destroy him; the men with pierced lips want to do just that, and make persuasive arguments about why this is a good thing. The professor has to decide who’s going to get the book. The young artist sees “El” drag another bundle down to the incinerator. She follows him, opens the furnace door after he leaves, and is terrified to see a human body in the flames. Then she turns around to see “El” staring at her, holding a knife in his hand, raggedly crooning “Love Me Tender.”

Climaxes should be exciting, tense, and uncertain. More than that, they *should* resolve the plotline. This doesn’t mean you have to explain *everything*; maybe the young girl never learns why “El” was killing—lone nut, or bizarre cultist? The professor has no way of knowing if his decision was the right one. Most importantly, the climax should *change* things. The girl knows “El” isn’t coming back. (Or at least she hopes so.) The professor knows the dice have been thrown, for good or ill. The detective knows that justice has been served and that the client won’t be out of the slammer for fifty years (eight with good behavior).

Each plotline should have its own set of circumstances and its own focus. To keep things from getting stale, you don’t want all your plots to be “the same but different.” If your PCs just came off



PAUL CARRICK

a long, harrowing, dangerous plot, you may want to pitch them a plotline with less violence and more mental puzzles. Or one that's more lighthearted. Or shorter. Or all of the above.

## Repercussions

It ain't over 'til it's over, but when the heck is it really over? (If you're running a one-shot game, over is over.) If you're running a picaresque game, you'll probably want to wrap up each story fairly neatly, much like in a television series. If you're running a goal-oriented game there is no end—until the campaign itself comes to a close. But in both picaresque and goal-oriented games, repercussions are used to add continuity and surprise to a campaign.

Repercussions are lingering bits of plot that last beyond a given story or session. Some are easy to spot. If the PCs broke into a house and stole something, the police are going to be investigating. If a PC was murdered, there will be questions from law enforcement, from relatives, from employers; there will be a funeral. Some are harder. That shadowy figure tailing the PCs whom they never caught—who was he, who did he work for, and will he come back? The PCs shatter a cult and send the leader to prison; will his assistant build a new cult and seek revenge? Will the strange idol the PCs recovered have powers that will come into play down the road?

At the end of each session, immediately give yourself a couple of minutes—go hide in the bathroom if you have to—and jot down some possible repercussions. Then as you prepare for the next session or story, look back at those notes and see if any of those repercussions might come into play.

Interest from law enforcement is one you should *always* keep in mind. UA assumes a world (our world) where there *are* consequences to criminal action, and if any laws were broken during the session, consider carefully what the police might be able to figure out. Did the PCs leave any identifying clues behind? Might someone have remembered their description, their type of car, their license plate? Did they use a credit card in the store moments before the shoot-out? Were they in a place—such as a bank or corporate office—where there might have been security cameras? If they were opposing a rival cabal, might that cabal go to the police with a plausible story and file charges against them? One interesting way to deal with law-enforcement repercussions is to fold such repercussions into a police investigation with a strong protagonist. (Rent the movie *Heat* for a good example of what this can be like.) Maybe a brilliant detective pieces together assorted unsolved cases and begins investigating the PCs. Maybe a tough cop who sees satanic cults under every rock tries to persecute them. Maybe an ambitious district attorney wants to pillory the PCs to help his upcoming mayoral campaign. Not all of the PCs' foes have to be in the occult underground, after all—and if the PCs end up with police heat on them, their allies and enemies are going to react warily.

Another possible set of repercussions arises from mainstream citizens. Did the PCs' actions jeopardize their own jobs? Are their families in danger? Did they tick off a biker at a bar who'll slash their tires the next time they come around? Are reporters on their trail? Might a citizen's group—such as the PTA, or Greenpeace—be up in arms about what's been going on? If a PC died, consider what his family and friends think; might they hire a private investigator to find out what the pool soul's crazy colleagues are up to?

A final set of repercussions are those tied directly to the occult underground. Foes who swear revenge, magical curses that

linger, ripple effects from what just happened, and the ever-popular Guy Who Got Away. What will other parties in the underground think about this? Will Alex Abel assign a team to investigate? Will the Comte de Saint-Germain turn up and poke around? If someone with knowledge of recent events got away clean, who will he turn to, and to what end? And what will the PCs' actions do to their reputations?

As stated earlier, repercussions exist to provide continuity and surprise in your campaign. But as these examples should make clear, they have another important purpose: to make players think twice about their actions, and to be aware that their actions have consequences. They may have defeated the Six Who Dare and smashed the Laptop of Nullification, but how good a job did they really do? And what price will they pay? We don't call them "repercussions" for nothing.

## Multiple Plotlines

Finally, there's nothing that says you can't have two, three, or more plotlines moving at the same time. This can get *really* confusing for you, but even more confusing for the players (after all, you know which plotline a particular clue refers to; they may not). Be careful about running multiple plotlines—don't overload yourself or your players. Most people can handle two at once, but once you get four or more, the complexity increases exponentially. A partial exception to this, however, is plotlines that the characters initiate and guide. For example, if you've got them investigating the Cult of the Naked Goddess, but off on the side they're trying to make it big as a rock 'n' roll band, you're not going to have to worry as much about the rock 'n' roll plot; they'll initiate action on that, and you just have to respond. On the cult-tracking plotline, you may have to take a bit more initiative.

## Pivotal Events

It's important to identify those things that are going to have long-lasting effects on your campaign, even when your players don't recognize them at the time. These are called **pivotal events**.

Some pivotal events are pretty obvious. If you've planned out a plotline and the characters reach the climax—well, clearly that qualifies. Give that scene the extra attention, detail, and tension it needs. Make sure your players see that you care and are taking it seriously; otherwise, they won't know to take it seriously, too.

Other pivotal events are a lot subtler. Suppose a middle-aged PC mentioned in passing that he was living with this woman down in Pasadena for a while when he was a teenager. You decide to throw him a curve: when he broke up with his Pasadena lady-friend, she was pregnant but neither of them knew it. Now his unacknowledged daughter has tracked him down. This offspring (named Judy) is going to become a focus for a future plotline, but you want to introduce her sooner (without giving away who she really is) and get some background on her, to make it more dramatic when she gets involved in the weird stuff—and when she reveals that she's the PC's love child.

To the players, at first this is just one more minor character. Only *you* know that she's *going* to become important. The first meeting with her dad is a pivotal event, but the PC doesn't know it. If he makes a real ass of himself, it's going to have a major effect on the future plotline. If he behaves well, that will be equally important.



On one hand, this is a pivotal event. You have to give it some extra attention so that when the revelation comes later, the PC remembers this and gets a sense that it was building up, instead of just flying in from left field. On the other hand, you don't want to alert him *too* much. Just enough to make him nervous. Act out the scene in more detail than you would with a generic minor character. Make sure he knows that her name is Judy. Don't spill the beans too soon, but have her ask enough weird questions that he knows *something* is up with this chick. Hopefully he won't try to sleep with her. (Mmm, madness check time!)

Once you've identified and played through a pivotal event, be sure to remember it—and make sure your players recognize it as well. They should be aware that something significant happened, even if they aren't sure exactly what it was. Be sure to keep track of the probable repercussions of the event, both for the PCs and for other, “offscreen” GMCs.

Now you're ready to deal with pivotal events in plot development. But what about character development? It can easily happen that in the course of play an event that has no real significance in the plot has a deep resonance with a character's passions. Don't short-change these. If a character who has always shown forbearance and forgiveness suddenly snaps and kills a minor opponent when a non-lethal solution was available—well, it means something. It may mean that the player had a bad day and wanted to kill something, or that he's simply gotten a little tired of playing a model of ethical restraint. Don't gloss it over. Make him come up with a *reason* his character did what he did. If he doesn't know why he did it, make sure he plays *that* out; after all, it's rather disturbing to find out that you acted in a completely abnormal way for no good reason.

In other words, make sure your players know that actions have consequences—consequences for character, if not plot.

## Coping with Changes

Players will throw you curve balls. Accept it. Don't get your head too married to one course of action, no matter how cool it is; if

your characters don't go there, don't try to force them. You can lead and encourage, but not compel. It's a temptation, but if you cram your characters down the plot path *you* want, they'll rebel.

When the players do throw you a curve ball, they'll still expect you to bat 'em out of the park, since ideally they have no way of knowing what you're *planning* for them to do in the first place. Here are some things you can do when your PCs do something significant, yet completely different from what you expected.

**Stall.** Hey, no reason you have to know what happens right away, is there? Don't forget the action, but once its immediate consequences (if any) have been described, just let it sit. If they ask about what happened, or try to investigate, give 'em nothing. Then think up something really cool for next session (or even a few sessions down the line). You may even lull them into a false sense of security.

**Roll with it.** Sometimes a surprise is just an unexpected action. It doesn't *mean* anything, you can cope with it and move on. Other times, it's a symptom.

Let me explain. Unexpected actions can't happen without *expected* actions, right? So you were expecting the characters to do one thing and they did something completely different. Might just be contrariness or the Imp of the Perverse. *But*. . . it might also mean you've read the characters wrong.

Take a step back and ask yourself if you've been giving the players what they want. Keep in mind that this isn't what the *characters* want; the players want *challenges* to what the characters want, and often specific types of challenges, in order for them to have fun. (There's a reason why all those old-school RPG dungeons were full of monsters and treasure; if they were full of treasure with no monsters, no one would have played the darn things.) If you've been running a very political and intrigue-laden game, what does it mean when your players all get gung-ho to unexpectedly shoot up a warehouse full of thugs? Maybe they just view violence as another political tool—and an unexpected one, for once. On the other hand, it might be a vote for a change of tone in the game.



THOMAS MANNING

An unexpected move on the part of the players can be considered an indication of the direction where they'd like the game to move. Being sensitive to this not only keeps players happy (and therefore engaged, and therefore making the game more fun for everyone), it keeps the game fresh and keeps you on your toes. Sure, it's a little bit more work. But it's worth it.

## Concluding the Campaign

Gaming is a bit like drinking. It's very important to know when to say when.

Just like a plotline, a campaign should have a climax and conclusion (unless you're taking the time-honored picaresque option, where things continue but little really changes in a big way). This can come when the last character dies, spitting defiance in the eye of her enemy, or (more commonly) when the characters achieve some great goal—either their original one, or something they decided upon in the course of play. When this happens, the characters have fulfilled their purpose. If UA is a game of characterization, then the game is over, because the characters have been completely developed through plot action.

## Coercive Endings

If your players screw up, make bad decisions (especially decisions that are out of character), or if they're unwilling to make the tough choices necessary to gain their objective, then you shouldn't just *hand* them success. It cheats you and it robs them of a decent story. Furthermore, it invalidates any *good* playing they did previously. The real meaning of an artificially happy "gimme" ending is, "You would have won no matter what, because you're player characters. You didn't have to work that hard. You had no genuine chance of failure. This satisfactory conclusion was mandated and you had no choice." Players hate being coerced. They hate being powerless pawns of the GM, even when the GM is giving them what she *thinks* they want.

We've said this before, but we'll repeat ourselves like cranky old men with liver damage, because it's *important*. Players don't just want the happy ending; they want to *earn* the happy ending. And the harder it is to earn, the more satisfying it is.

It is *essential* that your players have a real sense of doubt. Some GMs try to create a sense that failure is possible while secretly making sure the players succeed; but I've found the best way to create a that doubt is to have the outcome *really be* decided solely by the actions of the characters. If the outcome is bad, tough cookies.

## Hooray for Failure

Even failure can be satisfying, however. No, really.

Right now you may be scratching your head. "You mean that my players, who've been meeting every Wednesday night for *eight months* working towards taking over the world—they're going to be satisfied with an ending where they *don't* take over the world?"

It can be done, but only if they *choose* not to take over the world. For instance, suppose one of them is given the opportunity to take over the world at great cost. Alex Abel will throw his millions behind their cause—if they'll just give up one of their core beliefs. "Sure, we can work something out. Just punt that idea about eradicating poverty, 'cause it's a deal-breaker." Maybe the route to absolute power depends on mastering a certain type of magick—but to do so, they must give up something essential to their *identity*. "Sure, the power's yours. Just give me your son and we'll call it even. Hey, I have to know you're *serious* about this!"

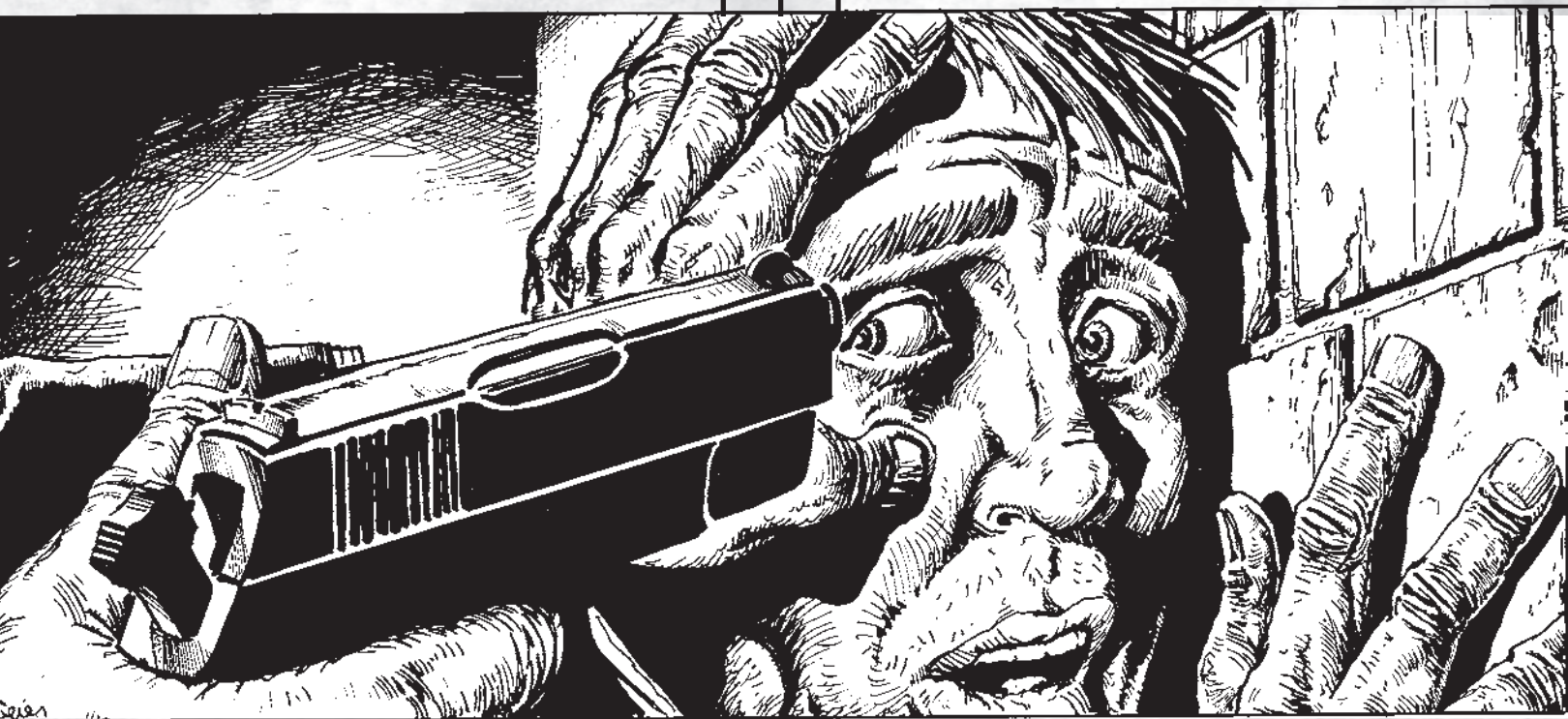
Literature is full of these types of choices. Another image you'll find recurring is the martyr, who makes some ultimate sacrifice for the well-being of all. Maybe your hit squad all dies in an explosion at the True Order of Saint-Germain temple. On the surface, that's a failure (since they all died). However, if the players know that by destroying the temple, they saved the Comte de Saint-Germain—and by extension, the entire human race's chance at collective rebirth—they might consider the loss of their characters worthwhile. After all, the plot has now completed their characters; dead and inviolate, they have ended their careers in a suitably dramatic fashion.

This is a game of character. The most memorable personalities will be those who chose to be true to themselves, even at the cost of their own lives.

## Epilogues

Some GMs like to have an epilogue where the players describe what happens to their characters afterwards, like at the end of some movies where short screens of text tell you who went on to do what. Maybe the PCs settle down with a family, ride off into the sunset, reconcile with their lost daughter, or wind up rotting in jail for life. (Hey, different strokes for different folks.) Others prefer a more open ending, where nothing is stated concretely, and the results of the climax are only implied. In still other groups, the GM decides on the eventual fate of the characters, or the GM and players work out the ending mutually. Do whatever is satisfying.







*chapter ten*  
*running the game*

**UNKNOWN  
ARMIES**



"SHALL NOT THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH DO RIGHT?"  
—GENESIS 18:25

"SOMEONE HAS TO SAVE THE WORLD—  
AND THAT MEANS SOMEONE HAS TO RULE IT."  
—LILI MORGAN



# LEGACY

▲ 106 Renata and Eugene sat in a diner. After some bickering, they'd both gotten out of the car and walked a few doors down to Ned's Hasty Tasty. At the door, Eugene had told her she could either run away and never find out anything, or she could have breakfast with him and they'd both spill their respective beans. He didn't care, he said, he was going in to put a bandage on his fucking head. When he'd come out of the bathroom, she was sitting in a booth. She'd picked one where she could watch the storefront through the window. Instead of sitting across from her, he'd pulled up a chair and sat at the end so he could watch it too.

"All right, who goes first?" she asked.

"Well, we could do a traditional 'ladies first', but since I got the gun and have been stabbed, I think *I'll* go first. What the hell are you doing here?"

So she told him her story—from coming home to find her parents gone, to tracking them through the truck company and taking the bus to Atlanta. She didn't tell him about breaking in to the Ossowski house; she just said she'd found them through her mom's disability check.

"How come you just didn't go to the cops?"

"I tried," she said, and it seemed like she got smaller right before his eyes. "When I went down to the station, they told me they couldn't find any record of my parents. Like, the social security numbers they'd given our landlord were fake and everything. They didn't have their names on anything—or mine either. Like I'd never been born, you know?"

He nodded, with the know-it-all smirk. "I wouldn't be too surprised at all if Duane Regis has an outstanding warrant or two floating around . . ."

"Who's Duane Regis? And how do you know my parents? And you *were* following me on that bus, weren't you?"

"Hey now, one question at a time."

"*You* asked two in a row."

"I . . . shit, I guess I did." He laughed a little, then sighed. "All right, you've been straight with me I hope. It's just . . . well, weird. Are you superstitious? Black cats, four-leaf clovers?"

"Burying an egg under your doorstep every month and burning pine cones on the first snowfall? Not particularly . . . what?"

"Your parents do that? The eggs and, you know, the pine cones?"

She looked down at her french toast and moodily stirred it around in a pool of thin syrup.

"Yeah, they're into all kinds of dumb little rituals like that. Like they sometimes walk into the house backwards, or hop across the threshold on one leg. It's embarrassing . . . what?"

"Okay, Renata." Eugene took a gulp of slimy egg and grimaced. "What if I told you that superstitions work?"

"Get out of here."

"What if I told you that not only do superstitions work, but that the same thing that makes the pine cones and black cats and that crap work, that same power can do other things, too? Bigger things?"

"What are you talking about? You gonna say, what, my mom rides around on a broomstick while I'm out at school?"

"The witch myth about the broomstick probably came from European witches taking drugs and having out-of-body experiences . . . but basically, yeah, I'm saying there are witches and warlocks and sorcerers running around, though they don't go by those names."

"Bullshit!" Renata was angry; her face was becoming mottled with color and her breathing was harsh. "I want to know about my *father*, not hear some fucking fairy tales about . . ."

"Okay, fine, you don't believe!" Eugene was practically yelling. He looked around and lowered his voice. "Would your parents?"

Renata opened her mouth, then shut it. She bit her lip.

"You've heard about Guyana, right? The Manson family? Those Japanese guys who gassed the subway? You believe in *those*, right? And you said your folks were superstitious."

"Yeah . . ."

"Well, before you were born they were in a cult, headed by a guy named Dermott Kane. And they *did* believe in all this stuff, and more besides. They were trying to . . . well, what they were trying to do was pretty complicated . . ."

"What? What were they trying to do?"

"Okay. Crash course in metaphysics here. There are a num-

ber of what we'll call 'gods' for the sake of convenience. They aren't gods, but it's close enough. Now for each god—a better name is 'archetype'—there's a human who, uh, kind of acts out that archetype."

"Huh?"

"Ok, there's an archetype of the Mother, right? Someone in the world is the woman who's the mom closest to the general type. That person has . . . power. She's a reflection of the archetype, called an avatar. She acts out the type and performs it in the world."

"Like a celebrity impersonator or something?"

"Kind of, or kind of like being possessed. Once you become an avatar, or start to become one . . . things just kind of fall into place for you. It becomes easier and easier to be like your archetype." His eyes had gotten far away.

"What does this all have to do with my parents and this cult?"

"Back in the seventies and eighties, Dermott Kane—he called himself Dermott 'Arkane' then—was trying to become an archetype."

"One of the high priest things?"

"No, one of the *god* things. He promised his followers that when he did, they'd get their reward, yadda yadda ya. Only it didn't work out so well."

"What happened?"

"A couple rival groups got wind of what he was trying and suddenly a bunch of his followers wound up with bullets in their brains. There was a lively little war for a few years, and Kane wound up making a strategic retreat."

Renata shook her head. "I don't get it."

"Basically, your parents were in a cult that became a threat to a number of other cults, so they ganged up on them. Rather than stay in one place to get picked off individually, they scattered across the country and hid. Then the other cults figured they weren't a threat anymore and started fighting each other again."

"So what now?"

"I'm not sure. But one of the guys who really hated Dermott woke up eight days ago with his head cut off—a particularly potent way to kack him, considering that he was the avatar of the Messenger—and

Dermott's old cronies all started gathering in Atlanta. I'd had a feeling about your part of Illinois for a while, but I didn't get a fix until your folks had beat feet. What I got a fix on, though, was you."

"What do you mean, a 'fix' on me?"

"I was trying to find Kane with a witchfinder . . . a kind of magick compass. It led me to you instead. When you ditched me in the bus station—nicely done, too—I took another reading and this time found the real McCoy. He's in that storefront," he said, gesturing.

"Ok, I'm calling your fucking bluff," Renata said irritably. "A 'magic compass'? Maybe my parents are dumb enough to buy that kind of crap, but come *on!* How dumb do you think I am?"

"Fine. You think I'm a bullshitter? I'll prove it to you. Prick your finger and bleed into that little shmutz of uncooked egg there," he said, pointing at his plate.

"What?"

"Do it. Come on. I'll show you magick, real magick, right here in Queasy Greasy or whatever this place is called."

"I don't believe you."

"Then why not prove me wrong? I mean, it's not like I have a lot to gain from you bleeding on my breakfast."

She scratched her ear, then undid one of the safety pins that held her backpack together. She poked her little finger and squeezed it over the egg.

"This is, like, so stupid." She felt uneasy at the intent gaze that Eugene LaRue was fixing on the little drop of blood that was welling out of her finger. While they'd been talking, she'd half-forgotten about him having the gun, her pepper spray, and Hiram Osowski's carving knife. Watching him look at blood made her forcibly recall those things.

"Who is this girl's father?" he intoned. Something about his voice seemed to grate through her body, like the sound of a buzzsaw biting.

His hand darted out and flicked the top of her finger. It hurt, the drop of blood fell, she said "Hey!" and he blew on the drop, hard, in midair, so that it sprayed and spread out and fell on the egg in a smear.

Her eyes opened wide.

Her blood had spelled out the words "Dermott Arkane." 160 ▼

# FIVE



**Traditionally, the role** of Game Master has involved providing a place and time to meet, offering drinks (usually caffeinated in order to heighten player tension and attention), and the occasional salty snack. Plus providing a story, complete with clever puzzles, gripping thrills, and unearthly danger, of course.

This hasn't changed. We can't help you with the first set of stuff, but here's a bunch of tips on actual GMing.

## Basic Narration

The first skill a GM must master is basic narration. In a pinch you can fudge rules, gloss over continuity errors, and get away with using formula plots. The one thing that you'll never be able to fake is the meat-and-potatoes ability to describe things.

You are the players' senses and, to some extent, their memories as well. Everything they experience comes to them through your words; everything they do has its repercussions described by you. It's a lot of responsibility and power, both of which you need to be a good GM. Let's look at the areas you need to consider to do effective narration—in other words, good storytelling. (Note that dealing with GMCs gets its own section a bit later in this chapter.)

## Voice

If you describe a lovely, daylit scene in a normal tone of voice, it establishes one set of expectations in your players. If you describe it in a low, growly, *hungry* voice, with just a hint of sarcasm underneath it—there you've got something else entirely. Similarly, describing a gruesome crime scene in a *blasé*, casual fashion is going to rob the scene of impact that could be captured by a taut and serious tone of voice. (Be careful, though: it's easy to talk yourself hoarse if you're doing lots of demanding voices and aren't used to it.)

## Vocabulary

You don't have to necessarily settle for the first word that pops into your mind; stretch for the most specific word, the one that captures your meaning exactly. The perfect word, *le mot juste*. After all, any number of people might be “big.” But is the character “flabby” or “beefy” or “bulky” or “towering”? Each has a different meaning and creates a different mental picture. A “dank” or “sticky” or “greasy” storm sewer has a lot more character than one that's merely “wet.”

## Props

Let's suppose you're a player and your character has gotten ahold of mad Dr. Lowenstein's notes. Which is going to make it easier for you to get into the story: a GM who summarizes what's contained therein, or a GM who hands you pages of hand-scrawled notes that you can actually read? The first option creates a layer between the player and the events of the story. The second brings it much closer. Granted, preparing props can be a lot of work, but it pays off.

## Images

Get out your scissors and cut up a newspaper, magazine, or one of those catalogues that get stuffed in everyone's mailbox. Pick out images of houses, office buildings, parks, whatever, and use them as visual depictions of scenes during play.

## Pacing

The way you describe things can obliquely affect the pace of the game. If you give a very spare, basic description of an area or individual, the players probably won't pay much attention. If you give a more detailed description, or indicate through tone that this area or individual is important (or better yet, “deviant”), you'll practically see their nostrils flare as they catch the scent.

Pacing is also important for maintaining a sense of excitement and suspense. Descriptions in combat should usually be quick, blunt, and brutal, presented in a tense tone of voice. If you drone on calmly about how their opponent is shuffling in, waving his fists around, making a feint, *etc.*, it doesn't sound like a fight. It sounds like stage directions. *Bad* stage directions.

To put it another way: if your characters are walking through an abandoned factory, looking for clues about perverse rituals that might have been conducted there the night before, then you can describe it in a slow, low tone of voice with plenty of detail and atmosphere. If the characters are tear-assing *out* of the factory because they've *found* a perverse ritual, then you'll be describing it in a quick and sketchy fashion.

## Full-Sense Description

Hearing and sight get the lion's share of GM effort, and rightfully so. Don't neglect the other senses, though. Temperature can be an effective way to set a tone. (A graveyard at night could feel unseasonably chill; a seducer's apartment may feel very hot and stuffy.) Aromas can be hints. (“Remember that nice citrus smell from the bloodstained sheets? Must be cologne, 'cause this guy's wearing it.”) Touch is up close and personal, so it can be especially effective. (“As you grab for it in the dark, your hand connects with something—an arm, perhaps, but the skin is so dry and brittle that it crumbles under your touch, then something hot and sticky pours over your fingers as you hear its hoarse scream . . .”)

## Level of Detail

Detail is good, so more detail is better right? Not necessarily. If your characters are in a library, you don't have to name every book. Choose the right details to focus on. If the purpose of the scene is to build a sense of dread and expectation, you can layer on details heavy with shadow, rustling sighs, maybe the sweetish smell of rotting meat, and so forth. But if the purpose of the scene is to give the PCs a place to discuss clues in character, the phrase “a well-lit diner” may suffice. You can add the comforting clink of silverware and the smell of frying bacon, but that's chrome. Weighing your players down with too much detail will bog down the pace of the game, just as surely as a lack of detail will leave it sketchy and unbelievable. (Don't worry. The range between “too much” and “too little” is broader than a lot of people would have you think. It also varies from group to group, depending on the tastes of the players and the GM. Even if you don't get it perfect, you'll improve over time.)

## Psychological Slant

Different types of people notice different things, because every perception is filtered by our expectations and interests. This isn't a technique to use all the time, but every once in a while it's very



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useful to remember that you're playing the characters' senses—and senses are heavily influenced by mental state. If you're describing an apartment to a real neat freak, you might want to stress how untidy it is: the clutter of unpaid bills on the mantelpiece, empty cups and glasses scattered around next to bowls of peanut shells, a reeking cat-litter box, and that sort of thing. The former Green Beret, on the other hand, might notice a pair of heavy candlesticks (potential bludgeons), the loop of phone cord strung amateurishly across the ceiling (could be a makeshift garrote), and the half-open closet door (as a possible ambush site). Someone else might immediately notice the kinds of bills the apartment dweller is paying, her choice in decoration, or even the *feng shui* (ambient Chinese magic based on the position of objects) that the room has.

## Bad Narration

Even as there are useful techniques to pursue and perfect, there are also pitfalls and common errors to avoid. These include the following.

### "Gamish" Description

If you ever hear yourself saying something along the lines of, "He's got Body 79 and he's pointing a chainsaw at you," hang your head in shame. *Never* describe characters or creatures in game terms. Nothing else will pop the bubble of credulity faster than drawing attention to the mechanics that underlie it. Movie stars don't point out their facelift scars, do they?

The rules and stats are conventions, tools for modeling capacity. Instead of describing the tool, describe what it's modeling. "He's a hulking brute of a man, and the grip of his chainsaw disappears into a fist that looks big as a bowling ball." Don't say that a character is highly educated; say that he speaks in big words, or put him in an academic setting (college library, museum, office full of books).

## Contradiction

If the town hall was on the east side of the town square last time the characters stopped by, it better not be on the west side next time. If "Marcia" was a character's older sister in one session, she'd better not be the younger sister in the next game. This isn't all that hard to manage; if a character, object or setting is important enough that your players are paying attention, you've probably given it enough thought to portray it consistently. If it's not that important, you can get away with glossing over a mistake—especially if it makes no difference to the plot. ("No, it was always on the west side. I said 'west' last time. Now can we please move on?")

A good way to avoid this problem in the first place is to keep notes. These don't need to be pages of elaborate detail; just a few key words or phrases about important places or people will be enough to underlie their descriptions and give you consistency.

## Repetition and Genericity

If your characters break into one evil cultist's apartment and it's filled with pentagrams and candles, that can be pretty spooky—the first time. But if the next few apartments they break into are always described the same way, it gets old fast. Don't get lazy. You probably wouldn't try to portray every blonde as a bubbly dingbat or every cop as a donut-eating lardass. (If you are, you shouldn't.) Why, then, should every setting be the same? Maybe one cultist's apartment is completely bare: no decorations, no TV, no bookshelves, just one mattress in the center of the room—a mattress crusty with dried blood and covered with flies and maggots. Maybe another cultist has an apartment that's completely decorated in sunflowers, gingham check, and teddy bears. It's only when you open the attractive wicker chest from Pier One that you find her collection of hollowed-out cat heads.

Remember that tension and suspense depend on the unknown. If your players can guess what a setting or scene or person is going to be like after your first sentence, you've just made your job of surprising them roughly a dozen times harder.

## GM Characters

Every character the PCs meet will be portrayed by a single actor: you. This puts some pressure on you, since it's important to make the GMCs memorable and different. There are two aspects to this: portrayal and character depth. We'll also deal briefly with GM stats and how to make GMCs that are tough but not *too* tough.

## Portrayal

The way you portray different characters is up to you. Some basic components of GMC portrayal include speech, body language, props, and pictures.

## Speech

The most common GM tool is the voice. If you're a radio actor and can do one voice for the breathy, sexy ingenue and another for the grunting, brutal thug—well, you've just made it much less likely that the players will get them confused. Accents can work, if you can pull them off; otherwise, it's just going to turn into a joke. (Which doesn't mean you shouldn't use them for comic-relief characters.)

Even if you aren't confident in your ability to do voices, word choice can be just as important. If one character always speaks in short, crisp sentences that rigidly follow the rules of grammar ("I'm accused of shooting whom?") and another uses rambling sentences full of slang ("And, like, I think he's givin' me the yank so I draw the nine and I'm like 'who's tasty now, man?' and he gets like jello on me then . . .") then once again, they're easy to tell apart.

## Body Language

People are very visually oriented. You can try holding your face differently for different characters (though this, too, should be reserved for comic characters if you're not confident in your skill) but body language is just as important. A slouching thug with hooded eyes is going to make a different impression from a graduate student who's constantly fidgeting, or a police officer who always sits up straight and stares, unblinking, right into your eyes.

## Props

Some GMs favor the use of props (a hand fan, a cigarette, a prop pistol) or even rudimentary costumes (like a hat or veil). These can be very effective if used appropriately (and if you're not breaking up the flow of a scene by switching back and forth between costumes every time you say something). To each his own, but here's one warning. We know, you're probably too smart to have to hear this, but you never can tell who's going to buy one of these books: **Don't use a real gun or a real knife, or any real weapon, as a prop! Just don't do it; it's begging for trouble.**

## Pictures

Collect a bunch of interesting faces, but avoid recognizable celebrities. Match each face to a recurring GMC in your game. Attach it to an index card, then put the character's name and a short description on the back. Now your players can connect a name with a face. You can even give the picture to the players as a sort of visual clue—or rather, cue. They can study the face, visualize the person, maybe tack the various faces up on a board and draw connections between them, and generally get creative with this little resource.

## Character Depth

The players are only portraying one character, but they're portraying that character (hopefully) in great depth. Your task is different. Because you have many characters, you can get away with being much shallower in your portrayals. After all, the focus is on the PCs all the time; your characters only get attention for a few minutes per session. Still, your characters deserve the best you can give them. An easy way to deal with this responsibility is to approach minor and major characters differently.

## Minor Characters

Minor characters shouldn't be obvious throwaways. That means that you must decide what is important about that character and how to show it as quickly and cleanly as possible. If the character is a district attorney who is going to tell the characters about the thug who attacked them ("The phrase 'chilling lack of remorse' is kind of a recurring theme in his criminal record . . .") you don't need to know how he feels about his mother or what he had for breakfast that morning (unless he's a slob and it's on his tie); all you need to know is what he knows about the thug, how he feels about that, and how he's going to display (or conceal) those feelings. Maybe he's tough, with a dry and ironic sense of humor. Maybe he's new and a little nervous, intimidated by getting involved (even tangentially) with this Bad Man. Maybe he's bored and *blasé*—he's seen it all, and worse, before.

## Major Characters

However, over-detailing your minor characters is unlikely to be a problem. A pitfall that's more important to dodge is *under*-detailing your *major* characters. You need to put more thought and attention into recurring characters, particularly major antagonists and important friends or allies.

These characters need to make sense. All the cool voices and acting in the world aren't going to save a character who isn't internally consistent. It's not enough to know *what* the character does; you have to know *why*. Motivation is critical. The framework established for PCs can be very useful here; passions and madness meters will put some meat on the bare bones of a GMC. (Though you should be careful to not get too caught up in the mechanics of these things. Those mechanics are for PCs; don't bother with them for GMCs, who are simpler creatures you can drive mad at will for the sake of the plotline.)

As your campaign moves along, your characters run into a variety of antagonists and allies. One way to make a campaign stale fast is to be lazy and stamp out cookie-cutter villains. This goes for minor characters, but it's doubly important for major characters. If every enforcer is a cool, sneering thug in a tailored suit (the "John Travolta") or a wisecracking, short-tempered sadist (the "Joe Pesci"), they're going to get boring and interchangeable pretty quick. Similarly, if every ally is a pleasant, stammering idealist (the "Jimmy Stewart") and every villain is a cultured megalomaniac (the "Jeremy Irons"), clever plot twists and exciting combats aren't going to disguise a certain feeling of *deja vu*.

Every major character should have unique goals and unique motivations. How are your players going to react when they find out their villain is trying to take over the world in order to save it? ("Only by controlling the ignorant masses can we sculpt their opinions, ensuring that the next ascension is a positive archetype — not some icon of sexism and degradation!") On the flip side, how are they going to feel if invaluable advice and assistance is offered to them by a murderous head case? ("Once I realized that magick was real, no other prey would . . . satisfy me. You can understand the lust for a challenge, can't you?")

You owe your players a good time and a challenge; you don't owe them anything they can take for granted. If *Unknown Armies* is going to focus on developing characters, you have to give them people worth interacting with.

## GMC Stats

Your GMCs should have skills and stats like PCs, but this doesn't mean you have to use the same rules for building them. Feel free to give them skills over 55%, stats over 70%, skills higher than their stats—just give them numbers that sound right.

## Too-Tough GMCs

Be careful about building characters who are all-around better than the PCs. This is okay for a major villain—someone they're going to have to gang up on. But it's very annoying for players if there's some GMC ally who constantly bails them out and makes them feel inferior. After all, how would *you* like being Miss Money Penny to someone else's James Bond?

A very simple example would be a thug character. If you want to give him a high Body, a great skill at Face Wrecking, and a fairly scary Unlicensed Gun skill as well, feel free. But give him a weakness. The obvious one is low Mind (or Soul) which makes him gullible and easy to trick. Maybe he's got a one-track mind, or maybe he's slow on his feet and easy to get away from. There you have a character who is challenging to a PC (because he's got superior combat skills) but not unbeatable (because he has a weakness that can be exploited if it's discovered).

## Managing the Flow

Horror and suspense, more than other genres, require steady pacing. If you get too slow, the players have a chance to assimilate what you've been telling them, and if the horrific elements become too familiar, they lose their power. ("Well, I suppose flying, screaming heads aren't really *that* awful.") On the other hand, if the pace is set too high then the players feel completely helpless and ineffectual and don't have time to figure out the things they're *supposed* to figure out. ("Threatened" is good; "completely helpless" is bad. If people want passive entertainment, they can click on reruns of *Hogan's Heroes* without even building a character.)

## Flow Tools

You've got two tools for flow control. You can control it through narrative and through plot. Let's suppose you think your players need a chance to get away from the Unspeakable Awfulness and put together some clues, so that they can figure out what this particular threat *is*. Let's further suppose that whatever it is, it's chasing them through the NYC subway system.

To slow things down using narrative, all you have to do is not describe any pursuit. They've been trying to get away; let them think they have for a while. They're still in the dark service tunnels between stations, but at least they don't have *it* breathing down their necks for the moment. They'll probably ask you questions about where they are, and then they'll start talking to each other. Once they've either figured out what you wanted them to get (but nothing more), or have spent so much time on their "breather" that the mood is in danger of winding down, that's when you tell them they hear/smell/think they see something that indicates the game is, once again, afoot. If you're really sharp, in the ensuing chase you give them more clues about the *it*.

On the other hand, slowing things down with plot is quite a bit easier. Just have them run into a subway station (or an access

tunnel, or a sewer worker who can guide them up and out). Now they've got all the time they need to talk things over—at least until you use the plot to prod them again.

The difference between these two is subjective time and objective time. If you use a narrative slowup, the ten or fifteen minutes they spend talking things over may only occupy a few tense seconds of game time. (If you're using this subjective slowup, you may want to remind them of the game setting every couple minutes or so.) With the plot maneuver, you give them objective time—their fifteen minutes is fifteen minutes of their characters talking.

## Dithering

One thing that slows games down *a lot* is player dithering. This is when the players (and/or their characters) spend endless time debating the advantages and potential drawbacks of every single conceivable course of action. This is somewhat forgivable when they're planning a course of action they'll initiate (half the fun of an RPG burglary is doing all the stalking and spying and planning how you're going to get in and out.) When it starts to drag, a few comments like "Is that your plan then? Are you ready to go?" will probably spur them on. However, there is *no place* for debate when they're *reacting*. If a clockwork automaton the size of a riding mower—equipped with a good dozen circular saw blades—is charging them, then they shouldn't be debating, they should be acting. If you ask a player what she's doing and get a request for information as a response, assume they're looking or listening for that information. Next round you can tell them the information, assuming the clockwork hasn't carved them into coleslaw. This may seem brutal, but it's a learning process; you've just taught that player that almost *any* fast action is preferable to taking *no* action because you're trying to take the *right* action.

This cuts both ways. It's not *carte blanche* to hose the characters who hesitate, and it also means you should cut some slack for people who *do* act fast. (Think of it as "positive reinforcement." You've just reinforced the behavior of getting with the program and keeping the pace going.)

## Communication

A key to good pacing is clear communication with your players. Let them know when they're in a "rest" scene so that they can lower their guard (slightly) and figure things out. Let them know when they're in an "adrenalized" scene so that they can react fast and enjoy the frenzied pace of nonstop terror. Let them know that what's appropriate in one scene is possibly the *last* thing they want to do in the other. Finally, let them know when you've switched scenes.

Does this mean you should draw up big signs that say "REST" and "DANGER" on them, holding them up at the appropriate times? Certainly not. You have to communicate these changes in tone subtly, using our favorite tools of vocal tone and word choice. If you're describing things in a leisurely fashion, choosing reassuring words ("You can feel your muscles relax as the sanitation engineer pops up the manhole cover. The sunlight is almost blinding, and a gust of cool, clean air pours down over you. Eagerly, you climb out into the street, which looks so normal it's almost impossible to believe that right underneath it was . . . that thing.") they'll *know* the scene has switched. Similarly, if you suddenly start talk-

ing in a tense tone of voice, describing unsettling input, they'll get into "lightning reflex" mode.

It's really not as hard as it sounds. Think of movies and how they communicate these kinds of scenes: through music, editing, and camera movement. The faster, noisier, and jerkier a scene is, the more likely that it involves danger. It's the same approach in GMing, only we use simpler techniques of expression.

## Skill Checks

Many (if not most) things attempted by characters won't require a roll. *No one* makes a PC roll to open a car door or light a cigarette—it just slows things down and impedes the pacing and believability of the story. You, as the GM, have a lot of latitude when it comes to asking for die rolls. If it's dramatically important and plausible for the attempt to succeed, then let it go if the PC has the appropriate skill. This can make a skill of 10% or 15% important. ("Thomas, your character took Climbing at 10%, so you automatically go over the chain-link fence without a problem. Everyone else roll against your Speed or Body stat—and you must roll a 30 or higher to succeed.")

In short, players only need to roll if the GM tells them to. The GM can declare automatic failures for low skills or really hard tasks, especially if the outcome isn't fatal. The GM can also declare automatic successes if the plot demands it.

Here are some rules of thumb about dealing with skill checks:

- Roll an appropriate skill, if uncertainty is a good thing and the outcome is important.

- Roll under the appropriate stat and beat a 30, if the character has no appropriate skill and it's not a tense situation.
- The GM just decides, based on skill level, stat level, difficulty of task, and (most importantly) the needs of the plot and the pacing of the evening's session. (Just take it easy on this, okay? Remember that no player likes to feel railroaded and helpless. "The plot requires that your worst enemy get the drop on you, knock you out, and have you duct-taped to the propeller of a helicopter by the time you wake up," is not going to go over very well.)

## Running Combat

Combat gets special rules because it's obviously *very* dangerous, *very* unpredictable, and *very* important. The extra rules are there to make it exciting and uncertain, hopefully without making it too tricky or removing the feel of confusion and chaos.

## Exceptional Skills

Individuals with superhuman Speed or Body stats—including clockworks and unnatural entities—gain some special benefits.

**Speed.** A character with a Speed stat of 101% or higher gets one free combat action before anyone else, every round, and then takes their normal combat action. If more than one character in combat has a Speed stat of 101% or higher, the character with the higher Speed gets the first bonus action, followed by the other high-Speed character's bonus action, and then it's back to normal combat actions in order of Speed.



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**Body.** A character with a Body stat of 101%–125% does an additional 3 wound points in hand-to-hand attacks. If the character's Body stat is 126% or higher, the hand-to-hand bonus is 6 wound points instead.

## Wound Points

First things first: make up a sheet with the wound points of all the characters on it. When they get injured, note down their new wound-point total and brief notes about the injury. (“12 points, left leg, meat cleaver” or “7 points, whole body, falling bookshelf.”) *Never* tell your players how much damage they've taken or how many wound points they have left.

**Wrong:** “She smacks you across the chops with the garbage can lid . . . she rolled a 12, so that's 3 points of damage, plus another 3 'cause it's a hard object, so 6 points.”

**Right:** “She snatches the lid off a metal garbage can and swings it at your head. The edge catches you right in the cheek with a tremendous clang that sends a jolt of cold, bruising pain all through your skull.”

The first example doesn't particularly make me frightened of the woman who hit me; after all, it's just six points, I've got forty-four left. It's abstract. The second is going to make me back off, because I don't immediately know how badly I'm hurt.

Now consider this: which is the more natural reaction from someone who's been hit in the face with a chunk of metal? Circumstances of character and experience aside, we're guessing the “back off” option.

## Death's Door?

Since you're describing damage verbally instead of numerically, it's important to give people clues when they're getting in trouble. Someone who's been reduced to under 20 wound points is going to be feeling it *everywhere*—he'll have a headache, slightly blurred vision, and terrible burning in his lungs from hyperventilating, *on top* of the direct signs of injury. Someone under 10 wound points should know for *certain* that he's in deep trouble. But even if they've just been getting hit with a light weapon (like a garbage-can lid), they should be bleeding plenty from somewhere, feeling nauseous, maybe hearing a roaring sound in their ears, getting dizzy, and so on.

Keep in mind that the system is tilted to make combat fast and dangerous. If players complain, ask them how many times they think they could catch a bullet and keep fighting, or how many times they'd like to get smacked by a baseball bat before they start running.

## Fudging

There's one other advantage that you get from keeping track of the PCs' wound points yourself—it makes it easier to save their bacon if they get stung by particularly good GM rolls. For example, one of your players has Body 60, which is pretty darn buff. Earlier in the adventure, he got schooled across the leg with a lead pipe for 13 points. You described the injury as hurting a hell of a lot, and he's hobbling but, since you wanted him to be able to continue with the adventure, you decided that 13 points isn't a broken bone. Now he runs around a corner and there's the chief sorcerer preparing a significant blast. The cultist rolls a 94 (which fails), flip-flops it into a

49 (which succeeds), and the character *dies*. Just like that. After two hits. (We told you combat was fast and dangerous!)

What do you do? You could decide not to flip-flop the roll, but that has the risk of making the head cultist look incompetent instead of spooky. Instead, describe gut-wrenching pain in gruesome detail, and tell him he's “passed out.” If the player was keeping track of his own wound points, he'd *know* that the dice declared him dead and that you spared him. That's no good; it defeats the whole idea of a horror/suspense game. This way, you can spare the character's life without giving up your title as “Danger-Mongering GM.”

Now of course, you don't want to fudge all the time. If in the above example the player knew full well that the head cultist was around the corner and could drop him in the blink of an eye, the character probably deserves to die—he knew the risks.

## Mechanics

Here's an outline of how to run combat mechanics.

### I. Initiative

1. All successful rolls go before any failed rolls do
  - A. OACOWA always goes first
  - B. High numbers that succeed go early
  - C. Low numbers that succeed go late
2. Any failed rolls go after all successful rolls do
  - A. High numbers that failed go early
  - B. Low numbers that failed go late
  - C. BOHICA always goes last

### II. Actions

1. Once the order that people act in is decided, people declare and roll their actions in that order. Each character can attack, dodge, or try to do something else.
2. If he attacks, have him roll his attack skill. Attacks may be modified by dodging.
  - A. If he rolls over his skill, nothing happens. (A 00 means something bad happens.)
  - B. If he rolls under his skill and is shooting a gun, he does damage equal to the roll. This damage can't exceed the maximum damage for the gun.
  - C. If he rolls under his skill and is fighting hand-to-hand, he does damage equal to the sum of the numbers on the two dice. (If it's a 45, it's 4 + 5 = 9. If it's a 20, it's 2 + 10 = 12.)
    - i. The damage is increased by 3 if he hit with a heavy object.
    - ii. The damage is increased by 3 if he hit with a large, hard object.
    - iii. The damage is increased by 3 if he hit with a sharp or edged object.
    - iv. If the roll is a matched success and the object increases the damage by at least 6 points, the damage is equal to the roll (instead of being the sum of the roll) plus the object's added damage.
3. If he dodges, all successful attacks made against him for the rest of this round that have a die result under his Dodge skill automatically do half damage. In addition, he may make a Dodge check; if the roll is his Dodge skill or less and is also greater than the attack roll, the damage from that attack is reduced to zero instead of just being halved.



4. Drawing a weapon takes one round. You can't attack with a weapon the same round you draw it without a special skill.
5. If he tries to do some other action, he begins the action this round. On the next round, the action is completed. (Some actions may take longer than two rounds, subject to GM discretion.) He cannot change actions between these two turns, except to abandon the action or modify it slightly.

## Running Magick

Magick is both tricky and easy. It's tricky because it doesn't exist in the real world, so there's no widely accepted conventions about how it "works." However, this is also what makes it easy.

Magick operates according to *meaning*, not logic or reason. For an example of the distinction, go read some magical realism. In the novel *A Hundred Years of Solitude*, one character (Remedios the Beauty) literally floats off into the sky one day. It doesn't make sense logically (what, she's too *pretty* for gravity?) but it makes sense thematically because she has always been "unearthly" and has never really "had her feet on the ground."

UA slants a little more towards the "realism" side of magical realism, but the system is designed to award "meaning" a higher station than number-crunching. For instance, let's suppose that there's a character who belongs to the Cult of the Naked Goddess. She's in Chicago, investigating the high-school and childhood years of the Naked Goddess. Of her own initiative, she gets drunk and throws up on the porch of an old, abandoned house. Later, she learns that the Goddess did the same thing when she was sixteen.

By the *rules*, she should now have some variety of mystic charge, because she recreated an action taken by the Goddess. However, it doesn't count because she did it ignorantly; it was not done ritually and therefore lacked the *meaning* required to build the charge. (This also doesn't spoil that particular ritual sex act for any other pornomancers.) Similarly, if a flesh mage hurts himself accidentally, he can't build a charge off it. It's not deliberate, it's just something that happened. That's why chaos mages don't get charges from fights that accomplish their tactical goals. The *point* of the risk wasn't to celebrate mystic chaos; the point was to hurt someone, and you don't get magick as a side effect.

This is also the purpose of the taboos. You're either a mundane or an adept; you don't get to go back and forth. When you decide to walk the path of mystic wisdom, you eschew all other paths, forever. That's why the followers of the Naked Goddess lose all their mystic power if they ever have sex just for fun, or even out of *love*. Those choices are forbidden to them; sex can only have one meaning for them, and it's communion with the Naked Goddess's transcended spirit.

All adepts are trapped in worlds of particular meanings; that's the price they pay for their power. If they retreat from that meaning, they lose their power (at least for a while). That's the price they pay for their freedom.

That's a lot of metaphysics, but the metaphysics underlie the mechanics. Don't let your adepts get away with paying lip service to their school of magick; you can't fool mystic power, even if you fool yourself. (If our hypothetical Naked Goddess adept performs an action she honestly *believes* hasn't been ritually recreated, she still doesn't get a Major Charge if someone beat her to it and she just doesn't know.)

## Spells

Magick, more than any other skill, is versatile. You can create a large number of effects, many of which are left to the discretion and imagination of the player. However, it's up to *you*, the GM, to put limits on what a particular school of magick can do, and how much it costs.

Each school has a list of sample effects and their costs. If a PC tries something similar to one of these effects, it can probably be done. It may cost a little more than the "standard" version, but that's what you get for wanting it your way, right away.

However, players like to test their limits (and so do adepts), so eventually someone will try something quite different from what's described in the book. For instance, the epideromancers deal primarily with the modification, repair, and destruction of human flesh. That's their path, their operational mindset. Now, suppose you've got a fleshwarper who borrowed his brother's BMW and, what with one thing and another, the fine leather upholstery got slashed up. The fleshwarper wants to fix the upholstery with magick. Can he do it?

On the one hand, it's flesh. On the other hand, what's the symbolic meaning of this action? Basically, he's just doing it so his brother won't get pissed. Personally, we wouldn't allow it; it's a questionable action in the first place, and since it puts magick in the service of the mundane, we'd rebel.

Now, suppose our epideromancer had instead found an old girlfriend of his, skinned by a fiendish sorcerer and kept alive (and tormented hideously) in a vat of alcohol. He cuts up the leather upholstery and decides to graft a new skin from it onto his poor girlfriend's body. Will this work? I'd make him pay with several Significant Charges at the very least, but he'd have a chance. This is what magick is *for*; transcending the limits of the merely possible. Also, since the power of the fleshwarpers is bound up with healing, improving, and modifying the human body, it applies much more to this situation. It's possible because it *fits*. In this example, a good die result may end up with the old girlfriend completely back to normal, or at least something closer to it than "skinned alive."

Naturally, a lot of this is personal, and that's as it should be. One GM may have a much different view of the pornomancers than another, and their powers may increase (or more likely, just work differently) between their two campaigns. This is okay; in fact, it's a *good* thing, because it keeps magick fresh and unpredictable.

No one understands everything about magick; no one's even close. Real adepts just suck it up and accept that lots of unpredictable effects happen.

## Madness

This is a sensitive topic; mental illness is one of the most horrible things that can happen to a human being. It is either the result of an inborn chemical imbalance (in the case of illnesses like schizophrenia) or it's a response to unbearable mental stress (such as traumatic amnesia). In either case it's a betrayal from within; when you become mentally ill, you are quite literally "not yourself"—or at least, not the self you thought you were.

Focussing on this topic in a game played for fun opens us up to the charge that we're belittling or distorting the seriousness of mental illness. Nothing could be further from our intent. Rather,

we consider madness important to the world of UA because it highlights the serious internal consequences of the actions taken by characters.

To put it in perspective: a character in the action film *True Lies* is not going to suffer mental trauma from seeing a lot of violence. A character in *Spellbound* is. They're both movies, and both aim to entertain; but you can entertain and be serious at the same time. We wouldn't have written this game if we didn't think the portrayal of insanity would be handled seriously.

When a character in a bad movie goes insane, it usually involves either scene-chewing melodrama or some fairly crude comedy. Reality is a bit more complex. Lots of disorders become apparent only in certain circumstances. (Phobias are a perfect example.) Just because a character has become "insane" doesn't mean that the player has to be limited to playing a caricature, that the character can no longer behave according to his or her own interests, or that the player is no longer in charge.

It's critical to discuss character insanity with the player. If there was a dictatorial chart the GM rolled on ("Too bad! Now you're a nymphomaniac!") insanity would remove layers of character, by denying choice to the player. Instead, because the player is involved, more characterization can be added—or revealed.

## Mechanics

Even though madness is intended to be primarily a matter of character, it is still a mechanical system. (A few objective rules keep people honest.) Just as with combat, here's an outline so you can walk through stress checks the first few times.

### I. The Situation Occurs

Each situation has a stress level and a type (rank-3 Violence for getting briefly tortured, rank-2 Helplessness for losing a job you love). Compare the level of the stress with how many hardened notches the character has in that stress.

- A. If the character has a number of hardened points equal to or greater than the level of the threat, nothing happens. (For instance, someone with four hardened points in Violence can get tortured briefly without risking their sanity. Someone with two hardened points in Helplessness can get fired without freaking out.)
- B. If the character has fewer hardened points than the level of the threat, she makes a Mind check.
  1. If the roll is under or equal to the character's Mind score, she gets a new hardened notch in that stress type, and has successfully confronted the stress.
  2. If the roll is over the character's Mind score, that character gets a new failed notch in that stress type, and must immediately decide to freeze, fight, or flee.

## Example of Madness

Samantha Nghilibosi has Mind 50. Samantha's had a sheltered life, so she has no hardened marks in Violence, and no failed marks either. One day, while she's checking out a parcel of property she's inherited, someone shoots at her through a window and hits her. This is a rank-3 Violence challenge. She rolls a 45—a success. She keeps her wits about her and crawls to cover. Her reward for staying cool is a hardened notch.

A few weeks later, after she's recovered somewhat from the gunshot, she's jumped by a man in a ski mask and a leather jacket as she's leaving the grocery store. He tries to cut her up with a knife. This is a rank-1 Violence challenge. Since she's already got one hardened mark in Violence, she doesn't have to roll; she can just dodge and try to get away, or do whatever else she wants.

Fleeing to her new home, she runs right into the clutches of the same guy who shot her before. He's broken into her house and is waiting for her. He ties her up and begins interrogating her about "the chamber of the undying." She truthfully tells him she knows nothing but he doesn't believe her, so he starts burning her hand with a hot lightbulb. This torture is a rank-3 Violence challenge. Now, she's already successfully beaten one rank-3 Violence challenge, but she only has one hardened notch, so she *does* have to roll for this rank-3 Violence challenge. She rolls a 62 and fails, getting one failed notch. She can freeze, fight, or flee. Her player decides that she'd try to flee, and so Samantha begins desperately thrashing against her bonds and screaming that she doesn't know what he's talking about. She thrashes so violently that she hurts herself—and this convinces her captor that she's telling the truth. He shrugs and leaves her there. The GM then tells Samantha's player to roll against a rank-2 Helplessness challenge (for being tied up and left).

## Impairment

For reasons of character (or lack thereof) you may choose to have your PC partake in various mind-altering substances—or someone may dose him up without your knowledge. There are a bewildering variety to choose from, all with various effects both physical and psychological. A brief categorical overview is all we can do here; individual GMs have authority to use, modify, or ignore these rules as they see fit. (After all, street drugs are notoriously impure. You never know if that LSD you just bought might have been bonded to the paper with strychnine, or if your cocaine got diluted with insecticide or drain cleaner to up the profit margin.)

## Alcohol

Drunkenness is a special case, since it's actually *required* for one of the schools of magick. Here's how it works.

The average person can drink one beer, one shot, or one glass of wine without feeling it. After that, each drink gives a five-point penalty to all Mind, Body, and Speed-based skills, and such Soul-based skills as the GM feels would be impaired by slurred speech and lowered inhibitions. (Sing The Blues is probably "booze safe" up to the point that you pass out. A skill like Ballet or Obtain Bank Loans is certain to be affected.)

This penalty drops by five points for every hour you spend without a drink. However, taking one drink an hour still increases your penalty. There's no way to keep it stable; you're either sobering up or getting drunker.

**Example:** Dirk Allen is getting wasted in preparation for a magickal showdown. He's slammed back six shots of schnapps and is taking a 25-point penalty on every skill. (The first drink's free, remember?) Unfortunately, he drops his bottle and has to stagger out into the street in search of more liquor. What with one thing and another it's almost an hour before he can find an open convenience store that stocks his favorite fruit-flavored malt liquor.



He chugs the whole bottle and goes to a 30-point penalty, even though he only had one beer that hour. If he hadn't gotten that beer, he would have dropped to a 20-point penalty.

A 10-point penalty is enough to get most people arrested for drunk driving. (If your character is exceptionally large, your Blood Alcohol Level may not reach illegal levels until 15%.) When you've reached a 50-point penalty or higher, make a check against your Body stat (ignoring the penalty) every hour of game time; if you fail, you pass out. If you manage to get a 60-point penalty going, you enter a blackout and can no longer remember your actions until you sober up.

Once you hit a 100-point penalty, roll Body again (also ignoring the penalty). If you fail this roll, you've got alcohol poisoning—you immediately throw up, pass out, and take damage equal to the sum of the dice you just rolled. Furthermore, if you don't get your stomach pumped soon, you take another single die of damage every hour until you wake up.

## Uppers

This category includes everything that pumps you up and makes you more alert and on the ball—or at least, makes you *think* you're more on the ball. Caffeine and nicotine are mild uppers (but your characters probably won't get dosed with enough of them to merit rules changes; just act more peppy). Cocaine and crystal meth are examples of more serious uppers.

Physically, these will make you twitchy and jumpy. You'll have a sense of increased physical and mental acuity, but it's illusory. If you're attempting any task that requires subtlety (like sneaking

around or hiding) or sustained concentration (like reading a book in a foreign language) any roll under 20% is an automatic failure, even if you would normally succeed.

Emotionally, they're often characterized by violent mood swings—often between megalomaniac self-confidence and crippling paranoia. If you have to make a stress check based on Helplessness or Self, give yourself a temporary +10% shift to your Mind score. However, if you have to make a stress check based on The Unnatural or Isolation, give yourself a temporary -20% shift.

## Downers

These are chemicals that make you calm, sleepy, and relaxed. The most popular by far is booze. Being legal, widely available, and so popular, booze gets its own rules of impairment, as described earlier.

Other widely known downers include prescription tranquilizers (Valium being the drug of choice for the brand-name conscious) and heroin—the latter being the strongest downer you can buy without a prescription.

Heroin (or synthetic equivalents like dilaudid, which comes in a handy pill form) and large doses of other tranqs produce a truly stupendous lethargy. For game purposes, if you're under the influence of these drugs, you can't use your Passions ('cause it just doesn't matter), and no matter what you roll for initiative, it's a failure. If you make a roll on any Mind based skill at 20% or less, it's a failure, even if it would usually succeed. However, you do get a +10% shift on all Mind checks against going insane since, frankly, you won't be noticing things nearly as acutely.



TOM MOSELEY

## Psychedelics

These are drugs that don't necessarily effect your energy level; they just warp your perceptions and blur the line between internal judgments and external data. To put it another way, drugs like LSD and psilocybin may well allow you to pop the hood on your mind and start tinkering. Unfortunately, almost no lay person has the skill to do this in a useful fashion. (Imagine an untrained guy opening his car hood and banging away at random with a hammer.) Luckily, the human brain is a lot more versatile and resilient than an engine. Lots of people take LSD without developing symptoms worse than the occasional flashback, freakout, or phony epiphany.

However, the difference between a good trip and a bad trip often depends on the input that wanders across your field of perception while you're tripping. Physically, there's no firm guideline for skill penalties; GMs may wish to assign them at random.

Emotionally, taking psychedelics is like a double-or-nothing gamble. If you have to make a stress check due to Isolation, Self, or the Unnatural, give yourself a temporary +10% shift to your Mind score. Take a -10% shift if you have to make a check against Violence or Helplessness. Furthermore, if you do fail a madness check while on LSD, you take *two* failed marks instead of just one. (As nasty as it is to watch someone flop around with a slit throat, it's a whole lot worse if you add a bad trip on top.)

## Tips & Tricks

The following is a grab bag of things that GMs should find useful and inspirational in play.

## Motifs

Motifs are recurring elements in a creative work. A house decorated in a Roman motif might have columns, lots of marble, reproductions of Roman statues, and so forth. A party with a Hawaiian motif might have bamboo torches, illuminated plastic tiki gods, and lots of fruity drinks with chunks of pineapple in them. Movies in the *film noir* genre often have motifs such as high-contrast lighting, looming shadows, rain-slicked streets, men in overcoats, and guns.

We'd like to encourage you to try using motifs in your UA games. To make it simple, try this: write down a list of a half-dozen visual elements that you'll try to have recur in your campaign. Examples might be:

- Abandoned buildings.
- Empty streets.
- Subterranean locales (basements, sewers, caves).
- Dogs.
- Ringing telephones.
- Bright, sunshine-filled days.
- Computers.
- Large trucks or vans.
- Delivery people.
- Libraries and bookcases.
- Pornography.
- Bad teeth.
- Mysterious packages.
- Cops.
- Junky old cars.

- Mistaken identity.
- Foreign languages.
- Public transport.
- Really good food in dive restaurants.
- Blurry photographs.
- Playing cards.
- Sports fans.
- Blank-faced children.
- Broken glass.

Your motifs should have some sort of connection to the major and minor themes you've chosen for your campaign (as described on p. 120). Ideally, you should assign each motif to a given theme. Then when one of your themes is coming into play, link it or cue it with an appropriate motif. Don't overdo it—these should be subtle. But they should also serve to plant clues in your players' subconscious minds. When you're watching a *film noir*, you get tense when a looming shadow appears across the heroine's face. Your players should likewise have involuntary reactions to the appearance of one of your motifs. It's a form of subtle mental manipulation that can bear tremendous fruit, since it helps to foster appropriate mental states in your players as you play without them knowing what you're doing.

If at some point your players begin to recognize some of your motifs, that's okay. Maybe a dog appears in some fashion every time a combat with a certain villain is coming up; at some point when you mention a dog barking in the distance, your players will tense up, look at each other, and know what's about to happen—and be scared witless as a result. That's great!

## Sweat the Details

Psychology teaches us that if a baby is bottle-fed instead of breast-fed, he may grow up to be an emotionally stunted neurotic. From this we learn that apparently little decisions can have big repercussions. It's important to take care of details—but it's equally important to *prioritize* your details.

We're going to place ourselves squarely in the left wing of game design with this next statement: *rules aren't as important as description*. This ain't chess; you don't have to worry about Bobby Fischer kicking you under the table if you make a tiny error in working the mechanics. In fact, no one is likely to even notice.

So instead of making sure you're running a player's armor-piercing, laser-sighted .347 magnum in a strictly rules-kosher fashion, you should concern yourself with little details of description. For example:

**GM #1:** "There's a cop at the scene, looking down at Mary's body. She's been strangled. The cop tells you there's no signs of forced entry, so the murderer may be someone she knew."

**GM #2:** "The first thing you see is Mary. She's sprawled on the floor, arms and legs splayed out in all directions. Her eyes are open, rolled back and staring at the ceiling. Her lips are blue and there's a long purple line of bruise encircling her neck. As you watch, a housefly lands on her opened eyeball, and then a large hand waves it away. The hand belongs to a big beefy man with a ruddy complexion. He's squatting over her, looking closely at the body with a grim expression. He finally glances up at you. 'Inspector Murtagh,' he says. 'You the next of kin?'"

GM #1 is certainly more efficient, but at the cost of a great deal of drama. He's given a generic sketch of a scene. The second



GM has given a *specific* scene; the details (the housefly, the line of bruise, the policeman's name) all act like bolts to secure the scene in the player's mind.

An axiom of fiction writing is "show, don't tell." The second GM doesn't have to say Mary's dead; no one alive is going to lie there while a fly crawls on her eyeball. A perceptive player can learn a lot from the details: she wasn't tied up, so she probably fought. She was killed with a cord, not bare hands—so the killer probably knew what he (or she, or it) was doing.

Attention to detail will save you a lot of frustration in the long run. In the first place, it makes a better story, so your players will be more engaged and need less plot prodding to get involved. Secondly, your players will take their cues from you. If you present a detailed world, they'll respond with detailed actions and characterization. If you gloss, they'll gloss—which means when they get stuck, they'll expect you to lead them by the hand. A detailed setting encourages them to get deeply involved, meaning they'll become proactive instead of reactive.

The final bonus of detail is that it gives you control over pacing—which is critical, as we've said. If you look at "Managing the Flow," back on p. 133, you'll see that your level of detail is crucial for establishing the mood and pace of the scene. If you never use detail, you'll have trouble with your pacing and your players will have trouble knowing how to react.

## Daily Life

The idea of injecting healthy doses of daily life into a game of the fantastic and bizarre may seem a bit counterproductive at first. Daily life? Don't we get enough of that when we're *not* playing the game?

Not necessarily. Half the pleasure of a roleplaying game is identifying with a character different than yourself. The conventions of the setting (big guns, bad mojo) provide the difference and exoticism; but it's the little weights of daily life that make us identify with the character. Sure, your character may have spent the night running through a hotel shooting at the fleeing back of a mob-connected supernatural hit squad. But when your character gets home, the dishes in the sink are still dirty and the dog is whining to be walked.

This doesn't mean that you should spend your roleplaying time pretending to wash dishes and shop for groceries. But neither does it mean that your characters should be dissociated cutouts who never get headaches or broken shoelaces.

Let's take a look at the TV series *The X-Files*. It's a show with paranormal elements raining from the sky; that's what grabs the viewer's attention. But what *keeps* your attention is the little details of character: Scully's unfortunate dog, Mulder's porn habit, their interactions with their families. They don't exist in a vacuum populated only with aliens and white-trash warlocks; they have a normal life as well. The extent to which they have something of an *abnormal* life compared to the rest of us, even apart from their paranormal exploits, tells us a lot about the characters.

Keep some elements in your story that are decidedly normal. The surly doorman at their building who's always reading Rush Limbaugh and looking for an argument; the guy in the next office

who always wants to go out and get coffee; the next-door neighbor with the yappy dog and the Gloria Gaynor records. All are good, normal elements.

It's even better if your characters have families. Imagine a PC getting home, singed and smirched from a close call with a car bomb, only to have his lonesome dad call him up from the nursing home, wanting to chat. Or even better—a spouse. Is your character going to tell her husband about the paranormal, and risk getting institutionalized or divorced if he doesn't believe? Or are you going to keep it a secret, with the resultant strains on a relationship? (To quote Roberta Gregory: "My husband thinks I'm having an affair. He'd *shit* if he found out what I'm *really* doing.")

We won't even get *into* the problems with kids. ("I can't help you track down the headless accountant—I've got a parent-teacher conference tonight!")

It might seem that all these sticky personal associations would be a drag to fun-loving, free-firing PC types. On the surface this is so, and a lot of players will opt for the lone-wolf type at first. But the payoff from being attached to these daily life types is that they're attached to you, too. They can offer support (both material and emotional). More than that, they add another dimension to the character. A lone-wolf character may mouth platitudes about Defending the Ignorant Masses from Magickal Mayhem—but a guy with a wife, a kid, and a mortgage *knows* what he's fighting for.

## The Fantastic/The Mundane

This brings us to the last tip for running UA: handling the fantastic, the mundane, and the blurry line between them.

In the beginning, it's good to keep the two elements separated. By doing this, you heighten the sense of crossing into a forbidden world, while holding out the illusion that they can step back into the mundane, safe world of VH-1 and TGI Friday's at any moment. At this first stage, the mundane and the fantastic are cast as contraries. Magick tries to undermine the rules of logic and sanity which support the mundane world, while the mundane strikes back with ruthless suppression.

As the campaign ages, you may want to blur these lines. Now the players start to get paranoid; can it be that *everything* is magickal, and they were always too dumb to see it? They should start to feel like they're getting sucked in. Once they could retreat to their comfortable mundane lives, but now the supernatural has seeped in, like a chill draft through cheap weather stripping. It's all around them; they have been subsumed into the occult underground. Now the mundane and the magickal are no longer contraries. They're just the acknowledged and ignored aspects of the same thing.

There's no way to go back once that step has been taken (except maybe with megadoses of psychotropics, or similarly abusing treatments with Edison's Medicine). Perhaps it's possible to come through to the other side with an enlightened view. Perhaps the magickal and the mundane are separate and they struggle, but their struggle is a dynamic harmony that motivates the universe. Or perhaps this is just another delusion.

MAYBE THERE'S A MORE REASONABLE EXPLANATION. I MEAN, D.L. CERTAINLY KNOWS HER WAY AROUND THE ADULT-VIDEO SCENE. MAYBE SHE JUST CONVINCED THE PEOPLE AT PAGAN VIDEO THAT "NAKED GODDESS" IS HER STAGE NAME, LIKE PRIME. UNLIKELY - BUT MORE LIKELY THAN THE ALTERNATIVE...

4/22 - R. CASUALLY DROPPED A FUCKING MYSTIC BOMB TODAY! I ASKED HIM ABOUT "THE NAKED GODDESS" AND HE SAID, "OH YEAH, WHATSERNAME... YEAH, I GUESS ~~THAT'S~~ SHE'S CALLING HERSELF THAT NOWADAYS, PROBABLY TRYING TO GET SOME MORE INTEREST BUT HER CAREER IS REALLY TANKED. YOU'RE A BIG FAN, RIGHT? SHE DID A FILM IN '71, RIGHT BEFORE "BRIDAL WHOREHOUSE." NAME'S ON THE TIP OF MY TONGUE... "THE EROTIC JOURNEY OF ROSA CROSS" SOMETHING LIKE THAT. YOU WANT I SHOULD TRY TO FIND IT FOR YOU?" I COULD BARELY GET MY JAW SHUT LONG ENOUGH TO SAY YES.

ROSACROSS! WAS SHE AN INITIATE? DID SHE PLAN HER ASCENSION STEP BY STEP? OR WAS IT ALL SOME COSMIC JOKE, SOME MYSTIC ACCIDENT? WITHOUT MAGIC POWER, HOW COULD SHE HAVE ARRANGED SYMBOLICALLY AND MYSTICALLY POTENT FILMS LIKE A SKIN FLICK ABOUT THE ROSICRUCIANS? BUT WASN'T THE WHOLE POINT THAT SHE GAINED MYSTIC POWER? I HAVE TO GET THAT FILM! IT'S GOT TO BE THE CORNERSTONE TO THE WHOLE THING!

5/11 - GOT "ROSACROSS" TODAY - AGAIN A "NAKED GODDESS" RE-RELEASE ON PAGAN. IT'S ALWAYS ALL FALLEN INTO PLACE FOR ME. IN "BRIDAL WHOREHOUSE" EVERYONE SLEEPS WITH HER EXCEPT THE GROOM. IN "THE BOO COUPLE" SHE KEEPS SAYING NO TO HER UGLY MILQUETOAST BOYFRIEND UNTIL OLIVIA PUTS HER OVER THE TOP AND SHE PUTS OUT FOR EVERYONE. IN "THE SEXORUST" IT'S THE PRIEST WHO WANTS HER BUT CAN'T HAVE HER EVEN THOUGH EVERYONE ELSE CAN. (I'LL BET EVERYTHING THE THEME IS PLAYED UP MORE IN THE GERMAN VERSION, SINCE IT'S BY THE SAME GUY WHO DID "BRIDAL WHOREHOUSE.") IT'S EVEN IN "VIDEO VIKER"! SHE'S THE WOMAN THAT EVERYONE CAN GET - EVERYONE BUT YOU!!!





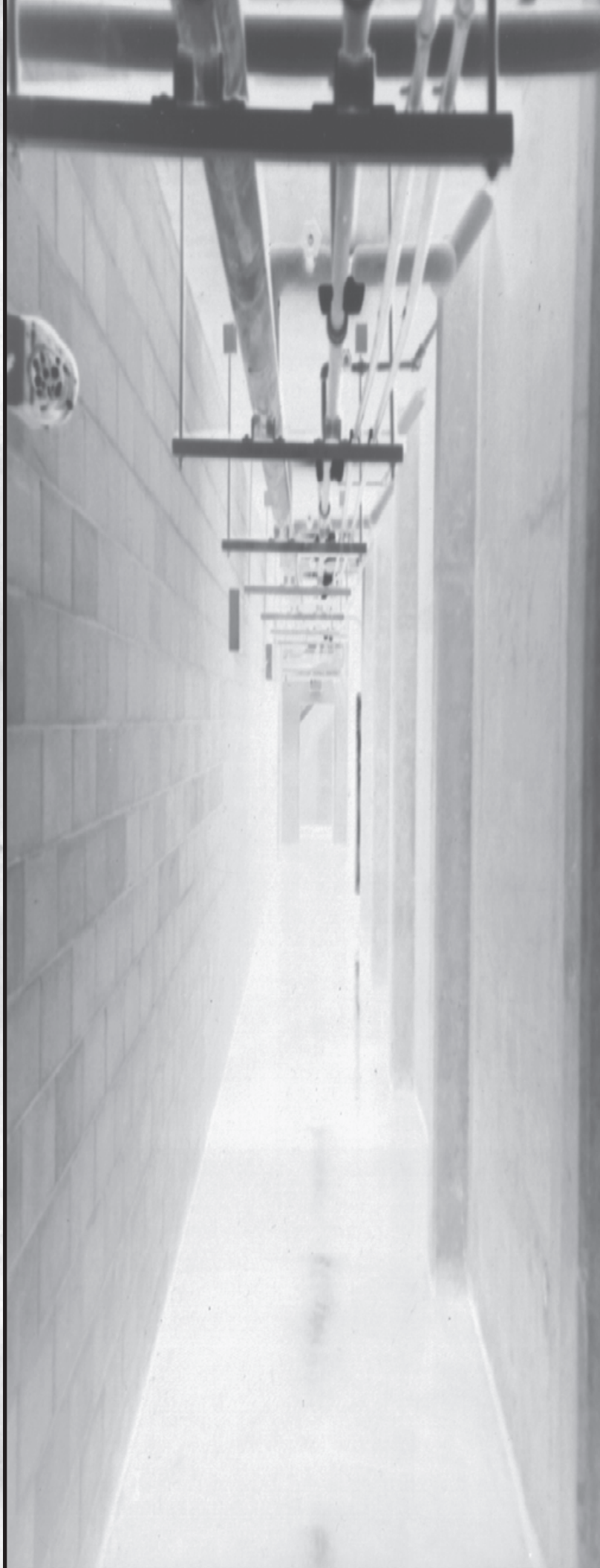
*chapter eleven*  
*the unnatural*

**UNKNOWN  
ARMIES**



"GHOST: THE OUTWARD AND VISIBLE SIGN  
OF AN INWARD FEAR."  
—AMBROSE BIERCE, *THE DEVIL'S DICTIONARY*

"IT'S A SAD FACT THAT THERE ARE A LOT OF PEOPLE OUT THERE  
WHOSE FIRST REACTION TO ANYTHING MIRACULOUS,  
WONDROUS, AND NEW CONSISTS OF TWO QUESTIONS.  
THE FIRST IS USUALLY, 'CAN I HAVE SEX WITH IT?,'  
CLOSELY FOLLOWED BY 'CAN I MAKE MONEY OFF IT?'"  
—DIRK ALLEN



**The unnatural is what you get** when the conflict between entropy and order is infused with magickal energy. Magick is naturally drawn towards this cosmic conflict and inflames it, but also modulates it in strange ways. Sometimes magick will favor order—but usually, it sides with entropy. What it does not do is respect the *status quo*. The unnatural is usually entropic because human societies have long held magick to be a destructive, evil force. So, it tends towards that direction when left to its own devices.

Manifestations of the unnatural vary wildly. Adept magick is a manifestation of the unnatural, as is discussed in the magick chapter. This chapter concerns other manifestations, divided into two broad categories: phenomena and beings.

In brief, **unnatural phenomena** are incidents or periods of time in which natural laws are altered or circumvented in some fashion but which are not the direct, intended result of an individual person. In other words, they don't happen because someone specifically wants or desires them to; like the weather, they just happen, often as a side-effect to deliberate unnatural activities such as adept magick. **Unnatural beings** are beings whose very existence is reliant on the unnatural—beings who could commonly be called ghosts or monsters, for example.

## Unnatural Phenomena

The range of unnatural phenomena can encompass most any unnatural event that is not the intended result of the conscious choice of a being. (An adept's magick-working is not an unnatural phenomenon in this sense because it is a specific, controllable, repeatable result.) Unnatural phenomena usually *indirectly* occur in the vicinity of unnatural beings or people affected by them—or just people who use magick, for that matter—but they're like ripples in a pond. No matter what or who the person or being indirectly responsible for the phenomena might be, he can't control whether or not unnatural phenomena result or what form they take. (The GM does.)

Three levels of unnatural phenomena exist, just as in schools of magick: minor, significant, and major. Examples of five phenom-

ena for each level are given in the following sections, but the GM is welcome to create more for future use or improvise tailor-made phenomena on the spot.

There are no hard-and-fast rules governing whether or not unnatural phenomena occur as a result of a given action or situation. They are meant to be used as dramatic devices in storytelling, to add color and drama to the plot and in some cases to serve as clues for the characters to follow. They also provide repercussions to the use of magick—every time an adept does a magick-working, there's a chance that some unnatural phenomenon will occur, drawing attention and making things difficult. Although unnatural phenomena are brought into play without specific rules, there are some suggested guidelines for likely causes of unnatural phenomena that are entirely subject to the GM's discretion. These are given in the nearby boxed text.

## Minor Unnatural Phenomena

These are phenomena that are purely environmental, and that do not in themselves affect humans. They can be perceived or experienced by humans, but they do not work directly on the human body and they occur whether anyone is around to perceive them or not. They rarely last more than a few seconds or minutes.

**Cold Spot.** A cold spot is a stable, three-dimensional area of air that is noticeably colder than its surroundings—perhaps 10° –20° colder or more. Cold spots typically exist in a single contiguous area, and are roughly a few feet in diameter. Thermometers placed within them will register the difference in temperature, as will thermal imaging equipment. They rarely persist for more than a few minutes or hours, but if their trigger remains in or returns to the vicinity, cold spots tend to recur in the exact same location as before.

**Sensory Stimuli, Minor.** This can be any of a variety of seeming hallucinations: strange rappings or footsteps, blurry suggestions of a presence, unpleasant smells, footprints appearing in carpet, and so on. Often these come in cycles, with different stimuli occurring in a random, sporadic sequence.

## Beyond the Veil

The unnatural has its origin in a space that humans cannot perceive. There is no single term for this space, even in the occult underground. It might be known as the afterlife, or the spirit world, or nirvana, or hell, or what have you. It is the answer to the question, "Where do we go when we die?" It is a mystery, even to adepts. It is *not* the astral plane, *or* the statosphere, at least as far as anyone knows.

What *is* fairly certain is that humans do have souls—incorporeal entities of willpower and personality who are our true selves—and that when we die, our souls lose their connection to our bodies and "go" someplace else. (Or perhaps they "stay" where they are and simply have no connection to our world.) Some adepts can disconnect a person's soul from its still-living body and imprison it, or capture the soul at the moment of death. Some souls have taken over other bodies, bringing with them their memories and personalities. These are some of the reasons why members of the underground have generally come to agree that humans have souls.

What is the space in which souls exist like? Do other beings besides souls exist there? No one knows for sure.

Some souls, contacted magickally by adepts or occultists, have spoken hesitantly about the other side, "beyond the veil." They have confirmed that it is the space from which the unnatural emanates and enters our world. They are aware of other souls around them, and seem to communicate with them. But they will rarely answer questions about the afterlife. When pressed, some contacted souls have said that there are repercussions for revealing the secrets of the afterlife to the living—that they fear "the others," or "the cruel ones."

The difficulty in learning about the afterlife is that the sole source of information is from souls, who might be lying, insane, or just so different that attempting meaningful description of their environment is pointless. They might filter their descriptions through their memories, cloaking their afterlife experience in the mythologies of the religions they followed while alive. They might take ideas from the adept's mind and use those to explain things. They might be agents of some unnatural power engaging in a careful program of disinformation.

No one knows.

**Spontaneous Moisture.** A patch or rivulet of damp wetness appears on a surface with no explanation. It might just be water—or perhaps musty/moldy/smelly water—or it could be blood, milk, seawater, or something else altogether. In some cases, the location of the moisture might be relevant to the nature of the location—such as tears or blood from a statue or painting’s eyes, or seawater footprints on a boat.

**Technological Malfunction.** Something goes wrong with a piece of technological equipment. It might be static on a telephone call, a car that won’t start, a cordless drill that starts by itself, lights that turn themselves on and off, or weird voices on the radio.

**Telekinesis, Minor.** Some small object inexplicably moves or is damaged, either in front of witnesses or while no one is looking. A plate might fall from a shelf, a ball might bounce down the stairs, or a mirror might crack.

## Significant Unnatural Phenomena

These are phenomena directed very specifically at human beings—the magick behind them is naturally drawn to the human body and mind. Though most are brief, some could persist or recur for hours or days.

**Missing Time.** A person or group of people disappear from reality for a GM-determined period of minutes or hours, then return. They recall nothing of the period in which they were missing,

and only realize that something has occurred when they notice the amount of time that has passed inexplicably. These people cannot be in the presence of others who do not experience the missing time phenomenon when it kicks in—they must be off on their own somewhere.

**Sensory Stimuli, Significant.** Similar to the minor variety, but the stimuli are stronger and are for the benefit of witnesses. Full-body apparitions, tremendous booming sounds, coherent disembodied speech, being grappled or shoved by an invisible force, nausea-inducing odors, and other similar effects are all possible, and they are much more likely to occur in combination or consecutively for a somewhat longer period.

**Spontaneous Wounds.** These are inexplicable but non-life-threatening injuries that occur to people in the vicinity. Examples range from scratches or cuts and slight bruising to broken bones and even stab wounds. In some cases, the wounds may be tied to the source of the phenomena, perhaps spelling out relevant words with cuts on someone’s arm or leaving a distinctive wound of some sort.

**Telekinesis, Significant.** Similar to the minor variety, but can affect more objects, larger objects, or will result in more dramatic movement or damage. Examples could include stacking chairs on a table, sending a car off the road, destroying every plate in a kitchen, making a doll walk, lifting people off the ground and shaking them, altered weather effects—generally, very visible movement with no discernible cause.

## Causes of Unnatural Phenomena

The following are suggested causes of unnatural phenomena. These triggers should be used by the GM to serve the narrative—to make the story more exciting, or strange, or whatever is needed. None of these triggers should be accepted to cause an unnatural phenomenon automatically, every time the trigger occurs. They are entirely at the GM’s discretion to use or ignore on a case-by-case basis.

### Adept Magick-Working

- If an adept spends a minor charge in a magick-working, a minor unnatural phenomenon *could* occur within a radius of a number of feet equal to the adept’s Soul stat.
- If an adept spends a significant charge in a magick-working, a significant unnatural phenomenon is *likely* to occur within a radius of a number of yards equal to the adept’s Soul stat. (Alternately, up to 10 minor unnatural phenomena could occur instead.)
- If an adept spends a major charge in a magick-working, a major unnatural phenomenon is *very likely* to occur within a radius of a number of miles equal to the tens digit of an adept’s Soul stat. (Alternately, up to 10 significant unnatural phenomena or up to 100 minor unnatural phenomena could occur instead, or some mixture of the two.)

### Artifacts

- Minor unnatural phenomena *could* occur as often as once a week in the immediate vicinity of a minor artifact.
- Significant unnatural phenomena are *likely* to occur as often as once a month in the immediate vicinity of a significant artifact.
- Major unnatural phenomena are *very likely* to occur as often as once a year in the immediate vicinity of a major artifact.

### Unnatural Beings

- Minor unnatural phenomena *could* occur as often as once an hour in the immediate vicinity of a minor unnatural being.
- Significant unnatural phenomena are *likely* to occur as often as once a day in the immediate vicinity of a significant unnatural being.
- Major unnatural phenomena are *very likely* to occur as often as once a week in the immediate vicinity of a major unnatural being.

(If the GM feels that—for whatever reason—such a decision should be left up to the dice, here’s a quick rule of thumb. In the above descriptions, the unnatural phenomena resulting from these triggers are described as being things that either *could* occur, that are *likely* to occur, or that are *very likely* to occur. You can make a roll on percentile dice each time one of these triggers pops up, with the chance of occurrence either 25%, 50%, or 75%, depending on which stage of probability is noted. *Could* is 25%, *likely* is 50%, *very likely* is 75%. If you feel you should roll this, you don’t necessarily have to roll it every time—maybe just when you feel like a surprise. After all, if you have these phenomena popping up all the time, they cease to seem unnatural; they’re just annoying.)





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**Visions.** At the GM's discretion, one person in range of the trigger could have a vision of the triggering event. Someone in range of an adept casting a significant magick, for example, could suddenly witness the magick-working remotely, or perhaps see its effect on its target. The vision could be crystal-clear, or might manifest in some strange symbolic way. Visions do not predict the future—they are remote viewings of concurrent events.

## Major Unnatural Phenomena

These phenomena are both rare and potent. They result in severe effects on the people and the environment in the vicinity of the trigger, and should be used very sparingly. Unless stopped or reversed through magickal means, they last indefinitely. (The exception being major telekinesis, which does something specific for a certain period of time and then stops.)

**Death.** Someone dies. The cause might be a heart attack, a coronary, or a stroke, or could be an inexplicable suicide or murder.

**Haunting.** The soul of a dead person is seized from beyond the veil and attached against its will to a static location—preferably the soul of someone relevant now or in the past to that location or to the triggering event. If the trigger event involved someone's death, the haunting will almost certainly be by the soul of the dead victim. For more information on hauntings, see the "Revenants" entry on p. 154.

**Reality Erase.** A person, event, item, or some other singularly relevant to the trigger event is erased from reality. Only people present at the trigger event for this phenomenon retain their

memories of what was erased. Reality retroactively reforms itself around the absence, taking the path of least resistance. If your husband was erased, you married someone else instead and the man you originally married was never even born. If a sailing ship disappears, there is no record of its existence. Possessions on the bodies of those few people who still remember the old reality are likewise not revised even if they support the old reality—if your husband was erased but you still remember him, the photograph of him in your wallet is still there. His parents, who were not present at the trigger event, had another child altogether and have never met you before.

**Sensory Stimuli, Major.** This is a completely immersive, credible hallucination indistinguishable from reality. Those affected might find themselves in the same location but a century earlier in time, or in the flaming pits of hell surrounded by the torment of the damned, or put through a surreal trial and terrifying (but illusory) execution by silent masked figures, or have a conversation with a mocking, impossibly knowledgeable double of themselves, or whatever bizarre situation seems appropriate. The experience should be relevant to the trigger event or the present circumstances in some way. At the GM's discretion, there could be permanent effects caused by the stimuli, such as injury or madness checks or new knowledge or even death.

**Telekinesis, Major.** Anything physical goes. An earthquake, the collapse of a building, tornado, boiler explosion, a person torn apart by invisible claws, you name it.

## Unnatural Beings

Unnatural beings are entities whose entire existence is due to the unnatural—they are not the product of our planet's natural processes. They are inherently magickal. There are many different types of unnatural beings, with many different goals and powers. Most of them have little or no agenda besides self-preservation and basic instinct. A sampling are profiled here.

Note that, even more so than with unnatural phenomena, most people never notice unnatural beings, even if exposed to them. Some of these beings are incorporeal and can't be seen; some look human and blend in; and some are just inherently skilled at avoiding detection. Those that have corporeal bodies and are obviously unnatural are also the rarest encountered.

### Entry Format

Each unnatural being has its own entry. Entries begin with a general description of the being and what it does, followed by any special rules or procedures governing their use in play, and conclude with the being's game attributes in this format:

#### Name (Power Level)

Pithy Summary

**Points:** (for the GM to divide among the being's stats)  
**Body:** (a range of minimum & maximum scores for that stat)  
**Speed:** (a range of minimum & maximum scores for that stat)  
**Mind:** (a range of minimum & maximum scores for that stat)  
**Soul:** (a range of minimum & maximum scores for that stat)

## Astral Parasites

These annoyances are psychic predators. They have no corporeal form, dwelling entirely on the astral plane which is their native home. From there, however, they can latch onto living humans and feed on them. Normally astral parasites cannot perceive humans, but any human who works magick is visible on the astral plane every time he uses a magick charge. (Other conditions can make this possible, too, such as being in a magick-rich environment, using a magick artifact, *etc.*) There aren't so many astral parasites around that they latch onto you whenever you cast a spell, but it can happen. They can also be controlled by an adept and made to latch onto a specific target.

If an astral parasite latches onto you, you lose 6 points of Soul every 24 hours thereafter. An astral parasite will leech as many Soul points from its victim as it has Body, at which point it detaches and wanders off. (The parasite's Soul does not increase; it converts the energy into nourishment.) The Soul-based skills of victims (including magick) are reduced if necessary, to make sure they aren't higher than the Soul stat.

If your Soul is reduced to 10 or less, you go into a coma. The parasite detaches and wanders off looking for more food.

Once you're free of an astral parasite, you regain Soul back at a rate of one point per day. If you went into a coma, you regain consciousness when your Soul stat is back to 20 or higher. (Should you have less than 20 normally, the GM will pick a level to reach.)

On the astral plane, parasites take any of a variety of unpleasant forms. They appear to be about the size of a small dog, and usually have some hideous combination of legs, wings, tendrils, mouths, and so forth. They are not very intelligent, but if confronted on the astral plane they are vicious hand-to-hand fighters.

### Astral Parasites (Minor)

Soul-Sucking Annoyances

Points:	100 + a percentile roll (1-100)
Body:	30-60
Speed:	20-50
Mind:	10-30
Soul:	30-60

## Demons

When an adept or an occultist or a random teenager with a ouija board contacts a soul in the afterlife, a demon is what he gets. Colorfully and seemingly inappropriately named (given that classical Christian mythology has no known validity in the occult underground), demons are the souls of the dead. They could just be called "souls," but that wouldn't distinguish them from the souls of the living—and frankly, "demon" *isn't* an inappropriate term. The reason is that the sort of soul you get from the afterlife when you go looking for one is almost always a soul who does not have your best interests at heart. Souls at peace in the land of the dead do not want contact with the world of the living—our questions and needs are no longer relevant to their existence.

Demons are not evil or entropic in and of themselves. Until they died, they were just Uncle Joe and Aunt Hilda and your childhood friend and Abraham Lincoln and so on. But in their dealings with the living, demons are often needlessly cruel. The sorts of

souls that agree to talk to the living are those who desperately desire to return to our world: perhaps because they left unfinished business, perhaps because they cannot let go and still crave physical sensations, or perhaps because they just don't like the way their afterlife is going. They're corporeality junkies. No demon will admit its agenda, but every demon has one: they desire to possess a living human and once more walk in the land of the living, doing whatever pleases them.

## Demonic Summoning

Among the schools of magick presented in this rulebook, only dipso-mancers and entropomancers can summon demons—it's a minor-charge magick. (Non-adepts can stumble into demon-summoning, as described under "Unwitting Possession.") Each school has its own rituals and precautions and such, but these aren't relevant to play. The better your magick check result, the more likely you are to get the sort of demon you're seeking, subject to the GM's discretion. If you're looking for a demon who can tell you a specific piece of information, or run an errand, or what have you, then the better your check result the better-suited a demon you'll get. (Note, however, that a good check result only gets you closer to the *sort* of demon who can help you—you can't select a *specific* demon without some extra work, as described later in this section.)

Summoning a demon is essentially inviting the demon into your body. You hold a conversation with it in your mind; no one around you notices that anything is going on.

Summoning a demon does not give you control over it. For that, see the next section. If you don't have control over the demon, it will almost certainly attempt to retain possession of your body for as long as possible—and it can potentially annihilate your soul and take your body over permanently.

- If you succeed in your magick check, the demon pops into your head and you start talking.
- If you get a matched success, you get a +20 shift to your control check (see the next section).
- If you get an OACOWA, you get the demon and you automatically control it.
- If you get a failure, you don't get a demon.
- If you get a matched failure, you don't get a demon and you get a sour cherry as per the magick chapter.
- If you get a BOHICA, you get a demon and it automatically possesses you.

When you summon a demon, you get whatever random demon responds, who may or may not be able to help you depending on how well you rolled. It is difficult, but not impossible, to contact specific demons. This requires double the number of charges needed to summon a random demon, and you have to roll half of your magick skill or less (round fractions down). If you fail, a random demon shows up claiming (not very credibly) to be the one you wanted. Note that many souls have no interest in being contacted and will not respond to a random summoning; if summoned specifically, they will depart as soon as they can and will answer as few questions as possible, no matter what relationship they had with the adept when they were alive. The nature of the soul contacted is at the GM's discretion—and there's no guarantee that your best friend's soul is going to be friendly towards you anymore.

## Demonic Control

Among the schools of magick presented in this book, only entropomancers have a spell to control demons (Cage for the Dead). To control a summoned demon, the adept expends the appropriate number of magickal charges (as per his school) and makes his percentile roll. The result must be higher than the demon's Soul and lower than or equal to the adept's Soul. If the demon's Soul is higher than the adept's, the attempt automatically fails unless the result is matched and under or equal to the adept's Soul, in which case it succeeds as normal. An OACOWA is an automatic success.

If the adept succeeds in controlling the demon, he can make requests of it. Each request requires another Soul check to compel the demon to carry out the request, but uncontrolled possession will not occur without a matched failure. (For a BOHICA, see below.) The degree to which the demon carries out the request successfully depends on how high the result of the check was without going over the adept's Soul, and is up to the discretion of the GM. See the sections entitled "What Demons Can Say," and "What Demons Can Do," for information on what adepts do with controlled demons.

If the adept fails in controlling the demon, it indicates that the demon has possessed the adept's body and will have full control over it for a number of minutes equal to the demon's Soul, at which time the adept can again make a Soul check to force the demon back beyond the veil.

A matched failure in controlling the demon also results in possession of the adept's body by the demon, but the demon will have full control over the body for a number of *hours* equal to the demon's Soul (instead of minutes), at which time the adept can again make a Soul check to force the demon out.

A BOHICA results in the complete and eternal annihilation of the adept's soul. The demon has the body for the rest of the body's life, and the adept will not reincarnate when next the cosmos starts over.

Assuming his soul is not annihilated, the possessed adept can continue making his regular Soul checks as per above. Some demons have controlled adepts for weeks or even months before the adept won back his body—or had his soul annihilated.

At the GM's discretion, the possessed adept may get additional chances to throw the demon out at times when the demon is weak or preoccupied. If the demon in an adept's body runs out and gets seriously drunk, the adept might be allowed a bonus chance of throwing off control by making a Soul check, with whatever modifiers the GM thinks might be appropriate.

## Demonic Possession

When a character is possessed by a demon, the demon has full use of the character's body. He has no knowledge of the character's memories, however, and so is unlikely to be a convincing imitation. (Likewise, a human who regains control of his body may have no memory of what the demon was up to, unless the GM desires otherwise.) Most demons who succeed in possessing a host will immediately flee on some lame pretext, attempting to get away from whoever knows the host. If it succeeds, the demon will do whatever it feels like. This is modulated by the demon's relationship with the host; if they have known each other for some time, the demon might seek out revenge for past summonings by having the body commit criminal acts or what have you. If this isn't the case,

though, the demon will just run around satisfying whatever urges it's been storing up while in the afterlife. These could range from having sex to eating fried chicken. Remember that demons aren't inherently evil or entropic—they're desperate for a body, but if they get one, they're not necessarily going on a murder spree. They might want to put flowers on their mother's grave or write an apology to their widow. Powerful or malevolent demons might well try to hook up with like-minded humans to do something nasty, but that's up to the GM.

One thing is *almost* certain: the demon will not kill the host's body. It might get the body beaten up or hurt—it might enjoy that, even, given how long it's been without physical stimulation—but a demon will try to keep the host's body alive in the hope that it will win the next Soul check against the host and get to keep the body for another chunk of time. A demon will only kill its host's body if bears a major, major grudge against the host or is dead certain that it will fail the next Soul check and is feeling spiteful.

## Unwitting Possession

Sometimes certain sensitive individuals (those with a Soul score above 80) with no magical training accidentally open themselves up to unwitting possession. These possessions are usually violent and destructive, since they bring out the worst demons of the lot. Often the host's beliefs leak through to and affect the demon's consciousness, so that highly religious (or pop-culturally immersed) individuals who are possessed will unconsciously force the demon to blather on like demons in the bible—or, more likely, *The Exorcist*.

The ways in which sensitive individuals can suffer unwitting possession vary, but essentially any sensitive individual who screws around with the unnatural and doesn't know what he's doing can suffer from unwitting possession. Examples of actions likely to get a sensitive person possessed include: using a ouija board, attempting automatic writing, trying to call spirits like a medium, acting out bogus old rituals from paperback occult books purchased at a shopping mall—you name it. What's important is that the individual have a Soul score higher than most humans ever dream (80+), and that they make a genuine, good-faith effort to communicate in some way with those beyond the veil. Even devout prayer and meditation has, on rare occasions, allowed a demon access to the sensitive.

When this occurs, it's identical to a matched failure on an adept's control attempt. The demon gains possession of the host's body for a number of hours equal to its Soul before the host gets his first chance at shrugging off possession, and play proceeds from there as described earlier under "Demonic Control."

## What Demons Can Say

Anything you want to hear, if it gets them closer to possessing your body or that of someone else. However, demons *can* be useful sources of information if you can force them to talk and make it clear that they have no chance of taking over your body—or offer them someone else's body to use for a while or even to keep indefinitely.

In general, any random demon will have some measure of occult/magickal knowledge if you want to learn about how magick works, the nature of reality, and all that sort of thing. Demons know about the 333 archetypes and about the karmic reincarnation of the cosmos and about the schools of magick. Some demons might be clued-in enough to know about the Comte de Saint-Germain, or

which archetypes have ascended. They *will* be very and strangely guarded in their descriptions of the afterlife, as discussed in “Beyond the Veil,” on p. 145, and will say little or nothing regarding their apparent dissatisfaction with the way things are there.

## What Demons Can Do

If you want to become an adept and can summon up a demon somehow, it could teach you a school of magick. This is an insanely bad idea unless an already-powerful adept helps you out, since otherwise you’re probably too inexperienced to control the demon or make a useful bargain with him.

If you need a supernatural spy, a demon can attempt to find out information for you about topics of interest in the world of the living. Essentially, the demon enters the astral plane and starts poking around on your behalf, acting as an invisible observer who can move through walls, listen to conversations, and so forth, but can’t affect anything—the demon couldn’t operate a computer to gain access to files, but he could watch over someone’s shoulder while they did it and report back. He’ll mostly be looking for an opportunity to possess someone and flee, however, so for this to work you need to either have a means of commanding a demon or be able to strike some sort of bargain.

If you need to construct a type of artifact, a demon can instruct you in the process. You need to double-check his instructions wherever possible, to ensure he isn’t telling you how to build an artifact that will let him enter your body.

If you need to get an astral parasite latched onto someone, a demon can do that for you. Just as with spying, however, he’ll spend most of his time on the astral plane trying to possess a human.

Demons can potentially do other sorts of things, too. But hopefully it’s abundantly clear now that while demons *can* be useful, it’s a really good idea to stay the heck away from them. Powerful, experienced adepts or certain artifacts can make demon-control more or less reliable, but conventional solutions are preferable. Think of demons as plutonium, and ask yourself if you’re qualified to handle raw plutonium. If not, put that ouija board down.

## Demons (Minor)

Desperate Souls

Points:	100 + a percentile roll (1-100)
Body:	0
Speed:	30-70
Mind:	30-80
Soul:	30-80

**Notes:** When a demon has possessed a host body, it has the host’s Body and Speed scores but its own Mind and Soul scores. The demon can use the host’s skills, but only at half their normal level. The demon also has the Body skill Get Back Up (described below) at a level equal to its host’s Body score and can perform one random minor unnatural phenomenon per hour and one random significant unnatural phenomenon per day. Some demons may know a school of magick and/or one or more rituals.

**Get Back Up:** This gives you a chance to shrug off the debilitating effects of injury, poison, sickness, or what have you.

You’re still wounded, but instead of lying in bed moaning or lying on the ground bleeding, you’re up and active with a pained look on your face. This is subject to the GM’s discretion—if your back is broken in a car wreck, forget about it.

## Entropics

It’s hard to explain Entropics. They have no body. No one’s determined that they’re actually intelligent. They can’t physically harm you. But, as one of their victims put it, “They try to kill you with your own hands.”

Maybe it’s simpler to explain what they do to you.

Suppose you came home one day and found your beloved husband screwing your sister—right there on the kitchen table. You turned and ran, screaming, or maybe you fainted.

You confront him about it a little later, and he’s nervous and defensive and clearly upset—but he denies it. He can offer proof that he was in the office when it happened. (Though how did he know when it was supposed to have happened when you didn’t tell him?) He’s got witnesses. Besides, your sister lives in Pasadena, a long plane flight away.

Maybe you call your sister. She denies it convincingly. How could you even think such a thing? Have you been having marital problems? Maybe your husband was with someone who just *looks* like her. (Did she sound a little smug saying that? She always was the pretty one.)

Slowly, you realize that it doesn’t add up. You know where you were at the time you “remember” seeing them: you were actually dropping your daughter off at soccer practice. Besides, the suit he was wearing? That suit’s at the cleaners. You know this. You know it’s impossible to have seen what you saw. But the memory of him . . . of her . . . his look of ecstasy . . . her look of vindictive greed . . . they’re crystal clear in your mind. They’re *your memories*.

And they’re false. (Your husband and sister have the same false memories of the encounter as you, so you’re all wiggling out.) They were planted by an entropic, an incorporeal being of entropy. Its nature is to unmake promises, to tear people apart, to isolate and corrupt even the sense of reality surrounding its victims. They retain only enough order to stick to one unfortunate target and those surrounding her.

Entropics are not intelligent, and they are not subtle. They have an instinctive knowledge of the fears and beliefs of their victim, and they can create scenarios based on those fears and plant them deep into both your memory and the memories of those involved. While it seems to be within their power to set up truly dangerous false memories (for instance, confusing you about which medicine to take or how much), they concentrate instead on producing the greatest amount of emotional misery and the quickest payoff. They don’t want you dead. They want you to suffer—to the extent that they want anything.

Some theorists believe every human personality has a self-destructive impulse, an “imp of the perverse” that makes us walk dangerously close to the edges of cliffs. It may simply be that entropics serve as mirrors of that urge, reflecting our darkest fears back at us in the most convincing fashion. After all, if you can’t trust your own memories, what can you trust?

No one’s sure how an entropic gets attached to an individual life. Certainly exposure to the supernatural makes one more vulnerable, but they seem mostly attracted to people who are building



something. If you're the center of a cult, a religion, or a philosophy, they'll see a big pile of order that they can unmake into chaos.

It's also possible to use magick to sic one of these on an enemy. If you can find the books that describe the ritual (or a demon or fellow adept who'll tell you), all it takes is a couple of hours, some colored chalk, peyote, a cracked mirror, a couple prisms, and the blood of a freshly slaughtered black cat. (More specifically, you need the type of peyote known as *Ariocarpus retusus*, known as *tsuwiri* to the Huichol indians of Mexico. This is the "bad peyote" which brings out bad thoughts and evil intentions. It's very distinct from *hikuri* [*Lophophora williamsii*], the good peyote which gives pleasurable visions. The two types appear almost identical, and the Huichol—who are experts on the subject—will be unlikely to give *tsuwiri* to strangers. Or anyone, for that matter.) Spend a significant charge (and endure one hell of a bad trip yourself from the peyote), make a successful roll against your magick skill, and you'll have stuck an entropic on your enemy. If the roll fails, nothing happens and you've wasted the components; but if you roll a matched failure, the entropic latches onto you instead.

It should be noted that putting an entropic on someone in the occult underground is tantamount to an open declaration of war. It's a risky move, because entropics cause suffering, but no physical or spiritual degradation (unlike the less annoying astral parasites). As Dirk Allen put it, "If someone comes after me with a knife, I'm going to throw a drink in his face and then do something else. If I just throw the drink, all I've done is ticked him off worse, see? Using an entropic is like throwing that drink."

Getting rid of an entropic is tricky. You can't just blow them away, for one thing, because they're incorporeal. An adept who spends a minor charge and rolls a success can attach it to herself instead of its current victim, but that's a pretty big favor to ask. Alternately, the adept can spend two significant charges, roll a success, and make the entropic go away entirely. (A failure means it stays stuck on the target. A matched failure means it switches focus to the adept trying to banish it. A matched success means the adept can destroy it permanently or stick it on anyone he wants. An OACOWA means you can either kill it or send it back to the person who sent it in the first place, even if you don't know who that is.)

There's also a special ritual for banishing entropics, and it can be performed by anyone. However, it's not quite as easy as spending a charge and rolling the dice. For one thing, you have to learn the ritual, and you can't just download that sort of thing off the internet. You have to get a silver mirror, colored chalk, peyote, a flawless convex lens, and all the hair off a live white cat. (You guessed it—for this you need the *good* peyote. Luckily, it's easier to get than the bad kind. At least, it's easier to talk the Huichol into giving it to you.) After about an hour-long ritual, even the most mundane entropic victim will appear in the astral plane to confront his nemesis—who will, appropriately, appear as a mocking mirror image of the victim. The entropic won't answer questions. It'll just send the worst experience it can find at you, only this time it's a perfect illusion in the *present* instead of in the past—you'll face it in real time instead of recalling it from earlier. If you can work your way through it successfully and assimilate it into your world-view, the entropic will shrivel up before your eyes. This is, of course, easier said than done; the simplest way to pull this feat off is to make a Soul check, rolling at least as high as the entropic's Soul stat. If it has a higher Soul than you do, you're pretty much at its mercy.

Furthermore, even if you do ditch an entropic, that doesn't mean the memories vanish. There's no cure for those except the old standards (time, booze, electroshock, concussions, and so forth). Sure, you know the memories are fake. But that may not offer a whole lot of comfort when you're lying down next to your wife and can clearly remember every second of her cutting your eyelids off with a kitchen knife, laughing all the while.

## Entropics (Significant)

Your worst fear recycled into memory

*All entropics have the same stats.*

Body:	0
Speed:	0
Mind:	0
Soul:	70

## Golems

First conceived by the Rabbi Akiba in the third century A.D. and recorded in his book *Sefer Yetzirah* ("The Book of Creation"), the Golem is an independent automaton constructed of clay and other inert materials. It is brought to life by writing a magickal word on a small slip of paper, which is placed in its mouth. Golems may be of any form, but the art to making them has been lost—except by the golems themselves.

Golems have long been made in the guise of humans as guardians and tireless servants, then later as lovers and companions. The art of their creation reached its height in the 1500s in Spain. There, golems were created by the Zohar sect, which soon came under the fires of the Holy Inquisition.

As far as is known, only one golem survived the purge in Spain. Named *Ein-Sof* ("Without End"), his last command from his creator was to reproduce himself and when done, to defend his master. Ein-Sof did what it was told by ripping portions of its body away; through a primitive parthenogenesis it was able to make a near-exact duplicate of itself. This process took many months and by the time Ein-Sof had completed it, his master was long dead at the hands of the Inquisition. Later, Ein-Sof and his twin were discovered on his late masters' estate which was to be sold. Thought to be squatters, they were told: "You can't stay here, go away." Masterless, they did as they were told.

And so they have continued to this day, following their remaining commands: "Duplicate. Go away." One begets a second and they separate, again and again. They follow those two commands only as long as they aren't following any other commands—and it's very easy to command a golem. Anyone who addresses a golem with something resembling an authoritative manner can control them, even though they don't know what the golem really is. If a golem falls under some sort of ongoing authority, the two primal commands are likewise ignored. It is only when a golem is fully emancipated that it returns to the two original commands. Each golem can only duplicate itself once, a months-long process requiring peculiar clays, chemicals, and so forth.

The golems created by the Zohar sect appear completely human in all respects. They are tireless, they do not have to eat (although they can for the sake of appearances), they have no need of air or water, and they are inhumanly strong. The one thing they lack is a soul.



Each golem is different, owing to its experiences and long lifespan (which technically is infinite). Many live openly in human society, working menial jobs tirelessly, repeating pointless tasks for minimum wage because some random human asked them to do something and it turned into a job. Innocent comments like, “You need work? I’ll get you a job at the factory!” are followed as if they were the sternest commands—the golem will take the job and work it forever. Many Golems mistaken for humans have been unwittingly adopted by strong-willed individuals whom they now consider their master. Golems are overlooked in human society due to their natural tendency to do what they are told to do, especially by those with a strong force of will.

Today, a typical golem holds a menial job and lives in an apartment. He comes home from work each day and stands inside the door until it’s time to go to work again. Some golems have even gotten married, having met someone who appreciates their complacency and willingness to do as they’re told. They are the silent bus drivers, the expressionless grocery clerks, the dull movie-ticket takers. They understand human society well enough to get along, and they don’t volunteer their nature. They just try to fit in and do what they’re told.

Every golem is physically identical to Ein-Sof, and so once seen they are very easy to spot. Each golem appears to be a mildly ugly mediterranean man of large build with big liquid eyes and a bow mouth. Their hair—which is always worn slicked back—is black, and their hands are huge and seem somewhat artificial (like those of a burn victim after reconstructive surgery). Their skin is extremely smooth, and when wet takes on a waxy sheen. They are good mimics, and if they are very old have mastered the whole gamut of human facial expressions, although their real understanding of the emotions which these expressions reflect is limited. They learn the rules of interaction invariably to obey and please the humans around them, because to a golem, there is no other motivation.

Most adepts love having golems around, for obvious reasons. They tend to keep their golems hidden away, though, so that no one else takes control of them. Once a master-golem relationship is formed, the golem will be loyal to his master unless someone with a higher Soul score steps in. “Virgin” golems—that is, golems who have not yet reproduced themselves—are especially prized. An adept with a virgin golem can, over time, gain as many golems as he likes by taking control of each newly made golem and having it create another virgin golem in turn. (If a golem takes about four months to reproduce, you could gain three new golems a year. You never get the benefits of exponential growth, only serial, but it’s still not a bad deal.)

How many golems are there in the world today? Maybe just a few hundred, scattered hither and yon. Many, many golems never get the chance to reproduce. Potentially, though, there could be *millions* of golems. Somewhere out there.

### Golems (Significant)

Would you like fries with that?  
*All golems have the same stats.*

Body:	150 (see p. 134, “Exceptional Skills”)
Speed:	50
Mind:	40
Soul:	0

## Lycanthropes

Lycanthropes—such as werewolves—are a bizarre by-product of demonic possession. The process by which a lycanthrope is created is byzantine and, frankly, random. No one sets out deliberately to become a lycanthrope, because no sane person would want to be one. Their existence is a slap in the face to reality itself, which does its level best to make things right whenever one of these cosmic aberrations comes along. The process of becoming a lycanthrope begins with demons.

Demons are reality-junkie ghosts who want to possess human beings, right? Well sometimes a demon has an urge that can be gratified by creatures lower on the evolutionary scale such as wolves, dogs, pigeons, *etc.* Possessing an animal is considerably easier than getting hold of a human host, certainly, and some demons figure out how to do it.

There are risks, to be sure. If you possess a housecat, you’re trying to wedge a whole human mind into a brain the size of a walnut. Extended animal possession almost always results in the demon losing large parts of its identity—skills, memories, personality traits—to the point that sometimes only the fleshy addiction that led them to take the animal remains.

These creatures aren’t lycanthropes. They’re just possessed animals.

Since possessed animals are often nasty, or just weird, people sometimes hunt them down, or they get sick, or they get preyed upon by something farther up the food chain. When that happens, sometimes the demon finally goes to its eternal reward (or punishment). But not always.

Sometimes when a possessed animal dies, the demon spirit and the animal spirit become mated—intertwined. Animals don’t have souls (they can’t ascend to the Invisible Clergy, which is why the world doesn’t look like a giant pile of meat) but they do have spirits (which is why they can still be influenced by mental and emotional magick). Demons that possess animals get dumber, but if they end up merging with the animal’s spirit, they can also get a lot stronger.

When a hybrid spirit possesses a human host, it’s a lycanthrope—and this kicks off an ungainly three-way struggle. The combatants are the human, the demon, and the animal. The body is controlled by a given combatant for a number of hours equal to the combatant’s Soul score—with the exception that the human combatant gets control for days rather than hours. When that comes to an end, all three combatants make a Soul check; the one who rolls highest without failing wins, and takes control of the body for the next interval. (Matched successes trump regular successes, and OACOWA trumps all.)

When the human’s in control, he’s in human form and he can’t recall what went on while the demon or the animal were in control—though he knows he’s been possessed. When the demon’s in control, he’s in human form too, and he gets his yayas out the way demons usually do. It’s when the animal takes over that things get really weird.

When the animal spirit takes over, the lycanthrope turns into an animal of whatever type the animal spirit is. The host body will change mass, organs, and so forth; a 300-pound man can turn into a chipmunk. Clothes and other possessions simply disappear, and will reappear in place when the human or demon seizes control. This may sound odd, but here’s the rub: the change is not a physi-



cal transformation with bones snapping, muscles stretching, and so forth. Instead, reality is rewritten to state that there never *was* a human—just an animal. Retroactively, there was no transformation at all. The lycanthrope has always been an animal, period.

(By the way, significant unnatural phenomena are likely to accompany transformations to and from animal form.)

You see, animals have no concept of linear time. Everything is “now” to them, even things they remember in the past. Therefore, when a lycanthrope changes into animal form, his past changes as well. It’s not just that he’s a wolf (or a raven or whatever): he always *was* a wolf. His parents don’t remember him being born; they remember there being a wolf, or a really big dog, running around the neighborhood instead. His wife doesn’t remember him saying “I do” because she never married him. (If it helps you grasp the concept, this works like the Entropomancer spell *Edit the World*, only on a much larger scale.) Sometimes the beast stays in control forever; such casualties literally cannot be counted because no one ever realizes that they even existed as human beings.

More frequently, the human (or even the demon) regains control and turns the lycanthrope back into human form. Now the universe snaps back to its natural course. The human’s parents remember him, he reappears in photographs, and things are back to normal. Except for this: anyone who saw him in animal form now remembers seeing the man instead. If the man was a were-raven, people will remember seeing him flying. If the man attacked someone in wolf form then once he transforms back, witnesses remember the man and the wounds are those of a human attack. Reality always snaps back along the path of least resistance, so events change as little as possible—resulting in some incongruous events. For example, people who saw the raven lycanthrope flying don’t find it strange to have seen a man fly until the next time they think about it *after* the human has regained control. If they had thought it really strange at the moment they saw it, they might have done something different than they did, and reality would have had to work harder to rewrite itself. Reality is fond of ungainly cop-outs. (At the GM’s discretion, this reality-snapping may be intriguingly patchy.)

What do animal-form lycanthropes do with their time? Whatever they want. Typically, they just act like a normal animal. This could be a problem, of course, if they’re at work or driving their car or what have you when the change comes.

Much like clothing and possessions, injuries also warp around transformations. Short of death, the human and the animal form each retain separate wound points and injuries. A woman with a broken arm would transform into an uninjured crow. If the crow lost an eye and then transformed back into a woman, the woman still has her broken arm but her eye is fine. Should the woman die in either form, she’s just dead—and her corpse stays in whatever form it was in when it died. (And no, silver bullets don’t have any special effect on lycanthropes. They can be hurt by normal bullets, broken bottles, car wrecks, and the flu just like anyone else.)

### Lycanthropes (Significant)

Trouble wears three faces.

<b>Points:</b>	100 + a percentile roll (1-100)
<b>Body:</b>	10-120 (see p. 134, “Exceptional Skills”)
<b>Speed:</b>	10-120 (see p. 134, “Exceptional Skills”)
<b>Mind:</b>	5
<b>Soul:</b>	10-70

**Note:** You’ll need to generate a set of demon stats as well. The stats here are for the animal spirit and animal form.

## Nonentities

At one time or another, most people have succumbed to solipsistic musings. “What if I’m the only real person,” they think, “and everyone else is just a soulless android? How would I ever know?” This feeling is especially acute in cities, where you can pass by a hundred people every day and never see any of them again. People ride their buses in silence, walk hurriedly down the street and never, *ever* make eye contact. (“You’ll just provoke them.”) In a society based on ignoring each other, it’s no wonder that we start to feel that the people around us are unreal—phantoms, hollow men, mindless, soulless, puppets.

Very rarely is this feeling accurate.

Nonetheless, there *are* soulless people out there. Every big city has perhaps a dozen: they seem to worm their way out of the cracks in the universe and make themselves at home—reflections forced into being by the unreality we project onto each other each time we pass on the street and look away. They’re called “nonentities,” and they’re mostly harmless.

Nonentities have no memories of childhood, and they don’t reproduce. They just coalesce from nothing, wearing bland business suits and carrying unremarkable résumés. They have no memorable features, by definition: your eyes just seem to slide right off them. They can be of either gender, but are usually male. They get office jobs and work quietly at them, surprising no one, until one day they get picked off by a reckless driver who didn’t notice them in time. Or sometimes they just disappear into the same oblivion from which they arose: the universe notices their anomalous existence and simply eradicates them.

They aren’t stupid or passive. They’re just soulless. They can feel physical pain and pleasure, but they have no emotions of their own. They can fake interest and sympathy about as well as most people, but usually they live and die (or perhaps it’s more accurate to say they *exist*) without experiencing a single feeling.

Usually, but not always. If a nonentity just happens to be within ten feet when someone experiences a truly intense emotion, that emotion impacts on the nonentity. A rank-10 stress check, for example, or the dizzying ecstasy two people feel the first time they realize they’re in love, or the vertiginous elation of a million-dollar lottery winner—any of these could “awaken” a nonentity. That’s when they become dangerous.

Awakened nonentities have felt something, and they want to feel it again. They try to get the original people to re-experience the feeling. If that doesn’t work, they try to find someone else to have the feeling for them. Sometimes this can be comic: imagine a young couple with a nonentity fixated on them, trying to keep the bloom of first love in their relationship by sending them roses in each other’s names. When that fails, though (as it inevitably does), the joke’s over. Nonentities don’t really understand emotions. To them, it seems perfectly reasonable to kidnap the young couple and say “I’m going to keep pushing these needles into your eyes until you love each other again.”

Of course, that’s just when they get obsessed with a *good* feeling. More often than not, they become awakened to fear, pain, or misery instead, these emotions being a more common currency in daily life. Then nonentities go from peculiar to monstrous.

Nonentities are a difficult prey to catch. They're hard to follow simply because they are completely nondescript. A nonentity could torture you for days to feed off your fear, but you still wouldn't be able to pick him out of a police lineup.

Once you catch them, it's hard to do anything with them. If you can prove they committed crimes, you can get them sent to jail, where they usually evaporate. (Anything that gives them an *identity* to a large number of people—anything that makes them stand out—is likely to make the universe erase them.) If you can't publicize them to death, you can try to kill them, but it's hard—they're preternaturally resilient. Even gunshots only do damage equal to the sum of the dice instead of the result. (Hand-to-hand damage is handled normally.)

Incidentally, nonentities don't bleed. They don't have bones or internal organs. Their flesh seems to be the same consistency throughout, as if they were poured into a mold and cast. This makes shooting or cutting one a rank 7 Unnatural challenge the first time you see it happen. Fire is painful to entropics but doesn't really injure them, and they can shrug off electrical shocks with equal ease. They don't even breathe.

Scariest of all, they're immune to magick because they have no souls, nor even any existence in the eyes of the universe. Blast spells don't damage them at all. (The exception is the Dipsomancy blast. That magick doesn't really target the victim, only the makeshift weapons the spell utilizes.) If you use magick to drop an anvil on their heads or something, that will work, but any spell focussed on them in particular is doomed to fail.

Their soulless nature does offer one way to identify them, though: nonentities have no auras, making them easy to pick out with the Aura Sight skill.

## Nonentities (Minor)

Soulless Office Workers

*All nonentities have the same stats.*

<b>Body:</b>	50 (100 wound points)
<b>Speed:</b>	50
<b>Mind:</b>	50
<b>Soul:</b>	0

**Note:** Nonentities typically start out without any combat skills except the default 15% in Struggle and Dodge. Those who get fixated on pain or fear tend to pick up skills like "Slice" or "Blow You Away" pretty quick, though. On the plus side, they can never increase their skills past 50%: they just don't have the drive and passion that excellence requires.

## Revenants

The term "revenants" is a colloquialism in the occult underground, referring to the gamut of examples of human souls who spontaneously manifest their will in the world of mortals. "Ghosts" would be an equally appropriate term.

In brief, revenants are human souls who have rejected the final reward of the afterlife—whatever that may be—and who have also escaped the afterlife *per se* to take up residence in the mortal world. They are distinguished from demons because demons remain beyond the veil until summoned by a human; revenants can breach the veil (in limited ways) all on their own.



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A revenant is the tattered remnant of an obsessed human soul. Such humans were so consumed with their obsession that at the instant of their death, their souls consumed their own energy so that the bare, naked obsession could survive. All that is left of such people are their obsessions, given direction and a vague sense of context and appropriate behavior by what remains of their depleted soul.

Revenants can take a wide variety of forms, ranging from traditional house-haunters and poltergeists to unusual classifications such as the ghouls and the snowfallen. No revenant is capable of possession unless specifically summoned by name, in which case they act as demons do but with less intelligence—they remain raw obsession and have little in the way of coherent personality.

In general, revenants are capable of causing six examples of minor unnatural phenomena and two examples of significant unnatural phenomena per week. Such behavior defines a classic haunting. Some examples of specific categories of revenants follow, but there are many others which may be devised by the GM. Revenants generally only make visual appearances (such as apparitions) before those with a Soul stat of 60 or higher. Those with a lower Soul stat will rarely see a revenant, though they may experience its influence in non-visual ways.

### Revenant: Ghouls

Ghouls are professional mourners. Obsessed with death and the circumstances of dying, ghouls are the vultures of the afterlife. When someone dies, ghouls are naturally drawn to the scene and material-

ize as normal-looking humans in grim, funereal clothing who drift out of alleys to congregate around the newly dead. They simply gather around a fresh corpse and stare down at it, forming a crowd that disperses once official help arrives. Ghouls exist in large numbers in major metropolitan areas, but rarely appear in rural ones. If you spot someone who appears to be a ghoul, it's a good sign that your life is in immediate danger. (In rare circumstances, a summoned ghoul could provide details on how someone recently died—a useful, if bizarre, investigative technique. Some experienced adepts in large cities are on a first-name basis with multiple ghouls and routinely tap them for information.) Ghouls are usually the revenants of people obsessed with death who themselves died unmourned.

### Revenant: Snowfallen

The Snowfallen are revenants of mothers who died violently while seeking or mourning a lost child. Only able to appear while snow is falling, they drift from place to place, following the course of winter across the surface of the Earth. Everywhere they appear, they either ask desperate questions about their lost child (who may well be long since dead or grown to adulthood) or make strange prophecies in verse to help those in immediate danger survive the threats that lie before them. They are sympathetic, but cannot answer questions or respond to conscious stimuli.

### Revenant: Splits

Particularly tortured humans—usually those who have at least three failed notches in the Self madness meter—may attract the attention of splits. These are revenants who were so insecure in life that they obsessed on the well-being of other people to the exclusion of their own happiness. When a split latches on to an unhappy human target, it waits for the target to be alone and then materializes as an identical double. Initially, the double can only act as a mirror image: its actions are only the left-right opposites of the target. But after a minute or two, the split gains the ability of independent action and can actually interact with its human double.

The split remains a double of the human target, and has full access to the target's consciousness. In its role as a mystical double, the split can knowledgeably converse with the target about the target's life and may attempt to exert either a positive or negative influence, depending on the temperament of the split (flip a coin). The split may even know *more* than its human target knows, such as what other people are up to. In this case, the split might help the target by giving it useful advice or betray the target by leading it into a trap, always doing so in the target's own voice and mannerisms and insisting that it is, somehow, just as much the target as the target is.

Dealing with a split, no matter what its intent, requires a rank-6 Unnatural check on the madness meter. If the split leads you astray because it is malignant, realizing this causes a rank-5 Self check.

### Revenants (Minor)

The Obsessed Dead

<b>Points:</b>	20 + a percentile roll (1-100)
<b>Body:</b>	0
<b>Speed:</b>	10-40
<b>Mind:</b>	10-40
<b>Soul:</b>	40-80

## Tenebrae

No one has ever gotten a clear look at one of the Tenebrae—by definition. The name means “shadows” or “the darkness” in Latin. They cannot exist in bright light: hit one with a spotlight and it either scuttles out of the beam or simply vanishes until you turn the light out. To put it another way, trapping one in a bright beam of light temporarily removes it from reality (similar to the phenomenon of “missing time” explained on p. 146). As soon as the light is removed or dimmed, they can return. Tenebrae are at their most fully real in utter darkness, and that is their preferred hunting condition. They can exist in dim light as well, but it weakens them.

The tenebrae are the mystical scavengers of the unloved dead. They guard the corpses of people whom no one misses, the nameless John and Jane Does that O.D. in alleys, drown in rivers, starve in deserts, and who leave no one behind that cares a whit for their fate. When such a person dies, the tenebrae come scuttling from the shadows and feast on the psychic misery of loneliness that leeches out of the corpse. A dead nobody can feed a pack of tenebrae for up to a week, as long as the corpse is not disturbed, so they loiter about the scene and may choose to attack anyone who comes near. Needless to say, the more obscure the place of death, the more likely the tenebrae are to show up.

From what some adepts have been able to determine, Tenebrae weigh about ten to fifteen pounds and are shaped like a centipede or spider (different ones have different appearances). Their legs are about twelve to fifteen inches long, and each is tipped by a sharp claw about the size of a human thumb. They have a chitinous exoskeleton, and even in dim light they are completely matte black in color: they seem to absorb any stray beams of light that fall on them. They do not vocalize; the only sounds they make are the rustling, skittering sound of their claws as they move. No one is sure how they navigate, but complete darkness is (naturally) no problem to them. They can jump up to five feet straight up, and up to ten feet horizontally. There are reports of them being found underwater; apparently, they don't breathe.

Tenebrae are pack animals, living in groups of six to twelve. They are about as smart as an average dog. In complete dark, they'll attack anything they think they can take down. They're reluctant to prey on groups of humans, having learned that people make light. Some have learned enough to attack a victim's flashlight arm, however. Generally they attack with a mass ambush, usually from behind or above. No one is sure how they communicate with each other, but they are able to coordinate their actions in a rudimentary fashion.

Some people claim to have trained and domesticated Tenebrae, but these claims have never been proven. There are also rumors about a ritual that summons or commands them—but then again, there are a *lot* of rumors in the occult underground.

Their semi-real nature makes the existence of Tenebrae very difficult to prove: when killed, they simply fade away like shadows. The only thing they leave behind for the light is the corpses of their prey.

### Tenebrae (Minor)

The Darkness with Teeth

<b>Points:</b>	a percentile roll (1-100)
<b>Body:</b>	20-30/30-40
<b>Speed:</b>	70-80/80-90
<b>Mind:</b>	10
<b>Soul:</b>	10

**Note:** The left-hand, lower set of stats is for Tenebrae in dim light. In full darkness their Body and Speed increase by 10 points, as do their wound points. All Tenebrae have the skills Dodge and Claw at 60%. Their claws do damage equal to the sum of their roll +6.

## Unspeakable Servants

Like golems, Unspeakable Servants are leftovers from the great age of hermeticism. Unlike golems, unspeakable servants cannot reproduce and they are not easily dominated.

Unspeakable servants are created by a special magick ritual (see p. 82) that builds them from moonlight, the flesh of sacrificed animals, and one of their creator's eyes. The servants fulfill the functions of familiar spirits in traditional witch mythology: they help their master cast spells, they run errands, and they protect the master and harass (or kill) the master's enemies.

In their "natural" form, servants are loathsome monstrosities—ungainly masses of tentacles, slime, suckered tongues and pseudopods. They are very elastic and stretchy; even the largest of them can ooze through a space as small as three inches across. Their skin can exude a sticky resin to enable them to move and climb, or a foul-smelling oil that lubricates them when they pass through a tight aperture. Their one common feature is a single, unblinking eye—the same eye the master plucked out as part of their creation ritual.

Unspeakable servants can be disguised. If an animal larger than the servant is killed and hollowed out, the servant can crawl into the body and animate it by gradually flowing into the animal's blood ves-

sels. These host bodies function as they normally would, except that they move with the speed and strength of the servant instead of their native qualities. An inhabited body ages at a normal rate. Without the Aura Sight skill, it can be difficult to identify an inhabited body. There are subtle clues, however: instead of the normal red and blue tones of arteries and veins in the body, the blood vessels visible beneath the skin are black. (This is generally most visible around the tongue and lips.) Furthermore, unspeakable servants can only see through their one eye. When they possess a body, they generally remove one eye to leave a socket for their own visual organ. In smaller animals this creates an ungainly bulge, while in larger ones it can result in a swollen, puffy socket. In human bodies, the fit is perfect, of course, but the eye may no longer match its mate or move in perfect synchronization.

Unspeakable servants were rare even during the height of old-school mystic studies. Having an unnatural slave is attractive, but removing one's own eye to cast a spell struck many as a rather high price, especially since there was no guarantee of success. However, the creatures are immortal unless killed, so there are still some around. The ritual survived as well, and there are some adepts desperate or crazy enough to create them.

Servants with living masters do the will of their master, plain and simple. They are strong, swift, remorseless, and disgusting. Furthermore, the master can see through the servant's eye at any time, and by spending a significant charge can communicate with it telepathically for a minute or two, no matter where the servant is. This makes them powerful and versatile tools. At any time, the master can command the servant to cease to exist; if it hears this command from its master, the servant dissolves into nothing.



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When the master dies, some servants become autonomous. Their motives are very different from humankind, and they may act in ways that seem odd or unwholesome even by the jaded standards of modern occultists. Some unspeakable servants, unchained by a master's death, simply dissolve themselves. Others have been found forming cults around themselves, trying to learn magick (usually without success, though there have been terrifying exceptions), and even attempting to be accepted as human by those around them. More commonly, a dying master will bequeath an unspeakable servant to a child, friend, or minion, who then becomes the servant's new master (and doesn't need to give up an eye). Some families in Europe are known to have passed servants from father to son for up to eight generations. Indeed, some may still do so.

### Unspeakable Servant, Lesser (Minor)

Loathsome Slave of Sorcery

<b>Body:</b>	40 (80 wound points)
<b>Speed:</b>	60
<b>Mind:</b>	40
<b>Soul:</b>	40

These creatures are generally the size of a chicken or a small dog. They are incapable of speech, but can be taught to read and write. If placed inside the body of a bird or other flying animal, they are capable of flight.

Lesser Servants are modestly intelligent but they are less intuitive than almost any human being. They can follow orders but have problems if their instructions are not precise. They are extremely literal-minded.

They are capable of causing any one minor unnatural phenomenon at will once per day, and one significant unnatural phenomenon at will once per week. These phenomena can only occur in the Lesser Servant's presence.

### Unspeakable Servant, Greater (Minor)

Loathsome Slave of Sorcery

<b>Body:</b>	70 (140 wound points)
<b>Speed:</b>	60
<b>Mind:</b>	50
<b>Soul:</b>	50

These unspeakable servants are the size of a sheep or a large dog. They can speak in guttural, barking tones, and they are capable of as much learning as a human being is. If placed within a human body, they are difficult to distinguish from human beings, except for their speech.

While greater servants are intelligent and capable of some independent reasoning, they are generally not very creative and show little initiative. They follow their instructions to the letter and can understand metaphors and other figures of speech. If they do not feel that they perfectly understand their master's wishes, they can and do ask for clarification.

Greater servants can cause any minor unnatural phenomenon to manifest in their presence at will, but only one at a time. They can cause one significant unnatural phenomenon to happen near them once per day.

### Unspeakable Servant, Abominable (Significant)

Loathsome Slave of Sorcery

<b>Body:</b>	100 (150 wound points)
<b>Speed:</b>	70
<b>Mind:</b>	70
<b>Soul:</b>	50

The largest and rarest of the unspeakable servants are too big to fit inside a human body and require a larger vessel such as a bull, horse, or some other large animal. In their "natural" form they are five to seven feet tall, two to three feet in diameter, and their tentacles can reach up to ten feet.

Abominable servants are fully as intelligent and intuitive as human beings—in fact, their intelligence is often above average. They are capable of independent thought and reasoning, and are therefore able to follow the spirit of an order and not just its strict wording. They can not only speak, they can flawlessly imitate any human voice they have heard—or indeed, almost any simple sound at all.

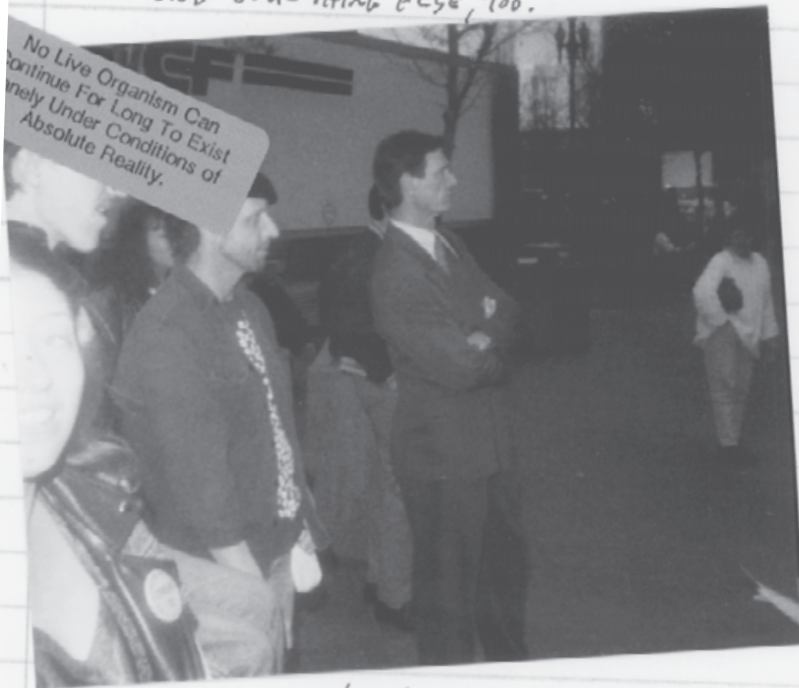
These creatures are the most dangerous of a dangerous breed, and not only because of their greater size, endurance, and intelligence. Abominable servants are nigh-invulnerable to anything except damage from their master. Any damage done to an abominable servant is reduced to one point, unless the damage comes from the servant's master. This is especially troublesome if the master is already dead. In that case, the options are: to find and dig up the master's grave, using its earthly remains as weapons against the creature; to summon the master's departed spirit and force it to deactivate the creature; or to find someone who can mystically and symbolically become the dead master. (This is possible in theory, probably by finding one of the master's descendants and changing their name to the master's name. Still, no one's managed to do it yet.)

Abominable servants can cause as many minor unnatural phenomena to occur in their presence as they desire, whenever they wish. They can cause one significant unnatural phenomenon to happen near them once per hour. They can cause a major unnatural phenomenon to happen near them once per year with a successful Soul roll.

6/12 - IT'S BEEN ONE HELL OF A MONTH, I HAD NO IDEA HOW CLOSE I WAS GETTING TO THE CORE OF THE N.G. ARCHETYPE. BUT AFTER THAT CONCEPTUAL REVELATION OF LAST MONTH, THINGS HAVE BEEN WAY SCREWY. I'VE BEEN SICK A LOT, GOT ~~ON~~ SOME KIND OF EAR INFECTION THAT HOSED MY SENSE OF BALANCE FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS. FINALLY FIGURED IT OUT - I WAS IN DANGER OF STARTING DOWN THE PATH OF THE AVATAR. KILL THAT NOISE. HER GRAVITY WELL ~~IS~~ IS POWERFUL, BUT I'VE BEEN TREADING THE PATH OF THE HERALD TOO LONG TO SWITCH NOW.

STILL, GETTING CAUGHT IN HER MYSTIC PROP WASN'T FOR A COUPLE WEEKS HAD ITS BENEFITS. I WON A FREE COMBO MEAL FROM THE GOLDEN ARCHES UP THE STREET, AND FOUND A TWENTY IN THE GUTTER.

I FOUND SOMETHING ELSE, TOO.



THIS PHOTOGRAPH STUCK TO MY SHOE IN THE STREET AS I WAS LEAVING WITH MY COMBO MEAL. THAT'S DERMOTT ARKANG THERE - THE SMARPY DRESSER. I'D KNOW THE BASTARD ANYWHERE.

THINGS LIKE THIS DON'T JUST HAPPEN. IF ARKANG'S MUCKING AROUND AGAIN, I'VE GOT TO NAIL HIM, AND FAST - I'M GONNA BE THE HERALD, NOT

HIM! THE OLD RELIABLE WITCHFLINDER HAS ME HEADED FOR SOME ARMPIT OF A TOWN, ~~IN~~ ROMEOVILLE, ILLINOIS. THAT'S WHERE ARKANG IS. ~~THE~~ GODDESS KNOWS WHAT HE'S DOING THERE.

I LEAVE IN THE MORNING. FIRST I'LL BURN THIS JOURNAL - CAN'T BE TOO CAREFUL. THE LAST THING I WANT IS FOR THESE PAGES TO FALL INTO THE WRONG HANDS.

THE HERALD IS COMING, ARKANG. FEAR HIS RIGHTEOUS WORD.

END







*chapter twelve*  
*the unexplained*

**UNKNOWN  
ARMIES**



"POETIC LICENSE MAY BE FORGIVEN  
TO THE TELLERS OF UNUSUAL STORIES."  
—ELIPHAS LEVI

"ONCE UPON A TIME, I THOUGHT THE GREATEST MYSTERY  
OF THE COSMOS WAS HOW I COULD BE  
THE CHILD OF TOTAL LOSERS."  
—REBECCA DEGHOULE



# LEGACY

▲ 129 Renata blinked, and stared. The words were still there: “Dermott Arkane.”

“Oh fuck,” Eugene muttered. She glanced up at him and knitted her brows at his look of sadness.

“What?”

“It all makes sense now.”

“*What* makes sense?”

He looked up at her and in a quiet, gentle voice said “Renata, what’s your middle name?”

“It’s . . . well, it’s Mers.”

“Mers?”

“Yeah, it was my mom’s maiden name . . . what? What’s that look?”

“Let me show you something.”

He pulled a napkin out of the holder and produced a ballpoint pen from a pocket of his coat. He shook the pen a little and wrote “RENATA MERS DAKOTA” on the napkin. Underneath he wrote “DERMOTT ARKANE.” Then he drew lines between the words.



“Looks like ole’ Dermott’s middle name is Asa, see?”

“I don’t see anything but a plate of fucking spaghetti,” Renata said. She was almost crying, though she wasn’t sure why. She glanced at the egg and saw that the name had faded away.

“You’re Dermott’s daughter, and your name’s nothing but a

variation of his—an anagram, see? And you don’t have a social security number or anything . . . I bet you always had trouble registering with schools, didn’t you?”

“No,” Renata said sullenly, but she had.

“No wonder I found you when I was looking for him. That’s exactly what you’re *for*.”

“Shut up! You don’t make any sense!”

He opened his mouth but for once didn’t say anything. He just stared at her with a pity that made her furious.

“What are you trying to tell me, huh? That I’m some kind of superstition? That I’m a trick so people can’t find this, this Arkane guy? That my parents *ditched* me because they only *had* me to protect some cult leader?”

Renata was crying in earnest now. Eugene hesitantly reached his hand towards her shoulder, and she swatted it away.

“Well you’re full of *bullshit*, mister! I don’t know how you did that trick with the egg, but my mom’s maiden name was Mers, and my dad is Fred Dakota, and, and I’m *me*, not just some weird decoy for a guy I never even met!”

She ran out of words and just cried.

Eugene LaRue watched her for a moment, then stood up and took her by the hand.

“Come on,” he said, pulling out his wallet.

“Where are we going?” He let go of her to pull out money for the breakfast, but she stood up anyway.

“We’re gonna go see your *parents*,” he said. He took her hand again and pulled. His other hand was in the pocket of his raincoat—the pocket with the gun.

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# SIX

CHAPTER ILLU BY ROB NEMETH

**The chapter on** “The Unnatural” contains explanations and explorations of a number of occult ideas, experiences, and phenomena. These occult displays are central to the game, but they’re not all there is. There is no “Unified Conspiracy Theory” that explains every weird thing in the world: after all, this would be a pretty poor game of mystery and suspense if the players always knew that there was an unnatural solution. Consequently, this chapter offers a variety of mysterious phenomena whose causes are completely *natural* (though many of them are pretty damn weird).

## Using the Unexplained

Your use of unexplained phenomena will, of course, depend on the narrative structure you’ve picked. If your PCs are occult investigators, you may want to throw a lot of strange but natural mysteries their way. If they’re reality cops, they’re supposed to look into all kinds of weird events—what are the odds that they’re going to uncover the real mystic deal 100% of the time? As for occult groups, they’re likely to want to investigate anything that seems mysterious out of greed (“How can I get this power?”) or fear (“Is this some new rival magick?”).

Putting in natural mysteries adds another layer of uncertainty and keeps your players honestly skeptical. The natural inclination of people in the real world is to look for a natural interpretation; the natural inclination of characters that have been exposed to the occult is to look for a *supernatural* interpretation. Mixing a little of the normal-but-weird with the unnaturally weird puts both elements in high contrast and shields your players from lazy thinking.

## Cattle Mutilation

There are reports from the American southwest and especially from Puerto Rico about animals being found dead and completely drained of blood. In some cases, soft tissue from the animals is missing—cow lips and rectums are just gone (“excised with laser-like precision,” according to UFOlogists). In most cases there are no tracks (either animal or human) around the dead cows or goats.

In most American cases of cattle mutilation, the public generally ignores it or blames either Satanic cults (and in a very tiny percentage of the cases they’re right) or extraterrestrials operating with the secret approval of the U.S. government. The Puerto Rican deaths are said to be the work of *El Chupacabra* (“The Goat Sucker”), a tailed creature with a big head, red eyes, and an insatiable appetite for animal blood.

In reality, there are many causes for strange cattle death: everything from insurance fraud to vindictive neighbors to illnesses ignored by poorly trained veterinarians to predator attacks. Most cases could be resolved after examination of the site by a well-trained forest ranger or veterinarian (or both). However, a number of cases of livestock death are truly unexplained, because the dead cattle were killed by uncataloged insect parasites.

These nameless insects hatch inside the lips or rectums of cows and chew their way out. The insect is (at this point) little more than legs, a tiny pheromone gland, and a comparatively huge stomach, folded up and empty. They’re about the size of a pinhead or smaller and they feed primarily on blood. They have no problem getting at it, since they hatch right in the host animal’s body. They simply attach themselves to the wounds caused by their hatching and drain until they’re full. Then they drop off and enter the next stage of their life, as their brethren take their place at the blood fount. Pheromone signals keep the traffic between sated bugs and hungry ones orderly as they move around jockeying for injuries. Like leeches, they secrete anti-coagulant chemicals to keep the blood flowing.

Since hundreds of thousands of parasites hatch inside each host, they can kill a cow in under an hour—faster if they crawl into the lungs and smother it. When they’re done, they crawl out, leaving pheromone trails to make the exodus easier. Once outside, the next phase of their life-cycle occurs: they metamorphose.

Unlike butterflies (who cocoon in order to change form) or locusts (who leave a shed chrysalis behind), the metamorphosis of these parasites is rapid and efficient. They change from bloated larvae to winged adults in a matter of hours. Once they become adults, they immediately take to the air for a mating flight. The male chases the female, sometimes for hours or even days. When



MATT ROACH

they finally couple, they do so midair. While her eggs are being fertilized, the female drives a proboscis into the male's brain, making it unable to do anything but continue to mate and flap its wings. With the male's wings providing loft, the female guides both of them towards some kind of vegetable shelter. When they reach the shelter, the female liquidates the male's brain and sucks it out. The male brain contains an enzyme which triggers death and rapid decay in the female. As the female dies, she ejects her thousands of eggs into the male's body. Her liquefying body sticks the male body to the plant. As the male decays, his body, too, becomes a glue-like jell which attaches the eggs to the plant.

Much like flea eggs, the eggs of this insect are extremely stable when dormant. Under ideal conditions, they can hatch up to four years after they were laid, though it's rare for foliage to remain unrotted for that much time. When a cow (or other animal) comes along and eats the plant, the eggs stick to its lips, or to its esophagus, intestines, or rectum during digestion. Soon, the cycle begins anew and another animal is infected.

These bloodworms are rare for several reasons. First, not every insect mates before death. Indeed, only the swiftest 10% of fliers do. Of those, some land on unappetizing foliage and their eggs go unconsumed. Many eggs are lost every fall when the foliage rots from beneath them. Finally, some egg groups get separated (usually by the autumn rot described above) and the parasites that do get eaten are too few in number to kill their host. Even when the attacks are deadly, it is far likelier that birds or wild animals will eat the eggs than domestic animals. The exsanguination of cows and goats is noticed only because the animals are valuable.

## Firewalking

People walk unharmed across red-hot coals in religious ceremonies all over the world. Hindu mystics do it, some Greek Christians do it when "possessed by saints," even New Age business consultants will teach you how to do it in thousand-dollar seminars.

Different firewalkers offer different explanations for how they are able to cross searing coals unscathed. Some say they're protected by angels, while others credit biofeedback or "positive energy." However, a scientific rationale can also explain it.

Firewalking is almost always done on wood coals—never on metal. This is because wood has a much slower rate of thermal transfer. In layman's terms, heat travels slower through wood than through metal. An everyday example is when you set your stove to 350°. You can stick your hand inside safely as long as you don't touch the metal racks or the side of the oven. The air is the same temperature as the metal rack, but it transfers that heat to your hand much slower.

Scientists have found that a bare foot, covered with a thin layer of sweat, can tread safely on some soft wood coals for as long as half a second before enough heat is transferred to burn the skin. That doesn't sound like a lot of time, and indeed some slow walkers *do* get burned. However, a common element in many firewalking ceremonies is fast paced music to encourage walkers (even if just subliminally) to step lively.

Some firewalkers make the practice even safer by raking the hottest coals to the outside of their path. Watching from the sides, it looks as if they're walking on white hot coals, when they're actually walking on the ground (or on cooler ash) *between* two ranks of hot coals.

## Hoaxes

A distressingly common explanation for almost any miraculous manifestation is "someone's faking it." Don't forget that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (creator of the profoundly logical Sherlock Holmes) was completely bamboozled by a set of photos of "faeries" produced by a pair of young working-class British girls who probably didn't expect *anyone* to take their faked pictures seriously. American teens in modern times have been able to convince scientists of their "psychic powers" by reading playing cards reflected in the researchers' eyeglasses.

How much simpler is deception for someone trained to deceive? Stage magician James Randi has been able to duplicate countless unnatural phenomena with sleight of hand. Spoon bending, crop circles, and "psychic surgery" are all well within the abilities of any half-talented stage magician—and the money and perks available to famous "psychics" are a lot more attractive than what you can get working children's birthday parties.

## Psychic Senses

In the world of *Unknown Armies*, paranormal senses certainly do exist. But in actual fact, particularly keen *natural* senses can often be just as mystifying. This is especially true if these senses are intuitively used.

A great deal of human action is done unconsciously. Every time you drive a car, you unconsciously think about it every time you hit the gas or the brake. Similarly, no cyclist is aware of every press on the pedals, and adult readers perceive individual letters and words much less than they do words, phrases and ideas.

Similarly, some people develop powerful detective skills that are *completely unconscious*. Such "intuitions" and "gut feelings" are most common among psychologists, police officers, and others who deal with lies and evasions on a daily basis. The intuitive cop isn't consciously aware that he can see the suspect's pulse speed up in his neck vein. His thinking mind isn't keeping track of anomalous word choices or how often the suspect meets his eyes, or any of the other countless ways people unconsciously telegraph discomfort. No, the intuitive person just knows that he doesn't trust the speaker.

In some particularly advanced cases, intuitives can reconstruct crime scenes from negligible details (a dent in the carpet from furniture, a tilted lamp, the way a dropped drink spilled) and get "visions of the past." These visions aren't paranormal, only unconscious.

There was, at one time, a showman who gave displays of a horse that could supposedly do math. People would ask it math questions and it would tap out correct answers with its hoof. In fact, the horse had just learned to watch the expressions of the people around it: when it reached the right answer, their faces and posture would change. That's how the horse knew when to stop tapping. Certainly it was a damn smart horse—just not mathematically.

If a horse can learn to read people and tell them what they want to hear, why not a human being? In fact, a human "psychic" has some psychological advantages built in. For instance, people remember what's unusual and gloss over what's ordinary. A stage psychic knows how to deliver vague and common information so that it sounds important ("I see you at home . . . there are other people there, maybe two or three . . .") "That's right! I live with my husband and two children!") One debunker found that a stage psy-

chic could impress a crowd with “amazing” psychic powers even when he was only right with one guess in fourteen. The audience simply paid more attention to the right answers (which were “extraordinary”) than to the wrong guesses (which they perceived as normal and unimportant).

## Spontaneous Combustion

There have been many reported cases of spontaneous human combustion—people bursting into flames for no apparent reason, burning up quickly and completely. Sometimes the fire will completely burn up parts of the body but leave only a hand or foot untouched. Other times, the flames will destroy the body but leave surrounding objects (such as furniture) untouched.

Many cases attributed to spontaneous combustion are nothing more than weird fires. Here’s an example: someone nods off with a cigarette in her mouth, it falls on her flammable cashmere sweater, it flares up and ignites some loose stuffing in her chair. She wakes up, draws in a breath to scream, and has her throat scalded by hot smoke. Breathing the airless smoke, she passes out in her own burning chair. She suffocates, or maybe dies of a heart attack. The surface of her body is scalded black, just as the stuffing of the chair and much of her clothes are burned away. Almost everything that burned (the chair stuffing and her sweater) was light and quick-burning, producing a very hot but brief flame. Such a fire might not even last long enough to ignite a wooden floor or the frame of the chair, but it would be enough to blacken her corpse—even though the cause of death was smoke inhalation. It might even leave her feet untouched if she had them up, because the heat of the fire was going up and they were outside the radius of the heat. (If this sounds farfetched, examine a campfire some time. You’ll probably find a log that’s burned clean through at the center while the ends are untouched. Same phenomenon.)

A few cases of spontaneous human combustion have been witnessed, though the witnesses are rarely reliable. (Much as we respect the work of skeptics and debunkers, they rarely consider *any* testimony reliable.) These cases—where someone simply explodes into flame with no apparent reason at all—have a scientific explanation. It’s due to a rare bacterial infection.

The bacteria were first isolated by Dr. Liberty Kostos in 1985. She named the parasite *Schizomyces Larryus* after her ex-husband, Mr. Larry Kostos. Dr. Kostos failed to realize how dangerous *Larryus* could be, because she never saw a severe infection.

These bacteria are usually harmless. They grow on the skin of perhaps one person in a hundred—it’s more prevalent in hot, wet climates and rarer in cold or dry regions. These bacteria live off microscopic debris, such as dead epidermal cells and the feces of skin mites. Their own excrement is slightly flammable, but in most people the concentrations are so small that it evaporates harmlessly.

When a bacteria colony grows large enough, it sometimes attempts to consume living skin. In most cases, this incursion is fought off by the body’s natural defenses. Some people succumb to severe bacterial skin infection, however, and the surface of their skin becomes densely covered with these microscopic invaders. The infection process can be rapid: someone might go to bed with a small rash on his shoulder blade and wake up with his entire back raw and itching. The bacteria’s flammable secretions build up in the infected areas. In some cases, the bacteria can penetrate to the body’s fat layer and the concentration can become high.



DAN PARSONS

At this point, the victim’s rash is inundated with combustible material. All it takes is a spark to ignite it. The worse the infection, the more likely it is that the victim will burn badly. Naturally, one of the first things to burn is the bacteria that caused the infection, which makes it unlikely that *Schizomyces Larryus* will ever be identified as the cause of combustion.

Not to worry: the chances of your body bursting into flame because of *Schizomyces Larryus* are sligher than your chances of being hit by lightning. Only one person in a hundred carries the bacteria: of those carriers, only one in a hundred develops a colony big enough to attempt to invade the living skin. Of those who get big colonies, only one in a thousand fails to fight off the infection naturally: thus, so far, the chances of even getting enough build-up to catch fire is one in ten million. Of those one in ten million, most get their infection washed and treated before it’s exposed to a spark. (Most ignitions are caused by static electricity, which happens most frequently in dry climates—and *Larryus* doesn’t like dry climates.)

The only real threat to humankind from the spontaneous combustion bacteria would be a mutant (or bioengineered) strain that was far more aggressive and efficient.

## Unidentified Flying Objects

Here’s a huge category. In addition to weather balloons, headlights reflecting off clouds, swamp gas, secret military aircraft, normal aircraft, meteors, the planet Venus, drunken hallucinations, ball lightning, and deliberate hoaxes, you can now add bioluminescent insect colonies.

That's right. Some of those weird flying lights in the sky are actually giant clouds of fireflies busily breeding the next giant cloud of fireflies.

Many Americans are familiar with fireflies—tiny insects that signal their readiness to mate with a flash of light. Their standard mating patterns are well documented. However, not every mating is standard.

Some seasons, breeding cycles coincide or a predator is removed (typically by pollution or some other act of man). In these seasons, the firefly population becomes particularly high, and a truly massive gathering of the insects is held.

No one knows what causes these grand mating meetings because no one's been paying attention before one happens. The explanation is as follows: if fireflies see an exceptionally high number of signals from the same sex, it sets off a trigger in their brain. This trigger says "only mate at high altitude." The fireflies then begin flying abnormally high and signaling. The other flies see someone above them and try to fly higher still. The predictable result is a race for altitude.

Simple mating pressures bring all the flies into one place. The females go where the males are, and the males go where the females are. It's a self-reinforcing cycle. These meetings tend to happen around thermal updrafts, where both sexes can get the desired altitude easier.

Fireflies aren't designed for high altitude flight, and the grand meeting generally lasts a short time before the gallant lover flies start dying in droves. Eventually a few manage to get lucky and still make it to the ground safely, ensuring that the next generation is comprised of strong fliers — and also ensuring that the following year's firefly population isn't ungainly huge.

The result, from a human standpoint: huge, wobbly, scintillating masses of light are seen in the sky by thousands, but no unusual thermal traces are found with imaging equipment, and radar detects *nothing*. If a lot of dead fireflies are found on the ground the next day (and who's going to notice? After all, they aren't glowing any more) it's just as likely to be considered an *effect* of the UFO than a probable cause.

## Vampires

The persistent vampire myth says a lot more about human nature and coincidental marketing than it says about supernatural reality.

The common vampire of fiction is a blood-drinking immortal with superhuman strength and speed, capable of a variety of physical transformations and mystical effects. They're also sexy as all get out.

Real vampires can be charming and personable, but no more so than a well-bred regular human being. They have abnormally long lifespans, that's true, but the desire to drink blood is a secondary symptom of a very natural, very physical disease.

The story of vampirism begins (as so many blood-soaked histories do) with a royal wedding in dark age Wallachia (the country which eventually became Transylvania). Two cousins were wed, as was the custom at a time when noble lineage was a critical consideration in every political question. Unfortunately, these cousins (of the infamous Dracul lineage) took their wedding vows seriously, preventing their severely inbred blood from being diluted by the hearty peasant stock of a good-looking footman or serving lad (as was also the custom of the time). Mutations popped up.

The Dracul children were albinos (having pale white skin and red eyes), and they were anemic (giving them a craving for red meat). None of this was a big deal to a noble culture with far more than its share of dwarfs, hemophiliacs, and supernumerary nipples. The mutation that would cause so much stir was damage to their internal clocks.

True fact: researchers working with very simple organisms (newts or salamanders) have radically increased their lifespans with a little genetic tampering. Aging, it turns out, may be programmed into animal physiology. Ages ago, the children of apes who died soon after menopause had an evolutionary advantage over apes who had to compete with generations of parents and grandparents for the last banana on the tree. When older competitors died off, it made those ape children more likely to breed, and the curse of age followed us out of the jungle and into the city. However, the curse got a little confused in Wallachia by the Dracul kids.

Their inbreeding had damaged the genetic program that (in most of us) says "get old and die." They age, of course: no genetic hiccup is going to prevent you from being scarred when injured or having your arteries get clogged if you eat fatty foods. But the "inevitable" liver spots, wrinkles and hair loss that waits for you and me ignores people with the vampire gene.

The vampire gene is recessive and extremely rare, and is almost inevitably associated with albinism, an allergy to garlic (ranging from minor sneezing and watery eyes to swelling and hives), severe anemia, low sperm counts in men and reproductive difficulties in women. Those with the active gene age normally through adolescence, but after pubescence is complete (sometime between the ages of 13 and 18) they age at about a tenth the normal rate. Their bodies heal at a normal rate, but exhibit a robust immune system that combines the best aspects of youth (vigor and resilience) and age (exposure to a wide variety of pathogens). There's an odd dental footnote: every tooth in a Dracul vampire's mouth falls out every three to six years, but a new one grows in their place. Essentially, their "baby teeth" are always replaced by more baby teeth. (Their white, smooth, *new* teeth may have played into the "fang" mythology.) Their albinism makes them prone to sunburn even on slightly cloudy days, and their eyes are very sensitive to bright light.

The first Draculs with this condition quickly learned that they felt a lot better if they ate a lot of red meat, and when Vlad Dracul (known popularly as Vlad Tepes) fought against the Turks, he found the scent of human blood irresistible. This secret was passed on down the bloodline, existing even in the present day.

## Zombies

According to American mythology, zombies rise from the grave for no particular reason and wander around eating the brains of the living. No one really believes in this.

According to African and Haitian mythology (where the zombie concept originated), a zombie is someone who's been put under a voodoo spell. The victim appears to die suddenly, and is buried. The night after the victim's burial, however, the spell caster sneaks into the graveyard and digs up the "corpse." The victim wakes up and is promptly beaten up by the sorcerer and his associates. The victim's soul is then sucked out and imprisoned. What remains is a zombie—a soulless automaton commanded by the sorcerer (or by whomever buys it from the sorcerer) and guaranteed



PAUL CARRICK

to serve without complaint as long as it is fed plenty of a plant called the “zombie’s cucumber.”

The effectiveness of the soul-sucking is up to individual GMs to evaluate. But even if the magick aspect of the operation doesn’t work, the effect is largely the same.

Voodoo in Haiti is strongly connected to secret groups who see themselves as community protectors. When someone transgresses their laws, he’s drugged with tetrodotoxin—a powerful venom found in various frogs and puffer fish. Tetrodotoxin occurs naturally all over the world, from the Red Sea (where they inspired one of the dietary restrictions still followed by orthodox Jews) to the coast of Japan (where “fugu” fish is considered a delicacy, even though it sometimes kills those who partake). It is used in the west as an anaesthetic, because it can put someone in a trance that is very difficult to distinguish from death. This death trance can be induced by a skilled poisoner without recourse to magick.

Once the zombie has been dosed, he apparently dies: his heart stops, he grows cold, respiration ceases. The effects usually wear off within 24 hours or less, but the victim is now trapped in his coffin—buried alive. He’s dug up by his poisoner, however, who immediately pounds the hell out of him to keep him docile and confused. In this state, he’s fed the zombie cucumber, a vegetable that’s chock-full of a drug called daturia, which induces confusion, apathy, and general listlessness.

So now you have someone who’s been buried alive, beaten severely, and drugged. This treatment is already likely to give you someone shell-shocked enough to just follow orders. Just as powerful (in Haiti) is the culture. Everyone there knows what a zombie is, and how a zombie is supposed to act. When you wake up in a coffin, get dug up and beaten, you *know* what you’ve become. Everyone treats you like a zombie (they tie your jaw shut and boss you around) and it’s very hard indeed to escape that social conditioning.







# *chapter thirteen* *archetypes, avatars,* *and godwalkers*

## UNKNOWN ARMIES



"AN INITIATE IS NOT THE SAME AS A MYSTIC. BEING AN INITIATE—HAVING AN INTUITIVE COMPREHENSION OF WHAT REASON CANNOT EXPLAIN—IS A VERY DEEP PROCESS . . . [A] MYSTIC IS A SLAVE, A SITE OF THE MANIFESTATION OF THE NUMINOUS, THROUGH WHICH SITE THE SIGNS OF A SECRET CAN BE OBSERVED. THE INITIATE ENCOURAGES THE MYSTIC AND USES HIM AS YOU MIGHT USE A TELEPHONE, TO ESTABLISH LONG-DISTANCE CONTACT, OR AS A CHEMIST MIGHT USE LITMUS PAPER, TO DETECT THE ACTION OF A PARTICULAR SUBSTANCE."

—UMBERTO ECO, *FOUCAULT'S PENDULUM*

"I KNOW WHAT I'M LOOKING FOR.  
I KNOW THAT BETTER THAN I KNOW MYSELF.  
SEE, IT'S THE LOOKING THAT MAKES ME WHO I AM.  
I MAY CHANGE, BUT MY GOAL STAYS THE SAME."

—ALEX ABEL



**As discussed earlier,** a group of ascended humans tied to specific archetypes govern our reality. Humans can choose to model their life on a given archetype and become avatars with magical powers. One person per archetype can strive to achieve the status of godwalker—one step away from the Invisible Clergy itself.

Note that avatars and godwalkers are not very well-known in the occult underground. There aren't many of them, and their powers—known as **channels**—tend to be on the subtle side. Most adepts assume that anyone who says she's an avatar of an archetype is probably just wacked in the head. Likewise, avatars and godwalkers look down on adepts as crude, scum-sucking bottom-feeders with no idea of what true magick is all about.

Being an avatar or a godwalker is not a casual undertaking. It's something you devote your entire life to. There are cases of accidental avatars and godwalkers, but they're very, very rare.

## Becoming an Avatar

Playing an avatar has some special rules associated with it, and it has some behavior restrictions as well, just like the schools of magick. However, it's more specific and simultaneously less restrictive.

First off, you have to pick the Archetype you embody. Eight examples are given in this chapter: The Demagogue, The Executioner, The Flying Woman, The Fool, The Masterless Man, The Merchant, The Pilgrim, and The Savage. Individual GMs may design their own Archetypes and tell players their options, or players may develop their own archetypes for their characters to embody. However, the GM has the authority to veto or change any Archetype or any power based on an archetype. (“Aw, what do you mean I can't have Kill With A Glance as one of my channels?”)

Rules-wise, you just take Avatar: Fool or Avatar: Pilgrim as a Soul-based skill. You do *not* have to take this as your obsession skill, and you *can* study a school of magick in addition to being an avatar. If you take it as an obsession, you can flip-flop rolls as usual. You can increase this skill with experience points, just like any other. However, there aren't any cherries for getting matches.

The big difference between the avatar skill and a skill like Badminton or Locate Good Restaurants is that an avatar skill can *decrease*. At the end of every game session, the GM will consider your recent actions; if you've been behaving like your archetype, well and good. If not—she may drop your avatar skill a point. If you've been actively going completely counter to type, she may decrease your skill by up to *three* points.

Another limit is this: you can only have one avatar skill at a time. If you completely lose one avatar skill, you can start another from zero, but you can't have more than one under any circumstances.

Those are the down sides to avatar skills. The up side is that the better you get at a avatar skill, the more things you can do with it. At low levels (1%–50%) the avatar skill can do one specific thing. At higher levels (51%–70%) you can attempt a second, bigger channel. A third ability is gained at 71%, and a fourth and final effect at 91%. These abilities are like formula spells—you can't change or customize them. On the other hand, you don't need charges to use these. You can attempt them as often as you want, subject to the limits of each channel.

## Becoming a Godwalker

Only one person in the whole world at a time can have a particular avatar skill at 99%, and that person is the godwalker for that archet-

type. If you've got Avatar: Flying Woman at 98% and you can't seem to go any higher, you'd better hunt down that chick with 99% and either kill her or get her to act against the archetype and lose her godwalker status (just one point will do the trick). Then *you* can become the godwalker (unless someone else beats you to it)—and there are powers reserved for godwalkers that even avatars with the skill at 98% can't touch. (But we're not going to reveal them in this book.)

## The Archetypes

Each archetype is described here in the following format:

**Attributes:** These are the traits this archetype embodies and represents. The closer your actions are to these behaviors and descriptions, the closer to becoming godwalker you are.

**Taboos:** These are the things that absolutely *don't fit* with this archetype. If you do any of these, you're in danger of having your skill level knocked down at the end of the session.

**Symbols:** Certain objects, colors, or mystic concepts are associated with each Archetype. The more of these you have around you, the better.

**Suspected Avatars in History:** Famous and successful people often get that way by tapping into the power of archetypes (either consciously or by dumb luck).

**Channels:** The good stuff—what the skill lets you do at its various levels.

## The Demagogue

**Attributes:** People want answers. The Demagogue provides them. The priest who inspires generosity and compassion in his parishioners may be channeling the Demagogue; so may the bigot on the internet, blaming economic woes on the Jews or the Communists.

The essence of the Demagogue is to provide a convincing explanation. Not necessarily a true explanation, or one that the Demagogue believes in, but one that makes superficial sense and appeals to the interests of the listener.

The power of this archetype lies in its ability to inspire belief and spur people to action. When used with foresight and wisdom, it can build communities, ease the tensions of hatred, and push people to greater exertions. When used selfishly, it can start wars, cripple societies, and turn ordinary people into a savage mob.

**Taboos:** Whatever doubt the Demagogue might feel, no matter what reservations might plague him privately, the Demagogue never admits he was wrong, especially not in public. There can be weaseling (“It now appears that I was given incorrect information—but the *basic premises* of my ideas are still as logical and rock-solid as ever . . .”) and waffling (“Oh, you misinterpreted what I said. Here's what I *meant* . . .”) but any show of ideological softness is a break with the archetype.

This doesn't mean the Demagogue can't change his position or contradict himself. Far from it—all it means is that each change and contradiction has to be presented as the logical consequence of what went before. If you said the Information Superhighway was bad last Thursday and now you're saying it's good, that's not a problem. You have many options. One is to explain that what you said last Thursday was deliberately misinterpreted by your enemies (the CIA, a crypto-fascist political conspiracy, the bleeding heart liberal press, whoever). The other is to simply bull your way through: “My position on the Information Superhighway has not changed, and I will not stand for these smears and accusations!”

**Symbols:** Any national flag or seal can serve as a symbol for the Demagogue. The animals associated with this Archetype include the eagle and the parrot. Demagogues are widely known for their use of slogans, and they are tied to locations where they can stand higher than an audience and speak—pulpits, soapboxes, balconies in front of a courtyard, *etc.*

**Suspected Avatars in History:** Senator Joe McCarthy is widely believed to have channeled The Demagogue (some say deliberately). Adolf Hitler almost certainly did, as did Winston Churchill.

**Channels:**

**1%-50%:** At this level, the Demagogue can make minor adjustments to the world-view of those around him. It takes about fifteen minutes to half an hour to really “explain things,” but after this one-on-one conversation, the Demagogue can make a roll against his Avatar skill.

If the avatar is trying to influence someone’s opinion, this roll is resolved just like a Charm or Persuasion skill. However, it can also be used to prepare someone for psychological trauma. Suppose a Demagogue sits down with you and explains that in pursuit of the Cause, you may be required to make the ultimate sacrifice for the greater good, you may be called upon to give your very life or take life from another, blah blah blah . . . You leave the conversation feeling prepared for violence, and as a consequence, you automatically succeed at the next stress check against Violence that you make that day. (This preparation only lasts a day and only works if the Avatar skill check was successful.) Similarly, if the Demagogue had warned you that you were going to see unspeakable terrors, then you could breeze through your next check against The Unnatural.

There are a couple important limitations on the use of this ability to bypass stress checks. First off, the Demagogue has to have a pretty good idea of what’s coming. It’s not enough to just make vague statements about how “You might experience some discomfort and, uh, you know, helplessness and stuff.” The warning must be specific enough that it’s clear which stress gauge is being targeted. Secondly, each person can only be shielded in one gauge at a time: if your fast-talking Demagogue buddy has prepared you to betray your values and make that Self check, he can’t also prepare you for Isolation. Finally, the Demagogue can’t use this skill on himself—only on others.

**51%-70%:** At this level, a Demagogue who makes a successful Avatar roll can get a sense of what an individual wants to believe. A Demagogue who used this on Alex Abel would realize that he wants to hear, “You’re right, you can’t make omelets without breaking eggs, taking the path of ascension is best for humanity.” This skill can also be used on a crowd to sense their general mood and what they’re willing to accept.

**71%-90%:** By now, the Demagogue has the power to create belief systems and slip them in the back door of mass consciousness. For instance, the Demagogue could decide that he wants people to believe that Ernest Hemingway was gay. All he has to do is spend a day meditating on the idea, then make an Avatar roll. If successful, the Demagogue doesn’t even have to *tell* anyone: people worldwide who are thinking about Hemingway start to believe he might have been homosexual. They’ll even think it’s *their own idea*. Grad students write papers on it, articles are submitted to scholarly journals, spokespeople for the gay and lesbian community start mentioning him. There’s no guarantee that the idea will become mainstream, of course; the more outlandish the idea (“Roleplaying games cause tooth decay.”) the more likely it is to be

dismissed out of hand. This power does put the notion in the marketplace of ideas, however.

**91%+:** At this level, the Demagogue can tell someone something and roll his Avatar skill. If the roll is a success, the person believes it—at least for a little while. This can implant very simple ideas (“You should drop your weapon.”). It can also implant very complicated ones (“The CIA controls the weather with laser satellites based on alien technology, but the aliens tricked them: the satellites also beam subliminal messages down to the population to make us lethargic and weak for an eventual invasion. Only a tin foil hat can protect you!”). The more reasonable the suggestion, the longer it lasts. If this is used to make someone perform an action blatantly contrary to their nature (“Don’t shoot me; you should be killing your wife instead.”) the target gets a Soul roll to resist it.

## The Executioner

**Attributes:** The Executioner is the embodiment of deliberate, premeditated violence. This archetype’s realm is not the battlefield of the soldier, nor does it approach from concealment like an assassin. The Executioner carries out a death sentence. The convicted may try to escape or evade, but the Executioner is relentless in pursuit.

While the Executioner is seen by some as an ugly necessity for a peaceful society, its role is far more often that of a servant to the powerful and vindictive. At its worst, the Executioner does not care whether it serves justice or treachery—it only serves blindly.

**Taboos:** The Executioner kills. It does not judge. The Executioner’s powers can only be harnessed in the pursuit and destruction of an individual condemned. This condemnation can be legal or illegal, just or unjust, but it cannot be pronounced by the Executioner. This archetype does the bidding of a higher authority. An Executioner who goes off hunting by itself is in violation of type.

It is also a violation of type to show weakness, fear, remorse, or hesitation during an execution. An Executioner can dissociate himself from a judging authority without penalty—but not in the middle of a mission.

**Symbols:** Black garments, the headsman’s axe, and concealed features (especially the eyes) are common to this archetype. The Executioner is also sexless: hiding or removing typical gender characteristics keeps one in line. The Executioner is represented by the Tarot card of Death, and the Ace of Spades in a regular deck. The vulture and the crow are associated with this archetype.

**Suspected Avatars in History:** The kings of England seem to have mastered many of these avatars, ranging from the “three good knights” who killed Thomas a Becket in Canterbury Cathedral to the knave Tyrrell who smothered the Princes in the Tower. Cromwell’s beheading of Charles I may have been a ritual theft of the archetype from the royal family.

**Channels:**

**1%-50%:** When a target has been named for you by someone you accept as a judge and authority, you can flip-flop any rolls you make in combat with that particular target. However, you can only have one target at a time, and you cannot change targets until your current target is dead. Furthermore, when you are given a target, you must be given a reason (anything from “He’s a dangerous serial killer,” to “He failed to show proper respect to the Boss.”). You cannot be assigned a target in the middle of combat.

**51%-70%:** At this level, you develop the death’s-head stare. If you lock eyes with someone and make a successful Avatar roll, you





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can force them to make a stress check against Violence (in this case, the fear of death). The level of the stress check is equal to the highest die you rolled. (For example, if you rolled 27, it would be a rank-7 check. If you rolled a 22, it would be a rank-2 check.) It takes you one action to do this in combat, and making the stress check takes your victim's next action.

**71%-90%:** When attempting to harm your designated target, you can add up to 20 points to any successful Firearms or Struggle roll. This roll is still a success, even if adding the points raises it above your normal skill level.

**91%+:** At this level, no effect can give you a negative shift to a combat roll. Blindness, magick, the powers of other avatars—nothing deters the Executioner.

## The Flying Woman

**Attributes:** The Flying Woman is not constrained by normal rules and restrictions; instead, she dictates her own destiny. She may choose to accept the leadership of others, but it must be her free choice. She is her own highest authority, and she carves her own path in the world.

While the Flying Woman is free and unfettered, she can also be dangerously overconfident. Because she trusts herself implicitly, a single miscalculation can mean disaster.

**Taboos:** The Flying Woman does not knuckle under to threats or concern herself with the opinions of others. Anyone who checks her actions out of fear of "what the neighbors might say" is not worthy of the powers of the Flying Woman.

The Flying Woman never asks anyone to do something for her when she is capable of doing it herself. Self-reliance is central to this Archetype.

No man can conduct the Flying Woman.

**Symbols:** Wings, airplanes, and birds are (of course) associated with the Flying Woman.

**Suspected Avatars in History:** Amelia Earhart is believed by some to have ascended during her final plane flight, thereby creating this archetype. Others believe Rosa Parks to have been one of its more celebrated avatars. Those in the know are keeping an eye on the Lilith Fair concert tour.

**Channels:**

**1%-50%:** Any failed stress check based on Self, Helplessness, or Isolation can be flip-flopped if the changed result is less than the Flying Woman's avatar skill. No avatar skill check is necessary.

**Example:** Rita has an Avatar: Flying Woman skill at 40%. She makes a stress check against Isolation and rolls a 90—a clear failure. She can flip-flop the roll to make it an 09—a success—because the 09 is lower than her Avatar: Flying Woman skill.

**51%-70%:** At this level, the avatar can actually fly. In addition to taking any other action, the Flying Woman can move 10 feet horizontally or vertically, or can just hover in the air. A roll must be made each round in combat to start/continue flying, or about every minute in a non-combat situation. (Keep in mind that using this skill too openly can result in urban legends, vendettas from antsy adepts, or even the dreaded Claws of the Tiger effect described on p. 111.)

**71%-90%:** The Flying Woman can overcome any attempt to restrain or imprison her. A successful Avatar: Flying Woman check will unlock doors, break chokes or restraining holds, and cause bonds to snap or unfasten. A roll must be made for each such hurdle to be surmounted, but this power is quite broad in its reach. For in-

stance, if you put a Flying Woman in your back seat and started driving down the highway, one roll could unlock the door and a second could make the car stop so she could get out. This can also be used to break magical effects—anything that influences the mind or compels action counts as an “attempt to restrain.” However, it doesn’t do diddly against straightforward attacks: there’s a big difference between trying to imprison someone and trying to destroy her.

**91%+:** At this level of power, the Flying Woman’s will is so powerful it warps reality around her without needing an Avatar: Flying Woman check. She can flip-flop *any* roll she makes if the result is under her Avatar: Flying Woman skill.

## The Fool

**Attributes:** The Fool goes where he shouldn’t, says what he ought not and gets into what is forbidden. He’s a walking disaster area, an accident waiting to happen, a seething focus of chaos that seems to wreck everything around him while he wanders on, blithely ignorant of what he’s doing. The fool is feckless, random—and undeniably lucky. “Fortune favors the fool,” even as he walks unheeding into the abyss.

The abyss represents the Fool’s dark side. This archetype is by nature easy to manipulate and can readily become the pawn of those more sinister and ruthless than he is. In the case of a pure fool, that’s almost everyone.

**Taboos:** The Fool is never exactly the sharpest knife in the drawer. If your Mind score ever goes above 50%, you’re in danger of thinking too much to be a good Fool.

The Fool is also gullible. Any time a Fool avatar acts suspicious of an individual or circumstance without good reason, the link to the archetype is weakened.

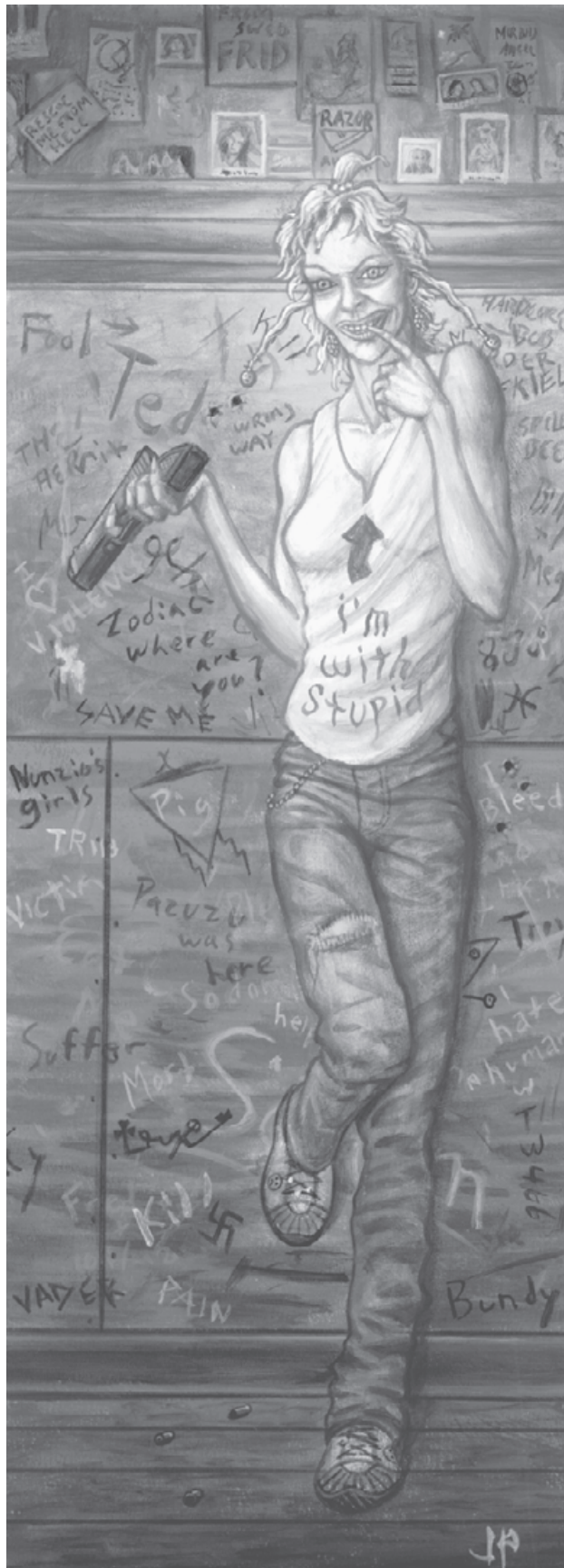
**Symbols:** The Fool card in the tarot deck, and the Joker in a standard deck. The hobo bag-on-a-stick is one of the Fool’s props, as are shoes with bells. The Fool’s animal is the butterfly, and in recent years the archetype has become associated with marijuana.

**Suspected Avatars in History:** Peter the Hermit, who started the Crusades, was probably a Fool, as was Christopher Columbus, who stumbled on the New World despite total confusion about his destination, his course, and how far everything was. Political-minded dukes, depending on their ideologies, suspect either President Reagan or President Clinton of being avatars of the Fool.

### Channels:

**1%–50%:** At this level you can find a common object wherever you need it and succeed in an Avatar: Fool check, as long as there’s a good possibility of it being where you’re looking. This is good for finding quarters, the hairpin you need to pick a lock, the lead pipe you need to smash someone’s face in . . . in more specific locations, you can find other things that would reasonably be there. You could find a 3/4" socket wrench in a garage, or a picture book of Goya’s artwork in a library, but not vice versa. This cannot be used for objects of great value, so no diamond rings or magical artifacts.

**51%–70%:** At this level, you become terribly lucky. Any time you take damage, you can immediately make an Avatar: Fool check to bounce the damage onto someone nearby instead. If you succeed, someone else takes the hurt, even if it’s normally impossible. If you use this ability, you lose your next action (because you’ve stumbled and fallen out of the way of a knife thrust, or simply because you’re standing around slack-jawed at the carnage).



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Keep in mind that *you* don't decide who takes the damage for you; the GM does. She may decide it randomly, or she may stick it to one of your fellow PCs. That means that using this ability a lot can make you *really* unpopular.

**Example:** Donna the Fool and her enforcer associate Clark get into a knife fight with some punks. Clark, who's injured, decides to spend a turn dodging. His Dodge skill is an impressive 40%. Meanwhile, one of the punks shoots Donna and hits, doing 23 points of damage. Donna decides to reflect the damage, and rolls successfully to do so. The GM decides, by spinning an empty bottle on the table, that the damage goes to Clark. Clark takes 23 points of damage automatically. It doesn't get halved even though it's under his Dodge skill, and he can't roll to reduce it because it's *his* damage; it's Donna's. He's just getting shafted with it.

**71%–90%:** You gain the ability to be in the right place at the right time. This is identical to the Pornomancer formula spell Synchronicity (p. 102).

**91%+:** Whenever anyone tries to harm you, either conventionally or with magick, their skill automatically takes a -30% shift when used against you—you don't need to make a check. (**Example:** If someone with Brawling 70% jumps you, he suddenly has Brawling 40% instead.) If you're willing to give up your next action (even if it's in the following round), you can forego this automatic protection and attempt to directly manipulate the forces of chaos to make it even harder on your opponent. You can choose to do this after you see their roll. If you do so, make an Avatar: Fool check. On a successful roll, your opponent's skill is reduced by ten times the number you rolled in the ones place. That is, if you rolled a 48, their skill would be reduced by 80%. On the other hand, if you rolled a 31, their skill would be reduced by 10%.

## The Masterless Man

**Attributes:** The Masterless Man shares some characteristics with the Pilgrim and the Flying Woman, while being distinct from both. Like the Pilgrim, the Masterless Man wants a higher purpose, but unlike the Pilgrim he has not found it. Like the Flying Woman, he is autonomous and possesses a powerful will, but the Masterless Man is not free by choice. Often he is someone who has lost his purpose (either empirically or through disillusionment) and now seeks a new one.

Some believe the Masterless Man archetype began in Japan as the *ronin*—a samurai whose master is dead, leaving behind a servant with no one to serve. In traditional fiction, the *ronin* wanders the countryside, battling bandits or working as a mercenary. In the U.S., a similar fictional trope is the western gunfighter.

At the core, the Masterless Man is suspended between conflicting desires. He serves the forces of order (even if it's a cruel or totalitarian order) in which he has no place. He longs for the justification of a higher purpose, but is too pragmatic and suspicious to dedicate himself like the Pilgrim. He is the chaos that fights chaos, which is why the gunfighter or *ronin* always dies or moves on at the end of the story; his skills have protected a civilization which has no place for deadly wanderers.

**Taboos:** The Masterless Man must never give his loyalty completely. He can be a mercenary, but only on his own terms, and never for very long.

The Masterless Man does not settle down. Owning a home, land, or more property than you can pack up and move in 12 hours weakens any link to the Archetype.

There are no female avatars for the Masterless Man.

**Symbols:** The restless wave is a symbol of the Masterless Man (*ronin* means "wave man"). So are dirty boots, unshaven cheeks (not quite a beard, but stubble), large handguns or swords, and any means of long-distance transport that is not enclosed (primarily horses and motorcycles).

**Suspected Avatars in History:** Davy Crockett was almost certainly an avatar of the Masterless Man, as were Wild Bill Hickock and, possibly, John Paul Jones.

**Channels:**

**1%–50%:** Masterless Men are notorious for taking punishment without yielding. Once every four weeks, you may make an Avatar: Masterless Man check; if successful, you gain a number of wound points equal to your Avatar: Masterless Man skill, no matter what your normal maximum is. Once lost, these points do not return until your next use of this channel—healing will only restore lost points back to your normal maximum. If you still have any magical wound points remaining when you next apply this channel, you still only achieve your normal maximum wound point total plus your Avatar: Masterless Man skill. Any lingering magical wound points are effectively lost.

**Example:** Sergio has a Body stat of 50, a current wound-point total of 38, and an Avatar: Masterless Man skill of 25. He tries this channel and gets a successful roll of 19. His maximum wound-point total jumps to  $50 + 25 = 75$ . His current wound-point total jumps to  $38 + 25 = 63$ . Healing will do him no good—he's already over his natural maximum of 50 points. If his wound points drop to 27, he can get healing back up to 38, but no further. If four weeks roll around and he still has 63 wound points out of his 75, he can perform this channel again, but his maximum will still only go to 75 and his wound point total will also stop at  $75 - \text{not } 63 + 25 = 88$ . (Keep in mind that the GM keeps track of wound points.)

**51%–70%:** If you try to attack someone and fail with a roll that's under your Avatar: Masterless Man skill, you can immediately re-roll that attack one time. If the second attack is still a failure, you can't re-roll it again, even if it's less than your Avatar: Masterless Man skill. Furthermore, you can only re-roll one attack roll per round regardless; if you attack three different people (or one person three times) and miss every time with a roll that's under your avatar skill, you're only allowed to re-roll one of those attacks. However, using this re-roll ability does not take your combat action or cost you your next one.

**71%–90%:** At this level, the Masterless Man is so relentless in combat that even death cannot deter him. If you've taken enough damage to kill you, roll your Avatar: Masterless Man skill at the beginning of every combat round. If you roll a success, you can continue to act with no penalty—though you still die at the end of the combat, or when you fail the check. (If you die in your sleep or from poison or some other non-confrontational situation, you're just dead—this only works for combat.)

**91%+:** Any time someone damages you with a roll that's under your Avatar: Masterless Man skill, the damage is either the sum of the dice, or what the damage would normally be, whichever is lower. (You don't have to make a check for this channel—it's always functioning.)

**Example:** If someone rolls a 39 and hits you with a chainsaw, the damage would normally be 21 points— $3 + 9$  (the sum of the roll) + 9 (for a big, heavy, slashing weapon). However, since the roll is under your avatar skill, it's only 12 points ( $3 + 9$ ).

## The Merchant

**Attributes:** The Merchant (or Salesman, in a more modern interpretation) facilitates the transfer of goods between those who have them and those who want them—while taking a little cut for himself. The Merchant can be a positive figure, when he brings together two people with complementary needs, helping both. On the other hand, the Merchant can also be a cheat or deceiver, selling worthless goods, acting as a needless middleman, or managing to rob both parties.

**Taboos:** The Merchant archetype never gets the worse of a deal. Any avatar who gets fooled or taken advantage of is going to weaken his connection to the Clergy.

The Merchant never gives anything away; any purely selfless act is contrary to type. (Note that giving someone an incentive or doing them a little favor to soften them up for a future sale is not selfless.)

**Symbols:** The Merchant always has a satchel for his wares—from a mendicant's sack to a briefcase or sample case. A perpetual insincere grin is typical, as are broad gestures and rapid, eloquent speech. The Merchant frequently imbibes or gives out alcohol, and is known for giving away free gifts of little value.

**Suspected Avatars in History:** Many esoteric economists (okay, about four esoteric economists) see the contests of the “robber barons” in 19th-century America as an occult contest to become the Merchant godwalker. If they're right, J.P. Morgan probably won. Andrew Carnegie's sudden burst of charitable giving probably resulted from the magical backlash of losing the contest.

**Channel:**

**1%–50%:** At this level, you can convince others to see value where there's little or none. (“C'mon man, it's a *Pinto!* The very *name* screams manly power!”) Alternately, you can convince someone to ignore value that's apparent. (“I'll give you this huge, round nickel for that tiny little dime!”) With an ordinary, successful roll you can get a deal that's good, but conventional; you can buy a car dirt cheap, convince someone to pay full price for a display model, maybe fool someone into paying inflated prices on worthless “collectibles.” If you get a successful roll that's higher than your target's Mind score, you can talk them into abysmally stupid trades. (“How much did you pay for the bullets in that gun? I'll triple it—and you can be sure I won't shoot you because I *don't* have a gun. It's pure profit!”)

This ability does not work on supernatural creatures like demons and entropics. It works just fine on human adepts, though.

**51%–70%:** You are now empowered to make Faustian bargains: as long as trade and exchange is involved (and a successful roll) you can facilitate exchanges of immaterial commodities. Want to buy someone's soul? As long as they agree to sell it, you can do it. Is person A willing to sell five years off his life, and person B has the money to pay? If both sides agree, you can make B five years younger. (A doesn't get any older; he just dies five years sooner.) You can even negotiate a cut from both sides for yourself (say, \$5000 and five months . . .).

The key to this power is that both sides must freely agree to the bargain; the power doesn't work if you've used supernatural power (like your 1%–50% channel) or physical coercion to get them to say yes. If all the involved parties freely agree (and you make your roll) you can make the deal happen. Using this power you can buy and sell wound points, transfer skills and stats—even broker psychological factors like failed notches on the Madness Meter. You do need to find a way to express this in character,

however. (“I'll trade you my sense of life's meaninglessness for that rubber chicken!”)

**71%–90%:** With a successful Avatar: Merchant check you can summon up a demon and make deals with it. The demon cannot harm you (unless that's part of the deal) and you can safely get rid of it if the two of you can't reach an agreement. If you offer it immaterial things in your possession (like your memories, your skills, or something you've gotten with the previous level of channel) you have the power to give them up to it. Once the deal is agreed upon, both sides are inextricably bound to obey it in all particulars.

**91%+:** Every time someone wants to harm you with magick or with a conventional weapon, they have to pay you some money. It doesn't have to be a lot of money—a penny or a million bucks, doesn't matter. They just have to give you (or throw at you) some kind of negotiable currency. If they don't have any cash on 'em, they simply cannot shoot, kick, or stab you, no matter how much they want to. (Trade goods don't work—it has to be valid currency presently circulated by a nation's mint.) Even if they're well supplied with money, they have to take an action to toss a quarter at you; then they can shoot you on their next action.

Each attack has to be paid for separately. Your assassin can't just toss a billfold with twenty bills in it at your feet and shoot you twenty times (one for each bill); those bills are considered payment for *one* attack. If he wants to attack you again, he has to pay again, even if it's just a nickel.

The strangest thing about this ability is that anyone who wants to injure you will instinctively know that they must pay for the privilege.

## The Pilgrim

**Attributes:** The Pilgrim (also called the Seeker) is someone focussed on a higher goal. The Pilgrim doesn't wander aimlessly like the Fool or the Masterless Man, nor is the Pilgrim's attention focused inward, like the Flying Woman. Rather, the Pilgrim has subsumed his own will to an external goal, and proceeds relentlessly towards that goal.

**Taboos:** The Pilgrim doesn't meander or dawdle—anything that doesn't take you towards your goal is a distraction. If you spend a game session without really *trying* to get closer to your goal (whatever it is), your GM can penalize you.

Neither does the Pilgrim change direction. If you ever give up your goal, the GM has good reason to dock your skill—so pick your goal with care.

**Symbols:** The Pilgrim is represented by the open road and by vehicles of all sorts. The staff, bowl, and broad-brimmed hat of the traditional mendicant traveller are also totems of the Pilgrim. Animals associated with the Pilgrim are salmon (who return to the headwaters to spawn) and swallows (who also make yearly voyages to a single destination).

**Suspected Avatars in History:** Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon, may have been conducting the Pilgrim (shame he wasn't a cliomancer). Meriwether Lewis almost definitely was, as were Xenophon and, less happily, Robert Falcon Scott.

**Channels:**

**1%–50%:** Name a goal, and a skill you have that's going to help you attain that goal, then make an Avatar: Pilgrim check. If you succeed at the roll, you can flip-flop all rolls you make with that skill while in direct pursuit of your goal (like your obsession

skill—see p. 43). Once you attain that goal you can repeat this process with a different goal, but you can only use this effect on one skill per goal. Similarly, you can only have one goal at a time. If you fail the initial check, you can try it with another skill, but you can't re-try the same skill, ever.

If you ever give up on that goal, your Avatar: Pilgrim skill will no longer work on the skill you chose—ever. Furthermore, you can't pick a new goal and skill until you've completed or abandoned your old goal. Abandoned goals can not be re-attempted.

**Example:** Rodney decides his goal is going to be “put Alex Abel down like a mad dog in the street,” and that the skill he's going to need to accomplish this is Shoot From the Hip. He makes a successful Avatar: Pilgrim roll and can now flip-flop his gunshot rolls when he's shooting at Abel or Abel's minions. Later on, however, Abel explains his goals and gets Rodney to join the team. Now he's abandoned his goal. He decides his new goal is going to be “put Randy Douglas down like a mad dog in the street.” He can't use Shoot From the Hip as his Pilgrim skill anymore because he had that attached to a previous goal—a goal he abandoned. He decides to be able to flip-flop his Stealth skill instead. This time, however, he fails his roll and can't assign Stealth as his Pilgrim skill. He tries it with Struggle and finally succeeds. If he manages to whack Randy Douglas, he can pick a new goal and try to make Stealth his Pilgrim skill again, but he will never be able to assign it to Shoot From the Hip, because that skill has been spoiled by his failure to kill Alex Abel.

**51%–70%:** With a successful Avatar: Pilgrim check, you can travel about the width of Australia or the U.S. in miles in a single day. If you're driving, you just sort of happen to reach your destination. If you have to cross an ocean, you might get on a barge in New York harbor in the morning and get off the Dover Ferry sixteen hours later. No one would have seen you change ships, and you wouldn't really have much recollection of going the distance—but you'd be there. You can only attempt this channel once every twenty-four hours. You can't bring anyone else with you.

**71%–90%:** At this level, you can recruit fellow pilgrims for a brief while. All you have to do is lock eyes with someone and explain, clearly and concisely, what your goal is and why it's important. Once you've explained the goal, make an Avatar: Pilgrim check. If you succeed and also roll more than your target's Soul or Mind stat (whichever is higher), the target passes into a highly suggestible state and will obey one simple command from you. You can't make someone do something morally abhorrent to them (“Now go kill your children for me, okay?”) or that grossly violates their sense of social convention (“Get naked and run around.”), but minor errands and such are fine. Afterwards, the experience seems kind of dreamlike to them (“Everything he said made so much sense . . .”).

**91%+:** At this level, all doors, roads, portals, and windows are as one to the Pilgrim. With a successful Avatar: Pilgrim check, you can step into your closet door in Washington, D.C., and step out through the front doors of the Kremlin. You can take five steps on a mud road in Beijing and take your next five steps on a highway in North Dakota. No one ever sees you appear or disappear; you emerge into a sort of perceptual blind spot that makes your action seem perfectly ordinary. You may do this—and attempt this—as often as you like.

You can bring people with you at this level, as long as you make a successful check for each person you bring. You also cannot travel to a place unless you have a clear mental picture of it. A

photo you've memorized or were looking at when you make the check would work. A picture you'd seen once—or somewhere you'd only heard described—wouldn't work.

A final twist on this ability is that you can use it to trap a person by re-routing all doors they pass through to (for example) your closet. The person walks through his front door and winds up in your closet. He opens the closet door and steps out, only to find himself stepping back into the closet. You have to be looking at the target to put this curse on them, and it usually lasts for about 24 hours. (Note that it's possible to break out of such a prison if the target can tear down a wall or create some other form of new exit.) This curse is considered a magickal attack—if you try this on an adept, you have to roll under your skill and higher than his skill at magick.

## The Savage

**Attributes:** The image of the Savage can be found in most early societies. Edgar Rice Burroughs gave the archetype a name (Tarzan), and Robert Bly hunted for him under the veneer of civilized manhood. He lurks in the Himalayas as the Yeti, he stalks through British Columbia as Bigfoot, and he comes to us in every ancient myth and urban legend about children raised by wolves.

The Savage has cast away the shackles of politeness or social expectation—or maybe they were never there to start with. Having turned away from the society of mankind, the Savage is welcomed by nature. The birds and beasts are the Savage's kin, and the untamed places of the earth are what the Savage calls home.

The dark side of the Savage is obvious. Someone who has cast aside the anxieties and polite fictions of society can easily cast aside morals and ethics as well. The Savage is as likely to be vicious and predatory as noble and unspoiled.

**Taboos:** The Savage is unsophisticated about deceit and social manipulation. Any Savage who successfully uses a skill that manipulates language or emotions in a devious fashion is violating the archetype. (Making a straightforward, passionate speech doesn't count; making the same speech when you don't believe it and are just telling the crowd what they want to hear is dishonest, and therefore not Savage.)

The Savage is equally uncomfortable with the works of man. Any skill that involves using, building, or repairing machines (including Drive) that goes above 30% counts as a transgression of Savagery.

**Symbols:** Hair, and plenty of it, is essential to the Savage. The hair (or mane) must be uncut and unkempt. Nakedness is common, but when clothes must be worn they should have fur. Even when clothed, the Savage is usually barefoot to maintain a link to the earth. The Savage is associated with many animals, but especially the bear, the ape, and the wolf.

**Suspected Avatars in History:** Many of the biblical “prophets in the wilderness” such as Elijah or Jeremiah seem to have been channeling the Savage; theologians and occultists naturally differ on the question. Enkidu's Ascension in 2662 B.C. may have been the beginning of this archetype.

**Channels:**

**1%–50%:** The Savage is exceptionally swift and physically powerful. Whenever you make a successful roll in a Body- or Speed-based skill, and that roll is under your Avatar: Savage skill, you may add up to 10 points to it. The roll is still a success, even if adding points makes the roll higher than your usual skill rating. The exception to this rule is when the skill used requires the use of





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a machine; you can get away with using this with Knife Fighting, but not Driving or Firearms.

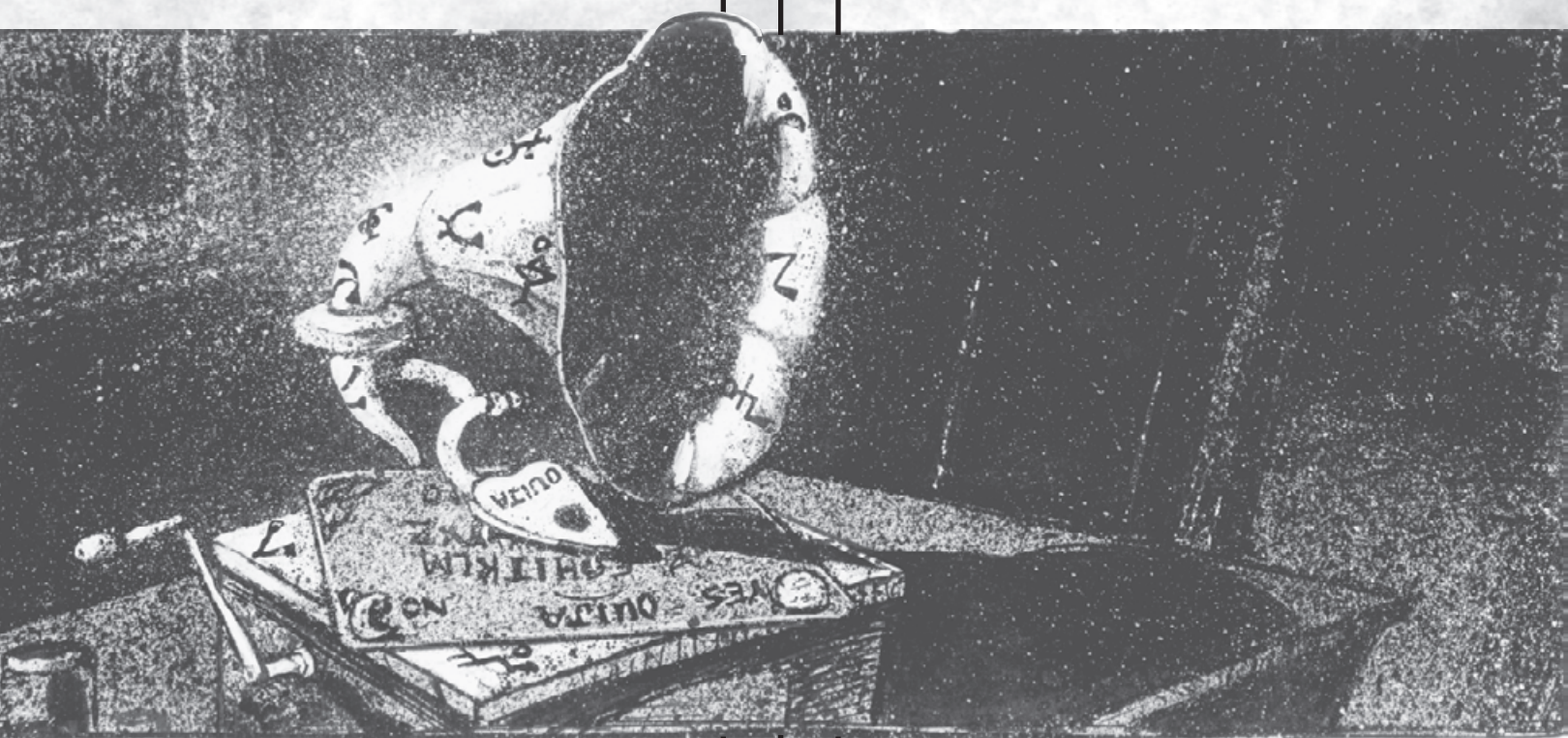
**Example:** An avatar of the Savage named Carla Horsrunner has the skill Fight Like An Ape at 55%. While escaping from a TOSG compound, she throws a punch at one of the guards and rolls a 49. Normally that would do 13 points of damage (4 + 9). However, the roll is under her Avatar skill of 55%. She decides to raise the roll to 59 to do an extra point of damage (5 + 9) even though it would normally be over her skill.

**Example:** When the TOSG try to recapture her, Carla kicks one of the guards and rolls a mere 12 for 3 wimpy points of damage. Because it's under her Avatar skill, however, she can raise the roll to a 19 and do 10 points.

**51%-70%:** You can now use your Avatar: Savage skill in the place of any of the following skills: Climb (including Swing From a Vine), Run, Swim, Stealth, Tracking, or Survival. If your Avatar skill is your obsession, you can flip-flop these rolls. If the skill being replaced is your obsession, you can also flip-flop them.

**71%-90%:** You are so in tune with nature that you can speak with animals. (Insects not included.) With a successful roll, you can ask any animal to do what you wish. You can only command one animal at a time. You can also ask them for information, but keep in mind that animals aren't terribly bright; their answers aren't verbal as much as images and sense impressions. (As a rule of thumb for using this channel, assume it can be used to get any animal to behave like a fairly well trained dog. "Sit," "Drop this message in that window," and "Kill that man with the red hair" are all fine. "Go start my car," or "Run into that burning building and stay there," are probably out of the question.)

**91%+:** Any spell or firearm damage done to you from a roll lower than your Avatar: Savage skill is reduced by 20 points due to your toughness and vitality. This does not affect damage from animals, unnatural creatures, or hand-to-hand attacks.



*chapter fourteen*  
*artifacts*

**UNKNOWN  
ARMIES**



"THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS LIKE UNTO A MERCHANT MAN,  
SEEKING GOODLY PEARLS: WHO, WHEN HE HAD FOUND  
ONE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE, WENT AND SOLD  
ALL THAT HE HAD, AND BOUGHT IT."  
—MATTHEW 13:31

"NOBODY'S REALLY SURE WHAT IT IS, OR WHAT IT DOES,  
OR HOW YOU MAKE IT DO WHAT IT DOES, OR WHERE IT IS,  
OR WHO HAS IT. BUT EVERYBODY WHO KNOWS  
IT EXISTS IS WILLING TO KILL TO GET IT."  
—DIRK ALLEN



# LEGACY

▲ 160 “Eugene . . .”

“Don’t worry, Renata. They won’t hurt *you*.” He had the keys to his cheap, shitty car in his hands. He squinted up the street, then down. It was mid-morning and still no one seemed to be around.

“Oh here, before I forget.” He fished her pepper spray out of his pocket and gave it to her. He’d locked the knife inside the car, under the driver’s seat.

“Eugene, before I go with you, tell me what you think is going to happen.”

Eugene stopped cursing at the trunk, which didn’t seem to want to accept the key. He looked at her for a moment.

“Kane did a terrible thing to you, Renata. From the moment you were born . . . hell, from conception, he used you. He hid behind you. I’m guessing most of his little cultist pals don’t know that.” He turned the key and opened the trunk. Renata gasped.

“At least, I *hope* they don’t know,” he said as he hunched forward and concealed a pistol-grip shotgun in the folds of his coat.

“Do . . . do you think you’re going to need that?”

He looked at her again, and his face was inscrutable. “Nah,” he finally said.

He set off across the street, and she followed. He tried the door to the storefront—locked. He took a deep breath.

“Still, you may not want to stand right next to me,” he said. Then he glared at the door, and Renata thought she heard clicking.

“Open it,” he said.

“But it’s locked.”

“Not any more.” His mouth was grim. “The herald cannot be stayed. Not when the message must be heard.”

The knob turned, the door opened, and he strode inside.

Renata followed.

It was dark, dusty, empty except for lumpy blanketed forms on the floor and a bare counter in front of a door to the back. As daylight streaked in through the door, the forms stirred.

“Master?” muttered one.

“Not quite,” Eugene said. “Shut the door,” he told Renata, who obeyed and then started to back away.

He turned on the light with his left hand. With his right, he held the shotgun, straight up and down.

There was a chorus of cries from the wakened sleepers. “Eugene!” “What the fuck?” “Where’s the Master?”

“Yes,” boomed Eugene’s voice, and Renata felt the same grating sensation from the restaurant. “Where is Master Dermott Arkane?”

Then, above the confused mutter of the residents, a shrill voice cried out “*Mother!*” It was Renata’s voice. A woman rising slowly to her feet looked back at Renata with a look both suspicious and forlorn.

Eugene turned towards her and suddenly Renata saw her father rise up from behind the counter. There was a gun in his hand.

“Look out!” she screamed, and then Eugene’s shotgun came down, pointing at her dad.

“Duane,” Eugene said, and his voice was as smartass as Renata had ever heard. “Met your daughter. ‘Course she’s not really yours, is she?”

“You should have stayed away, Gene,” Renata’s father replied coldly.

Slowly, the half-dozen people on the floor were edging away from the two men, from the two guns. Eyes wide, they pushed up against the walls and stood up fearfully.

“What are you doing, Eugene?”

“I’m here with an announcement.” Again, his voice was filled with that terrible tone. He spoke with a voice blank and pitiless as a peal of thunder or a dying man’s cough. “I’m here to tell the truth.”

The people against the walls were all starting to speak at once, desperately trying to explain, trying to get Eugene and Renata’s father to put down their guns. “Gene, you don’t understand . . .” “No, Gene, Master Arkane is going to become the Herald . . .”

“He called you Duane, dad,” Renata said. “Dad, he called you *Duane*.” Her voice grew accusatory. “Your name is *Fred*, you bastard, *Fred!*”

“Oh honey, you don’t understand,” her mother told her from against the wall, a quaver in her voice.

“She doesn’t understand, but I do and so will you,” Eugene said. “She carries Dermott’s blood and bears his name. He *made* her as a decoy.” Eugene’s glance shot for a split-second to a man standing by the wall. “Does that sound familiar to you, Pete?” A woman next to the man went ashen-faced. “Bridget, you remember someone else who did the same thing, don’t you?”

“What are you saying, Gene?”

“No Gene, Master Arkane wouldn’t do something like that . . .”

“He did, though, didn’t he Duane?” Eugene kept the lion’s share of attention on Renata’s father—or the man she’d called father, anyhow. “Just like Alton Montgomery in 1971, he had his name on children and hid behind them. You’re seventeen, right Renata? So you were conceived about the time the Temple of the Fearless Chalice was putting the pressure on. Just like Alton Montgomery had a son in 1965 when *we* found him the first time. Remember? You remember don’t you, Gina? Montgomery had that little boy, and when we thought we’d killed him it was the little boy who died instead. And we were all appalled. You were furious, Duane—when we finally found the real Alton, I remember your righteous grin when you shoved the shotgun in his mouth.”

Renata glanced at her dad. His expression was blank. He was standing with his side pointed at Eugene, presenting the least target possible, but his great belly still hung out. The gun was level with his shoulder, pointing right at Eugene.

“Duane, is it true?” One of the sleepers was looking at the two men—Renata thought it might be the man called Pete.

“He’s lying,” was Duane’s answer. “I never seen this girl before in my life.”

“*Daddy!*” Renata screamed, and then she sank to her knees.

That was when she saw the gun.

It was just the handle, sticking out from under a pillow. She saw the gun and blinked, and then she saw a woman by the wall not far from it, and she was looking at the gun, too.

Renata looked at the woman. She looked at Renata, then back at the gun. Then, as one, they both lunged for the pistol.

Eugene’s head twitched to the side and his body lurched, and then there was a loud crash and a jet of fire from Duane’s gun.

“Get down!”

“No, please *no!*”

People screamed, dove for the floor, and Renata had gotten the pistol first. The woman was right by her and Renata pointed the gun and pulled the trigger but nothing happened. She heard the crash of the shotgun and suddenly daylight poured into the room.

“Jesus, my leg, oh my *god!*”

Renata waved the gun, and every way she pointed it people screamed and dove to the floor. She had both hands on it, and she found a little switch, moved it, and then the gun went off, there was smoke and a flash and it gave her hand a stinging jerk. She could see Eugene low to the ground. He worked the slide of the shotgun and an empty cartridge flew out. Then he pointed and fired and she saw a man stagger back, chest suddenly red. Eugene was running towards the door and somehow Renata pulled the trigger again, to uncertain effect.

She saw her father aiming at Eugene’s back and she pointed the gun at him and it went off. Her father staggered.

Then she was on the street and running and the gun fell from her fingers and the sunlight was broken into a thousand splinters by her tears and she ran and there was a sharp pain in her ribs and she ran as her breath came in short, agonizing gasps and still she ran and ran and ran.

END

# SEVEN



**An artifact is** simply an object that's been given a magickal charge and performs a certain magickal task. They're handy for when you've just been caught with your taboos down, when you need a few extra charges, or when you just want something more reliable on your side than a flaky spell caster.

Artifacts come in two varieties: natural and constructed. Natural artifacts are items that have been imbued with magickal power by the cosmos, simply due to luck or destiny. They are very rare, and their powers are potentially infinite. Constructed artifacts are items deliberately created by an adept. They can only duplicate a magickal effect possessed by the adept who created the artifact—in other words, something taken from the adept's school of magick. If you can't do it, neither can your artifact.

## Natural Artifacts

There are no rules limitations on what natural artifacts can or cannot do—they're entirely in the domain of the GM. A natural artifact could split Mars in half or sharpen pencils. They are side effects of the cosmos, and as such they can have any power imaginable. But since they are side effects, with no conscious intent behind them, there's no telling if a given natural artifact is going to be of any use or not (“So this amethyst makes plants happy?”).

A recent example of a natural artifact is the original Naked Goddess videotape. No one prepared it for its destiny as an object of mystic power, and no adept was present to put magick into it. However, it *was* present at an incredibly powerful supernatural event, and being symbolically central to the event, it absorbed part of the power. The tape is like a footprint of the magickal energies that got unleashed and transformed when the Naked Goddess ascended to the Invisible Clergy.

This means that when a significant magickal event happens (and no one's totally clear about just what qualifies) there's often an ugly rush as various cults and adepts try to figure out what (if anything) got accidentally magicked. Looting of anything in the area is common, like souvenir hunters clipping blades of grass from Elvis Presley's Graceland.

Even if a natural artifact is identified and secured, it doesn't mean that everything is fine for the group who grabbed it. They still have to figure out how to make it do its trick, not to mention figuring out what its function (and symbolic reason) *is*. This can be somewhat akin to defusing a bomb; you never know what may set it off.

## Constructed Artifacts

Like magick, constructed artifacts are divided into three potency types: *minor*, *significant*, and *major*. An artifact's type is based on the type of magick it can perform, as chosen by the artifact's creator from his school of magick.

Artifacts are also divided into three usage types: *one use*, *limited use*, and *eternal use*. One-use artifacts only work once, and then they lose their magick and go back to being a mundane object. Limited-use artifacts will work a fixed number of times and then give out. Eternal-use artifacts are viable forever, but their eternal nature bumps them up to the next level of magick for purposes of construction: eternal artifacts that perform minor magicks count as significant, and those that perform significant magicks count as major.

## Making Artifacts

Most schools of magick can make artifacts, and the general process is the same. The first limitation is that you can only imbue an artifact with a magickal ability that you possess—if you can't do it, you can't make an artifact that does it, either. The second limitation is that the object you're using as the new artifact needs to be symbolic of the function it will perform: an artifact that aids communication might be made from a telephone or a ballpoint pen, but not from a carpet; an artifact that causes injuries might use a knife or a gun, but not a rabbit's foot.

Every artifact-making attempt requires a varying amount of charges, followed by a roll against the adept's Magick skill. Failed attempts result in a loss of all charges spent and no artifact.

### Making Minor Artifacts

To make a one-use minor artifact, you have to spend the minor charges you'd use to create the effect that you're putting into the artifact, and add one extra.

To make a limited-use minor artifact, spend the minor charges for the effect and add one significant charge. If you successfully make the gadget, it can be used a number of times equal to the sum of the dice. So if you rolled a 15, the item can be used  $1 + 5 = 6$  times. If you rolled 04, it could be used  $10 + 4 = 14$  times.

Minor artifacts cannot be eternal-use in nature. Eternal-use artifacts that perform minor magick effects count as significant artifacts and are discussed in the next section.

### Making Significant Artifacts

To make a one-use significant artifact, you have to spend the significant charges you'd use to create the effect that you're putting into the artifact, and add one minor charge.

To make a limited-use significant artifact, spend the significant charges for the effect and add one extra significant charge. If you successfully make the gadget, it can be used a number of times equal to the sum of the dice, as explained in the previous section.

You can make an eternal-use significant artifact, but it can only work minor-level magicks. Spend the minor charges for the effect and add one major charge. Eternal-use artifacts that perform significant magick effects count as major artifacts.

### Making Major Artifacts

Major artifacts are exceedingly difficult to make. It's up to the GM to determine what a given artifact should require—since every one should be different—but as a rule of thumb, major artifacts always require at least two major charges and the object to be enchanted must be historically important. A major artifact dealing with deadly communication wouldn't work with an ordinary telephone. But the telephone that President Truman used to order the nuclear bombing of Nagasaki would fit the bill. Given that, major artifacts can do just about anything, subject to GM fiat.

## Sample Artifacts

Several sample artifacts follow, representing a variety of types.

## Lucky Charm (Minor)

Possibly the most common artifact, this simple good-luck charm looks and functions like four-leaf clovers, cheaply dyed rabbit's feet, and unwashed "lucky shirts" are supposed to—only it really does work. When you hold it and invoke its magical aid, your next skill attempt is at a +10% shift. (If you do this in combat, it takes one action to invoke it.) These are usually made as one-use or limited-use items. Lucky charms are always made of "lucky" items, such as the aforementioned clovers, rabbit's feet, horseshoes, and so on.

## Travel Bond (Minor)

This nasty little item does not actually harm its target, but it can still be a terrible annoyance. Its function is to keep someone in place for twenty-four hours.

Suppose you're planning on double-crossing your partner and fleeing the country. The day of your flight, you may want to slip him a travel bond; for the next day and night, he'll be unable to travel farther than ten or fifteen miles from the site where he was first bound. It's nothing as dramatic as paralysis or an invisible wall; travel bonds work through synchronicity. So if he tries to pursue you, his car breaks down. If he tries to buy a plane ticket, the flight gets canceled. Even if he tries to come after you on foot, he gets cramps and sore ankles and maybe gets mugged.

This effect only lasts 24 hours, and the spell can be broken if its victim locates and destroys the bond itself. This spell is usually housed in an object relating to travel or bondage. Examples have included: a finger ring made from an antique slave chain; a tire from a crashed car (which was placed on the intended target's car); and a ritually prepared page from Jim Fixx's book on running (which was glued underneath the innersole of the victim's shoe).

Travel bonds are most popular among chaos mages, but a few other schools also know how to construct them. In addition to the physical artifact, it requires four or five minor charges and about an hour of ritual to create.

## Hand of Glory (Significant)

A Hand of Glory can only be made from the severed left hand of a hanged criminal. While the construction of this gruesome artifact is a closely guarded secret, it is known that the "recipe" also includes the following ingredients: nitre, salt, long peppers, fern, vervain, virgin wax, sesame, horse dung, and a mysterious powder called "zimat." (The dubious completeness of this list is the topic of hot debate.) These ingredients are combined into a hand-shaped candle of gruesome aspect, with a wick protruding from each finger. A brand-new Hand of Glory is good for about fifteen to twenty total minutes of use.

When these wicks are lit, anyone who beholds the light of the hand will fall into a passive trance. (Adepts subjected to a Hand's power get one chance to roll their Magick skill or lower to break free of the spell; everyone else succumbs automatically.) They will be unable to voluntarily move, speak, or even think, though they can slowly be led about or pushed around. After the spell ends, any person so enchanted by the Hand will have no recollection of the event. The holder of the candle is exempt from this effect, and the spell is broken if the candle is blown out or if the beguiled viewer is injured in any way. Furthermore, the Hand of Glory is only effective inside a building; its powers are useless beneath the open sky.



Creating a Hand of Glory is a ritual, meaning you have to find out *how* to make one before you can construct it—but it can be performed by anyone. In addition to the ingredients listed above (and any others the GM feels are appropriate) the spell requires five uninterrupted hours of attention and four significant charges.

### ***Das Garten* by Rebekah Krzynski (Significant)**

This novel was written in 1412 by a Polish Jewess who had learned German from her father. Rebekah Krzynski was renowned throughout Krakow as a learned woman and possessor of mystic wisdom, and her novel is believed to be an elaborate allegory describing different levels of magical initiation and comprehension. There has never been a mechanical printing of *Das Garten*; all known copies are hand-copied. There are rumors that Krzynski wrote the novel in an elaborate code, and that when its true meaning is unraveled, it includes instructions for several powerful rituals.

It is true that reading *Das Garten* has a powerful mystic effect, but it is not necessarily the one a reader might expect. Reading the book is itself a spell, one that is automatically successful when the last word is read. When the spell is complete, the letters and words become animate and rush off the page. These letter-animals are immaterial but visible, and they will rapidly skitter up the arms or legs of the reader, crawling over his body until they reach an aperture—mouth, nose, eyes, or ears. Then they crawl inside. Experiencing this invasion is a rank-4 Helplessness challenge.

Once all the words have entered, the victim will hear a woman's voice, speaking in his brain in archaic German or Polish. The

voice is that of Rebekah Krzynski, who has moved herself from the book into the her new human “host.”

Krzynski was indeed a powerful magus, and her long-term goals and plans are up to individual GMs. She created eight books of herself, two of which have been destroyed. Her plan was for eight people to read the books and become hosts to her spirit, which could switch between their bodies at will, seeing through their eyes and experiencing their sensations.

Reading the book and absorbing part of Krzynski's soul does not give her any control over an individual, however: it lets her in, but the reader is not possessed. The dead sorceress can comment, cajole, and suggest courses of actions, but she cannot compel—except with threats. She can take over a body when it's sleeping, but the native spirit will awaken and resume control if Krzynski opens its eyes. She can also create a terrible and distracting psychic din.

Those are her threats, but she can also act through magick. Rebekah has a skill of 75% in Epideromancy. If her host is an adept and builds a charge (of any type, from any school), Rebekah can use those charges to cast spells—and she can steal charges from her host without permission.

### **The Magic Bullet (Major)**

There are countless theories about shadowy conspiracies that killed JFK; the theories proposed in the occult underground tend to be even more baroque and bizarre than those joked about in the mainstream. One of the more popular theories among adepts is that JFK was assassinated expressly to create an historic event



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whose significance could be manipulated to create a singularly powerful artifact: the magic bullet.

While it's more likely that some enterprising adept simply took advantage of the situation (rather than engineering it), it's widely accepted that the bullet that killed JFK was stolen and transformed into a murderous talisman.

It's not impressive to look at. The spent slug (still reputedly stained with the great man's blood) is enclosed in a featureless steel disk on a chain. However, this plain circle has powerful magick for assassins: anyone wearing the amulet who shoots at an unsuspecting target does so as if his or her skill was 30% higher.

## The Warstone (Major)

One of the first archetypes to ascend to the Invisible Clergy was War. Many theorists believe this happened the first time a human used a weapon to kill a rival. That weapon was a rock on a cord.

While the cord rotted away long ago, the rock remains, and it has power. It's not much to look at—a chunk of granite about the size of a fist with a dry, brown stain on one side. Anyone who holds it, however, has the blessing of War.

As soon as it's touched, the warstone begins to exert influence over its holder. In the first place, any stress check the holder makes against Violence automatically succeeds. Furthermore, the holder gains a Hardened mark against Violence every day she owns the warstone, until all ten spots are filled.

The idea of violence is not just becoming more palatable, however; it is becoming desperately attractive. The holder's mind will be filled with vivid images of triumph, conquest, and butchery. (This may require stress checks against Self or The Unnatural if the GM thinks it appropriate.) Violence will become more seductive and attractive—every problem will appear to be a Gordian knot that can only be cut by lashing out.

Naturally, the warstone makes this option tactically easier, just as it becomes philosophically easier. Any attack made by the possessor of the warstone has a +10% skill bonus for each Hardened mark she has in the Violence category.

## The Naked Goddess Tape (Major)

When the Naked Goddess ascended to the Invisible Clergy, she was the first to do so in front of a video camera. Naturally, the master recording of this event has created a great deal of interest in the occult community.

Supernaturally, it does so as well.

Specifically, any adept who even hears about the tape's existence will become curious. Even the most intrinsically phlegmatic, blasé, and apathetic adept will be intrigued.

Any adept who just sees the tape—not who watches it, but who simply glimpses its plain black plastic shell—will want it. Badly. In fact, he'll want it so badly that it requires a great deal of willpow-

er to resist taking it (or trying to). Any adept who doesn't try to get the tape after laying eyes upon it has to make a stress check against a rank-10 Helplessness challenge. ("If only I had that tape, I'd understand *everything!*")

Anyone who watches the recording on the tape for the first time permanently gets +10% in a skill such as Magick Lore or Invisible Clergy Lore (player's choice), reflecting a new awareness of the cosmos. The viewer also gains the skill Create Desire at 30%. This is a magickal skill (but not a school; gaining this ability in addition to a "normal" magick skill doesn't drive you crazy) that has only one function: you can make people want things. When you use the skill, you can implant the suggestion in someone's head that they simply *must have* something (or somebody). The suggestion lasts until satisfied or resisted. They can resist this urge (using that pesky free will) but it's a rank-10 Isolation stress test. Once they make that challenge (pass or fail) the urge is pretty much mastered—still present, but gradually fading. On the other hand, if they obtain the object, they'll guard it obsessively. Losing it is a rank-5 Isolation test.

Like many magick abilities, this one has to be charged up before it can be used. It's charged by watching the master tape. The skill can be increased, but in order to spend experience points on it you have to watch the master tape. So if someone steals it—not unlikely, given its power to attract attention—you won't be able to use or improve your Create Desire skill any longer.

Duplicates of the Naked Goddess tape have (of course) been made. Just seeing the duplicate videotape (but not watching the recording on it) has no effect. Watching the recording, however, will do two things. First, it makes any adept watching it desire to have the master recording, with a rank-4 Helplessness check if the urge is resisted. Second, it works (on anyone) like a low-watt version of the master tape in that it grants skill points to Magick Lore or Invisible Clergy Lore or something similar. But instead of granting +10% to such a skill as the master recording does, duplicates of the Naked Goddess tape grant no more than +5% and most grant less, depending on how close to the original the dub is. First-generation copies—that is, copies made directly from the original—grant +5%. Second-generation copies—a copy made from a first-generation copy—grant 4%. And so on, with each generation dropping an additional 1%. Sixth-generation (and worse) copies are so lousy that they're worthless to anyone and won't even trigger the I-want-the-master-copy effect.

Watching multiple copies of the tape—original or duplicates—does not grant any cumulative effect, and neither does watching the same tape multiple times. You can only gain the bonus to your Magick Lore/Invisible Clergy Lore/whatever skill the very first time you watch the tape, even if you watch a better copy (or the original) later on. However, you can still gain the Create Desire skill by watching the original if you've seen duplicates before. (No, you cannot recharge/improve your Create Desire skill with a duplicate tape.)





*appendices*  
*supporting cast*  
*& intro scenario*

**UNKNOWN  
ARMIES**



"WHEN YOU HAVE ELIMINATED THE IMPOSSIBLE,  
WHATEVER REMAINS, *HOWEVER IMPROBABLE*, MUST BE THE TRUTH."  
—ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, "THE SIGN OF FOUR"

"WHEN YOU HAVE ELIMINATED THE IMPOSSIBLE,  
YOU KNOW YOU'RE ON THE WRONG TRACK."  
—DIRK ALLEN



## Appendix A: Supporting Cast

**Unknown Armies presents** a living, breathing world to play in. The PCs aren't the only important people out there—they may not even be important at all, at first. This appendix presents almost three dozen characters from the occult underground, ready for use. They're grouped by their affiliations or (in the case of dukes) the lack thereof.

Late in this appendix you'll find a selection of sample PCs. These can be used as examples of character creation, ready-made PCs for a pickup game, or just more bizarre GMCs to throw in your campaign.

Finally, at the very end of the appendix you'll find nameless, generic GMCs to slot into common situations—cops and thugs, ready to grab and use.

### Major Groups The Invisible Clergy

#### Comte de Saint-Germain, The First and Last Man

No stats are given for the Comte: assume that he has mastered every human skill and is pretty much invulnerable to all conventional forms of damage. As for his personality, let's just paraphrase Walt Whitman and say that he is large, he contains multitudes, and he contradicts himself. He can be whoever he wants to be.

### The House of Renunciation

#### Lili Morgan, Agent of Renunciation

**Summary:** Lili Morgan's life can be cleanly broken into two phases: "Before" and "After." The line of division between these phases was her stay at the House of Renunciation.

Before her trip to the house, Lili was arrogant, aggressive, intelligent, ruthless, callous and selfish. The transformed Lili is arrogant, aggressive, intelligent, ruthless, callous, and utterly *selfless*. It's an unusual mix, to be sure.

Most selfless people have a great deal of empathy. They can sympathize acutely with the pain of others. This tends to get them bogged down in individual acts of kindness—which is a great thing. Anyone who's had a kindly word from a close friend knows that individual acts of kindness are crucial. But that's not where Lili Morgan is at.

Lili takes the long view. She has a plaque in her bathroom that says "There are a dozen men sawing at the limbs of the tree of injustice for every one who is hacking at the roots." It's Lili's experience that the people with the desire to do good are often too gutless to put the ends above the means. She's determined not to make that mistake. She expects the Clergy to start filling up soon, and fast. She wants to make sure that the next universe is a better, fairer one than this one, and the best way to do that is to ensure that the last ascensions are good people. (At least, "good people" according to her tastes.) Consequently, she's been looking for Godwalkers who are trying the hard trick of ousting a sitting Clergy member. If she likes the cut of their jib, she drags their enemies into the House for a quick personality re-write. If she doesn't like the Godwalker, then it's a trip to the house for *them*.

Lili Morgan wants the world to be a better place—a good, kind, decent world for people to live in. If she has to lie to people, or murder them, or violate the very core of their identity—then she will. **Personality:** Scorpio. She's savagely fixated on her do-gooding. **Obsession:** Her obsession is helping the world. (Her obsession used to be helping herself, and her obsession skill still reflects that.) **Wound Points:** 60



ANDY BENNETT

The House of Renunciation: Lili Morgan

CHAPTER ILLU BY MATT ROACH

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** People who are as selfish and uncaring as she used to be.  
**Fear Stimulus:** (The Unnatural) Lili is scared by unpredictable ascensions. (The Naked Goddess is a case in point.)  
**Noble Stimulus:** The abstract, general welfare of humanity; she doesn't care about individual people.

**Stats**

**Body:** 60 (Stocky)  
**Speed:** 65 (S) (Determined)  
**Mind:** 70 (Well Informed)  
**Soul:** 65 (Intense)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** Cheap-Shot Fighting 55%, General Athletics 20%, Go Without Sleep 20%  
**Speed Skills:** Drive 30%, Dodge 55%, Firearms 45%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 25%, Notice 55%, Political Insight 45%, Occult Lore 60%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Lie 50%, Intimidate 50%, Agent of Renunciation 60%

**Agent of Renunciation:** This is a mystic ability that's similar to being an avatar. It gives her insight into the workings of the world and acts in subtle ways to bend reality to her will, much like some effects of pornomancy and entropomancy. In game terms, any time she makes a roll that's under 60%, she can increase or decrease her result by 10%. She can't add or subtract fractions, however.

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
6 Hardened	7 Hardened	0 Hardened	1 Hardened	6 Hardened
3 Failed	2 Failed	3 Failed	0 Failed	3 Failed

**Notes**

Lili knows the Ritual of Renunciation, but does not have it written down. To cast this spell costs her no charges; if anyone else uses the ritual, it costs them 5 significant charges. To cast it, she must be outside a building, standing in front of a door. To cast the spell, she says seven words for a total of twelve syllables, then opens the door. For a moment, that door will open to the House of Renunciation.

It is impossible to send someone into the house using this ritual unless you accompany them. Therefore, any adept who did learn the Ritual of Renunciation could not use it to transform enemies without entering the house with them and being transformed as well. It can be used solo by those who have already been changed, however.

**Possessions**

Lili generally packs a Glock 17 with a silencer, a bottle of chloroform, a couple pairs of handcuffs, and a few tabs of rohypnol.

**Sect of the Naked Goddess**

**Daphnee Lee, Imperatrix**

**Summary:** Daphnee has always been kept down by some man or other—first her dad, then her lousy high-school boyfriend Lionel

Cooper (who became her lousy trade-school husband), then a series of loudmouthed porn directors whose smelly cigars made a welcome break from their rancid body odor. But now—no longer.

She has seen The Truth, and it is the Naked Goddess. In the blinding instant of ascension, Daphnee realized how to turn weakness into strength, and subservience into command. She has the power now, the power of the Goddess. It is not the clumsy, demanding power of the patriarchal male, which compels unwilling service. Hers is the power to forge desire. She has no need of slaves, because her power can gain her willing volunteers.

**Personality:** For a long time, Daphnee was a just a sullen videographer in the porn industry, but her recent transformation has been so complete that some wonder if she hasn't gone to the House of Renunciation. She is now forceful, confident and dynamic.

**Obsession:** Her obsession is the magick border between unwilling desire and willing action.

**Wound Points:** 60

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Sexists of both genders.  
**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Spiders. She just never liked 'em.  
**Noble Stimulus:** She hasn't quite articulated it yet, but she's certain that the wisdom of the Goddess is good for humanity. Whatever the Goddess's wisdom turns out to be.

**Stats**

**Body:** 60 (Husky)  
**Speed:** 40 (F) (Leisurely)  
**Mind:** 50 (Average)  
**Soul:** 80 (Forceful)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** Struggle 35%, General Athletics 15%, Hold Her Liquor 40%  
**Speed Skills:** Dodge 40%, Drive 30%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 30%, Camera Operation/Film Production 35%, Invisible Clergy Lore 40%  
**Soul Skills:** Pornomancy 75%, Leadership 50%, Charm 15%, Lie 15%, Create Desire 50%, Sexually Alluring 50%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
2 Hardened	5 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened
2 Failed	2 Failed	3 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed

**Notes**

Daphne's Create Desire skill was gained by watching the Naked Goddess master tape (see p. 183). The tape has been stolen from her, and she only has a couple charges left in this ability. Once she uses those charges, she won't be able to use the power again until she gets the master tape back.

**Possessions**

Daphnee has been fooling around with making minor artifacts and usually carries a couple of what she calls "Apples of Eris." These look like little gold beads in the shape of an apple. They're activated by kissing them. When an apple is activated, everyone who looks at it has to make a Soul roll or desire to own it. Resisting this desire is a rank 4 Helplessness challenge. These do not work on



pornomancers. Daphnee has found these useful in negotiations, and also figures that if anyone chases her she can drop one. (She got the idea from the myth of Atalanta's race.)

In addition, Daphnee has access to at least a dozen first-generation copies of the Naked Goddess tape, twice as many second generation copies, and can produce as many third generation copies as needed.

### Hiram Ganz, Bodyguard to Daphnee Lee

**Summary:** Hiram's a simple guy. He used to be a boxer and has taken more than one hard punch to the head. When his career as a prizefighter washed out, he became a bodyguard for a porn producer who was worried about mobsters trying to collect on bad gambling debts. Hiram wasn't able to stop the hit men, but he made a good showing before they shot him in the gut and left him for dead.

When Daphnee started looking for a mundane bodyguard, Hiram immediately came to mind. Not only for his fighting skills and willingness to take punishment for pay, but because he was once an extra in an orgy scene with the Goddess herself.

Hiram is happy to be bodyguarding again, and having a variety of women wanting to have sex with him is a nice perk. He wishes they didn't always want to do it exactly the same way as that stupid movie, but he's not going to argue . . .

**Personality:** Hiram's generally an affable lout, easygoing and friendly. It takes a while to get him mad, but once he is—look out.

**Obsession:** Boxing. He not only does it, he follows the sport avidly.

**Wound Points:** 70

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** People who openly call him stupid.

**Fear Stimulus:** (The Unnatural) Magical blasts. He's only seen one person attacked with magick, (a woman named Trisha Nirval) and he didn't like it one bit.

**Noble Stimulus:** Protect women. Hiram is just enough of an old-fashioned chauvinist to expect women to need protection. Daphnee and the other NG cultists put up with it because his sexism doesn't extend to thinking women are less intelligent or capable than men—just worse fighters.

### Stats

**Body:** 70 ("The Brick Hit House")

**Speed:** 70 (F) (Quick Reflexes)

**Mind:** 30 (Dense)

**Soul:** 40 (Genial)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** Boxing 65%, General Athletics 20%, Endurance 50%

**Speed Skills:** Guns 30%, Dodge 50%, Drive 15%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 20%, Sports Trivia 25%

**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Lie 20%, Intimidate 35%

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
4 Hardened	2 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
3 Failed	3 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed



The Sect of the Naked Goddess: Daphnee Lee, Hiram Ganz, Lucius Zarcia, Andrea Deutsch, Chloe Greene

**Possessions**

Hiram carries an (unlicensed) Redhawk .44 revolver. He also wears an elaborate belt buckle that conceals a pair of punch daggers with three-inch-long triangular blades. The blades are a half-inch wide at the base and leave ugly wounds when used to enhance a punch (+3 damage).

**Lucius Zarcia, Agent of the Naked Goddess**

(aka "John Wallace" aka "Craig Stokes")

**Summary:** Wow, did this small-time grifter pick the wrong woman to shake down. When he heard about the Sect of the Naked Goddess, Lucius figured on finding some gullible neo-hippies, ripe on the vine and ready to fall for a slick line of pyramid-power crystalized bull. He had no idea that (a) magick really works and (b) people who can use it are a hell of a lot harder to hoax.

Daphnee was ticked off by his attempted scam and decided to humiliate Lucius. She made him profoundly desperate to own one particular pull tab off a Schlitz can, which she threw down the sewer in front of him. The cultists got a good laugh as he scrambled off towards a manhole cover after it. They were surprised a few hours later when he showed up and wanted to know how they'd done it. They told him to screw off. He came back. They had Hiram pound him a little. He still came back.

Eventually, Daphnee figured he was telling the truth about wanting to join the sect. He'd seen the power of magick and he wanted to be part of it, even a small part. Since that time, his skills have been very useful to a group that's widely perceived among the occult underground as being all women.

**Personality:** Pisces. He thrives on stress and unpredictability.

**Obsession:** Lucius has always been fascinated with people's wants and how they go about getting them.

**Wound Points:** 40

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Lucius hates to suffer because of other people's screw-ups. That's the fastest way to make him lose his cool.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Violence) He hates being cut. Even though he knows that gunshots are more dangerous, just the thought of his skin parting under a knife gives him the shivering whim-whams.

**Noble Stimulus:** Lucius never takes advantage of those he believes are worse off than him. He's been known to buy sandwiches for the homeless (though he never gives them money).

**Stats**

**Body:** 40 (Suety)  
**Speed:** 50 (F) (Moves Like a Tap Dancer)  
**Mind:** 50 (Clever)  
**Soul:** 70 (Everyone's Buddy)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Struggle 20%, Suave Good Looks 35%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 30%, Drive 15%, Dance 5%, Slight of Hand 20%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 40%, New Age Beliefs 20%, Poker Strategies 20%

**Soul Skills:** Charm 30%, Lie 30%, Social Chameleon 55%

**Social Chameleon:** This lets him act like he belongs, no matter what situation he finds himself in. He could spend a day each in a firehouse, a militia training camp, and a ballet school and leave every evening with everyone convinced that he fit in there perfectly.

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
0 Hardened	2 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	3 Hardened
2 Failed	2 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed

**Andrea Deutsch, Priestess of the Naked Goddess**

**Summary:** Andrea is an old trade-school friend of Daphnee's. They kind of drifted apart after Andrea went into broadcasting and Daphnee went into porn, but they sent Christmas cards. Then one day Daphnee asked if she could crash on Andrea's couch; she'd left her husband, but that was unimportant compared to the *real* news.

Andrea was glad that Daphnee had left Lionel, but she was dubious about Daphnee's claims of a "miracle" caught on tape—until she actually watched it. She became the first convert, and more followed quickly. The most important was Trisha Nirval, a co-worker who planned to help Daphnee and Andrea get the Naked Goddess tape on the air during a prime-time newscast. Somehow, their plan came to light, the master tape was stolen, and Trisha Nirval was torn apart before their eyes by the anger of an entropomancer. Since that time, they have made no further attempts to get the Naked Goddess tape played on the air.

By day, Andrea works for WGN news in Chicago. Though she's not a reporter (just a studio camera operator) she is in a position to keep her ears open for news about the paranormal that comes through the station. She has been of use to the entire occult community a few times, when she's given them warning in time to prevent a journalist from getting too close to the truth. This has most of Chicago's mystics convinced that Andrea and the NG cult have gotten with the program and are interested in keeping magick secret. This is not the case: the Goddess cult just wants to make sure that when the truth about magick is revealed, the first phenomenon people hear about is theirs.

**Personality:** Gemini. For most of her life, Deutsch was a skeptic who wanted to believe—just not blindly.

**Obsession:** Magick

**Wound Points:** 50

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Short-sighted selfishness that gets in the way of collective progress. (A prime example is the fearful attitude that led the Chicago dukes to block the tape's broadcast.)

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Electrical shock. Andrea saw one of her fellow students electrocuted in trade school, and she still remembers the smell. She always double-checks her power supply when filming.

**Noble Stimulus:** Enlighten the masses to the truth of the Goddess.

**Stats**

**Body:** 50 (Pudgy)  
**Speed:** 45 (F) (Methodical)  
**Mind:** 60 (Reasonable)  
**Soul:** 65 (Autonomous)



**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 25%, Struggle 30%, Drink You Under the Table 25%  
**Speed Skills:** Dodge 15%, Drive 20%, Darts 40%  
**Mind Skills:** Operate Camera (Video or Film) 40%, Notice 30%, General Education 15%, Electrician 5%, Invisible Clergy Lore 13%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 20%, Lie 20%, Pornomancy 55%, Sexually Alluring 25%, Create Desire 20%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
1 Hardened	2 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
2 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed

**Notes**

Note that, like Daphnee, her Create Desire skill is tied to the Naked Goddess tape. Andrea cannot use this skill currently because she has no charges, and she cannot get any charges until the cult gets the tape back.

**Possessions**

Andrea’s job gives her access to a lot of audio-visual equipment—telephoto lenses for a variety of cameras, shotgun microphones, radio microphones, light-intensifier lenses, *etc.* She can’t dip into the company equipment locker too often without arousing suspicion, but every once in a while she can “borrow” something. She also owns a first-generation copy of the Naked Goddess tape, which she keeps hidden in a box of blank videotapes.

**Chloe Greene, Acolyte of the Naked Goddess**

**Summary:** Chloe was an impressionable young woman with an interest in the paranormal. She might have wound up with the Scientologists or in the Raelian movement. Instead, she happened to find the cult of the Naked Goddess through a sign on a new-age bookstore’s bulletin board.

Since joining them, she’s seen and experienced things that she never imagined growing up in her upper-middle-class suburb. Her parents are uneasy with what she’s told them about the group (“It’s all about finding the goddess in yourself.”), and they’d be appalled if they knew what she was really doing.

Chloe herself is somewhat uneasy. On one hand, the things she’s seen and experienced have convinced her that the Goddess is absolutely, objectively real. On the other hand, she’s uncomfortable with the strictures and taboos that the cult demands. She has (reluctantly) taken part in a few ceremonies, but her doubts prevent her from touching the true powers of the Goddess.

**Personality:** Cancer. She’s sensitive and somewhat weak-willed.  
**Obsession:** Chloe does not have an obsession (or at least, not yet).  
**Wound Points:** 45

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** People who belittle her because she hasn’t done all that much with her life. (They’re right, and it’s a sore point.)  
**Fear Stimulus:** (Self) Screwing up. Chloe is afraid of making the wrong decision so often that she tends to make *no* decisions.  
**Noble Stimulus:** Other people’s feelings. She is very sensitive to the moods of others and attentive to their needs.

**Stats**

**Body:** 45 (Angular)  
**Speed:** 55 (F) (Easily Flustered)  
**Mind:** 55 (Well Read)  
**Soul:** 65 (Intuitive)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 20%, Struggle 15%, Tennis 20%, Pretty Young Thing 20%  
**Speed Skills:** Dodge 15%, Drive 15%, Sprint 20%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 20%, English Literature 20%, Notice 20%, New Age Concepts 15%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 30%, Lie 15%, Read People 50%

**Read People:** This represents her intuition and sensitivity. She can use it to get a general sense of someone’s emotional state.

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
0 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed

**Possessions**

Chloe comes from a fairly well-to-do family, so she dresses nicely and drives a four-year-old BMW convertible.

**The New Inquisition**

**Alex Abel, Mastermind**

**Summary:** Alex Abel resembles Donald Trump, except he has better taste, fewer divorces (he’s never married), he started out with less money, and he’s black. He’s also more diversified: the majority of his money is tied up in real estate, but he has significant investments in military hardware, biotechnology, electronics, and women’s fashion.

His wealth, however, has reached a self-sustaining level: the interest from his more conservative investments is earning him something like three dollars a *second*, every moment of the year. (For the math impaired, that’s close to \$11,000 an hour, just for being him.) His net worth fluctuates, but it’s around the \$2-\$3 billion mark.

As you can imagine, stacking zeroes in his bank accounts has begun to pall for Alex. After a certain point, money becomes an abstraction. It continued to hold his attention as a measure of power, until he found that there were powers that money cannot buy. Since that revelation, he has pursued magick power with the same intensity that made him one of the hundred wealthiest men in the world.

**Personality:** Scorpio. Underneath his charm and polish, Alex is driven with an intensity that most average people cannot even imagine.  
**Obsession:** Power. Alex believes he can make the world a better place, if he can just get enough of the right kind of leverage.  
**Wound Points:** 60

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Frustration. Ever since he made his third or fourth million, things have gone Alex Abel’s way. He’s largely forgotten how to deal with it when he doesn’t get what he wants.  
**Fear Stimulus:** (Violence) Death. The dossiers Abel has read about demons and the afterlife don’t paint a very attractive picture.



**Noble Stimulus:** Reform the world. Abel really wants, even *needs* to feel that he is improving the lot of humanity.

**Stats**

**Body:** 60 (Heavysset Athlete)  
**Speed:** 50 (S) (Deliberate)  
**Mind:** 80 (Insightful)  
**Soul:** 75 (Magnetic)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** Struggle 30%, General Athletics 30%, Football 30%  
**Speed Skills:** Drive 15%, Dodge 30%, Handguns 30%  
**Mind Skills:** Make Gobs Of Money 75%, General Education 25%, Notice 40%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 60%, Lie 60%, Leadership 60%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
2 Hardened	4 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened	1 Hardened
1 Failed	2 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed

**Possessions**

In addition to his fabulous cars, penthouse apartments, fine clothes, and art treasures, Alex Abel owns a few items that are one of a kind.

**Amulet of Retribution.** This is a one-shot artifact that Abel wears in a gold case around his neck. Anyone who successfully attacks Abel, either physically or with magick, is immediately target-

ed by a significant magick blast that attacks the liver and kidneys. This amulet only works once, but any roll made from its attack succeeds, and can be flip-flopped. (For instance, a 17 could be flipped into a 71 and still be successful.) The amulet does not stop the original attack; it simply fights back.

**Shield Against Assassins.** This is a major artifact that many would give much to possess. It's in the shape of a bulky diadem. Abel carries it in his briefcase. Anyone who physically attacks him takes a -10% shift to their attack roll as long as someone (such as Eponymous or another bodyguard) is actively trying to protect Abel.

**The Tongue of Abraham Elkhhabba.** Ages ago, a Moorish sorcerer had designs of protection tattooed onto his tongue, so that no one would be able to use magick to overhear his conversations. When he died, an enterprising apprentice cut the tongue out and taxidermied it to use as a protective amulet. Now it belongs to Abel, who keeps it in his briefcase along with the Shield Against Assassins. While he carries it, any attempts to gain information about him with magick are made with a -30% shift to the sorcerer's skill.

**Eponymous, Bodyguard to Alex Abel**

**Summary:** Eponymous was a Green Beret, an elite soldier detached to the CIA for illegal infiltration and assassination missions. He did a fine job, winning several medals that are filed in a classified container somewhere. But as the cold war came to a close, opportunities to get out in the field came less and less often. Itching for action, he resigned and went where the work was: organized crime.

**The New Inquisition: Eponymous, Alex Abel, Violet McIntyre**





Working freelance, Eponymous pulled a wide variety of jobs for a wide variety of clients—many of them mortal enemies. The fact that Eponymous was utterly apolitical and professional meant that his clients didn't hold his work for their competitors against him.

Eventually, however, things went sour. He fell in love with a terrific woman, then discovered that she was a rival assassin working for a disgruntled ex-client who wanted Eponymous heartbroken and dead, in that order. They had a wordless battle in rural Albania that lasted six days, playing cat-and-mouse. Finally, he got the drop on her and killed her. This revealed a further layer of secrecy: she was also the favored granddaughter of one of the heads of the five families of the New York mafia. Eponymous gained a price on his head larger than what JFK's assassins were paid, even when adjusted for inflation.

On the run and against the ropes, Eponymous signed on with Alex Abel. His old identity was erased, his name was forgotten, and his enemies believe he's dead. "Eponymous" is the name he chose to use when he went to work for the New Inquisition.

He's loyal to Abel because Abel gives him what he wants and has never screwed him over. In the (unlikely) event that someone could afford to offer him more money than Abel, Eponymous still wouldn't turn traitor: it's been his experience that no one trusts a back stabber and that they always get left out to dry sooner or later. **Personality:** Eponymous' life has been one of hard choices and brutal compromises. He has little left in the way of personality. He keeps going mainly out of inertia and a sense that the way he's always done things is probably what's best.

**Obsession:** Killing things. Eponymous was an avid hunter even as a youth, and has always fantasized about going big game hunting. He remembers those six days in Albania as the greatest hunt of his life.

**Wound Points:** 75

**Passions**

(Note: Eponymous can no longer use his passions.)

**Rage Stimulus:** Betrayal.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Poison. Dying of a stab wound or gunshot doesn't scare Eponymous nearly as much as the thought of dying from some slow, agonizing venom.

**Noble Stimulus:** Throughout it all, Eponymous has always wanted to do a good job.

**Stats**

- Body:** 75 (Massive)
- Speed:** 80 (S) (Soft-Footed)
- Mind:** 55 (Nobody's Fool)
- Soul:** 30 (Empty)

**Skills**

- Body Skills:** Beat You Senseless 60%, General Athletics 50%, Parachuting 60%, Swimming 50%
- Speed Skills:** Put A Cap In Your Ass 75%, Drive 50%, Dodge 60%, Stealth 55%, Sprint 50%
- Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 40%, Unlawful Entry 40%
- Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Lie 30%, Intimidate 30%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
10 Hardened	10 Hardened	10 Hardened	10 Hardened	10 Hardened
2 Failed	4 Failed	3 Failed	2 Failed	3 Failed

**Notes**

Eponymous is a sociopath (see p. 67) with all that this entails.

**Possessions**

Eponymous is extremely well-paid, which means he's extremely well-armed. He typically carries a Desert Eagle in a shoulder holster, and two Glock 17s. One Glock is loaded with hollow points (maximum damage 55) and kept at the small of his back. The other is in an ankle holster and is loaded with armor-piercing rounds (maximum damage 50, rounded down to the nearest multiple of 10). He always wears a bulletproof vest and generally has a long bladed knife (with a black blade for night operations) strapped to his left forearm.

That's his usual gear. When he's expecting trouble, he carries a bit more protection.

**Violet McIntyre, Peon for the New Inquisition**

**Summary:** Violet really isn't much worse than many people in the occult underground; she only seems worse because she puts on such a good front. Raised by poor white trash in the deep south, Violet always wanted money. It was her first lover, a flashy gambler named Louis DeMille, who taught her the real meaning of money. She married a rich (and disgusting) man for it and made damn good and sure that his bratty kids from a previous marriage didn't inherit anything when he kicked the bucket. (Contrary to what the kids thought, she didn't poison him. She knew he was going to die soon, and she might have encouraged him to drink heavily and eat plenty of fatty foods in his last days, but frankly he didn't need a lot of encouragement.) The kids set about ruining her reputation and trying to prove that she'd offed their dear dead (debauched, decadent) dad. They even got her dragged into court. She was acquitted, but the legal fees ate up a lot of her precious capital and she was becoming an unhappy regular on *Hard Copy*. At just that moment, an operative of the New Inquisition approached her. He'd gotten her name out of Louis's phone book. She agreed to join—only later did she hear rumors that Louis had gotten on the wrong side of Abel and that his death may indeed have been from unnatural causes.

Violet likes the lifestyle that Abel can provide her and is happy to be in his stable of oracles—she's got a natural gift for plutomancy. It put a serious crimp in her style to learn that the money she takes from him cannot be used to charge up her magick, but they quickly found a way around that problem. He pays for her magick services with material goods—cars, clothes, jewelry, and similar big purchases that she can't make without violating her taboo. Then he gives her investment advice on the stock market (much of which amounts to insider trading). In this fashion she makes enough money to keep her magick charged, and also lives a lavish lifestyle beyond the means of most of her plutomantic peers.

**Personality:** (Aquarius) Self-centered, but sweet about it.

**Obsession:** The mystic correspondences between our inner souls and our outward consumption.

**Wound Points:** 50

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** People who verbally insult her.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Physical threats. Oddly, she can handle actual violence better than the *threat* of violence.

**Noble Stimulus:** Family. Violet always sends checks home to her folks, even though she can no longer visit them. (They think she's married a Japanese businessman.)

**Stats**

**Body:** 50 (Slender)  
**Speed:** 50 (F) (Graceful)  
**Mind:** 50 (Witty)  
**Soul:** 70 (Friendly)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Struggle 40%, Run 10%, Cute As A Button 15%  
**Speed Skills:** Drive 15%, Dodge 40%, Handgun 25%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 20%, Notice 45%, Occult Lore 15%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 30%, Lie 20%, **Plutocracy** 55%

**Possessions**

Violet likes classy cars and fancy clothes. She's also gotten into the habit of carrying a Walther PPK, at the suggestion of her new employer.

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
0 Hardened	2 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
1 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed

## The True Order of Saint-Germain

### Randy Douglas, President for Life of the TOSG

**Summary:** What's worse than an unpredictable, violent psychopath? Well, how about a *smart*, unpredictable, violent psychopath?

Meet Randy Douglas. Raised in an environment that was equal parts John Calvin and John Birch, Randy rebelled against his parent's beliefs (in Christianity and racism) without sacrificing their values (revenge, personal power, and a violent, hair-trigger mutation of American frontier spirit). Randy doesn't blame the blacks and the Jews for America's problems; he blames the multi-nationals that have stifled the true free market. He blames the media elite that sedates the masses with clever lies. He blames the politicians who keep people dumb enough to trade their rights and freedoms for bread and circuses. He blames organized crime, he blames organized religion, he blames, blames, blames.

The scary thing is, if you talk to him long enough, he makes sense. About two hundred people throughout the world have listened far too long, and they are willing to kill and die at his command.

Randy Douglas is a true believer. Like Lili Morgan, he's willing to commit any atrocity to reach his goals. Unlike her, he's also crazy as a five-wheeled bike.

**Personality:** (Leo) Apocalyptic, white-trash *übermensch*.

**Obsession:** Randy wants to kill all his enemies, plain and simple.

**Wound Points:** 65

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** His enemies.

**Fear Stimulus:** (The Unnatural) Comte de Saint-Germain. Maybe it's backwash from his Calvinist upbringing, but Randy has always seen God as someone to fear.

**Noble Stimulus:** Individual freedom. Randy believes that once the organized power hierarchies are swept away, people will be able to grow up in a way they can't when they're under the boot heel of the corporations, governments, and religions.

**Stats**

**Body:** 65 (Built Like a Fireplug)  
**Speed:** 50 (S) (Alert)  
**Mind:** 65 (Strident)  
**Soul:** 70 (Charismatic)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** Karate Training 45%, General Athletics 20%, Resist Torture 40%  
**Speed Skills:** Guns of All Nations 50%, Dodge 30%, Drive 30%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Crackpot Alternative History Theories 45%, Notice 50%, Home Brewed Bombs 30%  
**Soul Skills:** Avatar: Demagogue 40%, **Constitutionally Protected Hate Speech** 65%, Charm 30%, Lie 60%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
7 Hardened	2 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	6 Hardened
3 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	5 Failed

**Notes**

Randy is insane and has been for years. His insanity manifests itself through paranoia and delusions of persecution at the hands of unseen, conspiratorial enemies. This has, on occasion, blinded him to the actions of his *real* enemies.

**Possessions**

Randy is never without his daddy's old straight razor and a pair of limited-edition chrome Desert Eagle pistols with pearl handles. He owns literally hundreds of guns and can lay hands on countless implements of violence at a moment's notice. He habitually wears a bulletproof vest as part of his "uniform."

### Darla Cooper, Captain in the TOSG Militia

**Summary:** Darla was raised in a nice, middle-class home in a nice, middle-class town in a nice, middle-class state. Her parents were middle class, Roman Catholic, and (you guessed it) nice. More than anything in the world, Darla hates "nice." Her parents gave her a lot more advice than love and a lot more anxiety than excitement. They got her so wound up worrying about what the other nice, middle-class neighbors would think that she eventually snapped. The pressure of keeping everything nice was too much for her: she felt such tremendous tension, worrying about the one slip that could ruin her forever, the one slip her parents had always warned her about, that eventually she made the slip just to finally be *done* with it.

Her slip was running off to marry U.S. Navy Midshipman Roger Dane after a weekend courtship. Surprisingly, the marriage worked for a while, but only because Roger spent nine months out of their first year in a submarine. Darla lived on the base and (out of curiosity and boredom more than anything else) started studying karate with a SEAL who'd been stationed in Okinawa for a while. She was a quick study, and her instructor gave her extra at-



tion after they started sleeping together. They cooled it (mostly) when Roger was home. That went on for about two years. Then the SEAL went off to the Gulf War and was killed (ironically enough in a fuel spill accident) just as Darla got word that she was pregnant—and Roger hadn't been home for months. The base doctor snatched her out to Roger when she got an abortion, and Roger divorced her after a marital brawl that took four MPs to break up.

From there she drifted for a while, working waitress jobs, studying karate, and honing her bitterness towards her parents, Roger, and her dead paramour. After a few years of that, she drifted to the TOSG, which was delighted to have a bitter young woman with an intimate knowledge of hand-to-hand combat.

**Personality:** (Sagittarius) This free spirit is just with the TOSG because they treat her well and give her a focus for her unpleasantness.

**Obsession:** Preparing for the worst. Her parents nailed that concept into her skull early and hard.

**Wound Points:** 70

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Darla is unreasonable about the superiority of Okinawan karate, and will strenuously demonstrate its virtues to anyone who claims that any other martial art is superior.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Darla still harbors fears that God is going to punish her for her sinful life. She is uneasy around Roman Catholic people, places, and paraphernalia.

**Noble Stimulus:** Raised Roman Catholic, Darla harbors tremendous guilt over her abortion. To make amends, she's terribly protective of children.

**Stats**

**Body:** 70 (Sinewy)  
**Speed:** 70 (S) (Whippet Fast)  
**Mind:** 45 (One-Track Mind)  
**Soul:** 50 (Stern)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** Okinawan Karate 66% (All her cherries are *Second Helping*), General Athletics 15%, Swimming 30%, Running 30%  
**Speed Skills:** Firearms 50%, Drive 15%, Dodge 50%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 15%, Speak Japanese 25%, Speak Spanish 20%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Lie 45%, Weird Sexual Appeal Based on Being Perceived as a Challenge 20%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
5 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	2 Hardened
2 Failed	0 Failed	2 Failed	2 Failed	3 Failed

**Possessions**

In addition to the numerous firearms and the wide variety of martial-arts weapons she keeps at her residence, Darla usually packs a Glock 17 in her purse along with a knife styled like those used by samurai warriors.



The True Order of Saint-Germain: Michael Hauser, Randy Douglas, Darla Cooper

## Michael Hauser, Agent of the TOSG

**Summary:** Michael Hauser looks like a regular guy. There's nothing unique about his demeanor, his actions, or his speech. He comes across as a friendly guy, not pushy or a loudmouth—maybe even something of a creampuff. You know, the kind of genial non-entity that's easy to push around. Most of the time, that impression is right.

Michael doesn't sweat the small stuff, which makes him fun to be around and easy to get along with. That's the good news. The bad news is, Michael also considers ethics and human life to be "small stuff." He stands for nothing, so he's capable of anything. His smiling, doormat façade isn't even an act: he genuinely doesn't care about most things. But when you cross him on the few things he does care about, he'll cut you up and drop you in the nearest cornfield without a second thought.

The only thing Michael really cares about is smashing the government. If you're a Republican, he can nod and grin and talk supply-side economics and welfare reform with you. If you have a Clinton/Gore bumper sticker on your Volvo, he can look concerned and talk about environmental issues and reproductive rights. His real beliefs are less left wing or right wing than anarcho-terrorist. He hates big authority figures because they make him feel inferior, and he considers the government to be the biggest authority figure of them all.

Randy Douglas doped out Hauser's real agenda and nature early on and pegged him as a perfect infiltration asset. Hauser looks completely average and acts absolutely normal; most people never realize how crazy he is until it's far too late.

**Personality:** Hauser has little left in the way of personality. He's a cipher, a blank, a hollow man.

**Obsession:** Hauser is obsessed with death and destruction. His anti-government stance is little more than an elaborate rationale.

**Wound Points:** 50

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** The government. *Any* government.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Michael is afraid of heights.

**Noble Stimulus:** Michael is unfailingly polite and likes to get along with people when he's not trying to kill them. A small percentage of the people he meets receive undying hatred and no-holds-barred murder attempts; the rest get treated with great courtesy and kindness.

### Stats

**Body:** 50 (Average)

**Speed:** 60 (S) (Def't)

**Mind:** 50 (Ordinary)

**Soul:** 60 (All Smiles)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 30%, Okinawan Karate 50%

**Speed Skills:** Firearms 45%, Drive 15%, Dodge 30%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 20%, Political Theory 20%, Notice 40%

**Soul Skills:** Act Like Someone to Gain Their Trust 55%, Charm 35%

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
7 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	6 Hardened
3 Failed	0 Failed	5 Failed	0 Failed	2 Failed

### Notes

Michael is insane. He has an elaborate, half-coherent fantasy constructed about his own inability to act freely. He believes himself to be an automaton genetically manipulated by the government while he was still in the womb, and that as a result he has no real moral agency or free will. He keeps this hokum to himself, by and large, though he may begin compulsively spilling out his theory if he's torturing or killing someone slowly enough that he can talk throughout the process.

## Mak Attax

### Derek Jackson, Hidden Master

**Summary:** Derek is very shy. He was shy even before he learned that there are people out there who will kill him slowly if they locate him.

Derek was raised on a farm by his great-uncle Franz after his parents were killed in a car crash. Franz was one of the last of the mechanomancers, and he taught his young pupil everything he knew. After he passed on, Derek took apart most of his creations, sold the farm and went off to Rolla, Missouri to study mechanical engineering. That's where he met Janet Kumyar.

Janet Kumyar was everything Derek wasn't: charismatic, intense, passionate—and deeply involved in the occult. She was astonished by Derek's magick abilities, and doubly astonished that he'd accomplished so much outside the so-called "community" of mystic seekers.

The two of them founded Mak Attax, along with an occult researcher named Margaret Brandt. Brandt had unearthed the ritual that made Mak Attax possible, but it was mostly Janet's idea. Janet persuaded the first members to join, Janet decided which restaurants to target for infiltration, and it was Janet who was brutally killed by an unknown assailant. Derek had been her silent second-in-command, doing all the necessary and unglamorous tasks. Derek ran the computer mailing list, kept track of the members, handled all the administrivia—and wound up as the leader after Janet died and Margaret disappeared in the middle of the night.

Known on the mailing list as "Superconductor" (the song he was listening to when the computer prompted him for a logon), Derek has reluctantly taken his place as leader of the organization. It has left his grades and graduate studies slipping, it's eaten up most of his inheritance from Franz, and it's made him jumpy and paranoid, but Derek keeps going because he believes in the cause. **Personality:** Derek is a nice liberal boy. His first instinct is to give everyone the benefit of the doubt, but he knows that's no longer practical. **Obsession:** The magickal border between alive and not-alive—what makes one thing a living being and another a collection of spare parts. **Wound Points:** 60

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** The occult predators who want to take advantage of Mak Attax.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Violence) Guns. Derek didn't like hunting even when he was growing up on the farm. He has reluctantly bought a few guns to build into his clockworks, but he doesn't like it.

**Noble Stimulus:** Derek believes he can bring people into a new age of magickal enlightenment. He honestly believes that no one is irredeemably bad, and this faith has actually enabled him to turn some enemies into allies. Who knows? Maybe he's right.



**Stats**

**Body:** 60 (Pudgy)  
**Speed:** 40 (F) (Sluggish)  
**Mind:** 70 (Abstract Thinker)  
**Soul:** 70 (Still Waters Run Deep)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Struggle 30%, Resist Toxins and Illness 45%  
**Speed Skills:** Dodge 15%, Drive 15%, Firearms 30%, Card Tricks 10%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 15%, Computer Use 30%, Mechanical Engineering 40%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Lie 15%, Mechanomancy 60%, Write Stirring Email Message 20%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
2 Hardened	8 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened
1 Failed	2 Failed	2 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed

**Possessions**

Margaret Brandt gave Derek and Janet a copy of a ritual she had discovered. This ritual is the keystone of Mak Attax' power. They've tried to be very careful about who gets access to it, but any time you get a lot of people involved, there's leakage . . .

The ritual is called *Lesser Correspondence*. Its details are uncertain, but it allows a sorcerer to pass a minor charge on to someone else. Using this spell, a Dipsomancer could knock back a beer and pass the charge on to someone from a different school, who would then be able to use that charge for their own spells. Furthermore, if a minor charge is passed to a non-adept, it works its way out as a spontaneous spell—something unexpected and unplanned, but miraculous. It's never possible to predict what the "leakage" will be from the uninitiated, but Mak Attax has observed the following:

- A woman in Indiana used her charge to literally vanish from the path of a speeding car. A Mak Attax observer saw her disappear a split-second before impact and reappear after the car was past.
- A high-school student in Louisiana saw the answers to his chemistry exam spelled out by a pair of caterpillars clinging to a branch outside the window.
- A woman in upstate New York had a vision that led her directly to a buried cache of jewelry in the finger lakes region. (She has since become a staff psychic for a tabloid newspaper and is usually relentlessly wrong.)

These are, of course, the most dramatic and obvious "leaks" of the hundreds that Mak Attax has delivered.

**Exception:** If a non-adept receives a minor charge but knows the Lesser Correspondence ritual, he can pass the charge on to someone else with the ritual instead of having it leak out as spontaneous magick. (This is how Mak Attax's many non-adept members do their work—adept supervisors pass out charges, which the non-adepts then pass on to the public.)

Derek is in possession of several clockwork automatons that he has built for various purposes. He has perfected a design he calls "hoppers" which look like vaguely mechanical frogs with a ring of

spike-tipped claws on the front, surrounding a swirling nexus of drill bits. Hoppers are basic attack automatons that jump at their victim, dig in with the claws and then drive the drill bits into the victim's flesh. Once they hit, they drop off and repeat. Their stats are: Speed 30 (F), Attack 40 (they do damage like a martial arts attack), 10 wound points. Hoppers weigh about a pound, and can jump up to five feet in the air. He usually carries about 3-4 in his satchel. It takes one action for him to dump them out and activate them in combat.

After returning from Europe during the second World War, Uncle Franz built himself a clockwork bodyguard, nicknamed Hermann. Hermann's finger bones were made from spent shell casings from the Normandy invasion, making it a significant clockwork. (Apparently Uncle Franz had enemies: Hermann made short work of them, and their very deep grave on Franz's farm was never found.) Hermann looks like a sour-faced German man in his late fifties with wrinkled, leathery skin. It can speak, but only to repeat what it's been told to say. Derek tells people that Hermann is his great uncle, who's a little senile: the clockwork spends most of its time apparently reading the bible in front of the window in Derek's rental house, or napping in a recliner. At Derek's command, however, it can take a grown man to shreds. Its stats are: Speed 80% (S), Attack 70% (empty handed, Hermann does damage like a gun with no maximum damage), 70 wound points.

Derek has recently obtained a third-generation copy of the Naked Goddess tape and is strongly tempted to direct Mak Attax to devote its attention towards getting the real thing.

**Harvey Duopulous, Burger-Flipping Adept**

**Summary:** Is it possible to be obsessively happy-go-lucky? One might be tempted to say no, until one meets Harvey Duopulous.

Harvey is a believer, first and foremost. Like all entropomancers, he believes in chaos; additionally, he is firmly convinced that chaos should be *shared*. He's the kind of guy who says things like "Hey, here's a bet: I'll flip a coin. Heads, I slam my hand in the cash register drawer. Tails, you do it. C'mon, it'll be fun!"

This kind of risk-taking is endemic among bodybag adepts, of course, but Harvey has linked it to a theory that utopia on earth would consist of everyone accepting and even embracing risk and randomness in their life. His natural inclination is to rebel against authority, but he's willing to behave in order to keep his job at the counter for a burger joint on the highway in DeKalb, Illinois.

**Personality:** (Sagittarius) "Stone Free" is Harvey's theme song.

**Obsession:** The magical connection between blind chance and deliberate action.

**Wound Points:** 60

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** People who try to boss him (or others) around. "Fascists, man!"

**Fear Stimulus:** (Self) Harvey is afraid that one day he'll lose his nerve and become another cautious, anxious drone.

**Noble Stimulus:** Harvey wants everyone else to be as free as he is.

**Stats**

**Body:** 60 (Rangy)  
**Speed:** 60 (S) (Smooth)  
**Mind:** 40 (Impulsive)  
**Soul:** 60 (Energetic)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 20%, Struggle 30%, Skateboarding 40%  
**Speed Skills:** Drive Like a Maniac 35%, Dodge 55%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 20%, Occult Trivia 20%, Music Trivia 15%  
**Soul Skills:** Entropomancy 45%, Lie 15%, Charm 30%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
0 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed

**Possessions**

Like all members of Mak Attax, Harvey has committed the ritual of Lesser Correspondence to memory.

**Monica Barberry, Manager and Mak Attaxer**

**Summary:** Monica Barberry manages a fast food restaurant in New York's Grand Central Terminal (more commonly called "Grand Central Station"). She runs things from 6:00 AM until 2:30 PM, which is fine with her: it allows her an opportunity to harvest the cliomantic energy from the historic station early. It also gives her a good vantage point to keep track of the station and make sure there aren't any other cliomancers leeching off her landmark.

Monica is well-known in the New York occult underground. Even those who look down on her for being a cobweb farmer re-

spect her knowledge of the people and politics of magickal society. No one knows for sure that she works for Mak Attax, though most who are aware of Mak Attax at all strongly suspect her of belonging, given her place of employment.

She's a big, slightly sloppy woman with tired eyes and a lot of dyed red hair. When she isn't crammed into a polyester work uniform, she likes big flowing peasant skirts and tie-dyed dresses.

**Personality:** Monica is a practical, no-nonsense type (a rarity in the occult world).

**Obsession:** The influence that the past magickally exerts on the present and the future.

**Wound Points:** 55

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Playing with danger. She doesn't mind people horsing around safely, and she doesn't mind danger if it's regarded maturely, but it pisses her off when people play with matches.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Isolation) Monica doesn't like wide-open spaces. While not actively agoraphobic, she's much more comfortable in a forest than out in a plain.

**Noble Stimulus:** She's a nurturer at heart. She wants to take care of people and make sure they're safe. This goes double for children.

**Stats**

**Body:** 55 (Flabby)  
**Speed:** 40 (F) (Deliberate)  
**Mind:** 65 (Talks Back)  
**Soul:** 60 (Confident)

**Mak Attax: Monica Barberry, Derek Jackson, Harvey Duopoulous**



JIM PAVELEC



**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Struggle 20%, Large and Hard to Move 50%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 15%, Drive 15%, Firearms 40%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 20%, Notice 50%, New York History 25%

**Soul Skills:** Cliomancy 55%, Charm 30%, Lie 30%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
1 Hardened	6 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
1 Failed	2 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed

**Possessions**

Monica has a notebook in which she’s recorded the ritual of Lesser Correspondence (p. 196), as well as two other rituals she’s uncovered—the rituals Snowblinding and the Seek the Lost Tome (both described in the Magick chapter). All three rituals are protected by a personal code known only to her. Note that this is a code, not a cipher: each symbol is a *word*, not just a letter. Cracking this isn’t something you could do on your personal computer.

In a specially designed fanny-pack holster, Monica keeps a Glock 17 loaded with hollow points (maximum damage 55). The same holster contains a clip of armor-piercing rounds.

## Minor Groups

### The Sleepers

#### Cletus Crowe, Sleeper and Cop

**Summary:** Cletus is a second-generation sorcerer and a second-generation Sleeper. Along with his mother’s milk, he suckled the notion that knowledge of magick must be suppressed. He’s dedicated to the cause, which is why he went into law enforcement.

Officer Crowe sees no conflict between his roles as mundane cop and supernatural hit man. He sees both roles as sides of the same coin. He stays within the law to serve and protect those the law was designed for: normal people. Magick entities are another matter. When he assassinates a sloppy sorcerer or a careless cultist, he doesn’t consider it wrong or unethical. Technically illegal, but you can’t expect people to legislate against something they know nothing about, right?

The occult underground in his city has no idea that Cletus is supernaturally aware. Their contempt for “normals” clouds their ability to recognize a danger to them that disguises itself as mundane. Cletus likes it that way.

**Personality:** Taurus—Cletus just bulls ahead, doing his job(s).

**Obsession:** Magick and the societies that form around it.

**Wound Points:** 50

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Magicians with contempt for ordinary people.

**Fear Stimulus:** (The Unnatural) Unnatural creatures. Cletus feels like he can handle most humans using magick, but supernatural creatures are too much of an unknown for him.

**Noble Stimulus:** To serve and protect. Officer Crowe believes that what he is doing keeps everyone safe.

**Stats**

**Body:** 55 (Portly)

**Speed:** 55 (S) (Quiet Step)

**Mind:** 55 (Cunning)

**Soul:** 55 (Forgettable)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 40%, Restrain Suspect 45%

**Speed Skills:** Drive 25%, Dodge 20%, Handgun 40%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 20%, Notice 45%, Authority 20%

**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Cliomancy 50%, Lie 20%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
3 Hardened	6 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
1 Failed	2 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed

**Possessions**

Cletus carries a Ruger Blackhawk Revolver at all times, and usually has a cheap and untraceable gun for use as a drop piece. (When he needs to, Cletus presses the drop piece into the hand of dead sorcerers so he can claim self-defence.) When he’s on patrol, he carries a nightstick (+3 damage), handcuffs, pepper spray, a taser, and an impact-resistant flashlight (+3 damage). He also has a shotgun in the trunk of his patrol car, along with a bulletproof vest. At home, Cletus has a wide variety of firearms.

### Angela Forsythe, Sleeper

**Summary:** Angela Forsythe is a wealthy British woman in her eighties, though she looks forty at most. Her father created the school of magick known as cliomancy, and his daughter was his best pupil. Her father (Dugan Forsythe) stressed the importance of subtlety to all his students—a creed that has endeared the cliomancers to the occult neighborhood watch known as the Sleepers. Angela was recruited at the tender age of thirty and she has been armed to the teeth for her task of removing unwanted “noisy” sorcerers.

Angela does not particularly care for her work, but it doesn’t bother her much either. She recognizes it as a necessity and also feels that people with a real passion for murder are the least likely to carry it off. She is self-righteous, smug, and extremely dangerous to anyone she deems a threat.

When Dugan Forsythe founded cliomancy, he fed his students a rather baroque line of bullshit about Atlantis. The primary purpose of this was to enable his children and trusted cliomantic heirs to pose as Atlanteans and push the other cliomancers around. Dugan Forsythe liked to travel and saw no reason to be stuck in London greedily guarding Buckingham Palace and Big Ben from his own students. Angela can pass herself off as Atlantean to many cliomancers (some students of students were not taught the “Atlantean phrases” but Angela has been quick to correct them) and consequently has little trouble charging up wherever she travels.

Her preferred method of killing anyone who pisses her off involves using the spell I Believe the Lies to make the victim believe he has been put on a course of antibiotics by a physician. Then she arranges for the victim to get a bottle of his prescription pills—actually a dangerously powerful narcotic. Naturally, the victim believes he’s supposed to take a fatal dose.



**Personality:** (Capricorn) A perfect plotter.  
**Obsession:** Magick. Specifically, she's obsessed with the tangles of historical truth and belief that form her father's school of sorcery.  
**Wound Points:** 50

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** The blatant use of magick. To her, it's more than just dangerous and foolish to use magick wantonly; it's downright *rude*.  
**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) She is terrified of losing her magick powers. She and her father were in a position to reap a *lot* of major charges, and that's what's kept her fairly youthful and healthy.  
**Noble Stimulus:** Protect the world from sorcery, and sorcery from the world. She believes that keeping the occult underground separated from the "normal" world is not just a good idea—it's essential for the health and well-being of both.

**Stats**

**Body:** 50 (Well Preserved)  
**Speed:** 60 (S) (Remarkably Spry)  
**Mind:** 65 (Calculating)  
**Soul:** 65 (*Seems* Warm and Friendly)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Struggle 40%, Equestrian 30%  
**Speed Skills:** Firearms 30%, Dodge 40%, Drive 20%, Stealth 40%  
**Mind Skills:** Education 30%, Notice 65%, Breaking and Entering 40%, Occult History 65%

**Soul Skills:** Cliomancy 65%, Charm (Proper British Manners) 40%, Lie 50%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
10 Hardened	10 Hardened	0 Hardened	1 Hardened	4 Hardened
2 Failed	2 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed

**Possessions**

As a wealthy British semi-aristocrat, Angela has little difficult procuring any material object she might desire. When on a mission, she carries a pair of Walther PPKs, one in her purse and one in an ankle holster. As a member of the Sleepers, Angela can (at the GM's discretion) gain access to artifacts, rituals, clockworks, or even a Golem or Unspeakable Servant.

**Daoud Mabsut, Bodyguard to Angela Forsythe**

**Summary:** Angela met Daoud twenty years ago in India. He was the nineteen-year-old gofer, agent, and bodyguard of an aged adept that she'd been sent to kill, and he impressed her. She decided that it would be worthwhile to break his mind and rebuild it, only this time make him completely dedicated to her. With her powers of memory editing, it wasn't difficult.

Angela Forsythe is literally everything to Daoud. He adores her, lives to fulfill her every wish, and would die at her command in an instant.

**The Sleepers: Angela Forsythe, Daoud Masbut, Cletus Crowe**



BRIAN SNODDY

**Personality:** Daoud is polite, cheerful, obedient, thoughtful, and pleasant to everyone he meets, unless instructed otherwise by Angela. He makes a good first impression, but the more time one spends with him, the more apparent his inner blankness becomes.  
**Obsession:** Angela Forsythe's protection and well-being.  
**Wound Points:** 75

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Anyone who threatens Angela Forsythe.  
**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) He is terrified by the thought that harm might come to his beloved Angela.  
**Noble Stimulus:** On his own, Daoud is a merciful man. Given the choice, he will usually let a helpless opponent live. However, Angela rarely gives him a choice.

**Stats**

**Body:** 75 (Powerful)  
**Speed:** 70 (S) (Sleek)  
**Mind:** 45 (Vacantly Polite)  
**Soul:** 30 (Vacuous)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** Cut You Up 70%, General Athletics 50%, Run 30%, Climb 30%  
**Speed Skills:** Drive 15%, Dodge 60%, Stealth 60%, Handgun 40%  
**Mind Skills:** Notice 40%, General Education 15%, Breaking and Entering 40%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 30%, Lie 30%, Good Lookin' Man 30%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
10 Hardened	10 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	3 Hardened
4 Failed	3 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	5 Failed

**Notes**

Daoud is insane. He has confabulated a series of memories that contradict his memories of Angela being ruthless or cruel. All the people she has remorselessly killed, all the people she's ordered him to remorselessly kill—he remembers it all differently. He remembers roughing them up, giving them a stern lecture, then letting them go cowed and beaten. If this version of events is seriously challenged—especially if proof of their death and his involvement is shown—it will count as a rank-4 Stress challenge, immediately sending him into a fight, flight, or paralysis response.

**Possessions**

Daoud doesn't worry about material possessions; his beloved Angela takes care of all that. He usually has a couple of knives concealed on himself somewhere. If occasion warrants, he carries a firearm (preferring a Colt Viper), but doesn't consider it a necessity. He's good with his hands.

## Satan's Chosen Temple

### Rebecca DeGhoulé, "Satanic Leader"

**Summary:** As described on p. 18, "Rebecca" (aka Judy Bradie) is basically a maladjusted young woman doing the occult equivalent of playing with matches.

**Personality:** Rebecca acts the perfect Leo: she is smug, arrogant, and dismissive of others, who nonetheless find themselves wanting her approval.  
**Obsession:** Magick. Rebecca has always found the lure of the occult irresistible.  
**Wound Points:** 50

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Anyone who belittles her or treats her like she's an inferior.  
**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Rebecca is deeply afraid of looking sentimental or emotionally weak.  
**Noble Stimulus:** Independence. Rebecca believes that people should be free to do what they want (as long as they don't get in her way).

**Stats**

**Body:** 50 (Slender)  
**Speed:** 50 (F) (Agile)  
**Mind:** 50 (Precocious)  
**Soul:** 80 (Oversensitive)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Dance 25%, Struggle 15%  
**Speed Skills:** Dodge 30%, Drive 15%, Unlicensed Firearm 1%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 15%, Occult History 15%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Lie 40%, Boss People Around 40%, Summon Demons & Send 'Em Away 40%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
2 Hardened	4 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened	1 Hardened
2 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed

**Possessions**

Rebecca has recently acquired a Colt Viper revolver and a sawed off, double-barreled shotgun (contains two shots, 20-gauge, maximum damage of 60).

### Thurston Joseph "T. Joe" Walters, "Satanist" Wannabe

**Summary:** Thurston "T. Joe" Walters comes from the same suburban, upper-middle class background as Rebecca, and his skills and stats can serve as a template for about half the members of Satan's Chosen Temple.

T. Joe was Rebecca's boyfriend for about a week, back when she was Judy. He never got over it 100% when she dumped him, but he acted the role of the "good friend" with her, secretly hoping they'd get back together. Then she made her "satanic" breakthrough, and everything changed.

T. Joe gets a masochistic thrill out of being ridden by the demons, and his willingness to give up his body has given him a great deal of clout in Satan's Chosen Temple. He's started thinking about trying to call up some of the demons on his own, so that he can make his own deal with the "infernal powers." He's been too scared so far, but he's been dreaming of taking over the temple from Rebecca and showing her who's really in charge . . .

Like many "members" of SCT, T. Joe lives at home with his parents but spends a lot of time hanging out at the rundown house that Rebecca is using as her temple.

**Personality:** T. Joe is basically a follower at heart, but he wants the admiration and respect that go with being a leader.

**Obsession:** Self-interest.

**Wound Points:** 50, but he'll run away as soon as he gets bloodied, struck with a weapon, or takes more than 10 points of damage.

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Anyone who points out unpleasant truths about his personality (*i.e.* "You're a big weak loser.")

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Getting caught by his parents and kicked out of his house.

**Noble Stimulus:** T. Joe is almost as kind and friendly to those who look up to him as he is envious and bitter towards those who look down on him.

**Stats**

**Body:** 50 (Young & Healthy)  
**Speed:** 50 (F) (Restless)  
**Mind:** 50 (Naïvely Cynical)  
**Soul:** 50 (Willfully Inarticulate)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** Struggle 20%, General Athletics 20%, Recover from Binge Drinking 40%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 50%, Drive 15%, Shoot Hoops 25%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 15%, Satanic Rock Band Trivia 40%

**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Lie 30%, Vague Threat 30%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
0 Hardened	3 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed

**Possessions**

Other than a bitchin' black leather jacket and his dad's cast-off car, not much.

**Josie Reed, Satanist Hanger-On**

**Summary:** Word has gotten around that there's this crazy chick out in the suburbs who has a house of her own where you can crash. All you have to do is go through this "Satanic" rigmorole.

That's what Josie Reed heard anyhow. It sounded better to her than whoring or sleeping under a bridge. Since she showed up and "pledged her soul to Satan" she's found out that there's more to it than that—something genuinely weird is going on, with words appearing in blood on the walls and tables flipping over and other weird stuff happening. Josie's avoided being "ridden" by the demons, which is actually fine with the middle-class satanists—it gives them a good reason to look down on her, even though they're kind of intimidated by her "street cred." There's an unspoken agreement. Josie watches the house, makes sure that no one gets too nosy, throws out the beer bottles and paper plates, and grabs anyone who seems to really be freaking out at the ceremonies. In return, she gets to crash as long as she wants and sponge off Rebecca's demon-donated cash.

There are 3-5 other street kids like Josie living in the Temple. Some of them have allowed themselves to be possessed, others

(like Josie) are reticent. All will fight to defend their home, however. They won't call the cops no matter what.

**Personality:** Josie is shy, introverted, and glum. She ran away from an abusive home and didn't find life on the street much better. She doesn't exactly like Rebecca or the Temple, but she sure as hell dislikes it less than her alternatives.

**Obsession:** Josie has no obsession.

**Wound Points:** 40

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Anyone who tries to hurt her.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Having to go home to her abusive family.

**Noble Stimulus:** Josie is protective of people like herself—people with no good options.

**Stats**

**Body:** 40 (Sickly)  
**Speed:** 50 (S) (Twitchy)  
**Mind:** 50 (Street-smart)  
**Soul:** 50 (Edgy)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** Struggle 40%, General Athletics 15%,

**Speed Skills:** Run Like Hell 30%, Dodge 50%, Drive 15%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 45%

**Soul Skills:** Invoke Pity (Charm) 30%, Lie 30%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
2 Hardened	2 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened
2 Failed	2 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed

**Possessions**

Josie carries a large hunting knife with her at all times.

**The Order of St. Cecil**

**Fr. Jose Carillo, Kicking Ass for the Lord**

**Summary:** Father Carillo is a native of El Salvador and a former supporter of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. He spent a lot of his time hiding out from right-wing death squads and preaching hope to the downtrodden, until one day he met a group of peasants who had their own protection from both factions. They made strange calls, like birds, and strange, formless things came down from the mountains and trees to tear apart any interlopers. Father Carillo barely escaped alive, but when his bishop told him a group of exorcists had arrived, he insisted on going into the jungle with them. The exorcists (from the Order of St. Cecil) were impressed with his courage in the face of supernatural evil and recommended him for membership. For his part, Jose had seen that there were even worse threats than the Contras. He agreed to join the Order and trained hard.

Jose has mostly specialized in South and Central American exorcisms, but recently his cultural background and expertise has led him into the United States. He has suspicions that a group of drug smugglers are using black magick to get their product into North America.

Jose is still a dedicated communist, but his politics take a back seat to his faith. He dislikes killing human beings and thus far has been able to avoid doing so.



**Personality:** (Taurus) He's a trooper, able to overcome most setbacks.  
**Obsession:** Father Carillo is dedicated to wiping the supernatural off the face of the earth.  
**Wound Points:** 65

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Oppression, especially politically sanctioned violence.  
**Fear Stimulus:** (Self) Jose is afraid that if he becomes too wrapped up in his hatred for the powers of evil, he could lose his love of Christ.  
**Noble Stimulus:** Protect the world from the devil's wiles—particularly the supernatural.

**Stats**

**Body:** 65 (Burly)  
**Speed:** 65 (S) (Graceful)  
**Mind:** 65 (Keen Mind)  
**Soul:** 65 (Intense Beliefs)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** Judo 55%, General Athletics 50%  
**Speed Skills:** Firearms 45%, Driving 45%, Dodge 50%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 20%, Theology 30%, Notice 50%, Occult Countermeasures 45%  
**Soul Skills:** Pray 65%, Charm 30%, Lie 45%

**Pray:** If Father Carillo is being influenced or controlled by magick, either mentally or emotionally, he can make a Pray

roll to snap out of it. In addition, any time he fails a Madness check he can make a Pray roll; if successful, he can reroll, but he only gets one attempt per failed check.

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
5 Hardened	8 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	1 Hardened
2 Failed	0 Failed	2 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed

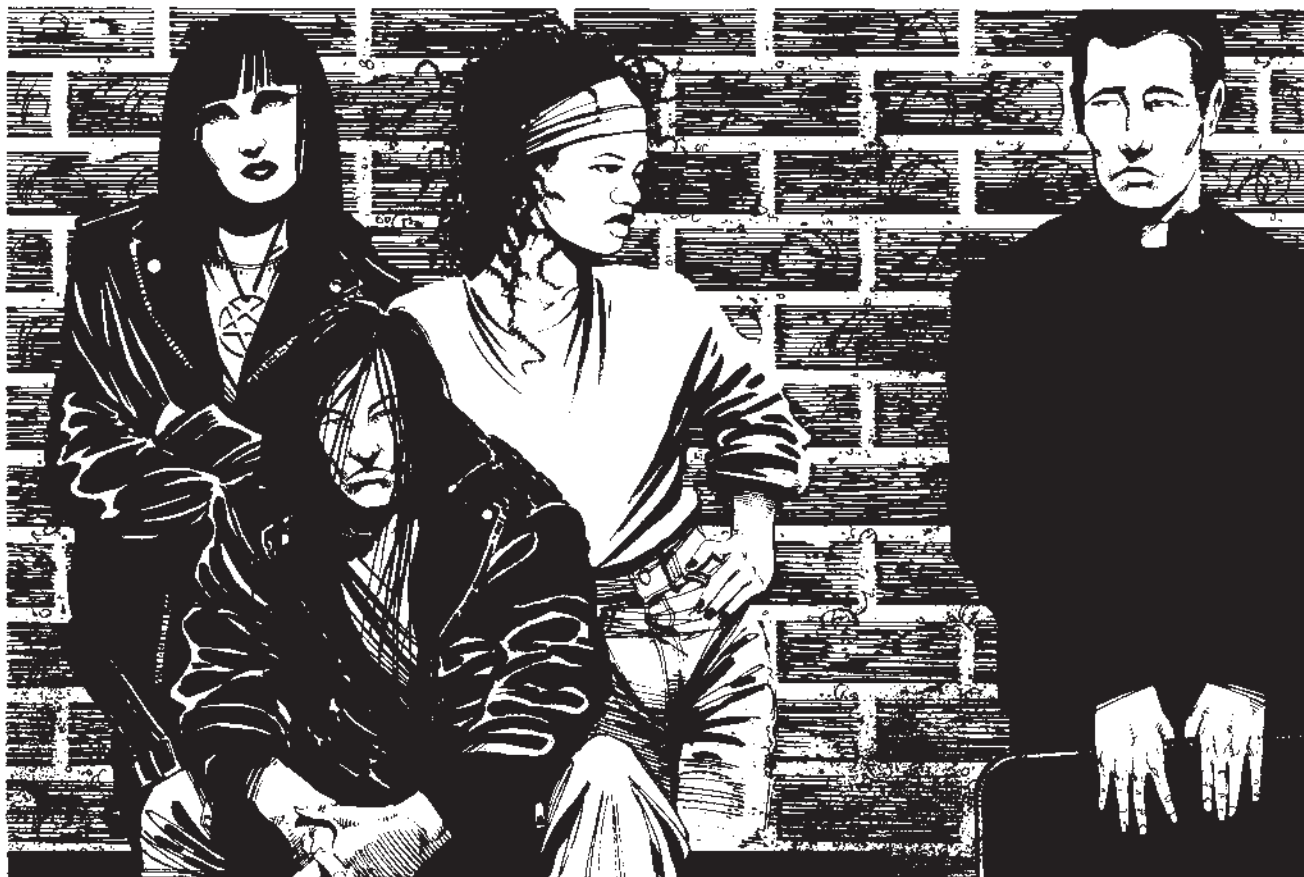
**Possessions**

In addition to his cross, bible, and holy water, Father Carillo usually carries two pair of handcuffs, a canister or two of pepper spray, and a hunting knife. If expecting real trouble, he is generally armed with a Desert Eagle semi-automatic and an MP5 submachine gun, supplied by the Catholic Church.

**Dukes**

**Dirk Allen, Boozehound**

**Summary:** Underneath his irascible, drunken old coot act there lies the marinated wreckage of a once-fine brain. Dirk started out as an earnest young writer with a taste for the weird, and the weirder his work got, the more people liked it. Unfortunately, he couldn't keep the supernatural confined to his writing. He didn't want to just make up new fictions. He wanted to tell the truth, and in 1963 he went on a "fact-finding trip" to South America with his



**Satan's Chosen Temple:** Rebecca DeGhoule, Thurston "T-Joe" Walters, Josie Reed; **The Order of Saint Cecil:** Fr. Jose Carillo

BRIAN STODDY

first wife on the trail of something that sounded (to him) like a weird crossbreed between traditional Orixia worship and the Papuan cargo cults.

His wife returned from Brazil with a strange illness that killed her a year after they returned to the U.S. Subsequently, Dirk wrote a novel—actually a thinly fictionalized account of the whole hideous experience—entitled *God's A-Bomb* (1965) that garnered critical praise and some financial success. He also started drinking heavily. After his wife's death, he checked into an asylum for a while.

After his emergence from the sanitarium, he lived in California, where he was pals with Jerry Garcia and Timothy Leary. (That's what he claims, anyhow.) It was during that time that he got married again and started down the path to dipsomancy. If his novel *The Biggest Secret of Them All* (1970) contains any autobiographical elements, he was probably being pursued by the South American cult as well. Presumably fleeing them, he moved to Chicago, where he wrote *Dead Harlots of the Western Sky* (1973) after an acrimonious divorce. This was his most financially successful novel, and it was eventually made into the B-movie *Witch Hunter 1990*.

His years of shabby fame and squandered fortune, combined with his ongoing alcoholism, has turned Allen into a mean-eyed predator. He knows the booze is killing him. He's sacrificed a handful of naïve acolytes drawn by his reputation and consumed their souls to keep himself alive. Presently, he's seeking a ritual that will let him move his own soul into a younger, healthier body.

Dirk Allen currently lives in Austin, at least according to his tax documents. He keeps apartments in Seattle and New York as well. He recently appeared on the TV show *Selena!* in Chicago, but generally he avoids the windy city like a plague or a rehab clinic.

**Personality:** Allen is a self-centered, cynical burnout. The first woman he truly loved died for his curiosity, and his second wife abducted their daughter after she realized he'd never really loved either of them. He has no idea where his child (who would be in her 20s now) is. Sometimes, when he's sober, he misses his little girl and wishes he knew where she was. But that soon passes.

**Obsession:** Dirk is obsessed with transgressing the laws of reality with magick.

**Wound Points:** 30

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** Anyone who brings up the subject of his first wife is likely to piss the old man off severely.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Self) Allen is terrified of his past catching up to him. He's thrown a lot of dirt up the hill and is worried that one day it's all going to come rolling back down.

**Noble Stimulus:** He'll do anything to keep writing, as he considers it the only worthwhile part of his whole wretched existence. He can successfully rationalize the worst atrocities as being for the sake of the higher purpose of his art.

### Stats

**Body:** 30 (Ravaged)

**Speed:** 50 (S) (Rabbity)

**Mind:** 60 (This Is Your Brain On Booze)

**Soul:** 80 (Weirdly Likeable)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Struggle 30%, Run Away 30%

**Speed Skills:** Drive 20%, Handguns 40%, Dodge 50%, Stealth 40%

**Mind Skills:** Occult Gossip 50%, Occult Lore 50%, General Education 25%, Notice 50%

**Soul Skills:** Dipsomancy 65%, Charm 50%, Lie 50%, Write 65%

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
5 Hardened	10 Hardened	2 Hardened	0 Hardened	4 Hardened
2 Failed	2 Failed	3 Failed	2 Failed	4 Failed

### Possessions

Dirk's prized possession is the coffee cup that Richard Nixon drank out of while authorizing the Watergate break-in. He carries this with him everywhere and uses it to get significant Dipsomancy charges.

Dirk also owns a cup made from the skull of a Capuchin monk. Lord Byron owned it once, and later Gabriele D'Annunzio. This is his backup vessel, which he keeps hidden in a secret, mystically protected location. (After all, you can't just walk into the corner bar and say, "Fill my skull with liquor.")

For protection, Dirk usually carries a gun if he can get one easily. (He flies when he travels, so he's usually only armed in Seattle, New York, or Austin.) He favors revolvers such as the Colt Vi-per and the Redhawk.

## "Dr." Henrietta Apoida, Just Plain Fake

**Summary:** Henrietta was always very smart about things like math and chemistry, but back in college she was very dumb about things like crime and criminals. She started making drugs for her pals, and then for profit. Eventually some pushers who considered the campus their turf beat her up and then turned her in to the college authorities. She got kicked out of school and traveled around brewing various drugs in a portable lab. Eventually she was caught and sent away to a truly dreadful prison experience.

When she got out, she decided to look for tamer turf. She sold phony medicine for a while, then got into computer crimes and internet scams. In between sending out emails titled "Perfectly Legal Business Opportunity—NOT A PYRAMID SCHEME!!!" and "XXX Photos—These Girls Are HOT!" she noticed that the impending millennium seemed linked with an increased interest in the occult and the paranormal.

Currently, she's shaking down gullible rich believers to invest in "the Apoida resonator," a gadget that "electrically stimulates the pineal gland, unlocking latent psychic abilities such as aura sight and astral projection." Actually, the resonator is an elaborate, impressive-looking piece of junk. The active ingredient in the scam is the "saline paste" that she rubs on the temples and foreheads of her marks before hooking them to the machine. She says it's to increase electrical conductivity; in fact, it's laced with powerful hallucinogens. Once that stuff kicks in, almost everyone develops some kind of "psychic power."

**Personality:** The basic sleazy snake-oil salesman. On the surface she comes across as a slightly naïve but well-educated doctor.

**Obsession:** Getting the better of people. Money is actually a secondary element of her crimes; she mostly likes breaking the law on general principles. She's never admitted this to herself, however, and she's far too smart to take risks without a good payoff.

**Wound Points:** 40

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** Being grabbed or manhandled.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Self) Being revealed as a fraud and sent back to prison.  
**Noble Stimulus:** Her one ethical issue is the environment. She would never pose as an environmental charity, and in fact she's ratted out a couple "environmental protection" scams.

**Stats**

**Body:** 40 (Dumpy)  
**Speed:** 40 (F) (Tense)  
**Mind:** 70 (Brilliant)  
**Soul:** 70 (A Born Schemer)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Self Defense 35%, Run 20%  
**Speed Skills:** Drive 40%, Dodge 30%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Illegal Chemistry 35%, Computer/Phone Abuse 35%, Notice 15%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 30%, Lie 70%

**Madness Meter**

<b>Violence</b>	<b>Unnatural</b>	<b>Helplessness</b>	<b>Isolation</b>	<b>Self</b>
2 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	1 Hardened	2 Hardened
2 Failed	0 Failed	2 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed

**Possessions**

A large RV containing her "lab."

**Jordan Clay, Occult Entrepreneur**

**Summary:** Jordan sees himself as a slick operator—an icy-cool manipulator who plays the players against each other, shafts them all, and gets their gratitude as payment. He wants to be the smooth cabalist con man who comes out of every deal on top, who always gets away with it, the man who always has his phone calls returned.

The truth is a little different. Clay is doing all right for himself, but he can't be free of the nagging fear that he's being used as much as he's using others. His powers are in demand, but he never seems to get quite as much out of his deals as he wants to, never seems able to present himself as fully in charge and on top of things. He's worried about coming across as nervous, uncertain, pleading instead of demanding—all the things he secretly feels but is terrified to show.

He has resolved himself to become ruthless, to show no mercy, to *make* people fear and respect him. He has what they want; they'd better meet his price, or . . . or else.

**Personality:** Clay's personality is in conflict. His natural inclination is to be a nice guy. What he *wants* to be is a tough guy. The result is (sometimes) that he's a back-stabbing, cowardly, and treacherous guy, retaining only enough decency to feel bad afterwards.

**Obsession:** Jordan is fascinated by the idea of exchange and the fluctuating value that items (or abilities) have in relation to each other.

**Wound Points:** 50

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** People who treat him like an inferior, immature peon. (In other words, people who confirm his fears.)

**Fear Stimulus:** (Self) He's afraid people will realize that his competent mystic salesman act is just an act.

**Noble Stimulus:** At some level, Jordan really wants to please others. This inclination (which makes him such a potent avatar for the

Merchant) also leads him to the ingratiating behaviors that he perceives as weak.

**Stats**

**Body:** 50 (Average)  
**Speed:** 50 (F) (Unimpressive)  
**Mind:** 50 (The King of Small Talk)  
**Soul:** 75 (Persuasive and Persistent)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Wrestling 20%, Golf 45%  
**Speed Skills:** Drive 25%, Dodge 25%, Target Shooting 30%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 20%, Notice 40%, Computer Use 20%  
**Soul Skills:** Avatar: The Merchant 65%, Charm 35%, Lie 25%

**Madness Meter**

<b>Violence</b>	<b>Unnatural</b>	<b>Helplessness</b>	<b>Isolation</b>	<b>Self</b>
2 Hardened	4 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
2 Failed	1 Failed	2 Failed	0 Failed	2 Failed

**Possessions**

Jordan's best deal to date resulted in him receiving a Hand of Glory from Alex Abel. It has about 5-8 minutes of use left on it; he's hoping to pawn it off on someone else for something more immediately useful to him.

**Jeeter, Weird Old Duke**

**Summary:** When it comes to Jeeter, people react one of two ways. No one's quite sure which reaction is appropriate.

The first group reacts with contempt and revulsion. This is understandable: Jeeter is an incoherent old bastard in dirty, vomit-flecked clothes. His eyes look like they might have once been blue, but they're now they're so yellowed and bloodshot it's hard to tell. His beard and hair are both long, severely unkempt and grubby underneath discoloration from nicotine and other, less-identifiable stains. As for his teeth, the less said about them the better.

Jeeter blathers, stumbles around, and generally behaves like a complete schizophrenic. He can work some minor mojo now and again, which gets some naive newcomers to the occult scene trying to learn from him, but they usually give up in disgust after weeks (or months).

The second reaction to Jeeter comes from more experienced occultists who notice that for a penniless old nut-job, Jeeter sure seems to get around a lot. Dirk Allen split a short dog of muscatel with Jeeter one night in Austin, got up early the next day and flew to New York—only to see Jeeter passed out under a pile of newspapers near Allen's New York apartment.

**Personality:** Jeeter's personality is a fragmented jumble.

**Obsession:** With all the tenacious strength of his shattered mind, Jeeter clings to his passion for understanding the underlying mystic nature of reality.

**Wound Points:** 30

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Anyone who makes fun of the Invisible Clergy will see Jeeter's mean side.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Violence) Jeeter is really scared by violence, plain and simple.

**Noble Stimulus:** Jeeter has a soft spot for people in trouble, especially normal folks caught up in mystic intrigues. Unfortunately, he's far from being a reassuring figure.

**Stats**

Body: 30 (Wrecked)  
 Speed: 60 (F) (Jumpy)  
 Mind: 30 (Ruined)  
 Soul: 80 (Like a Car Wreck, You Can't Look Away)

**Skills**

Body Skills: General Athletics 15%, Struggle 15%, Run Away 30%  
 Speed Skills: Drive 15%, Dodge 45%, Hide 30%  
 Mind Skills: General Education 15%, Notice 15%, Occultism 30%  
 Soul Skills: Avatar: The Pilgrim 70%, Charm 15%, Lie 15%, Entropancy 30%

**Avatar: The Pilgrim.** Jeeter's Pilgrim quest is to attain perfect mystic knowledge. His pilgrimage skill is Hide.

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
2 Hardened	8 Hardened	2 Hardened	3 Hardened	0 Hardened
5 Failed	3 Failed	4 Failed	2 Failed	0 Failed

**Notes**

Jeeter is insane. In addition to his manic ravings, he has a severe phobia of weapons. Just seeing one makes him run like hell.

**Possessions**

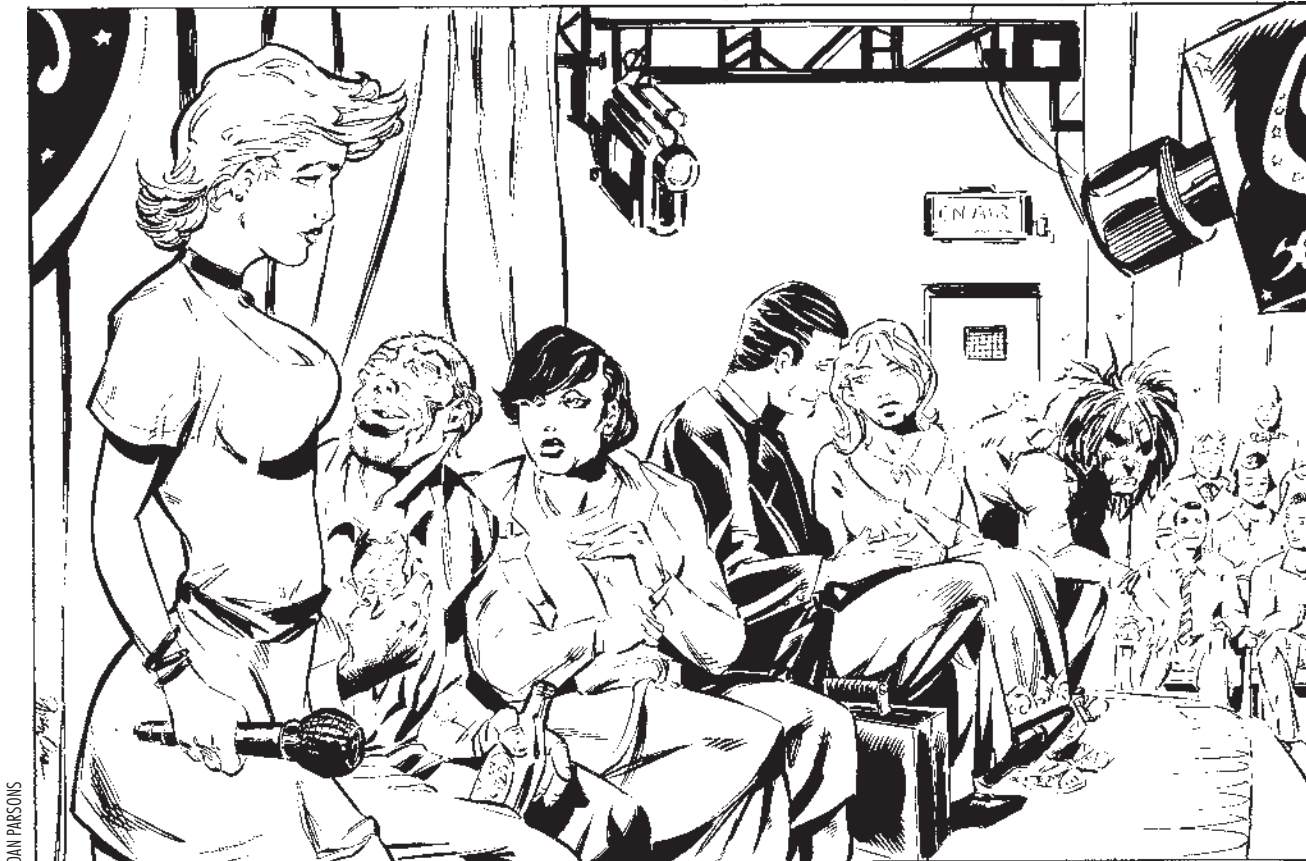
Other than a staff, a bowl (with a label that says "War Veteran, Please Give"), and a broad-brimmed hat, Jeeter owns nothing beyond the clothes on his back.

**Selena Ramirez, Investigative Reporter**

**Summary:** The lovely and aggressive star of the cable "soft news" and talk show "Selena!" is a miracle of *chutzpah* and applied cosmetic technology. She's a breast-implanted bottle blonde with a brain, not to mention a staff of fairly unscrupulous characters willing to do what it takes to get the scoop—even if that means making it up.

In general she prefers to cover actual stories. She is still haunted by the ghosts of her integrity, and besides—it's cheaper to find it than make it yourself. What she's interested in now is the occult, following the high ratings of one of her first shows. She turned up to snoop on what she thought was a routine adulterous politician and stumbled into a kidnap and attempted murder after a farcical trial. (The politician had been kidnapped by a duke who planned to "try" him in front of a stacked jury and hang him. Then he intended to use his carcass to make a Hand of Glory, replacing the duke's old one, which was nearly burnt out.) She got some dramatic (and unexplained) footage, found an audience with a taste for the occult, and earned herself a visit from the Freak (who had been hired to steal the dead duke's Hand of Glory—probably by Alex Abel). Now she's on the trail of the occult for real, which can make her an ally or an enemy for your PCs, depending on their narrative structure.

**Dukes: Selena Ramirez, Dirk Allen, "Dr." Henrietta Apoida, Jordan Clay, Mabel Rhinegold, Jeeter**



DAN PARSONS



**Personality:** Aries. She's pushy, but can get away with it.  
**Obsession:** Oddities of nature. Selena was born with six digits on each hand and foot, though her extra toes and fingers have since been removed.  
**Wound Points:** 60

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Racism. Even though she hardly broadcasts her ethnic heritage, she's sensitive to stereotyping.  
**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Dogs. She got badly bitten one time and has been scared of the beasts ever since.  
**Noble Stimulus:** Selena is a deep believer in the free press—and not just because her job depends on it.

**Stats**

**Body:** 60 (Ruthlessly Exercised)  
**Speed:** 50 (F) (Quick Step)  
**Mind:** 50 (Inquisitive)  
**Soul:** 60 (Aggressively Empathetic)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** Struggle 30%, General Athletics 15%, Distracting Breast Implants 45%  
**Speed Skills:** Run in High Heels 30%, Drive 15%, Dodge 35%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 20%, Investigative Reporting (Notice) 45%, History of the Bizarre 25%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 45%, Lie 45%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
2 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
2 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed

**Possessions**

In addition to plenty of high-tech cameras and sound equipment, Selena owns a nice sports car and plenty of low-cut clothing. Additionally, she owns a copy of the *Malleus Maleficarum* which has the ritual for constructing a Hand of Glory handwritten in the back. (She recovered this at the same time as the Hand of Glory, but since she didn't consider it important and never mentioned it, no one knows she has it.)

**Mabel Rhinegold, Everybody's Pal**

**Summary:** Mabel is something of an occult opportunist. She runs a new age bookstore/organic coffeehouse that serves as an unofficial meeting place for the dregs of the mystic subculture. GMs can locate her store (named The Owl's Eye) wherever is most convenient.

She fancies The Owl's Eye as a Rick's Café American for those in the know about the supernatural. ("Sooner or later, everybody comes to Rick's.") The truth is, many serious adepts wouldn't be caught dead there. Nonetheless, Mabel hears (and overhears) a lot, which gives her an adequate if incomplete overview of the mystic doings in her city.

Mabel isn't really on anyone's side (except her own, of course). She likes being in a position to sell to both sides, and she hasn't really had to deal with the dangers of being a neutral third party. Most of her business is crystals, incense, and coffee that was grown by peasant-owned collectives, but she makes some cash on

the side peddling information. Her store is on a site of minor historical importance, so her cliomantic abilities are usually quite well-charged. (Perhaps George Washington slept there, or Pancho Villa; pick something appropriate to the region.)  
**Personality:** (Sagittarius) An autonomous free spirit.  
**Obsession:** Magick's history and historical magick.  
**Wound Points:** 40

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** Unbelievers who mock her faith in the paranormal.  
**Fear Stimulus:** (Isolation) Right wing fundamentalists who want to destroy her business.  
**Noble Stimulus:** Mabel looks out for the naïve and tries to protect them from the occult underground's more predatory elements.

**Stats**

**Body:** 40 (Out of Shape)  
**Speed:** 40 (F) (Sedentary)  
**Mind:** 65 (Sharp)  
**Soul:** 75 (Pleasant)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** Struggle 15%, General Athletics 15%, Ignore Sleep Deprivation 40%  
**Speed Skills:** Drive 20%, Dodge 20%, Card Tricks & Slight of Hand 30%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 25%, Notice 55%, Run A Business 15%, Local Occult Gossip 45%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 30%, Lie 15%, Cliomancy 55%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
0 Hardened	5 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	2 Hardened
0 Failed	2 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed

**Possessions**

Mabel has a valuable and old copy of Brauster's *Lives of Ye Greata Witches* with contains the Poison Ward ritual.

**Sample Player Characters**

**Louis Brownstone, Paranormal Investigator**

**Summary:** You were just an average guy. Made okay grades in high school, played some football but never made it to State, joined the army, learned how to fix cars. Got married to a white girl, which raised some eyebrows, but people in the army weren't too weird about it. There were some wise cracks and snubs, but you could endure it. Your friends were all behind you—they were open-minded, and pretty soon it wasn't any kind of big deal to anyone.

The only other thing that was even a little odd about you was the science fiction. You were a fan, but you weren't the only one in the army—not the only one in your unit, even. It's not like you were a trekkie, though you did like it when they finally had a black captain on one of the spinoffs.

Oh, the bit with the UFOs—some people thought that was weird. But it's not like you were one of those "abductees." You always kept a level head about it. It just seemed to you that there were too many sightings, too much evidence, too many people say-





Louis Brownstone

ing so for it not to be *something*. Yeah, you spent a vacation looking for Bigfoot and you were a member of a club or two, but it's not like it was your life or anything. Just a hobby. You saw some funny stuff once or twice, but you're keeping an open mind. Could have been anything.

The only really weird thing that ever happened to you was winning a lottery for \$500,000. It's paying out slowly, which is fine. You've retired from the army, you're trying your hand at writing some SF, and you're travelling around the country with your wife. What's weird about that? Lots of retirees do the same thing. So what if you're a few years younger? And if your travels take you close to Groom Lake and other "paranormal hot spots"—well, what's the harm?

**Personality:** (Capricorn) You'd like to make the world a better place, and help the people you meet to become better people. But you don't want anyone to notice what you're up to.

**Obsession:** Having new experiences. You believe that new experiences make people more broad-minded, and you want to see and do as much as you can in your life.

**Wound Points:** 60

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** Racism, especially when it's directed against you.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Isolation) Something bad happening to your wife.

**Noble Stimulus:** Introducing new things and new ideas to people.

Your greatest pleasure is sharing your experiences with people.

### Stats

**Body:** 60 (Middle-age Spread)

**Speed:** 55 (Stable)

**Mind:** 65 (Curious)

**Soul:** 40 (Easygoing)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 25%, Run for Miles 20%, Struggle 45%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 25%, Drive 25%, Guns 35%

**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Mechanic 15%, Notice 25%, Paranormal Lore 40%

**Soul Skills:** Charm 40%, Lie 15%, Tell Story 15%

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
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3 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
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0 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed
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### Possessions

Army-surplus motorcycle, gun license, Ruger Red Label double-barrel 12-gauge shotgun, IMI Desert Eagle .50 semi-automatic handgun (hollow points), Winnebago RV

### Connections

Army buddies nationwide, family & friends in Terra Haute, Indiana

### Minerva Brownstone, Paranormal Investigator

**Summary:** Your dad was what kindly people called "eccentric." He always had fascinating stories to tell about history, foreign cultures, ancient myths—things like that. People looked at him a little funny sometimes, but you loved it. After all, it was all there in his books.

ANDY BENNETT

Then one day, someone broke into the house. Only your daddy was home then, and no one's sure quite what the burglar did, but daddy was different afterwards. Not hurt anywhere you could see—but hurt on the inside. Scared, guarded . . . haunted. He stopped talking about “old mysteries” but started doing a lot more reading. Your mom acted like nothing was wrong, but the next school year you were sent off to a convent school, and when you came back your dad was in an asylum. All his books, the books of wonders and mysteries and knowledge—they were gone.

That was many years ago, of course. Both your parents are long dead, and the house you grew up in is a gas station now. You have a husband of your own—you hit it off when he started talking about how the Egyptians buried their dead. For a while you were a librarian, but now (thanks to your husband) you can afford to travel across the country looking into the same mysteries that fascinated your father.

You and your husband Louis operate a web page on the paranormal. It serves as a linking point to others with similar interests (and a few skeptic sites for balance) and it gives you a good excuse to go around the country looking into “weird happenings.”

**Personality:** (Pisces) You've channeled your inborn eccentricity into productive, life-affirming interests, but are still sensitive about being labeled a loony.

**Obsession:** Knowledge, especially forgotten or forbidden knowledge.

**Wound Points:** 50

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** When people mock (or worse, abuse) “eccentrics.”

**Fear Stimulus:** (Self) You're afraid of going insane like your father.

**Noble Stimulus:** You're a nurturer at heart. Whenever you see someone unhappy, your first thought is to make it better. (Though of course you're reasonable about this.)

**Stats**

**Body:** 50 (Delicate)

**Speed:** 50 (Graceful)

**Mind:** 70 (Sharp)

**Soul:** 50 (A Sweetie)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 20%, Nice-Looking 20%, Running 20%, Struggle 20%

**Speed Skills:** Dodge 30%, Drive 30%, Guns 20%

**Mind Skills:** Computer Operation 40%, General Education 15%, Notice 15%, Occult Librarian 30%

**Soul Skills:** Charm 40%, Lie 40%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
1 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed

**Possessions**

Father's onyx ring, large reference library (with sister in St. Louis), portable computer, small occult library (on Winnebago)

**Connections**

A few librarians here & there, family & friends in St. Louis, paranormal enthusiasts nationwide



Minerva Brownstone

ANDY BENNETT

## B. D. Dover, Skeptical Publisher

**Summary:** “I have spent years researching bigfoot, UFOs, and ‘magick,’ and I assure you that the only thing I cannot explain is the abysmal gullibility of the average person.”

Sometimes you feel like your whole life has been an elaborate joke. Born on an Alabama farm to a father who thought it was “real cute” to name you Buck, you’ve been fighting a battle for respect, a decent life, and good dental care ever since.

A track scholarship got you into college. Grades there got you into law school. Elocution lessons finally erased your shameful backwoods drawl, and a career as a District Attorney was supposed to follow. Somehow it didn’t, though. You couldn’t understand it: you were constantly beaten by lawyers with shoddy cases, illogical arguments, and naked appeals to sentiment. Eventually, you realized the ugly truth.

Most people are just plain stupid.

Sickened by the injustices inherent in a jury system that selects only the most ignorant, you quit in disgust and founded a magazine dedicated to bringing the light of rational thinking to the benighted masses. It’s a slow process, but you’ve revealed frauds, uncovered hoaxes, and even gotten a few con men put in jail.

You are convinced that there is no phenomenon that can resist logical investigation, which is why you’re the only member of your family who isn’t woefully superstitious.

**Personality:** (Leo) You’re superior to most people, darn it, and they should realize that. Failing that, they should at least realize how stupid they are and reward you for pointing this out.

**Obsession:** Being right. More than that, you want people to *recognize* that you’re right—especially when they’re wrong.

**Wound Points:** 45

### Passions

**Rage Stimulus:** Puns. Anyone who makes jokes about your name, or your brother’s name (Ben Dover) or your initials (“Beady”) really gets under your skin.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Self) Looking unintentionally stupid.

**Noble Stimulus:** Helping people overcome their superstition and irrationality.

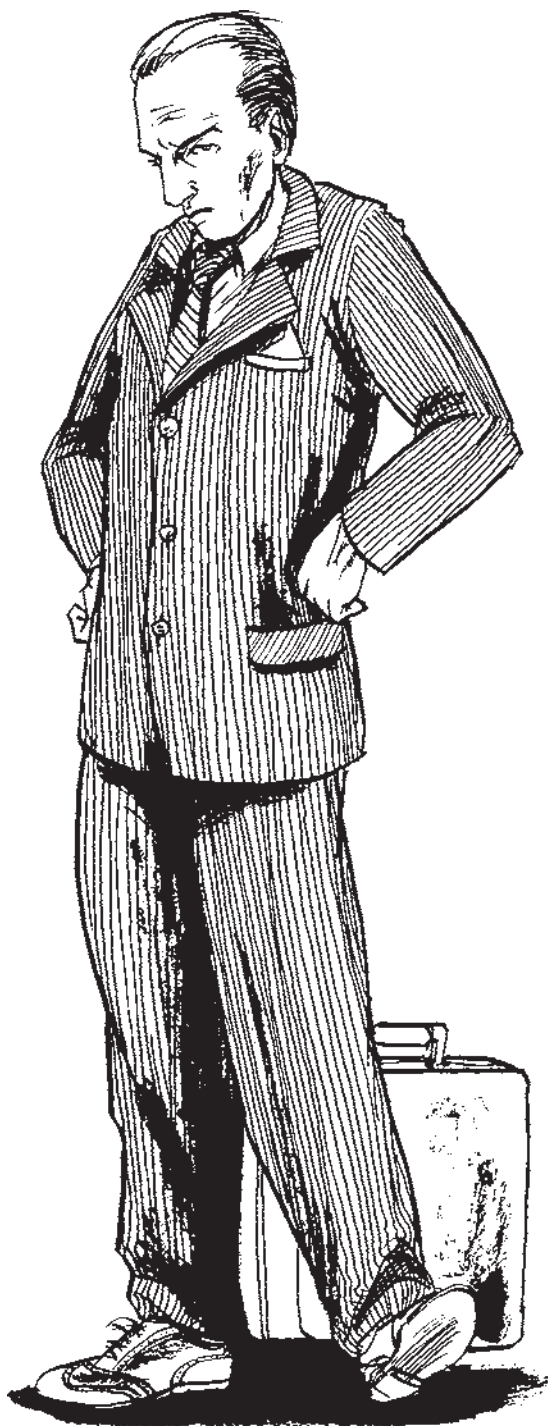
### Stats

**Body:** 45 (Lean)  
**Speed:** 60 (Fidgety)  
**Mind:** 70 (Dry Intellectual)  
**Soul:** 45 (Fussy)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** Athletics 15%, Struggle 20%, Run Track 40%  
**Speed Skills:** Dodge 25%, Drive 15%, Guns 30%, Stage Magic 20%  
**Mind Skills:** Education 30%, Law 25%, Notice 25%, Paranormal History 20%  
**Soul Skills:** Badgering 45%, Charm 15%, Lie 15%

**Badgering:** Badgering is the debating skill of forcing people to agree with you—often by simply wearing them down. It was your one great skill as a lawyer, and it’s quite useful for making crystal-waving New Agers confront the contradictions inherent in their beliefs. Also good for getting out of speeding tickets, getting your money back in restaurants, *etc.*



ANDY BENNETT

B.D. Dover

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
0 Hardened	2 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed

**Possessions**

Home computer, law reference library, Ford Taurus

**Connections**

Friends in the skeptic subculture, old cronies in the D.A.'s office, media personalities who use you as a debunker

**Henry Watts, Animal Control Officer**

**Summary:** "When you got one guy with a shotgun, they send in the SWAT team. You hear 'shots fired, officer down,' dozens of cops swarm all over the place. But when you have two people *toro to pieces*—well, they send in a single animal control officer."

You didn't quite cut the mustard to get into Vet school, so you picked the next best thing: animal control. You've been around animals all your life, and you were sure that all most of 'em need is a little love. To be fair, in 90% of your calls, that's all it takes. It's that last 10% that's a bitch. That's where you got the big, deep scars on your arm—trying the old Dr. Doolittle charm on a pit bull that had been systematically abused by an owner who wanted it to fight in the ring.

Most animals back down if you lock eyes with 'em. The rest will try to chew your face off. That's how you know *it* wasn't an animal. Sure, it looked like a dog on the outside—a big Alaskan Malamute—but it looked at you with human eyes, and you never knew a dog that could lead a man into ambush. Nor a dog smart enough to knock over a can of gasoline so you couldn't shoot at it. And those sure as hell weren't dog tracks leading away when it fled.

You're not sure what you believe, but you've poured yourself some silver bullets. Just in case.

**Personality:** Think Billy Bob Thornton in *Sling Blade*, only not so handicapped. A quiet good old boy who doesn't want to hurt anyone—but don't get him angry.

**Obsession:** Animals. They fascinate you, especially the ways they're like humans and the ways they're different.

**Wound Points:** 70

**Passions**

**Rage Stimulus:** People who abuse helpless animals and children.

**Fear Stimulus:** (Helplessness) Flying. If God had meant you to fly, he'd have made you a bird.

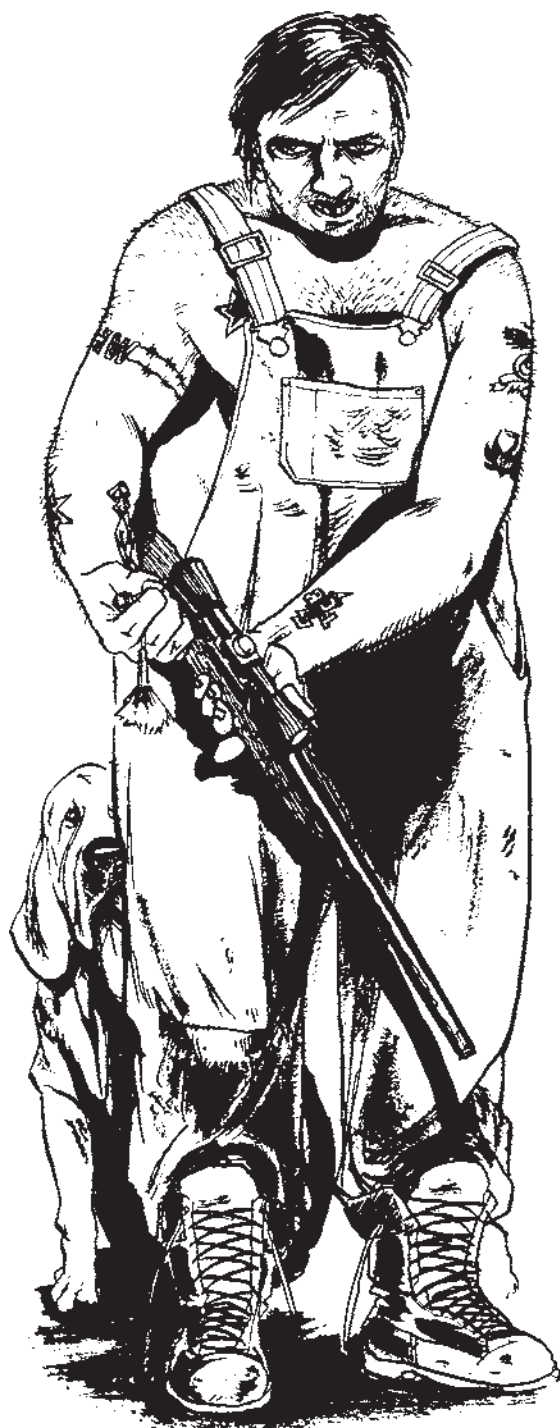
**Noble Stimulus:** Helping mistreated animals find good homes.

**Stats**

Body:	70 (Robust)
Speed:	60 (Relaxed)
Mind:	40 (Sharp-Eyed)
Soul:	50 (Friendly)

**Skills**

Body Skills:	Athletics 15%, Get Back Up 35%, Struggle 40%
Speed Skills:	Dodge 25%, Drive 15%, Guns 50%
Mind Skills:	Authority 10%, General Education 20%, Notice 40%
Soul Skills:	Animal Magnetism 50%, Charm 15%, Lie 15%



Henry Watts

ANDY BENNETT

**Animal Magnetism:** This works basically like Charm, but it only works on animals. Dogs do what you tell them, cats don't scratch or run away, and it was simple for you to train your pets.

**Get Back Up:** This gives you a chance to shrug off the debilitating effects of injury, poison, sickness, or what have you. You're still wounded, but instead of lying in bed moaning or lying on the ground bleeding, you're up and active with a pained look on your face. This is subject to the GM's discretion—if your back is broken in a car wreck, forget about it.

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
3 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed

**Possessions**

Animal traps, big white van, Browning BDM 9mm semi-automatic handgun (hollow points), Colt Anaconda .357 revolver (silver bullets), Fang (pet pit-bull terrier), flare gun, gun license, Icecube (pet husky), many brown jumpsuits, Old Blue (pet bloodhound), one-shot tranquilizer rifle (efficiency 60%, knocks out target), police band scanner

**Connections**

Buddies on the police force

## Generic Characters

### Average Police Officer

**Summary:** Sometimes you don't want or need a detailed police officer; you just want someone convenient to the plotline. So if you need a uniformed officer to harass, question, or pursue your PCs, this is what they're like. A couple of these guys can be a real challenge to PCs who aren't geared towards combat, so use with caution. On the other hand, more experienced (or dangerous) PCs will go through the average cop like a jackhammer through wet tissue. If that happens too often, it's time to throw an above-average cop at them—especially if they've been assuming all cops are created equal . . .

**Personality:** (Virgo) Serving and protecting.

**Obsession:** Help the downtrodden.

**Wound Points:** 50

**Stats**

Body:	50 (Good Condition)
Speed:	50 (Juggles)
Mind:	50 (Alert)
Soul:	50 (Stern Exterior)

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 35%, Restrain Suspect 45%  
**Speed Skills:** Drive 20%, Dodge 20%, Handgun 40%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 20%, Notice 40%, Authority 20%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 20%, Lie 20%, Good Cop/Bad Cop 40%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
4 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened
0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed

### Average Police Detective

**Summary:** These people have been promoted from street beats, usually (but not always) because of talent and skill. They're a notch above patrol cops in terms of detective work, though sometimes they let their physical condition slip a bit.

If you think your PCs are going to have a lot of interaction with the police force, it's probably a good idea to develop a detective in a little more detail. You can either put the pressure on them by putting a really sharp investigator on them, or you can give them some breathing room by giving them a less-competent nemesis.

**Personality:** (Leo) It's my world. Ya better behave.

**Obsession:** Punishing the guilty.

**Wound Points:** 50

**Stats**

Body:	50
Speed:	50
Mind:	60
Soul:	60

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 25%, Subdue Suspect 45%  
**Speed Skills:** Drive 20%, Dodge 15%, Handgun 40%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 20%, Notice 45%, Authority 25%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 20%, Lie 20%, Interrogate Suspect 50%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
4 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened
0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed

### Stock Thug

**Summary:** Whenever you want an opponent of modest skill—a cultist, security guard at a mall, a mugger, whatever—you can probably use the stock thug. They're about equal to PCs who aren't designed for combat, and should only really threaten a group of PCs if they have a numerical advantage.

**Personality:** Duh.

**Obsession:** Dawk.

**Wound Points:** 50

**Stats**

Body:	50
Speed:	50
Mind:	40
Soul:	40

**Skills**

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 30%, Rough You Up 30%  
**Speed Skills:** Drive 15%, Dodge 20%, Handgun 30%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 30%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Lie 20%, Intimidate 30%

**Madness Meter**

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
1 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened	1 Hardened
0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed



## Appendix B: Intro Scenario

### “Bill in Three Persons”

is a scenario designed to kick off an *Unknown Armies* campaign. It’s appropriate for any type of player characters, and can potentially have repercussions that the GM can bring to bear later in the campaign. It can, however, stand on its own as a one-shot scenario if desired.

Since this is intended as an introductory scenario for whatever PCs you have at hand, it’s a pretty grab-em-and-go plot. Some scenes may seem to unfold in a fairly scripted fashion. These scenes are written this way to establish a baseline—they explain what happens if the PCs don’t intervene. It’s up to the GM to roll with the punches and deal with what happens if the PCs go astray; guidelines are provided where possible.

Essentially, there is one main timeline and three stand-alone branching scenes. Each of the three scenes can be aborted at any point if the PCs walk away or pursue some wrong course. That’s okay. Just drop out of the scene and go back to the main timeline. Don’t force the PCs to do things they don’t want to do. There *are* repercussions for aborting a scene, however, and those are explained where appropriate.

“Bill in Three Persons” is intended as a whirlwind tour of *Unknown Armies*, offering opportunities for intrigue, combat, magick, and madness. You may decide it’s not right for your group or campaign; if so, we encourage you to take GMCs or plot ideas from this scenario and use them as you like in your own, original creations.

### Background

Bill Toge is a divided man. There are *three* Bill Toges, identical in appearance and personality, living separate lives in different cities across the country.

The split occurred one night when Bill—there was only one of him then—was driving on a dark highway. He’d lost his job and been kicked out of his dad’s house. He threw everything he owned into his ratty Hyundai and drove off with no destination in mind. Somewhere along the way, he started to doze off and ran off the road into a ditch near a crossroads. He banged his head in the accident, and blearily worked the car back onto the road. When he drove away from the crossroads, there were three of him—three Bills, three Hyundais, three sets of ratty possessions, and so forth—each heading in a different direction. They drove off into the night, oblivious to each other.

The three Bill Toges spent the next five years living meager lives, working odd jobs for cash and sliding into depression. All three spent some time as petty criminals, rootless young men drifting unnoticed across the landscape. They stole cars, held up convenience stores, and—when crime didn’t pay—mopped floors. They also got involved with the occult underground.

For different reasons, each Bill Toge reached a crisis point this past afternoon. Each one decided that he was mad as hell and he wasn’t going to take it anymore. Each one did something stupid—and got away with it, in the short term.

On the run for their own reasons, all three Bill Toges headed for the only safe haven they could think of: home, where the father they hadn’t seen in five years seemed like the only person in the world who could possibly give a damn for their misbegotten lives.

So it was that at the same crossroads where the three of them had split off five years before, the three Bill Toges came speeding back tonight, at the same moment in their strangely fractured times. The ensuing three-car pile-up was nightmarish.

Now all three Bill Toges lie bleeding in the wreckage of their cars and their lives. The chaotic nexus of probabilities that they have traveled through these last five years will soon draw in another group of people altogether—the player characters. Trapped in the unraveling fabric of time and space, the PCs must intercede in the lives of each Bill Toge and ensure that the car wreck at the lonely crossroads doesn’t happen after all; if they fail, they will pay a terrible price.

### Getting Started

The only requirement for the player characters in this scenario is that each of them needs to be driving down a lonely road at night. It doesn’t matter if they’re all together or each in a separate vehicle. It doesn’t matter where they are—they can be on different roads, or even different continents. As long as they’re in a car driving down a road in the middle of nowhere, they’re all set.

Tell the players that it’s about two in the morning, and they’re driving on a deserted road someplace. Ask the players to decide where their characters are, why they’re there, and who (if anyone) they’re traveling with; the sole restriction is that there shouldn’t be any GMCs involved. Once they’ve worked that out, ask the players to mark down what possessions their characters have on their persons or in their vehicles.

With that decided, you’re ready to go.

### Scene One: Crossroads

Take each player aside—or each set of players, if some or all of them are traveling together—and set up the first scene. The following “Canned Intro” is a brief bit of text used to set up this scene. You can read it straight, you can paraphrase it in your own words, or you can ignore it entirely and do whatever you like. The idea of the piece is to set the mood, and if all it does is set the mood in your mind before you make up your own stuff, that’s plenty.

### Canned Intro

The insects buzzed groggily in the thick loam of the night sky. The stars shone down between patches of cloud, reflected dimly in the

### Where is This?

“Bill in Three Persons” doesn’t transpire in any particular place; it’s just a pile-up in the middle of America’s psychic landscape. You can pick arbitrary towns or cities as needed, should any PCs ask. There’s no need for them to be located close together. In general, medium-sized towns are recommended, preferably in rural areas. Watch *Fargo* and you’ll get the picture.

growing pools of blood that gathered on the asphalt at the scene of the accident.

Everything about this was an accident. The drivers of the three cars should have seen each other as they approached the crossroads from different directions, but they didn't. They shouldn't have all been arriving at the crossroads at the exact same moment, but they did.

They shouldn't all have even existed in the first place. That was the biggest accident of them all, and it had happened five years ago at this same crossroads.

There was only one driver that night, and he spun out into a ditch because he fell asleep at the wheel, fleeing a broken home and the promise of a broken life to come. A simple accident, compounded by some savage violation of probability: one driver came towards the crossroads and piled into a ditch; three drivers pulled out of the ditch and drove off into the night, each taking a different direction, each living a different life, each ignorant of the other two.

Tonight they all came back and finally, they met—head on.

The sheriff stood and surveyed the wreckage. Twisted metal, twisted bodies. A godawful mess.

He looked down at his reflection in a pool of blood, his handsome face framed by stars. He'd need some help with this situation. Behind him, a vehicle approached and slowed down, illuminated by the flashing lights of the sheriff's cruiser parked nearby.

The sheriff turned around and called out.

"We need some help here. There's been an accident."

## At the Crossroads

Each player-character vehicle that approaches sees the same thing: three cars have collided from three different directions at a four-way crossroads in the middle of nowhere. The wreck is horrendous. A sheriff's cruiser is parked on the side of the road nearby, lights flashing, and the sheriff is looking at the wreck, evidently having just arrived. The sheriff flags down the vehicle—the road is blocked, anyway—and asks those inside for some help.

Paradoxically, every PC vehicle has the same experience simultaneously, yet no one in any vehicle sees any of the other PC vehicles until they step out and join the sheriff. At that point, all of the PCs are present, and all of their vehicles are gathered at the scene. No matter what location or terrain a given PC vehicle was driving through, they're all in the same place now.

This should be jarring. None of the other vehicles were here a moment ago, yet now they're all here, together, and the sheriff acts like he didn't notice a thing. If asked, he'll look quizzical and say that all these vehicles came driving up just now, and all the PCs got

out and came over. He seems to have no knowledge of anything odd happening, and will shrug off whatever the PCs might say on the topic—his priority is helping the three drivers in the wreckage, and he doesn't have time for fool questions.

The situation is this: the nearest hospital is more than twenty miles away, the sheriff's radio isn't working, and his left arm is in a sling from a bad fall off a ladder last week. The cars are leaking gas, and he's worried about a possible explosion. He wants to get the three drivers out of the cars as soon as possible, then drive back to get an ambulance for them. He has some body boards in his cruiser to lift the victims out on and he can direct the PCs in reasonably safe removal of the drivers. Each car was equipped with an airbag, and although the drivers are injured, they aren't completely mangled or trapped. No special equipment is needed to remove them besides the body board, used to stabilize the victim's spine in case of back injury.

Any PC with a cell phone can call for help, and will be successful. The sheriff will be grateful, but will still insist that they need to lift the drivers out of the cars immediately; as if to drive his point home, the smell of gasoline is overpowering, and sparks can be seen under the hoods where the cars' electrical systems are malfunctioning. The danger of explosion is very real and very immediate, and the sheriff is determined to save these lives. He'll cut short any argument or discussion and pressure the PCs to help him.

Should a PC simply refuse and attempt to leave, it's your call. If refusing to help is against the PC's nature, a Self check may be in order. Regardless, anyone who wants to leave may leave; they're out of the scenario, but that's their decision.

## Removing the Drivers

Removing the drivers is a tense process. Each driver is bleeding and unconscious, and all have compound fractures in their legs—broken shafts of bone have jutted up through the muscle and skin, and they gleam bloodily in the flashing light. The sight is worth a rank-1 Violence check for each driver. Failure probably indicates that the PC in question is unable to participate in the rescue, though they're still in the scenario.

It takes effort and delicacy to remove the drivers safely. The sheriff offers expert, step-by-step guidance, and any PCs with medical knowledge or similar experience will be especially useful. Have each PC working on removal—up to four per driver at a time—make a roll as follows:

- Any PC with a medical skill or something similarly useful may employ that skill.

## The Truth

Knowledgeable players may be taken aback that the sheriff wants them to haul the injured drivers out of the wreck, especially if a PC had a cell phone and summoned help. The threat of an explosion is very real and help is fifteen or twenty minutes away, but even so, it's a drastic step and some players may understand this and be skeptical of the plausibility of this situation.

The simple truth is that the sheriff isn't really a sheriff at all. He's the Comte de Saint-Germain, and he's here tonight to try and push reality back into line with itself by removing the paradox known as Bill Toge. He needs the PCs to pull it off, and getting the drivers out of the wrecks is the first step.

As a result, the sheriff will insist that this is what needs to be done, that he knows best, and damn it, why aren't you helping these poor people instead of standing around yapping? There's no time to argue—only to act.

- All other PCs may make a Speed check, with a minimum success of 30. Anything below a 30 (except for an OACOWA) is a failure.

If any PC fails the roll, the victim's body lurches a bit during the removal, triggering an unconscious moan of pain from the man and possibly a fresh gout of blood from his lips. A failure also triggers a rank-3 Helplessness check in the PC who blew the roll. If that check is failed, the PC is overcome by the situation and has to step back. The sheriff will have any such PCs tend to the drivers after they're removed, or set up road flares to divert oncoming traffic (there is none).

### The Realization

Once all three drivers are safely away from the wreck and the threat of an explosion, the sheriff gets an industrial-strength first aid kit from his cruiser and, again using the PCs as his arms, works to stop the worst of the bleeding. During this process—in which you can call for similar rolls to those in the previous section, with similar consequences—something should become evident to the PCs.

Ask each PC to make a Mind check. If successful, they realize that all three drivers look identical. They're dressed differently, but they have the same height, weight, build, face, hair, eyes, and hands. They look like identical triplets. Plus, they're driving identical cars.

As this realization sinks in, the sheriff shakes his head grimly. "I just knew it. It's that damn Bill Toge again." Sparks from the wreck ignite the pool of gasoline gathering on the road, and the cars explode in a deafening fireball.

## Scene Two: Supermarket

The realization that all three drivers appear to be the same man pulls the PCs squarely into the nexus of probability that swirls around Bill Toge. As soon as the sheriff speaks and the cars explode, the scene changes; the energy from the explosion is all the raw power needed to trigger this situation.

It's now twelve hours earlier, about two in the afternoon; watches change accordingly. The PCs are crouching together in the pet-food aisle of a large supermarket. Bill Toge—one of them, at least—and three of his ne'er-do-well buddies have taken over the supermarket and are pulling off a heist.

### The Heist

Bill Toge, Skeet Reynolds, Manning Weir, and Jared Arnold have a plan. Jared used to work at the local Fresh Way Foods, the biggest

supermarket in town, and he knows that by mid-afternoon, there's more than \$10,000 in cash in the safe up front. He also knows that there's not much in the way of security. He figures that a four-man crew can waltz in, make some noise, and waltz out with ten big ones and no hassles. They'll wear masks—of Nixon, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton, inspired by the action flick *Point Break*—and be in and out in no time.

Things have gone wrong. Although they secured the front part of the store quickly, they failed to spot the police motorcycle parked in the side parking lot. Officer Dan Schwartz was inside getting a cup of coffee and a bearclaw when the heist went down. As he crept towards the front of the store to see what was going on, he was spotted by Skeet.

As the scene opens, the cop and the crook exchange gunfire, just as the PCs appear in the pet-food aisle nearby.

### The Situation

Refer to the map of Fresh Way Foods that appears on the opposite page. The PCs are in aisle eleven, with cleaning supplies on the west side and pet supplies on the east side. They're up towards the front of the aisle, crouching against one side, as yet unnoticed by anyone, at the spot marked "PCs." The other principals are in the following locations:

- Skeet (Reagan) is at the checkout line near the front of aisle nine, facing the small service desk at the front of aisle seven. He's aiming a shotgun towards the desk.
- Officer Schwartz is behind the small service desk at aisle seven, pointing his sidearm at Skeet.
- Manning (Bush) is at the main customer service counter at the front of the store parallel to aisle seven, overseeing the removal of the cash from the safe behind the counter with a rifle. His back is to Skeet.
- Jared (Clinton) is by the west entrance parallel to aisle one, brandishing his shotgun towards a bunch of huddled shoppers in the food court.
- Bill (Nixon) is covering the east entrance with a handgun, parallel to aisle thirteen. He swivels around constantly, checking the aisles and the produce area nearby.
- Shoppers are everywhere. There are forty shoppers in the front part of the store, twelve of whom are clustered in the food court. The rest are in the checkout lines, in the aisles, and crouching by the entrances.

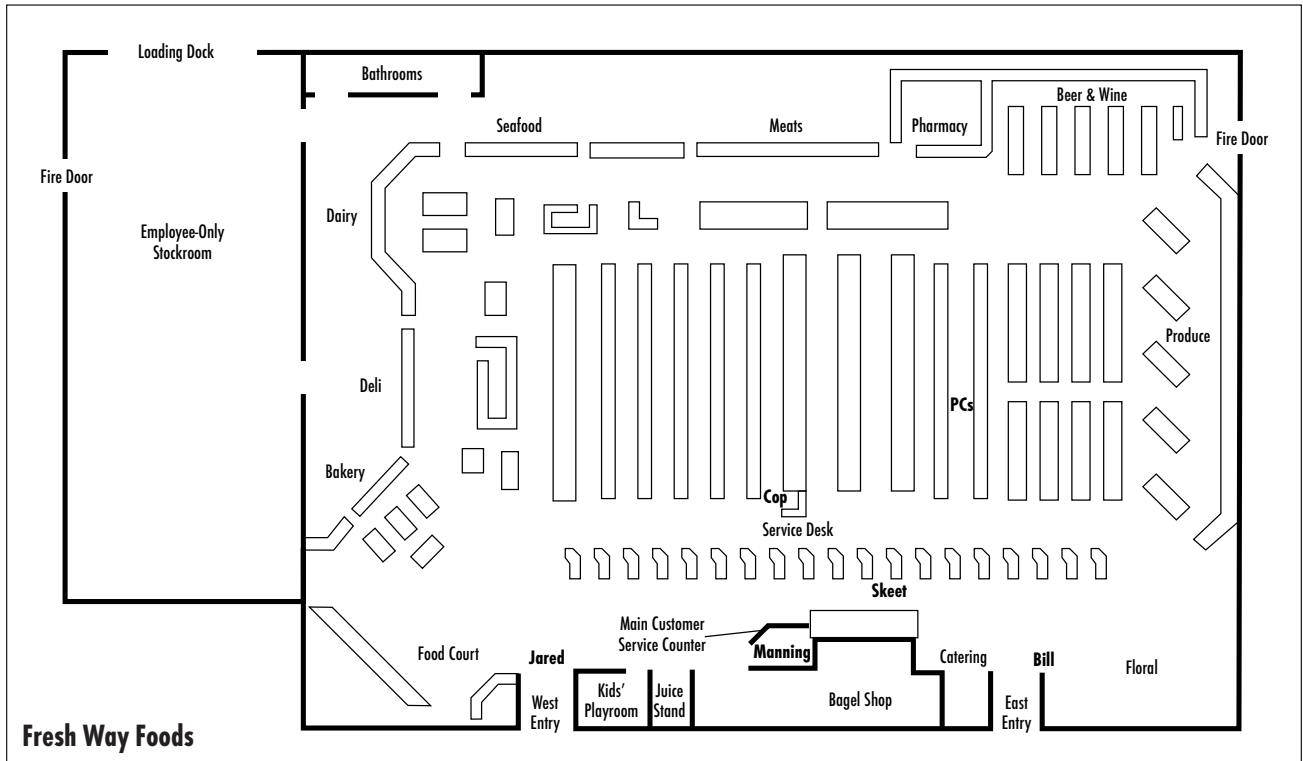
### The Medallion

Bill has a medallion that he's wearing on a chain around his neck. It's a JFK half-dollar, hand-etched with nonsensical patterns, letters, and other symbolic detritus. Last night, Bill was out drinking with his partners in crime and getting psyched up for the heist. He slipped into an alley to take a whiz and bumped into a crazy old drunk who asked him for a dollar. Bill hesitated, and the drunk offered him the medallion for his trouble. Bill relented and made the swap.

The medallion is a significant artifact. It contains an eternal-use version of the entropomancer minor formula spell *Fortune's Fool*. As long as Bill has this medallion, the GM makes a second roll every time you get a failure for Bill. If he fires his gun and misses—even a matched failure or a BOHICA—you immediately re-roll and see what happens. There's only one re-roll per action attempted.

Bill has no idea that the medallion has any sort of power, and for that matter wouldn't believe it if you told him. The drunk he got it from was, of course, the duke known as Jeeter, sniffing around the edges of what he sensed to be a mystical catastrophe in the making.





Officer Schwartz is hit by the blast from Skeet’s shotgun, and he drops to the floor wailing. His shot misses and strikes the wall between the customer-service counter and the east entrance.

## What Happens?

The rest of this scene plays out improvisationally. With Officer Schwartz down, the crooks have regained control of the situation—more or less. The shooting makes many shoppers start screaming. One might make a run for the west doors, hysterical, and get gunned down by Jared.

In the chaos that follows the gunfire, the sound of sirens is heard nearby. (Officer Schwartz called for backup as soon as the heist started a couple minutes ago.) Cops will begin surrounding the entrances within a few minutes, turning this into a hostage situation.

You can play the crooks as you like. They might be blood-thirsty psychopaths, or just twitchy, scared guys in over their heads. Bill Toge, however, should fall under the latter category. He doesn’t really want to kill anyone, but now he’s in this mess, he’s frightened, and he’s liable to shoot at anything that moves before he knows what he’s doing—which means he’s dangerous.

If the PCs don’t interfere, the employees behind the main customer service counter soon hand over a duffel bag full of loot to Manning just as Bill opens fire on two cops who were approaching the east entrance. They both duck out of the way and hold their position as more cruisers pull into the parking lot.

Assorted problems with shoppers may ensue, but soon the four crooks sprint for the back of the store. They head into the employee-only area and run out through a fire door that Jared knows about. From there, they pile into their getaway car parked nearby and flee the scene before more cops arrive. Twelve hours later, Bill hits the crossroads.

Ideally, the PCs interfere somehow. What they do is, of course, up to them—and up to you to react to. Note that they can’t tell which of the crooks might be Bill Toge unless they recognize his clothes as belonging to one of the three drivers they pulled out of the wreck; that takes a Mind check with a minimum result of 30 to pull off, or a skill such as Notice at full. (Any matched success, even below 30, definitely succeeds.) Of course, recognizing Bill Toge isn’t going to be very helpful since the PCs don’t really know what to do about him.

The goal of this scene for the PCs is to prevent Bill Toge from getting away as planned, so that he fails to make his rendezvous at the crossroads. They can shoot him, they can kill him, they can beat him up, they can delay him until the cops have the building secured, or whatever. Play out the scene until it seems like you’ve reached an appropriate stopping point. Ideally, this scene should turn into a combat sequence, to kick things off with a jolt of excitement and danger.

## The Janitor

The PCs and Bill Toge aren’t the only ones here from the crossroads. The sheriff is here, too. He’s now a janitor at the supermarket. He shouldn’t really do anything, and if confronted by the PCs he just looks at them dumbly, as if he has no idea what they’re talking about or who they are. The Comte de Saint-Germain is just here to see how things play out, not to get involved.

## If They Fail

Should the PCs fail to prevent this Bill Toge from escaping, they’ve screwed up. As he flees, pick one PC at random—or just choose the one with the highest Soul stat, or the one who somehow screwed up. An exact duplicate of that PC stands up between two checkout

aisles at the other end of the store. He or she catches the PC's attention and waves mockingly, with a cold glint of malice in his or her eyes. The double then turns and walks out of the store through the nearest entrance; only the PCs can see the double.

The scene shifts and the PCs are back at the crossroads at night. Any injuries they suffered are still present, as are any other changes to their bodies or possessions. The three drivers are still lying on the ground.

## If They Succeed

If this Bill Toge is stopped from making his escape in a timely fashion, the scene shifts back to the crossroads. (What constitutes "a timely fashion" is up to the GM, but anything more than ten or fifteen minutes should do it.) As noted in the last section, the PCs are in whatever condition they were at the end of the supermarket scene. However, there are now just two cars wrecked in the crossroads, and just two drivers lying unconscious and bleeding nearby—the Bill Toge from the supermarket is gone, and in fact was never here.

## Either Way

As this realization sinks in, the sheriff shakes his head grimly. "I just knew it. It's that damn Bill Toge again." Sparks from the wreck ignite the pool of gasoline gathering on the road, and the cars explode in a deafening fireball.

## Scene Three: Apartment

As soon as the sheriff speaks and the cars explode, the scene changes; the energy from the explosion is all the raw power needed to trigger this situation.

It's now twelve hours earlier, about two in the afternoon; watches change accordingly. The PCs are standing in the hallway of an apartment building, just outside a door marked "101." From inside, they hear the muffled cries of someone in a great deal of distress. It sounds like the person has a gag in his or her mouth. Over the cries comes a barking demand: "How's it feel? How's it feel, dead man?" The door is slightly ajar.

## The Interrogation

Inside, the PCs find a run-down apartment with no bathroom (it's communal, down the hall). There's a sagging mattress with dirty sheets on the floor, and pizza boxes and fast-food bags are everywhere. There are wads of bloodstained paper towels everywhere—maybe twenty or thirty of them. They don't look like they were used to mop blood off the floor; the stains look more like the wads were applied to wounds.

There are two men present. One is Bill Toge, dressed in a pajama top, jeans, and no shoes. He has a bloody gash on his left arm, a minor stab wound in his left abdomen, and another gash on his left shoulder. He's holding a bloody Bowie knife. The other is Don Lewis, a local child molester.

Don isn't doing well. He's tied to a metal folding chair. His mouth and nose are sealed with flesh—as if his face melted. He's struggling and groaning. It's clear that he's suffocating and will be dead shortly.

Bill will be surprised to see the PCs come into his apartment. What happens next is largely up to the PCs. Here's what's going on, which Bill will explain (or not) as appropriate.

- Mr. Spending The Rest Of His Short Miserable Life In Agonizing Pain over there is Don Lewis, a child molester.
- Don kidnapped Sascha Delillo, Bill's four-year-old illegitimate daughter. She's still missing.
- Bill found Don, lured him here (Don is an illegal handgun dealer, and thought Bill was a customer), and is trying to find out where Sascha is so he can rescue her. He figures Don's got her stashed at some secret location.
- Bill is pretty spooked by the arrival of the PCs, whom he doesn't know from Adam. But he's in a crazy frame of mind, desperate to find his daughter, and isn't liable to make a lot of sense; by the same token, he's also likely to take any explanation the PCs have to offer about their presence here at face value, because he doesn't care—he just wants to save Sascha.
- Sascha's mom is Bill's ex-girlfriend, Delilah, who has sole custody. Delilah is with her mother, freaking out about her missing daughter and waiting for the police to call with news.
- The cops questioned Bill about his missing daughter and leaned on him pretty hard, since he has a criminal record and has had some "messy" fights (read: violent) with Delilah before they broke up; she has a restraining order in effect to prevent him from coming near her or her daughter. Bill and the cops don't get along, so he's on a vigilante/redemption kick.
- How did Bill finger Don for the crime? Bill has connections; he's done plenty of time in the county lock-up. Word about kiddy-rapers gets around.
- What's wrong with Don? "Asthma."
- Should any of the PCs be adept and ask Bill about his magick, he'll look surprised and admit that he's an epidermancer. He always used to cut himself a little when things were bad as a way of dealing with stress, and one day this guy he met in a bar saw some fresh cuts on his arms and introduced him to the ways of fleshworking.

The above points don't have to all come out at once, since after all, a man is dying. But they should serve as a guide to Bill's behavior, and may be revealed when and where the GM desires. Potentially, the PCs may simply be kept in the dark. Don't try to force all of the above information through Bill's mouth if it doesn't make sense.

As for Don, he'll pass out about half-a-minute after the PCs come in, with death following shortly thereafter. Bill isn't wasting time, no matter how the conversation with the PCs is going; about the time Don passes out, Bill steps over to the chair and stabs Don in the face—cutting a hole where his lips used to be. Don inhales.

Of course, the PCs might prevent Bill from doing this. He doesn't plan to kill Don just yet; he's just torturing him to find out where his daughter is. If the PCs try to stop him from cutting Don a new mouth, Bill will shout at them for a few moments, trying to persuade them that the guy in the chair needs this or he's toast, and that Bill needs this because his daughter's life is on the line.

If the PCs aren't cooperating, Bill slashes himself (3 wound points) to get a minor charge and tries Warring on the nearest PC. If the PC is male, Bill chooses the PC's testicles as the target for the blast. Whatever the result, Bill's goal is to cause enough of a ruckus for him to get over and cut a hole for Don. He doesn't want Don dead . . . yet.

## What if the PCs Walk Away?

It's possible that the PCs will just decide to wash their hands of this situation and walk out at any number of points. That's okay—never force them into a course of action. If that's the case, see the section titled "If They Fail" on the next page.

### If Don Dies

It's possible that Don will die, if the PCs interfere with Bill long enough. If so, things are still up to the PCs. Bill will be angry that Don is dead, but will want to immediately take off for Don's house—taking Don's keys and his car (parked outside)—in the hopes that Sascha is there or that some clue to her fate will be found. The PCs can help him, hopefully.

### If Don Lives

Once Don can breathe—through a ragged hole where his mouth used to be—Bill will shout at him for a bit ("Where's my daughter, dead man?"), then cut himself again for 3 more wound points. He uses the minor charge to cast *Regeneration*, restoring Don's face to its normal self so the man can talk.

Don will give up the goods. Sascha is in the basement of his house, in a secret room behind a tool rack. He'll show Bill and the PCs where she is. He's incredibly freaked out by what's happened to him, and will be wracked with sobs as he talks. He repeatedly claims, crazily, that he loves Sascha, that she loves him, that they're going to be together forever, and a bunch of other ravings straight from the dark core of Don's diseased, deluded mind.

### Don's House

One way or another, the PCs and Bill probably end up at Don's house. It's a rat-trap of a place in a rat-trap part of town. (A map appears on this page.) Sullen drunks and tough-looking street kids eye the group from a nearby corner. (One of the drunks is the sheriff, but the PCs probably won't recognize him.) A bulging, pregnant cat lies dead in the road.

Inside, it's a mess. Don has three dogs, all yappy little pomeranians, and there's dog crap everywhere. Empty beer cans are scattered about. Flies are a constant presence. On the walls, there are posters of dolphins. The closets contain dozens of handguns, boxes of ammo, and holsters. A closet in the bedroom has a locked cash box with \$8,500 inside.

As noted, Sascha is in the basement. A tool rack mounted on hinges glides out like a door, revealing a small area of basement not otherwise accessible. It contains a sink, a toilet, a bed, manacles, and an four-year-old girl with a gag in her mouth. She's dead—apparently she grew nauseous earlier and, because of the gag, choked to death on her own vomit.

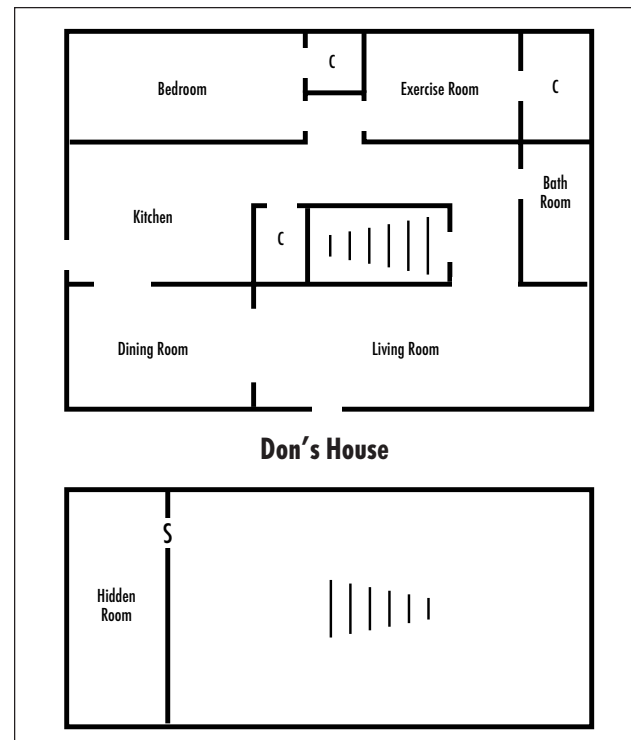
Bill hugs his daughter, wailing. If Don is present, Bill then stands up and stabs himself in the leg, badly—generating a significant charge. He uses this to cast *Body Melting* on Don. Don dissolves from the inside out, Ebola-style, and begins to vomit up liquid gouts of his own flesh. Bill follows the PCs back upstairs, cradling his daughter's body. Or at least, that's what happens if the PCs don't intervene somehow; there's no need for them to, but it's up to the PCs to act or not.

### The Cops

About the time the PCs are leaving the house, two detectives are approaching the front door. They're here to do a routine questioning of Don, who has a past conviction for child molestation. He's just one name on a long list, and they weren't expecting trouble. The sight of Bill—or anyone—carrying a limp Sascha is the last thing these two guys wanted to see. The two cops immediately draw their guns and tell everyone present to raise their hands, intent on getting Sascha free of whoever these people are; they can't be sure that she's dead just yet.

Bill is still crazed and boiling mad. He's been hassled by cops for years, and this is just the topper. He's on the edge and wants only to get loose, to get away from the cops and his ex-girlfriend and his dead daughter and all the hassles of this town and this sad-sack life he's made for himself. If the PCs weren't here, his plan would be to stab himself in the eye, gain a major charge, make the cops explode in a flood of flesh and fluid, then take off for his car, bleeding and crying, and blow town.

With the PCs here, of course, things can go differently. The idea here is, once again, to prevent Bill from killing the cops, leaving town, and keeping his deadly rendezvous with his other two selves. How the PCs do this is up to them; they might talk him down, they might tackle him, whatever. Keeping him inside the house while the PCs call 911 is a first-rate idea, since it means the PCs will probably be the ones who greet the detectives when they knock on the door and Bill will be somewhere else inside.



## If They Fail

Should the PCs fail to prevent this Bill Toge from escaping, they've screwed up. As he flees, pick one PC at random—or just choose the one with the highest Soul skill, or the one who somehow screwed up. An exact duplicate of that PC appears in a duplicate of the PC's car driving down the street nearby. He or she catches the PC's attention and waves mockingly, with a cold glint of malice in his or her eyes. The car races off.

The scene shifts and the PCs are back at the crossroads at night. Any injuries they suffered are still present, as are any other changes to their bodies or possessions. Depending on how the PCs did the previous time around, either two or three drivers are still lying on the ground.

## If They Succeed

If this Bill Toge is stopped from making his escape as he otherwise would, the scene shifts back to the crossroads. As noted in the last section, the PCs are in whatever condition they were at the end of the apartment sequence. There are now either one or two cars wrecked at the crossroads, depending on how the PCs did in the supermarket sequence, and either one or two drivers lying unconscious and bleeding nearby—the Bill Toge from the apartment is gone, and in fact was never here.

## Either Way

As this realization sinks in, the sheriff shakes his head grimly. "I just knew it. It's that damn Bill Toge again." Sparks from the wreck ignite the pool of gasoline gathering on the road, and the cars explode in a deafening fireball.

## Scene Four: Trailer Park

As soon as the sheriff speaks and the cars explode, the scene changes; the energy from the explosion is all the raw power needed to trigger this situation.

It's now twelve hours earlier, about two in the afternoon; watches change accordingly. The PCs are standing in a dusty trailer park, in what appears to be an arid, tumbleweed-strewn patch of the Southwestern U.S. Three dozen ramshackle mobile homes sit in jagged rows. The park is in a narrow cul-de-sac of rock, surrounded on three sides by the steep slopes of red mesas. The (presumably) open end of the cul-de-sac is obscured by trailers. There's no grass or other plants in the park save tumbleweeds. The mobile homes have no hook-ups—there are no power lines, phone lines, or other evidence of utilities. The place looks like it's been abandoned for years. (Refer to the map nearby as needed; the PCs appear at the spot marked "PCs.")

Things are quiet, except for a low murmur of engines somewhere out of sight, as if there were several cars idling nearby. No one is visible.

Taking a walk around will quickly give the PCs a view of the entrance to the cul-de-sac. It's a bizarre sight.

The entrance is dead center between the two main rows of trailers. It's a large, windblown wood archway with a hanging sign. The sign cannot be read from the back, where the PCs are. The collapsed remains of what appears to be a huge UFO is on the far

side of the entrance. It's patently fake, made of canvas and plywood, and seems to be several years old. It's now falling apart, the paint largely erased by sand. A large, shabbily painted sign over the UFO reads, "WELCOME!!! JESUS!!! AND THE ESSENALUMBANS!!!" It's in the same weatherbeaten condition (and age) as the saucer.

Just in front of the entrance is a corpse. The body of a black woman in her twenties lies on the ground, a pool of dried blood crusting in the dust. It appears that she was shot several times. There's a revolver near her right hand.

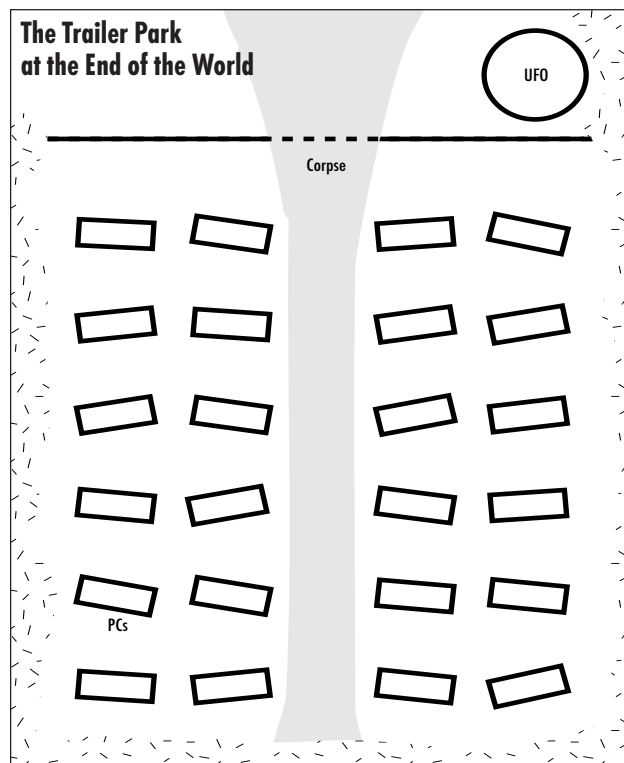
Beyond the entrance and the UFO lies the source of the engine sound. A couple dozen vehicles are parked haphazardly along a poorly maintained gravel road a hundred yards from the entrance. There's a mix of police cars, unmarked sedans, television news satellite trucks, and the like. Perhaps forty people are apparent, standing among the vehicles. A dozen or so of them are holding rifles, though they aren't presently aiming. The appearance of the PCs comes as a surprise, and there's a sudden flurry of activity.

Moments later, the PCs hear a rifle crack and a shot whizzes by one PC's head. If they haven't done so already (and avoided the shot altogether), the PCs should probably get behind a trailer.

A nearby trailer door pops open (pick whichever one is closest) and Bill Toge looks out at the PCs. He looks like he hasn't had a shower in days. He smiles broadly. "Kindred! Come inside, the time is at hand!"

## The Situation

This Bill Toge is the leader of a small apocalypse cult known as the Essenalumban Collective. A couple years ago, Bill got a powerful premonition that this date—today—would be the end of the world, when Jesus and the inhabitants of the planet Essenalumba would come in their spaceships and carry away the faithful. He managed to attract a dozen followers, mostly zoned-out losers. Bill would



lead them out into the desert and feed them hallucinogenic mushrooms, triggering crazed visions. On one of those trips, they found this group of abandoned and rusting mobile homes, and on the spot Bill declared this to be ground zero of the Essenalumban arrival. They've fixed up the place a bit, building the UFO and welcome sign and making the trailers habitable for weekend visits and psychedelic sessions. There's an outhouse off to one side, but that's the extent of the amenities—they have to bring their own water and other supplies when they stay here.

A couple of days ago, Bill led the Essenalumbans out here to wait for the end of the world. Some family members and friends of a few of the cult members got concerned and involved the authorities. The first police officer to come out here was shot dead by Satchel Phair, Bill's sidekick. Things got out of hand from there, and now there's an armed standoff. Every now and then the cult members—eating a steady stream of 'shrooms—take shots at the cops, and an hour ago a reporter was struck by a round fired by Jessie Deere, the dead woman near the entrance. The police are no longer fooling around, and will storm the "compound" shortly. They will assume that the PCs are members of the cult, since the authorities don't have a definitive membership roster.

This Bill Toge has something unusual going for him: he's an unwitting avatar of the Fool archetype (p. 171), and it's his innate dumb luck that has brought him this far . . . *if* you can call this coming far. His Avatar: The Fool skill is 55%, granting him both the ability to readily find what he needs and to redirect damage to those nearby. It also means that he's just as gullible as heck, which is why he assumes the PCs are fellow mystics who have slipped past the cops.

## Inside the Trailer

The trailer that Bill beckons the PCs into contains four cult members (including himself). It also contains the body of Officer Will Southwing, the sheriff's deputy who Satchel Phair shot and killed yesterday. The cult members have lain Southwing's body across a rickety card table and disemboweled him; most of his internal organs and his brain have been eaten. Satchel convinced Bill and the others that by consuming the deputy, he could join them on the spaceships and be saved along with the cult—so his death was somehow okay.

The trailer reeks of rotting flesh and stinking bowels, but the cult members are too gone on 'shrooms and millennial fervor to pay attention to such things; they believe the smell comes from the rock mesas nearby, since "the land is coming alive," and it's another sign of the apocalypse.

A grocery bag full of dried hallucinogenic mushrooms sits in a corner. The cultists snack on these and offer them to the PCs.

## The Trailer Cultists

As noted, there are four cultists in the trailer. They are summarized below; full stats can be found at the end of the scenario. All four have blood smears on their clothes and hands from occasionally gnawing on the deputy.

### Bill Toge

Leader of the Essenalumbans and avatar of the Fool, Bill is a hapless misfit who stumbled into a mystical vision that changed his life. He's not violent or cruel by nature, but he's so entrenched in his apocalyptic vision that little will faze him; he's insane.

### Satchel Phair

Satchel is a middle-aged sadist. On his own, he wouldn't have hurt anybody except for consensual S&M. But under Bill's hapless tutelage, he accepted the truth of the coming apocalypse and realized that nothing mattered. His apartment contains the remains of three street kids that Satchel lured in and murdered during the last couple of months. Satchel is a blooming psychopath in the throes of divine rapture—he thinks everything is about to end and he couldn't be happier. Satchel has made himself Bill's chief disciple.

### Nicky Lime

Nicky is a thirty-year-old woman from Iowa. A year ago she was on the run from the cops after hitting bottom and passing bad checks hither and yon. Then she met Bill. Initially, she saw him as a rube she could take advantage of, but soon she came to accept his vision; in a world that had never made sense to her, his cockeyed view of reality at least had an imminent deadline. She's fiercely loyal to Bill, but she's a little scared of Satchel. Bill is oblivious to the depth of Nicky's devotion.

### Sal Rhys

Sal is a fifteen-year-old kid from San Francisco. He ran away from home a few months ago and ended up on the streets. Bill took him in and shared his vision. Sal suffers from schizophrenia and depression, and has been off his medication for weeks. He has bought into Bill's belief system. However, a lifelong jones for firearms has brought him close to Satchel, who obsesses over weapons of all types. If push came to shove, Sal would side with Satchel over Bill.

## The Other Cultists

There are eight more Essenalumbans in the trailer park, scattered amongst the other trailers. (The thirteenth was Jessie Deere, slain by

## Bill Toge's Vision

Two years ago, Bill had a vision. It was a jumble of ideas and knowledge with occasional flashes of imagery, rather than a full-blown I'm-watching-mystic-television-in-my-brain production. What it boiled down to was that Bill saw a date—today's date—and knew that he and some close friends would be at a trailer park someplace. There would be a lot of dust, and heat, and noise. Then a brilliantly-lit craft would enter the park and Jesus would emerge. Bill and his friends would be taken by Jesus aboard the craft, which came from a place known as Essenalumba, and the world would end. Bill's mission, as he saw it, was to recruit as many people as he could, find the trailer park, and get them all out there when the date came around.



the cops when she freaked out and rushed the entrance with a gun.) Use the “generic thug” stats on p. 211 for the other cultists, and give most of them a .22 semi-automatic handgun. In general, these cultists are devout believers in Bill’s apocalyptic vision with no combat ability, though that hasn’t stopped Satchel from handing out weapons and ammunition like candy—it means the cultists can’t shoot very well, but it does mean they can shoot if they feel like it.

## What Happens Next

The bulk this scene consists of the PCs interacting with the trailer cultists, which means it’s pretty improvisational. Guidelines for this interaction follow. Sooner or later, however, the cops are going to move in and shut things down—probably within ten or twenty minutes of the PCs’ arrival. Just when this happens is up to the GM; when the time feels right, skip to “The Raid” and go from there.

## Cultist Goals

Each of the four cultists in the trailer has goals for this scene, in terms of their interactions with the PCs. These are summarized below. Keep in mind that all four are under the effects of the ’shrooms, which generally means they act very off-kilter, laughing oddly and sometimes speaking in a stream-of-consciousness style. Occasionally they might react to some hallucination.

- **Bill Toge** just wants to wait for Jesus and the Essenalumbans, and meanwhile he’d like to share his fervor with the newly arrived fellow mystics. He’ll describe his vision of two years ago (summarized in the nearby boxed text) and compare notes with the PCs. Whatever they say, Bill will be friendly and will try to help the PCs understand what’s going on. He’s just a nice, gullible guy who really believes what he’s saying, but he’s also too far gone into his vision to really be concerned with trivia like life and death and the difference between them.
- **Satchel Phair** believes what Bill’s saying, too, but his spin is that it means all bets are off. The longer the PCs are here, the itchier and jumpier he gets. His goal is to massacre the PCs and eat their bodies, joining them to the spiritual whole of the cult. He’ll probably try to lead one or two PCs off to another trailer on some errand with Sal Rhys in tow and then the pair will jump the PCs.
- **Nicky Lime** is having doubts about Satchel’s spin. She joined in the slaughter of Will Southwing, but Jessie Deere’s death an hour ago really shook her; some part of her understands that they’re all in a lot of trouble and things have gone terribly wrong, but she’s too dazed by drugs and her own damaged personality to act on that understanding without prompting.
- **Sal Rhys** follows Satchel’s lead, whatever that may be. If Satchel told him to shoot Nicky and eat her eyes, Sal would do it. He’ll say as little as possible to the PCs, except to enthusiastically back up whatever Satchel might be saying.

## The Drug Gestalt

These four cultists have been tripping on hallucinogens for a couple of days straight now, and they all have a fair amount of experi-

ence doing this together already. What this means is that they tend to be on the same wavelength of mood and vibe—their minds are sort of tied together, in terms of what they’re thinking and feeling and how they’ll react to the PCs. When the PCs first arrive, the four of them are happy and talking, excited by the prospect of the coming of Jesus and the Essenalumbans. Occasionally they talk to the corpse of Will Southwing, patting his hand and telling him not to worry because they’ll all go with Jesus together.

The coming of the PCs threatens to alter or even disrupt their drug gestalt. Essentially, whatever attitude the PCs bring to the conversation will become magnified very quickly by the cultists. If the PCs talk quietly and patiently, the cultists will calm down and listen very intently. If the PCs are excited and upset, the cultists will go ballistic. Pay attention to how the players are running their PCs and then shoot that attitude right back at them through the cultists, amped up and filtered through their delusions.

## The Others

Although the four cultists in the trailer are the focus of the scene, you can certainly involve the other eight. They’re scattered among the other trailers. Some might be in the other row of trailers, which means they can only be reached with a risky dash across the open ground leading to the cops.

The rest of the cult is likewise tripping on ’shrooms and gripped with mystical fervor, but they’re not on quite the same violence-and-weirdness kick as the lead four. They tend to be meditating, praying, and so forth.

## The Raid

At some point in the PCs interactions with the cultists—preferably when some sort of a crisis point is reached—the local cops launch their raid on the trailers. They’d prefer to incapacitate the cultists and take them alive, but they won’t hesitate to shoot. Here’s how the raid is planned.

Eight deputies have been airlifted to the tops of the cliffs overlooking the park, maybe a hundred yards overhead. When the signal is given, they’re going to launch volleys of tear-gas grenades down into the compound. They’ll be aiming for the windows and doors of the trailers, but the trailers are so full of holes and missing chunks of floor that they don’t need to be very accurate; the gas will spread quickly.

Thirty seconds after the first volley is fired, a mammoth SWAT battle van will pull out from behind the mass of cars and barrel for the park. It’ll cover the hundred yards to the entrance quickly, knocking down Bill’s rickety archway—the sign on the front hits the ground and can now be read from inside the park; it says “PARADISE”—about the time that the tear gas is making short work of the cultists. The van contains twenty-two SWAT officers in full body armor and gas masks, each armed with an FN-FAL Light semi-automatic rifle and a Glock Model 17 semi-automatic handgun.

The SWAT officers will break into five teams of four officers apiece. At each row of four trailers, one team will hit each trailer while the fifth team stays in the main road behind the battle van, providing cover in case cultists from the latter rows rush the team. The last two officers stay in the front of the van, driving forward slowly as each row of trailers is pacified. They’re protected by bulletproof glass and will not engage the cultists unless if they have to. The driver is the sheriff from the crossroads, dressed in SWAT tactical gear.

## Effects of Tear Gas

To simulate the effects of tear gas, use the Drowning rules on p. 61. As long as you can hold your breath, you can still act. However, even while you're holding your breath the gas is working on your eyes. Assume that after four combat rounds, everyone exposed to tear gas will be at a -10% shift on all skills. After eight rounds, it's -20%. After twelve rounds, -30%. About that time, you're going to have to breathe. As soon as you can't hold your breath any longer and have to take in a lungful of air and gas, you're incapacitated—you hit the ground and begin choking, desperately trying to breathe. You're not going to die, but it sure feels that way.

All of this assumes that you're in the thick of the gas, however. The opening volleys from the deputies on the rocks may or may not work that well on a given trailer. If you want to assume (or determine randomly) that a given trailer didn't get gassed that bad, just apply a -20% shift on all skills, and no one needs to hold their breath. Should a SWAT officer plow a tear-gas grenade into the trailer, however, use the full-exposure rules above.

Each team will lob a tear-gas grenade into their targeted trailer just for good measure, wait ten seconds, and then go barreling in. (They'll skip the grenade if there are already cultists flailing around outside or something.) Inside, they'll disarm the cultists and handcuff each one. Many trailers will be empty. Once the trailer has been checked out, they'll leave any cultists handcuffed and return to the van. Once all four trailers are clear, they'll advance to the next row.

Meanwhile, the eight deputies on the rocks will switch to Remington Sportsman 74 semi-automatic rifles. They'll pick off any cultists who appear to be out-maneuvering the SWAT team or who are hiding in the rows that the officers haven't gotten to yet. There won't be any warning shots. If a couple of cultists are lurking behind a trailer and waiting to ambush some officers, the deputies will drop them cold.

Anyone who wants to surrender can do so easily. Rolling on the ground and choking from tear gas is a good way to surrender. Putting your arms in the air is also a reliable method.

### The Cult's Reactions

It should be clear from the preceding section that the cops are going to take down the cult, and quickly. No one has to die—if everyone surrenders or is incapacitated by the gas, no one gets hurt. But of course, Satchel has passed around a lot of cheap .22 handguns, and several of the unnamed cultists are bound to crazily pop off a shot when the officers come barreling in. They'll be shot to pieces in seconds, and the officers are unlikely to take any serious injuries given the circumstances.

But then there's the PCs, and the four main cultists. The GM needs to decide the extent to which the tear gas is affecting them, as explained in the Tear Gas boxed text. The following notes should help you decide what the cultists do, assuming they aren't overcome by gas.

- **Bill** will try to get to the SWAT van and talk to the officers. He'll be excited but not violent; he'll passionately implore them to join him in welcoming the apocalypse.
- **Satchel** will consider the raid to mean open season on anyone and everyone except for Bill. He'll begin shooting up the place. Should he get some hapless cultist, PC, or SWAT officer immobilized, he'll draw a hunting knife and stab them, screaming all the while.
- **Sal** will want to be with Satchel. Satchel may tolerate Sal at first, but will turn on him if no other victim is handy.

- **Nicky** will stick with Bill. She might come somewhat to her senses and try to get him to surrender, or she might flip out and rush the officers to protect Bill.

The PCs are wild cards in all of this; they can do what they like. Don't forget Bill's Avatar: The Fool skill, though. If SWAT officers (or anyone else) hurt Bill, there's a good chance that the damage will instead strike someone nearby—maybe the PCs, maybe Nicky, maybe another SWAT officer. That should make things interesting.

One way or another, it shouldn't take very long for the raid to come to a close. The cops are pretty well guaranteed of victory. The raid should end with the cultists and the PCs under arrest, wounded, or dead. Bill might or might not survive, depending on how well his Avatar: The Fool skill protects him.

### Here Comes Jesus

When the raid is over, Jesus and the Essenalumbans show up just as predicted. With brilliant lights and sirens, the first of several ambulances pulls into the trailer park; on the front hood, the word "AMBULANCE" is printed in big, bold letters but in reverse, so that drivers can read the sign in their rear-view mirror: "ECNALUBMA". From the ambulance comes a Hispanic paramedic whose nametag reads "JESUS"—that's pronounced "hay-soos," of course.

Any wounded major cultists and PCs are put into the ambulance; wounded unnamed cultists get the next ambulance. Unwounded PCs go into a paddywagon with unwounded major cultists.

### What About Bill?

In the first version of events (before the PCs got retroactively involved), Bill was grazed by a bullet and was taken off by Jesus in the ambulance. On the way to the hospital, Bill happened to find the handcuff key in his gurney, where an officer dropped it while helping Jesus load Bill into the ambulance. (You can thank Bill's Avatar: The Fool skill for that bit of fortune.) Bill got free and bailed out of the ambulance once they got back to town. Then he got to his car and fled, eventually arriving at the crossroads late that night.

With the PCs involved, things may end differently. Bill might have died, or might have been wounded grievously enough that escape was not an option. If he wasn't wounded at all, he ended up in the paddywagon and couldn't escape. Any of these outcomes count as victories for the PCs; skip to "If They Succeeded" and go from there.

If Bill was mildly wounded and went in the ambulance, though, he'll still make his escape bid. Any wounded PCs are with





him, however. If there are no wounded PCs, Bill gets away as before. Skip to “If They Failed” and go from there.

Should Bill and one or more wounded PCs end up in the ambulance, it’s up to the PCs. (Any other PCs in a paddywagon are out of this scene, barring some bizarre PC brainstorm.) They can prevent his escape, delay it, or aid his escape but take some different tack. Maybe they rent a car, or stick Bill on a bus, or just lead him to the cops. If Bill still ends up getting into his car on schedule, they’ve failed. Otherwise, they’ve succeeded in changing Bill’s destiny.

## If They Fail

Should the PCs fail to prevent this Bill Toge from escaping on schedule, they’ve screwed up. As he flees, pick one PC at random—or just choose the one with the highest Soul skill, or the one who somehow screwed up. An exact duplicate of that PC appears somewhere nearby. He or she catches the PC’s attention and waves mockingly, with a cold glint of malice in his or her eyes, then wanders off.

The scene shifts and the PCs are back at the crossroads at night. Any injuries they suffered are still present, as are any other changes to their bodies or possessions. Depending on how the PCs did the previous times around, either one, two, or three drivers are still lying on the ground.

## If They Succeed

If this Bill Toge is stopped from making his escape as he otherwise would, the scene shifts back to the crossroads. As noted in the previous section, the PCs are in whatever condition they were at the end of the trailer park sequence. There are now either zero, one, or two cars wrecked at the crossroads, depending on how the PCs did in the supermarket and apartment sequences, and either zero, one, or two drivers lying unconscious and bleeding nearby—the Bill Toge from the trailer park is gone, and in fact was never here.

## Scene Five: Conclusion

It’s time to wrap things up. Three different options are possible, depending on how the PCs did. These are explained in the following sections. In every case, the PCs still have whatever changes to their wound points and possessions may have occurred during the scenario, and they still remember everything that happened—even if they don’t understand it.

## If No Bill Toges Remain

The PCs can briefly feel the heat from the explosion, but now there is no explosion, and the heat is just a memory. There are no wrecked Hyundais, no sheriff, no squad car, and no Bill Toges. The PCs are standing near their cars at a deserted crossroads. Fade to black.

## If Two or Three Bill Toges Remain

As this realization sinks in, the sheriff shakes his head grimly. “I just knew it. It’s that damn Bill Toge again.” Sparks from the wreck ignite the pool of gasoline gathering on the road, and the cars explode in a deafening fireball.

A powerful heat wave from the explosion passes over the PCs, the sheriff, and the remaining Bill Toges. When it fades, the sheriff

and his squad car are gone. From behind the flames, the sinister doubles of the PCs that first appeared in the failed scenes emerge, driving in doubles of the PCs’ vehicles. They peel off into the night and disappear.

A few minutes later, an ambulance—not driven by Jesus—arrives to take the Bills away. Fade to black.

## If One Bill Toge Remains

The PCs can momentarily still feel the heat from the explosion, but now there is no explosion, and the heat is just a memory. The sheriff and the squad car are gone. Bill Toge pulls up next to them in his unwrecked Hyundai and looks at the PCs without any sign of recognition, then speaks: “What is this, a dork convention?” He drives off. In the passenger seat is the sinister duplicate of the PC that appeared at the end of the failed scene, waving out the window as the car is lost to the night. Fade to black.

## Wrapping Up

If any sinister duplicates of the PCs were created during this scenario, they’ll be back. The nature and goals of the doubles are up to the GM. They might be true physical doubles who want to take the originals’ places, or they might be Splits (p. 155) drawn by the mystical catastrophe of Bill Toge at the crossroads. They might even just pop up every now and then, waving from a passing car, leaving the PCs to wonder what the hell happened that night in the middle of nowhere.

## NPC Stats

Use the stock cops, detectives, and thugs from p. 211 as needed in this scenario; Bill’s cohorts in the first scenario qualify as stock thugs.

### Bill Toge, Divided Man

**Summary:** This Bill hasn’t made any real changes in his life since that night at the crossroads five years ago. He’s still a loser, a low-rent crook with low-rent friends.

**Personality:** Matt Dillon in *Drugstore Cowboy*.

**Obsession:** None.

**Wound Points:** 55

### Stats

**Body:** 55 (Scrawny)  
**Speed:** 45 (F) (Slack)  
**Mind:** 50 (Confused easily)  
**Soul:** 70 (Untapped potential)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 30%, Brawling 40%  
**Speed Skills:** Dodge 15%, Drive 25%, Firearms 35%  
**Mind Skills:** Notice 25%, Streetwise 40%  
**Soul Skills:** Hustle 35%, Lie 40% (#2: Epideromancy 55; #3: Avatar: The Fool 55%)

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
1 Hardened	3 Hardened	0 Hardened	1 Hardened	0 Hardened
0 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed	0 Failed	4 Failed



## Don Lewis, Illegal Arms Dealer and Child Molester

**Summary:** A predator who makes his living off other predators.

**Personality:** Steve Buscemi's partner in *Fargo*.

**Obsession:** Finding his true love.

**Wound Points:** 60

### Stats

**Body:** 60 (Works out)  
**Speed:** 65 (S) (Practices his fast draw)  
**Mind:** 35 (Conspiracy theorist)  
**Soul:** 30 (Dead eyes, like a shark)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 40%, Kickboxing 50%  
**Speed Skills:** Dodge 15%, Drive 15%, Firearms 45%, Fast Draw 20%  
**Mind Skills:** General Education 15%, Notice 50%  
**Soul Skills:** Intimidate 25%, Lie 35%

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
3 Hardened	0 Hardened	2 Hardened	2 Hardened	4 Hardened
0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed

## Satchel Phair, Apocalyptic Psychopath

**Summary:** Killer on an end-of-the-world spree.

**Personality:** Wishes *Mad Max* was a documentary.

**Obsession:** Inflicting pain on anyone he can.

**Wound Points:** 40

### Stats

**Body:** 40 (Just a little guy)  
**Speed:** 65 (S) (Busy hands)  
**Mind:** 60 (Leads an orderly life, makes clean kills)  
**Soul:** 50 (Scarily deranged)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 30%, Bushwhack 30%  
**Speed Skills:** Dodge 40%, Drive 25%, Firearms 30%  
**Mind Skills:** CPA 55%, Notice 20%, Feign Sanity 15%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 15%, Lie 45%, Psycho Rant 20%

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
6 Hardened	0 Hardened	3 Hardened	3 Hardened	6 Hardened
0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	4 Failed

### Possessions

Ruger Super Redhawk revolver

## Nicky Lime, Lost Soul

**Summary:** A good woman on a bad road.

**Personality:** (Cancer) Worries about others, ignores herself.

**Obsession:** Making sense of her screwed-up life.

**Wound Points:** 60

### Stats

**Body:** 65 (Tall, tough chick)  
**Speed:** 45 (S) (Walks fast)  
**Mind:** 55 (Talks fast, sometimes too fast)  
**Soul:** 75 (Deeply compassionate, deeply wounded)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 15%, Hold Your Liquor 45%, Struggle 30%  
**Speed Skills:** Dodge 15%, Drive 35%, Squirrely Reflexes 25%  
**Mind Skills:** Argue 35%, General Education 25%, Notice 25%  
**Soul Skills:** Aura Sight 40%, Charm 45%, Lie 20%

### Madness Meter

Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
1 Hardened	1 Hardened	3 Hardened	3 Hardened	2 Hardened
1 Failed	0 Failed	1 Failed	3 Failed	4 Failed

## Sal Rhys, Delusional Runaway

**Summary:** A delusional teenager who's been off his medication for months. Secretly drawn to violence.

**Personality:** The kid in *Terminator 2*, gone crazy as his mom.

**Obsession:** None.

**Wound Points:** 40

### Stats

**Body:** 40 (Skinny kid)  
**Speed:** 55 (Good with video games)  
**Mind:** 40 (Not as smart as he thinks he is)  
**Soul:** 35 (Nobody home)

### Skills

**Body Skills:** General Athletics 25%, Struggle 35%  
**Speed Skills:** Dodge 15%, Firearms 15%, Squirrely Reflexes 55%  
**Mind Skills:** Notice 20%, Serial Killer Lore 20%, Streetwise 30%  
**Soul Skills:** Charm 25%, Lie 40%

### Madness Meter


Violence	Unnatural	Helplessness	Isolation	Self
2 Hardened	0 Hardened	4 Hardened	6 Hardened	2 Hardened
1 Failed	0 Failed	0 Failed	2 Failed	2 Failed

### Possessions

Ruger Mark II semi-automatic handgun



<b>NAME</b>	
<b>SUMMARY</b>	
<b>PERSONALITY</b>	
<b>OBSESSION</b>	
<b>RAGE STIMULUS</b>	
<b>FEAR STIMULUS</b>	
<b>NOBLE STIMULUS</b>	

<b>BODY</b>				<b>SPEED</b>
<b>WOUND POINTS</b>				
<b>UNKNOWN ARMIES</b>			<b>UNKNOWN ARMIES</b>	
<b>MIND</b>				<b>SOUL</b>

<b>BODY SKILLS</b>	
<b>SPEED SKILLS</b>	
<b>MIND SKILLS</b>	
<b>SOUL SKILLS</b>	

<b>VIOLENCE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 10	<input type="checkbox"/> 9	<input type="checkbox"/> 8	<input type="checkbox"/> 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<b>HARDENED</b>	<b>FAILED</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
<b>THE UNNATURAL</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 10	<input type="checkbox"/> 9	<input type="checkbox"/> 8	<input type="checkbox"/> 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<b>HARDENED</b>	<b>FAILED</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
<b>HELPLESSNESS</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 10	<input type="checkbox"/> 9	<input type="checkbox"/> 8	<input type="checkbox"/> 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<b>HARDENED</b>	<b>FAILED</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
<b>ISOLATION</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 10	<input type="checkbox"/> 9	<input type="checkbox"/> 8	<input type="checkbox"/> 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<b>HARDENED</b>	<b>FAILED</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
<b>SELF</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 10	<input type="checkbox"/> 9	<input type="checkbox"/> 8	<input type="checkbox"/> 7	<input type="checkbox"/> 6	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<b>HARDENED</b>	<b>FAILED</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

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FOR THE CRIME OF CREATING THE HUMAN RACE?"

—MARK TWAIN