

SECOND SIGHT™

the World of Darkness



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By Alan Alexander, Will Hindmarch, Conrad Hubbard, Brand Robins and John Sneed



Prologue: Boogeyman

I got my powers from my father, but I wasn't born with them. Powers. He'd call them that, but I don't. I try not to talk about them at all. I remember the conversation I had with my mother, in the hospital as a kid, with me in a paper dress and wired up with sticky electrodes. She said we – the family – that we called them "powers" because we didn't have any other words yet for that kind of stuff.

"It's like when people say 'powers of speech,' John," she told me. "It's just the word we have for it. Don't get hung up on it." Right, ma.

My folks insisted that people would take me more seriously later on, when we were published, when the proof came. What I learned later on was that the only people who would take my parents' work seriously were nut jobs and conspiracy types. The kind of people whom I didn't want to be counted with. So I eventually stopped taking me seriously, too. That lasted until my mother died.

She was the rational one, the one interested in bridging the gap between the work and the people whose attention my parents wanted. She went out of her way to put us in touch with real scientists, real academics and real backers. She understood that if we wanted respectable, trustworthy people to get through the lunatics, we'd have to clear a path for them. My father just figured that his important and remarkable work – meaning me – would draw the right people through the hordes of sham mystics and wannabe psychics.

I remember him saying to me, "The kind of person we're waiting for, Johnny, is the one who wants it bad enough that he'll come shopping." He said that lots of times, but the time I'm thinking of was when he said it in the dark over my mother's corpse. We were sitting on either side of her bed under the striped shadows of the hospital blinds, listening to the dull droning of electrical equipment. We sat there for maybe 15 minutes after that, and I thought he felt bad. That he was sitting there quiet, feeling guilty.

Then he got up with a kind of "break's over" sigh and left the room with a momentum that says, "Back to work."

I'm not psychic and never have been.

.....

My father's **work** was the research and development of my powers. He insisted that I had "multiple capabilities," in his words, but it never seemed that way to me. Maybe I'd have lent his assessment more weight if he hadn't first made it while reading directly out of a book he'd bought in the mail.

He came into our fake-wood paneled kitchen from his half-buried den (which was also our garage). He had his finger holding a spot in a red, featureless hardcover. My mom was doing dishes with the window open. I remember trying to do my math homework, but being distracted by moths batting against the ceiling light. We had this hideous, peeling orange

Eventually, my mother's input into the process became a greater influence over my father's methods. They turned to science and medicine in addition to their psychological and parapsychological approaches. I remember seeing **E.T.** in the theater and thinking Elliot was kind of weird – until they put him in the paper room with the wires stuck all over him. That I understood.

Let me put it in perspective: between the ages of six and 16, I didn't see a dentist once, but I spent at least a week in more than two dozen different hospitals in nine states. I don't remember if this is really true, but I tell people that I didn't eat anything but hospital food in 1981. Sometimes we moved to get me looked at by curious doctors in other states – whom my mother called specialists. Other times we moved so that she could take on new nursing jobs. She and my father ate and slept in hospitals, too, off the books and unofficially. My mom got politely fired a lot.

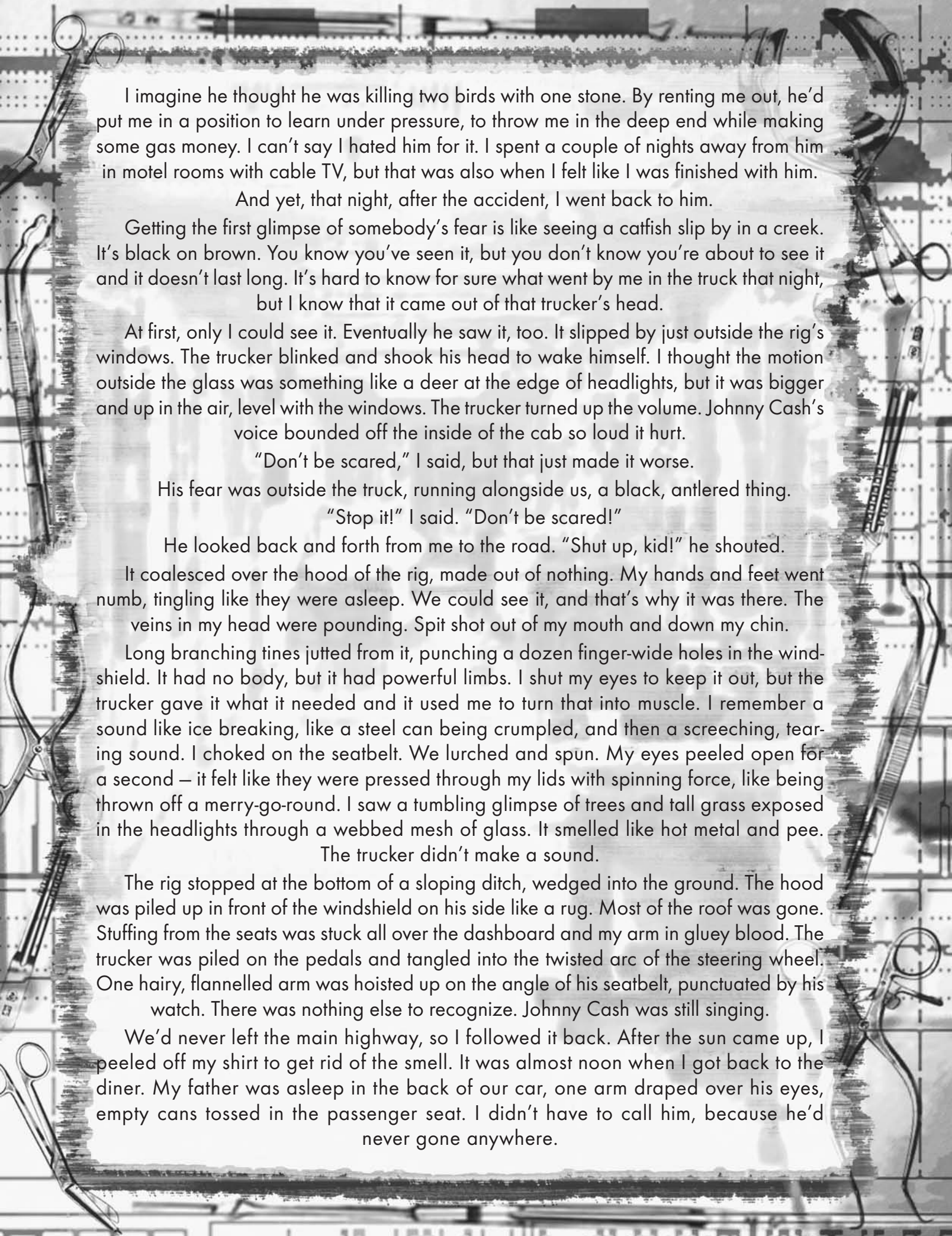
What maybe bothers me most about the hospital years is how little I remember. Not only have the hospitals and highways and vending machines and doctors and nurses blurred together, but so have the stories I was told about where I was going and why. For a lot of the tests, they kept me awake for a solid day beforehand, so I'd sleep longer and give them the kind of testing window they needed. Plus, it was hard to get a kid to sleep on a paper-covered bed while doctors stared through a window from a control room. The sound of scanners' needles scratching brainwaves kept me awake, too.

More than anything, I remember sweating in our station wagon, sleeping in back as we drove from Cedar Rapids to Billings. I remember the awful, viscous red medicine I had to drink out of a weird plastic scoop to keep my seizures down. I remember overhearing an argument my father had with a doctor outside my hospital room. It was about whether or not I was clinically retarded.

Hearing the doctor, compared to the way my father talked, I realized that my father wasn't an independent scientist in a fringe field. He was ignorant. He was out of his depth. He wasn't a researcher or even a parapsychologist as much as a would-be inventor. He wanted the patent on me. But listening to him argue with the doctor, it became clear: this stranger knew what he was talking about, and my father didn't.

I was alone in my room, in the dark, pretending to sleep, sure that my father would come in before light, tell me to get dressed and take me out of there. Aside from that, he didn't have a plan. He was just going to keep testing theories until he got what he wanted, if he even knew what that was. That night, thinking about the only two people I really knew in the whole world and realizing that I wasn't really sure which hospital I was in or what was outside if I tried to run away, that was the most scared I've ever been.

His arguments turning to insults and accusations, my father sounded scared, too. He seemed small and stupid. It seemed as if he could feel himself withering away, his importance evaporating in the mind of the doctor. In my father's frustration, he stumbled out of the costume of the dedicated parent and well-read researcher, and had been caught in the fluorescent white of the hospital hallway. He tried desperately to use more quasi-medical terms to get back into character, but it was like a bald man trying to put his toupee back on. My father could say the words, but he'd still be a fool underneath.



I imagine he thought he was killing two birds with one stone. By renting me out, he'd put me in a position to learn under pressure, to throw me in the deep end while making some gas money. I can't say I hated him for it. I spent a couple of nights away from him in motel rooms with cable TV, but that was also when I felt like I was finished with him.

And yet, that night, after the accident, I went back to him.

Getting the first glimpse of somebody's fear is like seeing a catfish slip by in a creek. It's black on brown. You know you've seen it, but you don't know you're about to see it and it doesn't last long. It's hard to know for sure what went by me in the truck that night, but I know that it came out of that trucker's head.

At first, only I could see it. Eventually he saw it, too. It slipped by just outside the rig's windows. The trucker blinked and shook his head to wake himself. I thought the motion outside the glass was something like a deer at the edge of headlights, but it was bigger and up in the air, level with the windows. The trucker turned up the volume. Johnny Cash's voice bounded off the inside of the cab so loud it hurt.

"Don't be scared," I said, but that just made it worse.

His fear was outside the truck, running alongside us, a black, antlered thing.

"Stop it!" I said. "Don't be scared!"

He looked back and forth from me to the road. "Shut up, kid!" he shouted.

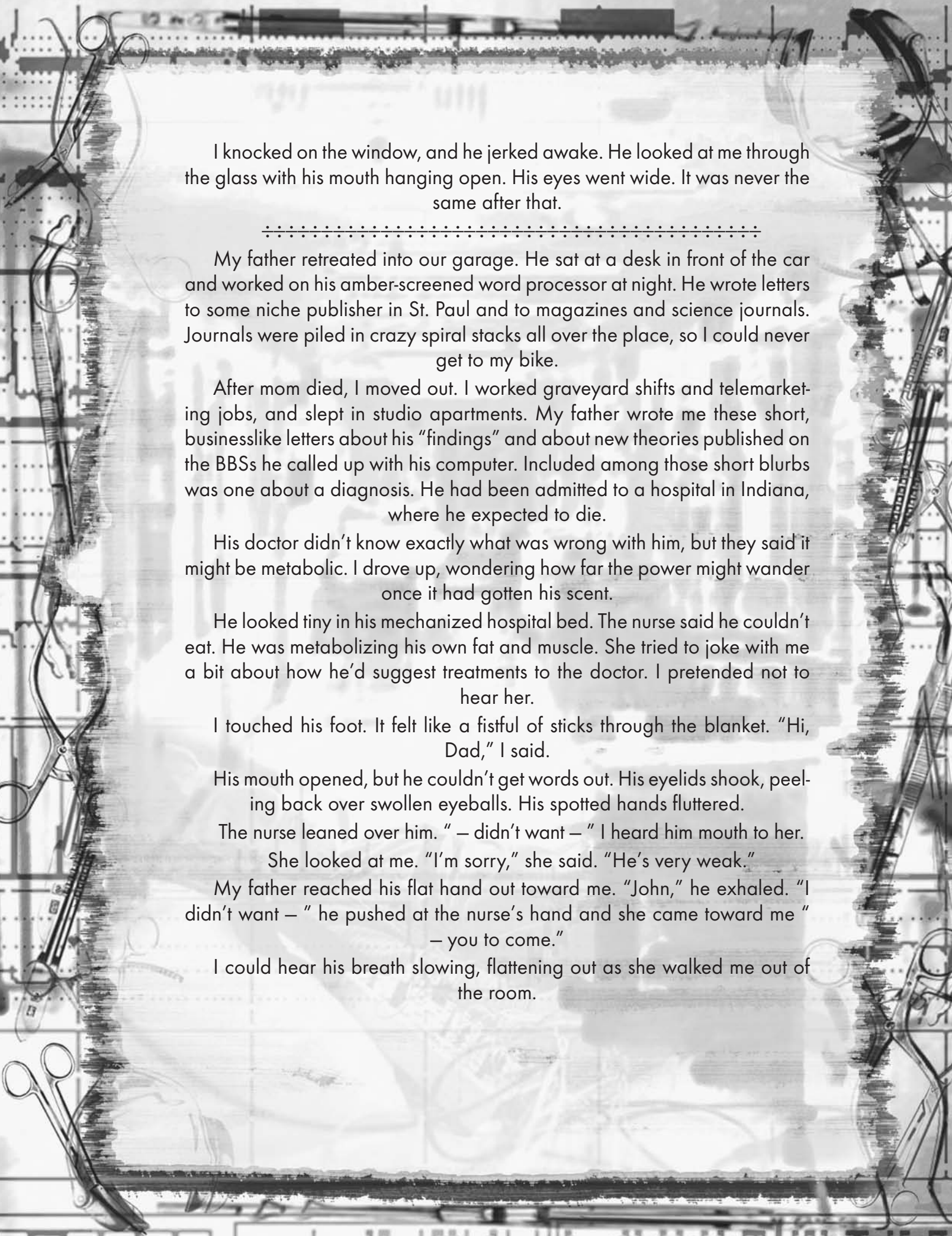
It coalesced over the hood of the rig, made out of nothing. My hands and feet went numb, tingling like they were asleep. We could see it, and that's why it was there. The veins in my head were pounding. Spit shot out of my mouth and down my chin.

Long branching tines jutted from it, punching a dozen finger-wide holes in the windshield. It had no body, but it had powerful limbs. I shut my eyes to keep it out, but the trucker gave it what it needed and it used me to turn that into muscle. I remember a sound like ice breaking, like a steel can being crumpled, and then a screeching, tearing sound. I choked on the seatbelt. We lurched and spun. My eyes peeled open for a second – it felt like they were pressed through my lids with spinning force, like being thrown off a merry-go-round. I saw a tumbling glimpse of trees and tall grass exposed in the headlights through a webbed mesh of glass. It smelled like hot metal and pee.

The trucker didn't make a sound.

The rig stopped at the bottom of a sloping ditch, wedged into the ground. The hood was piled up in front of the windshield on his side like a rug. Most of the roof was gone. Stuffing from the seats was stuck all over the dashboard and my arm in gluey blood. The trucker was piled on the pedals and tangled into the twisted arc of the steering wheel. One hairy, flannelled arm was hoisted up on the angle of his seatbelt, punctuated by his watch. There was nothing else to recognize. Johnny Cash was still singing.

We'd never left the main highway, so I followed it back. After the sun came up, I peeled off my shirt to get rid of the smell. It was almost noon when I got back to the diner. My father was asleep in the back of our car, one arm draped over his eyes, empty cans tossed in the passenger seat. I didn't have to call him, because he'd never gone anywhere.



I knocked on the window, and he jerked awake. He looked at me through the glass with his mouth hanging open. His eyes went wide. It was never the same after that.



My father retreated into our garage. He sat at a desk in front of the car and worked on his amber-screened word processor at night. He wrote letters to some niche publisher in St. Paul and to magazines and science journals. Journals were piled in crazy spiral stacks all over the place, so I could never get to my bike.

After mom died, I moved out. I worked graveyard shifts and telemarketing jobs, and slept in studio apartments. My father wrote me these short, businesslike letters about his "findings" and about new theories published on the BBSs he called up with his computer. Included among those short blurbs was one about a diagnosis. He had been admitted to a hospital in Indiana, where he expected to die.

His doctor didn't know exactly what was wrong with him, but they said it might be metabolic. I drove up, wondering how far the power might wander once it had gotten his scent.

He looked tiny in his mechanized hospital bed. The nurse said he couldn't eat. He was metabolizing his own fat and muscle. She tried to joke with me a bit about how he'd suggest treatments to the doctor. I pretended not to hear her.

I touched his foot. It felt like a fistful of sticks through the blanket. "Hi, Dad," I said.


His mouth opened, but he couldn't get words out. His eyelids shook, peeling back over swollen eyeballs. His spotted hands fluttered.

The nurse leaned over him. "— didn't want —" I heard him mouth to her.

She looked at me. "I'm sorry," she said. "He's very weak."

My father reached his flat hand out toward me. "John," he exhaled. "I didn't want —" he pushed at the nurse's hand and she came toward me "— you to come."

I could hear his breath slowing, flattening out as she walked me out of the room.



"Maybe we can try again tomorrow," the nurse said. My father wheezed, trying to force air into his sinking chest.

"Maybe," I said. He died later that night.



I don't believe in ghosts. Spirits and all that are just denial. People project their blame on the world. They put their responsibilities on others and call it ghosts. But it's all us. It's all what we put out there.

Walking along the filthy fluorescent skywalk from the hospital to the parking garage, I passed a middle-aged man in a plaid cowboy shirt and a farmer's cap, holding a beer in one hand. In his other hand was a thick red book.

I tried to ignore him. I didn't make eye contact. Didn't turn around.

I kept walking, but when I got to the end of the skywalk and reached the concrete stairs, I know he started in my direction. When I got to the bottom of the stairs, he'd reached the top.

I went past my car, out of the garage, into a diner next door and through to its men's room. I slipped into one of the stalls, locked it and climbed up onto the toilet, sitting on the tank with my feet on the seat.

The men's room door opened. Bony, bare feet slapped on the tile floor, clattering like falling pencils. Through the crack between the door and the wall, I could see red plaid. I heard the sound of slurped beer. I shut my eyes, buried my face between my knees and held the stall door shut with my hands.

The footsteps paced back and forth. I took a deep breath.

I thought of my mother at the sink, doing dishes. I thought of her in the kitchen of the diner outside, drying plates with a rag. I imagined her sitting at a booth, drinking sweet tea through a straw and turning the page of an old medical journal, stolen from the rack at some hospital.

The feet went back toward the bathroom door with the quick, excited pace that came with a new, mad discovery. I heard a deep thud as the figure dunked an empty steel can in the trash.

I spent the night in that stall, sometimes sleeping, sometimes listening to people talk outside, all the while wishing their fears would just go away.

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Coming Next: Tales of the 13th Precinct



For Use with
the World of Darkness® Rulebook



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PRINTED IN CANADA.

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Introduction

There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

– Deuteronomy
18:10-11

Chris is a poker player whose instincts are so sharp he can feel what his opponents think. It all comes through the table to him like a telegram. When he touches his wife, he knows that he's losing her and that she thinks he's crazy. He feels it in her skin, like the beat of her heart.

Sally found the book in the wet leaves under the overpass near school, and followed the recipe inside — names written on walnut shells, a dollar bill burned in a fire and put out with her own blood. She did it just to make her mother angry. Her mother had a seizure that night and bit out her own tongue.

Elliot's co-workers surrounded him in the parking lot. He thought it was an intervention, a trip to AA, but they took him to a half-burned motel well off the highway and put him in a stinking room with an unconscious woman. "Make us a child," they said. "It needs to have green eyes, like yours."

World of Darkness: Second Sight explores the possibility of ordinary people exposed to the unknown. These folks aren't just aware of the supernatural and perhaps driven to confront it. In a small, glimmering way, they are a part of the supernatural. For the most part, their lives were ordinary — they had families, they held down jobs, they went to the grocery store, they instinctively shied away from the shadows. But now they are capable of more than other people. They can move things by will alone, make horrible fates befall those who cross them or draw their own blood and whisper the right words to make the world change to their favor. These people are no longer common, blind and ignorant. They know some spark of truth to the World of Darkness, because they've seen it, *they've become part of it.*

This book helps you introduce psychics, mystics, mediums, seers and other "gifted" characters to your Storytelling game. These people join the vampires, werewolves and mages already at your disposal, but don't stand on par with those beings, being still everyday mortals lifted just above the masses, perhaps as a gift but more likely as a curse.

The paranormal abilities presented here aren't a part of the World of Darkness per se, but are a part of the characters who inhabit it. These powers have a hundred possible sources and uses within the fictional world of your stories. The real purpose of these powers is to exemplify normally intangible qualities such as fate and faith, and to beg dramatic questions. What if you could see the future? What if you could enchant others? What if the world were just a dream? **Second Sight** gives you new ways to confront such questions through new types of roles.

Audience

This book is for players and Storytellers alike. The phenomena within add wonder and fear, suspense and mystery to your stories and characters. Information here may be true secrets, legendary myths or common misconceptions in a world where the paranormal is real but rarely what it seems. The boundaries between the three categories of powers offered may be strict and inviolate metaphysical facts, or may be illusory constructs erected by overwhelmed imaginations and frightened minds.

That is, this is a book of raw materials as well as finished products. Every supernatural phenomenon and power can be used as is or reverse-engineered to create new powers for specialized chronicles. Each psychic capability is a potential story, villain or ally. Each mystic spell is a dramatic conflict or dangerous solution. Each extraordinary force is a moral dilemma or a disaster to avert.

What's in this book is a wealth of mystery, terror and drama. Use the information at face value to add surprises and special effects to your stories. But use it for only such simple tricks, and you waste your full potential, like a spoon-bender at a state fair, hawking his incredible abilities at \$10 a head.

Each power in this book is a tool you can use to create real drama, suspense and fear. Each talent is a lens for looking at the World of Darkness in a new way. Each Trait is a chance to change someone's mind or to conjure up a story with meaning for your troupe.

Chapter 1: Not Normal looks at ways to use paranormal powers and supernatural phenomena to their fullest, creating compelling stories and satisfying characters. Players, read this chapter for ways to bring your creations to life and for advice on making them distinct from others in the World of Darkness. Storytellers, look for advice on making these paranormal powers meaningful parts of your chronicle.

Chapter 2: Psychic Phenomena explores the exceptional powers of extraordinary mortal minds. Inside is information on the past, perceptions and the effects of psychic powers in the World of Darkness.

Chapter 3: Low Magic examines earthly witchery and mystic powers workable by mortal will. Learn what makes these thaumaturgical powers unique — and what mortals give up to acquire them.

Chapter 4: Reality-Bending Horrors looks into the face of otherworldly powers and surreal



dangers that become even more perilous in meddling mortal hands. Many of these phenomena are too alien to be truly understood by those who command them, but all are accessible enough to be abused.

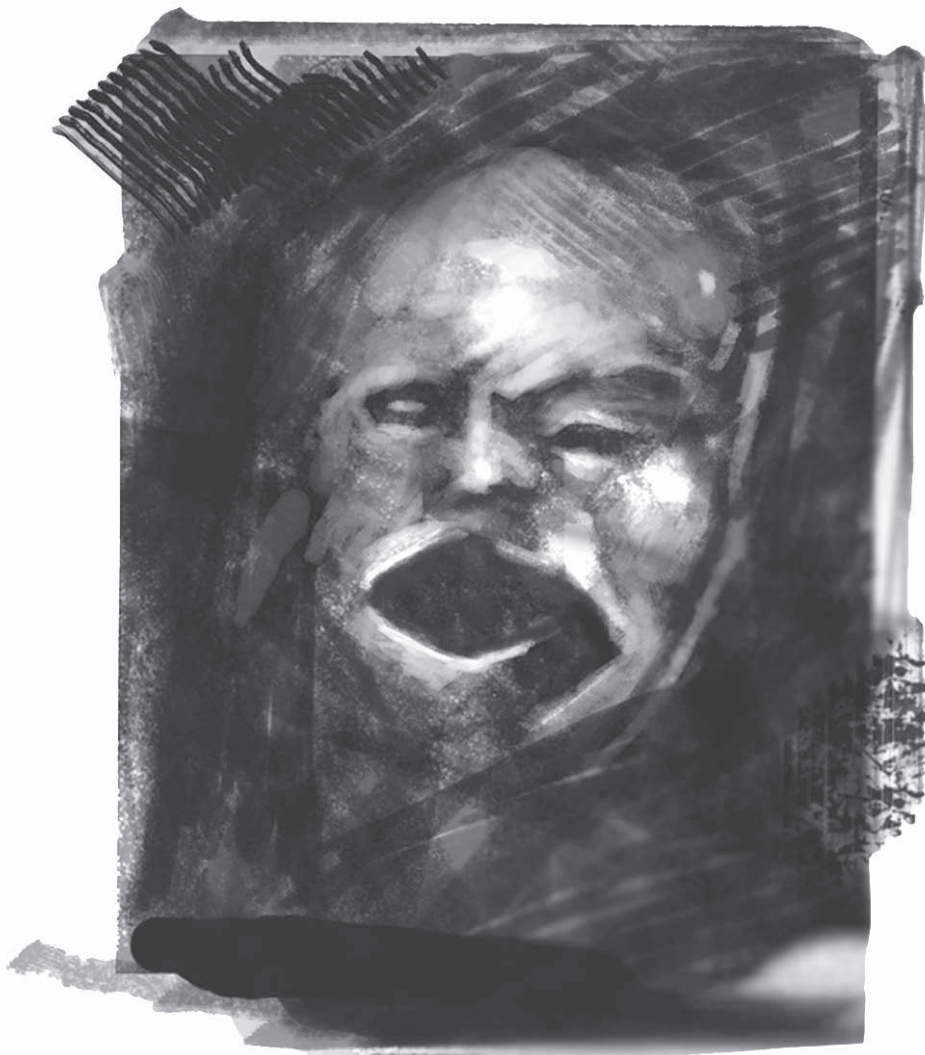

Appendix: What Thou Wilt is a story suitable for any World of Darkness chronicle, designed to introduce players and their characters to the perils of paranormal powers and their consequences.

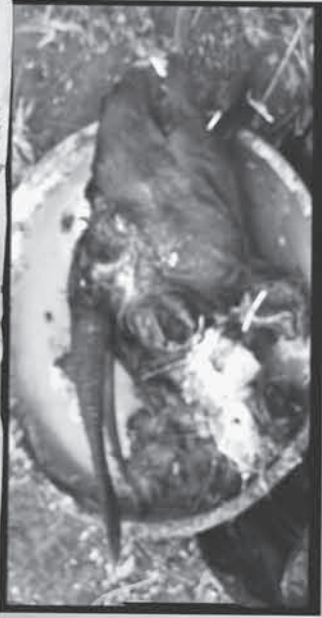


Supernatural Advantage

For the most part, all you need to read and use the contents of this book is the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Systems from other games

such as **Vampire**, **Werewolf** and **Mage** occur here and there, but you really don't need those books to create psychic or mystic characters. One concept new to strict core rulebook readers, however, is a Trait called a Supernatural Advantage. That's a generic term used here to represent vampires' Blood Potency, werewolves' Primal Urge and mages' Gnosis — Traits that represent those beings' raw magical capability. These Traits are invoked from time to time among this book's powers and Merits as contributors to dice pools, usually in contested rolls. So, when you as Storyteller see "+ Supernatural Advantage" in a dice pool, add any Blood Potency, Primal Urge or Gnosis dots that your cast member has to resist a character's mental or spiritual power.





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Chapter One: Not Normal

**Thou wilt never be
spiritually minded and
godly unless thou art
silent concerning other
men's matters and take
full heed to thyself.**

– Thomas Kempis

Words such as *power* and *phenomena* are often used to describe the abilities of psychics and mystics. In truth, those capabilities are actually burdens and abnormalities. Being able to, say, glimpse the future doesn't make one powerful if he foresees a loved one commit murder. Being able to glimpse the future also doesn't make him strong if he knows that something terrible will happen to a friend, but he doesn't know where or when. The sight, trick or spell has the power, not the individual. Prove to people what you're capable of and life as you know it is over. You become a *thing* for others to use, a tool for those with the social, economic or political power that you don't have.

The fact is, anyone can see the future. An ordinary girl can see that if she doesn't do something about her father's drinking and abuse, things will end in grief and pain. A psychic glimpse of the future only robs her of the chance to hope, of the chance to deny the inevitable. Magical insight forces her to recognize that her father will go too far and she will have to stand up to him. Any ordinary person can get a knife out of a drawer and put an end to the suffering. It takes a conscious decision and a conscious act. Stab. Fight. Kill. And yet, the mystic ability to put an end to misery, to fight back from the other side of a locked bathroom door, may not be conscious at all. That ability might be a residual result of pain, anguish or rage made real by imagination or a whim. To think a horrible thought about someone is one thing, but to actually carry it out is another. For someone with psychic or mystic powers, the thought and the act can be one and the same.

Psychic and mystic powers, at their heart, are extraordinary exaggerations of mundane concepts: intuition, foresight, confidence, ambition, fear, wrath. Supernatural capabilities are really just manifestations of an otherwise ordinary person's desire or dread. They represent the ability of a world to manipulate a character as much as she manipulates her world. These capabilities beg dramatic questions.

If you can see the future, what can you do about events to come?

If you perform that ritual to get revenge, can you deal with what will happen to the bastard who touched you?

If your lovelorn pleas are heard from Beyond, is there a price to pay for making your wishes come true?

Everyone else gets through life without eldritch recipes or mental powers. If you know them and use them, are you more powerful or less?

Most people are lucky. They can ignore the truth of what's out there, of what some people are capable of. They can close their blinds or turn up their stereos to drown out what they don't want to know. But psychic characters feel the pain through the glass and plaster. They glimpse what's out there, what's really happening, what will happen.

Once the supernatural is seen and heard, it can't be ignored. Psychic abilities and magic spells allow people to see and touch terrible things in the dark. Those powers don't deliver the confidence, will or wisdom to do what's right, though. They don't give people strength over the secret truths of the world. Such powers simply reveal what's there, whether one wants to know or not. Psychics might have metal tricks and mystics might cast arcane spells, but those people aren't safer than ordinary folks. Psychics and mystics aren't happier. In

fact, they're tormented by what they know and by what they can do, because once they're immersed in that secret world, there's no going back.

Overview

The powers in this book don't come from a common source. Unlike the Atlantean magic of mages, the mysticism described here doesn't have a single, knowable origin. Not all psychic powers are acquired through mental enlightenment or inherited from a clairvoyant parent. Not all apocalyptic forces are controlled by a devil from beyond reality.

The powers in this book are combined because of their effects, rather than their ancestry. These talents are personal, exceptional, surprising and mysterious. That's what they have in common. In most cases, they are also unwanted, misunderstood and frightening. Like a loaded gun pulled in the delirious hours of a drunken party, these powers might be fascinating or fearsome, exciting or sobering, but they are undeniably dangerous.

This chapter isn't concerned with where powers come from so much as where they're headed in your stories. The history of the witchcraft your characters encounter depends on the particular style and theme of your chronicle. The places where psychics can be found are determined by your settings. Storytellers and players alike can find plenty of resources about the folklore, metaphysical or pseudoscientific origins of unique powers, written from the perspective of real-world authors. Simply choose one you like and make it factual (if not truthful) for the purposes of your game.

This chapter focuses on how powers work in a story, rather than how they work in the fictional world of the narrative. This helps Storytellers decide where powers enter a chronicle, rather than how they enter the World of Darkness.

What This Book Is

Stories set in the World of Darkness are tinged with the supernatural. At ground level, from the perspective of earthly, mortal characters, the supernatural appears to be unexplainable — or at least unexplained — phenomena. Even after years of exposure to occulted strangeness in society's peripheral vision, many so-called experts on the paranormal cobble together explanations based on mistaken assumptions, desperate half-truths and ignorant bias. Misinformation and disinformation plague those who study the occult, which is difficult to observe or understand even without the aura of taboo that surrounds it.

Supernatural phenomena are mysterious because they are not understood, but also because they cannot be understood. That mystery is the vital source of wonder that makes the supernatural exciting for players in World of Darkness stories, and for their characters. Mystery is the essence of

mystique, and psychic and magical phenomena are nothing without mystique.

This book is, therefore, in a difficult position. On one hand, this book details supernatural phenomena and secrets of the paranormal for the sake of players and Storytellers. On the other hand, those details are like burning sunshine to the foggy atmosphere of mystery and suspense. Although the game needs clear and understandable systems, quantifiable and understandable rules spoil the mood.

Normally, the reader of a story about the paranormal is asked to suspend his disbelief so that he may buy into the imaginary possibilities of the tale. With a book like this, you must suspend your disbelief when you read, and then reinstate it at the gaming table. If you can suspend your disbelief, you can suspend your familiarity as well.

Your character, who delivers packages by day, touches the door of a posh suburban house and gets what feels like a static shock. In a wave of déjà vu, she has the dreamy, familiar feeling that she's been there before, except in her vision she isn't herself. She's a middle-aged white man with a bag of dog food in one hand and a set of keys in the other. The projected sense continues inside, revealing that the cookie-cutter, three-bedroom house is new and empty. The smell of wet paint makes her visionary self dizzy as she heads down the basement steps and throws the bag of dog food over the top of a chain-link pen. Inside, a young woman is chained to the floor, wearing the ragged remains of a brown delivery uniform.

You know your character's precognitive ability shows only one possible future and she "sees" only up to 24 hours in advance, so you might just have her get back in her truck and steer clear of the place for a day. But if you focus on the letter of game mechanics, you miss out on the rush of the tale that could be told. Suspend your familiarity instead. Trust your Storyteller, and put yourself in your character's shoes. How would you feel if you felt like — didn't know, but *felt like* — you were about to be kidnapped? Play the role. Let the story unfold.

When it comes down to it, you'll find it's easy to suspend your familiarity. Despite this book's frank examination of some pretty unbelievable powers, nothing here should be considered commonplace, fully understood or normal by characters of the World of Darkness. Stories set here are tainted by the supernatural. They're mysterious, terrifying and wondrous, but seldom easily understood. This book provides a broad catalog of supernatural phenomena to fuel stories, with the understanding that all of these capabilities are imaginary to even inhabitants of the world — until those powers appear in your chronicle.

This Book and the World of Darkness

The paranormal abilities in this book are rare and often unrepeatable. One character may gain some facet of telepa-

thy after a near-fatal car wreck, while another in identical circumstances suffers brain damage. A group may encounter a demonic being in the burning hell of a lightning-struck cornfield, but is never able to contact the being again, no matter how many fields are destroyed.

The powers here are designed to be extraordinary or even unique. Don't be fooled by the amount of information you read about telekinesis or the limits of precognition. These powers cannot be easily described even by those who use them. The game mechanics presented may be reliable, but the powers themselves are not.

The number of pyrokinetics and clairvoyants in the World of Darkness is too small and obscure to count, too small to claim a secret society of its own. No "league of firestarters" secretly fights a war with the mages of the Adamantine Arrow, and no precognitive police force lurks behind the scenes at the FBI. The powers described here are intensely personal and isolating. The life of a medium or fringe sorcerer is lonely, even if he shares it with a handful of friends.

Your psychic sits in her sedan outside the palm-reader's storefront, staring at a neon eye glowing from a barred window. She has driven around the block three times, lingering at a stop sign every time. She watches the crystal-hugging losers and fat spinsters come and go. She imagines their heads swollen and their faces warped by the fish-eye lens of her peephole, as if they showed up at her apartment for "guidance." She thinks how glad she is that she missed her "calling." That she doesn't have to listen to the whining of people desperate

to know when they'll meet their true love, or to hear from someone years dead. Snorting, she decides to make one more pass around the neighborhood.

It's possible that the characters in your chronicle are the only genuine psychics and hedge wizards in your version of the World of Darkness.

What Powers Do

The telekinetic gangbanger covers his eyes and bullets drop out of the air to his feet, still sizzling. The liver-spotted grandmother buries bones in the sand and lures lightning to the ground. The blood-spattered father stacks bodies in the garage to forestall the end of the world for one more night.

These are things that characters can do with supernatural powers, but what do the powers themselves do? How do they change the way your stories feel and unfold? What effect do the powers have on the types of stories you tell, the allies and antagonists you introduce, or the way you design and play out horror and mystery tales?

Supernatural powers broaden the palette with which you have to paint, whether you're a Storyteller or a player. But if you believe the theory that only so many kinds of stories exist to be told, you'll see that psychic phenomena don't necessarily create a new category all their own. Adding supernatural



powers to a game about mortals lets you tell stories in new ways, but it doesn't necessarily help you tell new stories. Lots of tales in which paranormal abilities seem essential are actually just common stories given a new sheen.

Stephen King's *Carrie*, a staple of supernatural storytelling, is a tragic coming-of-age tale, even without the brutal psychokinetic murders. On one hand, *Carrie* may be partly responsible for the trope that telekinesis is a core ability of paranormal young women, as with the witches of *Charmed* and *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer*. On the other hand, *Carrie* wouldn't have had the emotional impact to start any trend if the book weren't a good, accessible tale to begin with. *Carrie*'s telekinesis is a dramatic exaggeration of angst, a frightening manifestation of her emotions, but the reader needs to understand her emotions to take that manifestation seriously.

Supernatural powers are often just the ignition that gets a story going, or the MacGuffin that makes a story possible. Charlene McGee's abilities in *Firestarter* explain why the story takes place, but read carefully and you notice that they don't explain why the characters make most of their decisions. Allison DuBois' visions in the television series *Medium* don't make that week's crimes happen; they simply enable the protagonist (and therefore the audience) to interact with a wide variety of stories. The visions of the troubled father in *Frailty* may not be real, but the actions he takes as a result make for a challenging and disturbing tale whether he's a seer or not. Intriguing characters, interesting goals and exciting settings are the machine parts of a great story, whether or not paranormal powers are built into the engine.

For comparison, look at the show *Cold Case Files* and observe how some of its stories are constructed. On *Medium*, psychic visions motivate characters to look into stories that would otherwise go unresolved. On *Cold Case Files*, the character likewise digs into unresolved stories, but with wholly mundane and earthly motives. Both series use visual tricks to render a character's motivations — and the story's exposition — in exciting ways for the audience. The musically enhanced flashbacks of *Cold Case Files* exist simply for the audience, and the eerie psychic visions of *Medium* exist for the audience and the protagonist at the same time. As Storyteller, you can use flashbacks and music in similar ways to get players' attention without having to add a psychic element to your game.

Psychic exposition is uniquely powerful in a Storytelling game, however, because the audience and the protagonist all sit in the same seat. Sharing visions with the psychic characters of shows such as *Medium* or *The Dead Zone* brings the spectator closer to the seer. In a Storytelling game, the experience brings the player closer to the narrative, turning something as potentially leaden and dry as expository text into a visceral and personal communion with events.

Using magic and psychic powers in your stories doesn't automatically heighten drama, though. Sometimes the headaches that come with managing the narrative ramifications of telepathy only complicate matters. An omniscient narrator works for writing fiction, but the players in a Sto-

rytelling game are members of the audience in addition to being actors, and an omniscient audience makes suspense and mystery impossible.

To Your Character

Powers should affect a character as much as they do a chronicle, probably more so. Look at characters who possess paranormal abilities in movies such as *Scanners*, *The Gift*, *The Dead Zone* and *Firestarter*. These people don't feel better off for having the powers. A character who is enthusiastic or blasé about her strange talent is a superhero, able to cope with her alienation and confusion with a bravery and strength out of the league of normal folk, and out of place in the World of Darkness. Even the psychic superheroes of *The X-Men* have a certain fear of their capabilities — and a somber dread of what ordinary people would think of them if they were open about it all. World of Darkness characters have much more subtle powers, and live in a far less forgiving world.

No character is utterly defined by his magic or psychic abilities. Think about it: is your character captured completely by a single quality, like a reclusive housewife who identifies herself only by her mental illness or a cancer patient who's doesn't do anything but read or think about tumors? If that's not the kind of character you want to play, consider the kind of person he was before the powers. Consider the person he'd be without them.

How does your witch or medium interact with people on the street or at the store? Is she able to get along with her mundane neighbors? Is she frank about her beliefs, and do her neighbors think she's crazy or just eccentric? What hobbies or passions does she have that aren't related to her capabilities? Are they distractions that make her feel "normal," or pastimes she's adopted to be more than what her strangeness alone allows? You may be thrilled that your character is psychic, but is *she* thrilled? Are her friends and lovers thrilled? Do they even know the truth?

The crux here is the very point of character creation in the Storytelling System: to encourage players to imagine compelling characters first, so that supernatural elements have good ground in which to take root. Even if you create a character who will have psychic Merits, think seriously about what he would do if he lost them.



Storyteller's Option: Hidden Powers

What about unwanted powers? What if you as Storyteller grant a character psychic powers after he witnesses the death of a powerful psychic antagonist? What if a hoodoo conjurer curses a character to carry some magical power around? The player doesn't necessarily ask for this power.

Although she's willing to see where stories will take her character, she had other plans for her experience points.

You shouldn't make a player pay for such imposed powers. The names and dots of these bequeathed capabilities probably shouldn't even go on her character sheet. In a way, the character doesn't possess these powers — the Storyteller does. He controls them, decides when they activate and chooses to bring them into play. Storytellers can get a lot of mileage out of this idea, using unquantified mystic abilities to deliver essential exposition, drawing characters into events without introducing all the baggage of mortals becoming overt supernatural beings in their own right.

Consider a player who wants her character to go through a slow story arc in which she gradually develops and learns to control mystical abilities, whether psychic or magical. She and the Storyteller agree that the character will be granted a three-dot Merit in the next story, even though the player doesn't currently have the experience points to pay for it. Until it's paid for, the Storyteller gets to offer uses of the power to the player. When the Merit is paid off, the player takes control of the character's talent.

Notice that the player takes control of her character's ability, but the character does not. Still looking to draw out her character's struggle to understand her paranormal abilities, the player continues to portray a woman with little control over her own psyche.

Feeling Paranormal

Everyone feels as if they're different or somehow apart from the crowd at some point. Everyone knows what it's like to feel like an outsider. Imagine that feeling amplified by demonstrable proof that you're not like your friends. Imagine them asking you to show off the deformity that makes you different, knowing full well that doing so makes you miserable. Imagine hearing your friends' thoughts, and discovering how different they really are from the people you thought you knew.

Paranormal abilities are not ordinary, not even for your character. They aren't something with which he should be comfortable. In his bones and blood, he has the instincts of a human animal. He thinks and feels like an everyday person, but the sensations he receives aren't meant for him and his body doesn't understand them.

Think of a time when you were ill, when you knew you were going to pass out or throw up. Your body didn't feel right. It felt things it didn't want to feel, things it wasn't sure how to feel, and it let you know.

Your character can't commiserate about paranormal powers. Other people don't understand how he feels, and because language was created by people like them instead of people like him. There are no words that get it right. He describes what it's like to his closest friend, to his lover, but when he says, "You know what I mean?" she answers, "No."

The powers in this book are integrally linked to your character, but they are not a natural part of him.

Lesser Templates

Each of the supernatural character types in the World of Darkness is a kind of template. When you turn your mortal character into a werewolf, you apply a template to him. Supernatural transformations that are the basis of a whole game, such as the Embrace that turns an ordinary person into one of the Kindred, or the Awakening turns a regular human into a willworker, are full-grade templates. Those in-between states, the partial transformations that create beings such as ghouls, are the result of lesser templates.

When a character gains psychic Merits, learns to cast shamanic spells or manifests one of the other kinds of powers in this book, he is considered to acquire a lesser template.

A character can be subject to only one template at a time, whether greater or lesser. Greater templates such as those at the heart of other World of Darkness games trump lesser templates. When a ghoul is Embraced by a vampire, she ceases to be a ghoul and becomes a vampire. Likewise, if a mortal with psychic Merits is Embraced, he becomes a vampire and loses all of his psychic Merits. Though a lesser template may be shed, a full template cannot be. The transformation from mortal to werewolf, mage or vampire is permanent.

As a rule, a character can have only one lesser template at a time. That is, a character cannot be a psychic ghoul. If a character with one lesser template is exposed to the transforming power of another lesser template, the Storyteller must make a judgment call. The decision as to which template wins out must be based on the story at hand. If the choice between two lesser templates arises out of a dramatic dilemma, the player can be allowed to decide for her character. If the Storyteller wants to emphasize the destructive nature of ghoulish existence, she may have it override a character's previous lesser template. No one way is best for all stories and chronicles, though certain decisions can lead to ugly, unintended consequences. Here are three possible rulings:

- The character's first lesser template is automatically dominant. A ghoul exposed to psychic phenomena has no ability to learn them, while a psychic who is given Vitae gains no special benefits from it. Only by abandoning one lesser template, if possible, can another lesser template be acquired. For example, a ghoul who avoids Vitae for 40 days may be able to learn psychic Merits. This is the default rule.

- Exposure to another lesser template always results in a change of template. This ruling is probably not a good idea, because a game of "musical templates" is almost always funny rather than frightening. The dramatic element here

comes from the danger of exposure to things such as Kindred Vitae. If a character doesn't want to lose his psychic powers, Vitae is like kryptonite.

- Exposure to a second lesser template always results in a choice for the player and his character. Though this option can create wonderfully dramatic situations in which a character must choose between the ability to foresee the future and the opportunity to experience it personally, this option also risks making the acquisition of lesser templates into a coldly tactical choice. If you don't want characters deciding to be ghouls for a few weeks before choosing to return to the psychic template, don't use this approach.

Avoid the temptation to resolve the conflict of vying templates with dice. The acquisition of a template should be the consequence of a choice made by a player, whether that choice is to spend experience points or to have his character accept the bloody price of eternal youth.

Psychic Vampires and Werewolf Shamans

When a character transitions from one of this book's lesser templates to a full template, he loses the supernatural abilities he gained from the lesser template. This is a rule of the game, however, not a rule of the supernatural cosmos of the World of Darkness.

If your psychic mortal is Embraced, she loses her psychic Merits, but she may still have a compelling explanation for her character's affinity for an out-of-clan psychic-like Discipline, as described by one dot in that Discipline when applying the vampire template. A character whose background in shamanic magic leads to his Awakening has a great explanation for a future Legacy. A mortal who undergoes the First Change while attempting to rescue his wife from a spirit-worshipping cult might manifest Uratha Gifts that enable him to continue his crusade.

At the Storyteller's discretion, some, half or all experience points or dots spent to purchase powers from this book may be recovered by a player and re-spent on supernatural abilities appropriate to a new template. A character's distance from normalcy is not reduced by her transformation. A seer's psychic voltage creates a charge in her mystic blood when she is Embraced. A shaman's spiritual gravitas echoes in her lunar soul. Even the profound personal changes of undeath, essential transformation or soulful enlightenment cannot utterly erase the marks the supernatural has already made on a character.



A Psychic Embraced

After almost a year of preparation, Violet has made up her mind to accept an invitation to immortality. Tonight, she dies and becomes Kindred.

Violet's player and the Storyteller agree that Violet's existing telepathic abilities should affect the Disciplines she has as a vampire. Violet becomes a Mekhet, so has access to Auspex auto-



matically, which is a good fit. Her player puts two of her starting Discipline dots into *Auspex*. In life, Violet often used her psychic influence to coerce people to act in her favor. This tendency sounds like the Discipline of Dominate, so her player puts her final automatic Discipline dot there (see “Disciplines,” p. 92 of *Vampire: The Requiem*).

Even after converting psychic Merits back into experience, Violet’s player doesn’t have enough points to buy the third dot of *Auspex* or the second dot of *Dominate*. If the Storyteller wants to play up the distillation of the self into the Blood of the Embrace, he could allow Violet to obtain the second dot of *Dominate* at an in-clan experience-point cost. Or if he wants to emphasize the death of the self that comes with damnation, he could simply rule that Violet’s psychic Merits are lost altogether.

Ultimately, the Storyteller and Violet’s player agree on a middle ground. The experience points that had been spent on psychic Merits are set aside as “Discipline-only experience points,” to be spent on *Auspex* or *Dominate* somewhere down the line. Violet’s player also tells the Storyteller that if he were to introduce a Mekhet bloodline with *Dominate* as its fourth Discipline, Violet would consider joining it.



Alternatively, your character may lose her tenuous grip on her fragile supernatural powers when she’s exposed to the damnation of the Embrace or to the overwhelming instincts of her werewolf blood. Her history isn’t erased, though. One era of the character’s life is over, but her future springs from her past.

Remember that game mechanics are not the absolute rules of the imaginary phenomena of your game world. What *are* psychic powers, anyway? Could they have been the first stirrings of a soul about to Awaken? What made your character able to understand and use the magic spells he encountered? Was it a spiritual quality he inherited from Uratha ancestors? Sometimes game mechanics emphasize aspects of a character begging to be explored. Sometimes friction between the game and the story leads to questions that define your character.

To Your Chronicle

Adding paranormal powers to your chronicle can change everything, but they don’t have to. While adding the Merits of this book to your chronicle is great way to bump up the supernatural factor of the game, remember that you still decide to what these powers are added.

To get the most mileage out of a character’s psychic capabilities or mystic spells, you may feel that the chronicle’s

antagonists and story lines need to focus on those phenomena as well. They don’t.

Giving characters control of their own paranormal talents doesn’t shift the balance of the game wholly toward the supernatural if they’re the chronicle’s primary source of “magic.” If *World of Darkness* stories are about frightening and dramatic stories shaded by the supernatural, you just change the direction from which the light shines. Stories might be about mundane horrors such as murderers or stalkers as seen through the eyes of mildly supernatural characters. Look at a TV series like *Millennium*. In the first season, Frank Black was the main supernatural presence, and most of the horror grew from mundane sources such as madness and obsession. Black was the origin of the supernatural onscreen, and yet the show was creepy as hell.

Introducing a psychic protagonist to your chronicle can affect the table dynamic of the players, too. Players of mundane characters worrying that they’ll be relegated to the supporting cast is not unreasonable. The player of a character who suddenly turns to witchcraft may intend to draw attention to his character. In a lot of movies and novels, the lone supernatural protagonist is often the star of the show, but that kind of focus doesn’t often work with the ensemble style of a game.

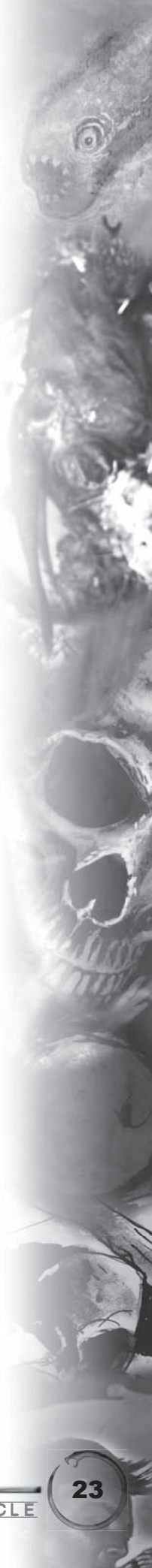
The adoption of supernatural powers doesn’t need to be an all-or-nothing proposition. If every character is important to at least one other in an emotional way, trait imbalances can be overcome by cooperative players. If they don’t know each other well enough to cooperatively deal with these problems, it’s your job as Storyteller to demonstrate that an exceptional, supernatural character isn’t necessarily the star of the show. Share the spotlight, draw the next story from the history of a mundane character or work with the “star’s” player to find a reason why he might bluntly turn to the rest of the group for help, kicking off a new story.

Most troubles that derive from a sudden change in a game’s focus are the result of expectations, whether welcome or unwelcome. If a player assumes that giving his character psychic powers will turn him into a wise, oracular figure in the eyes of the others, he may be upset if they fear or resent him. If a player expects that a character’s new magic spells are going to turn her into some kind of action hero, that player may lose interest in the chronicle. The trick to using powers in your game is to be frank about how they’ll be portrayed, and why. You risk losing a bit of the paranormal mystique when you break it down at the table like this, but you improve the odds of saving your chronicle.

Remember: if you can suspend disbelief, you can suspend familiarity. Players who are comfortable with the role that powers have find it easier to roleplay the wonder their characters feel for the supernatural.

Incorporating Powers Into Your Chronicle

Did psychic phenomena exist in your game world before you bought this book? Were witches casting genuine



spells? Objectively, nothing happened in the imaginary past of your game until you, the Storyteller, decide it did. When you first explore new powers, you get to decide just how much of a presence they have.

Take charge of these phenomena. Bury the roots of mortal witchcraft deep in the dirt of the past if it's what you want, making well-known historical witches and witch-hunts half-true accounts of actual events. Perhaps the Salem witch trials revealed and executed real witches, and scared others into hiding.

If it's what you want, the first seeds of psychic capability are just now being planted in the pharmacologically fertilized brains of modern humans, making previous manifestations of telepathy and telekinesis the mythic vocabulary for real powers now. Maybe Uri Geller and TV mediums were frauds while the characters in your stories are the real thing.



Finite Phenomena

What if psychic phenomena throughout the world all draw from the same finite reservoir of power? What if there are only so many dots worth of psychic Merits available at one time in the World of Darkness? When one character finally achieves a four-dot Merit, he hoards the power from which all of the world's telekinetic and precognitive people draw. To gain more power for oneself, it must be taken from someone else.

This sweeping limitation creates a precarious dynamic and makes the decision to develop one's powers potentially dangerous. It also begs a wonderfully dramatic moral question: What is your character willing to do to become more powerful? Would he kill another psychic to cease her drain on the psychic reservoir? What if the number of psychics in the world is roughly constant, and for everyone killed another is born? In this twist, all psychics are locked together by metaphysical bonds more powerful than family. The only way to protect oneself from the covetous threat of paranormal kin is to deny one's ability, if it can be done.



Awareness

Beyond the number of people with paranormal powers inhabiting your setting, think about how aware the setting is of them. Knowing that the World of Darkness appears very much like the real world, you have to maintain a careful balance between power and visibility, or the illusion of occulted horrors hidden within a modern context is shattered. That

said, there's plenty of space in the World of Darkness for paranormal characters without the challenging the status quo.

The more psychics or witches you plan to have wandering the streets, the weaker the powers you may allow. Ordinary people in the chronicle need to be able to reasonably deny the existence of the supernatural without seeming like idiots, or the cracked veneer of normalcy is ruined and with it goes the mood of your game. If storefront mystics have real power in your World of Darkness — defined as actual dots in paranormal Merits — then that power must be faint enough that unbelievers can discount it. One profound Tarot reading probably isn't enough to change people's minds, but those who see characters perform feats using one-dot powers can be utterly convinced that magic is real without changing the world. Others may believe a palmist has real power, but be unable to reconcile that power with their religion, or they're simply unwilling to look too closely at something they don't (or don't want to) understand.

"I don't think about it too much, honey. I just go and listen, and she ain't never been wrong yet."

Public

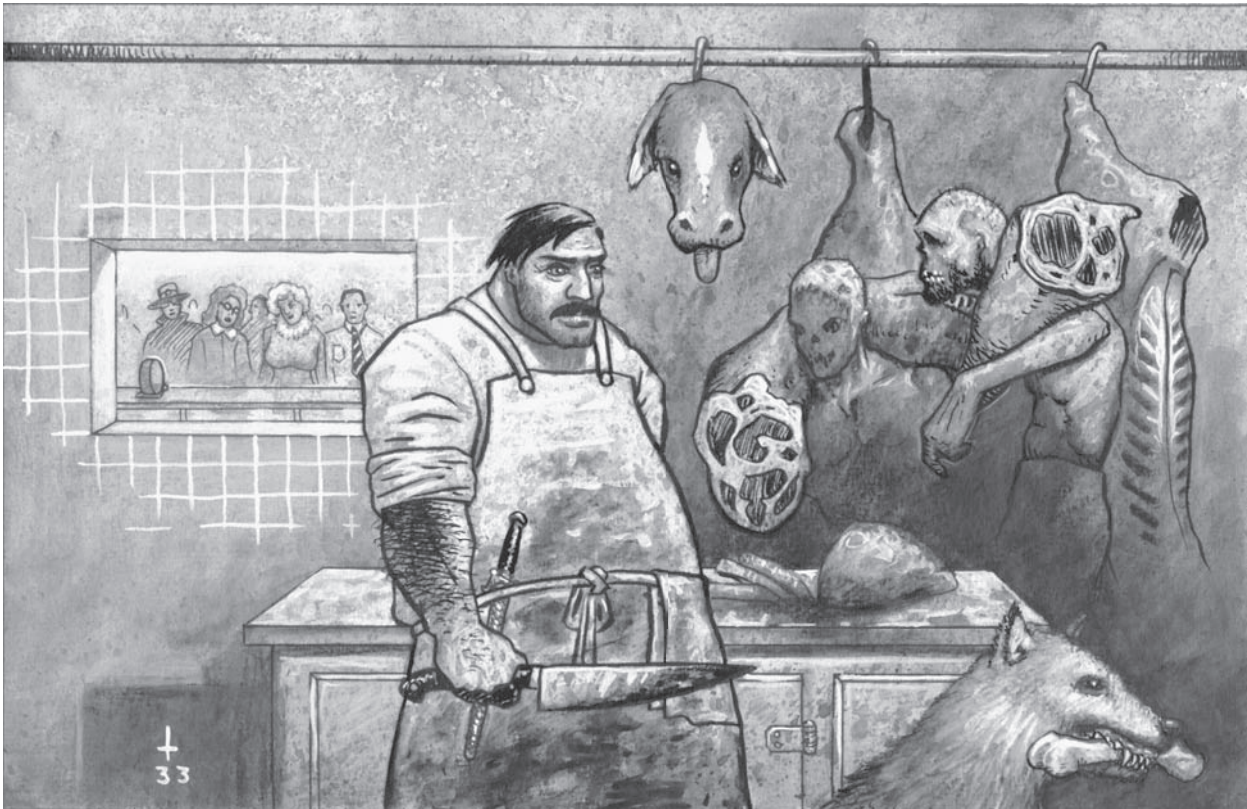
In the real world, the public knows and on some level accepts that people who claim to be psychics work with police forces and private citizens. Allison DuBois' name is used as the protagonist of a television series. Uri Geller has bent spoons in sold-out auditoriums. Whether you buy the claims of real-world psychics or not, there they are, claiming it and not changing the way most people live their lives.

Suppose that even a tiny percentage of the palmists, Tarot readers and neon-sign psychics from San Francisco to New York have genuine power. In game terms, imagine if only one percent of those people actually possess psychic Merits, or if just one percent of backyard pagans can cast spells with real power. That's still a lot of stories to tell. Now think about what percentage of the world's psychics and dabblers are *considered* to have power by their cronies and customers. It's not so hard to imagine what the World of Darkness would look like with even a small number of public, authentic mystics on stage. It would look a lot like the world you know, from the cheesy midnight ads on down.



Secrecy and Awareness

Rethink the relationship of what's public and what's secret in your setting. If magicians on television know real spells, but hide their most frightening powers from the audience, they're both public and secretive. The power may be out in the open where anyone can see it and be skeptical, but that doesn't mean the truth is out there, too. Surface phenomena may be visible, like fish at the top of a pond, but the water isn't clear. Most people don't go wading into



the sludge to prove that more fish are there, so most people don't know how deep the water really is.

Societal

Wolf Messing may be one of the best documented psychics in the world. Joseph Stalin believed in Messing's abilities (after putting them to the test), and according to some accounts so did Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud. Ask around, however, and his name doesn't ring a lot of bells. Wolf Messing's name is only well known in certain circles. If you're plugged into that society, his powers may appear certain, irrefutable. If you're not a member of the subculture of true believers, it all bears the appearance of lunacy.

Profound powers known and accepted by small groups of clued-in witnesses are a good middle ground for *World of Darkness* chronicles. A single person with real psychic or magic powers — another Wolf Messing — can make hundreds or thousands of people aware of the existence of the supernatural without upsetting the realism of the world at large. Societal awareness lasts long after noteworthy figures die, and can grow stronger as legends swell and secondhand artifacts such as bent spoons or cryptic letters add mystique but not proof to the tales. Stories about supernatural phenomena can be told using a subculture aware of

the paranormal, without needing to give members of that subculture access to actual effects.

And yet, societies of characters convinced rightly or wrongly of the power of magic or psychic phenomena may be a conduit to introduce such capabilities. *Scanners* shows the exaggerated extreme of this idea, with the paranormal having become institutionalized. Yet, private or secret organizations pursuing the secrets of the paranormal are a trope of stories set in more familiar worlds, from *Firestarter* to *Sixth Sense*.

Anonymous

At the opposite end of the spectrum from publicly visible phenomena are anonymous — but not necessarily less powerful — demonstrations. No better example can be found than the *X-Files* episode, "Clyde Bruckman's Final Repose," in which psychics of various power are shown as both celebrities and nobodies. Clyde Bruckman himself is a miserable, lonely insurance salesman, despite verifiable powers, because no one wants to know what he knows. Another character is a precognitive bellhop whose paranormal ability just doesn't make him interesting.

Just because a character has paranormal capabilities doesn't mean he believes in them or has interest in the culture that surrounds them. In a place as lonely and callous as the *World of Darkness*, is it so hard to believe that psychics and witches might want to remain anonymous? Indeed, the kinds of people who are attracted to such abilities may not be the kinds of people whom genuine practitioners want to know.



4

Chapter Two: Psychic Phenomena

The mind commands
the body, and it
obeys; the mind com-
mands itself, and it
withstands.

— St. Augustine

In this chapter, we address individuals gifted or cursed with psychic powers. This section is intended as a toolkit for Storytellers who wish to incorporate such abilities into their games. The focus is not on creating a “hidden conspiracy” of psychics that competes with vampires, werewolves or mages as equals. Instead, we approach psychics as individuals or small groups, whether as players’ or Storyteller characters. If you allow psychics in your chronicle, they’re created under the standard mortal character-creation rules outlined on pp. 34–35 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. In this chapter, we use the term “ordinary people” to refer to humans with no supernatural or paranormal capabilities. The only difference between a psychic and an ordinary person is that psychics can possess any of the psychic Merits contained in this chapter with some or all of their Merit dots.

While psychics have access to paranormal abilities denied to ordinary people, the default setting assumes that such characters are not as powerful as vampires, werewolves or mages built on the same number of dots or experience points. Supernatural beings generally begin with free dots in special magical Traits (whether mage Arcana, vampiric Disciplines or werewolf Gifts), which do not need to be purchased with Merit dots. Creatures also have access to supernatural advantages such as Blood Potency, Primal Urge and Gnosis, which augment unique powers. Finally, supernatural creatures typically have access to some form of mystical energy that improves their capabilities even further, such as Vitae, Mana and Essence. Psychics lack these supernatural edges, and Storytellers who wish to beef up psychics to make them more competitive with or as more dangerous adversary to supernatural beings may increase the number of Merit dots available at character creation, or may simply give psychics additional starting experience.

If a psychic ever assumes the template of a supernatural creature, he typically loses all of his psychic abilities. You may choose to mitigate this penalty, though. A clairvoyant Embraced as a vampire loses his paranormal sensory abilities, but the Storyteller may permit the player to convert some, half or all experience spent on psychic powers into additional dots of Auspex, or the character may eventually be able to establish a new bloodline that has a unique Discipline that mimics a mental power. Or a psychic who awakens as a mage might be permitted to convert experience into suitable Arcana, such as Space for clairvoyance, Death for mediumship or Forces for pyrokinesis. Whether such a conversion is permissible is *completely* within the Storyteller’s discretion. We recommend that no more than half the experience spent on psychic Merits be available to characters who become vampires or mages. Because Uratha Gifts are not innate abilities but are taught to werewolves by spirits, Storytellers are discouraged from permitting a psychic undergoing his First Change into a werewolf to retain any powers at all. As a final note, the presence of any significant quantity of vampiric Vitae in a psychic’s system generally leaves him too distracted to exercise the degree of concentration needed to access his powers. Consequently, psychics who become ghouls lose their psychic powers for the duration of their ghoulish existence.

Lexicon

astral projection: A form of ESP, essentially an improved version of clairvoyance by which a seer fashions a “psychic body” for himself that travels to a location to be viewed.

aura: A field of energy that surrounds living (and some unliving) beings. Some psychics are able to perceive a person's aura and determine certain facets of her mood or personality.

automatism: Physical activities performed by a psychic's body without his conscious control or knowledge. The most widely known form of automatism is automatic writing, in which a psychic writes intelligible messages or draws pictures without being consciously aware of what she communicates. Parapsychologists are divided on whether automatists subconsciously use innate ESP abilities or simply act as conduits for *discarnate entities* or the *Universal Unconscious*.

biokinesis: The ability to affect the biological processes of living things through mental means.

channeling: The act of permitting a *discarnate entity* to control one's body temporarily.

clairvoyance: In general, the power to perceive information outside one's physical proximity solely through psychic means. Technically, clairvoyance refers to paranormally obtained visual information, while clairaudience refers to being able to hear things at a distance, and clairsentience refers to perceptions not involving either sight or hearing. In modern application, however, clairvoyance encompasses all senses. The archaic term for clairvoyance is second sight, and it is also sometimes referred to as remote sensing.

cryokinesis: A form of psychokinesis that permits a psychic to reduce ambient temperature. Cryokinesis most commonly manifests in troubled adolescents by uncontrolled means as "cold spots" often ascribed to ghosts or poltergeists.

crystal gazing: A subset of ESP in which a psychic must stare into a reflective surface in order to obtain paranormal information. Also known as scrying.

discarnate entity: A non-material entity that may be a spirit, ghost, angel, demon or possibly even an extraterrestrial. Some psychics claim their abilities are the result of the intercession of such entities, while some parapsychologists speculate that discarnate entities are merely facets of psychics' personalities — essentially "imaginary friends" who protect one from recognizing that his powers are entirely internal. Ghosts are the most commonly encountered discarnate entities.

dowsing: The ability to detect hidden or lost objects using tools such as a divining rod or a pendulum as a focus.

dreamscape: An artificial reality created within the mind of a person while dreaming. Some psychics have the ability to project their astral forms into others' dreams, and a few can even manipulate the environment of a dreamscape through sheer will.

empathy: In the context of parapsychology, the ability to perceive and possibly affect the sensations or emotional states of another through psychic means. Some empaths assess the emotional states of subjects by viewing auras. An empath with sufficient talent can manipulate a person's aura and consequently his emotional state. For others, psychic empathy is a form of ESP that allows one to sense strong emotions over great distances from people with whom he has a connection.

glossolalia: Unintelligible speech patterns often uttered while one is in a trance state. Glossolalia is often referred to as "speaking in tongues" and is sometimes thought to have religious significance.

Kirlian photography: A photographic technique invented by Russian inventor Seymon Kirlian, which involves taking pictures of persons or objects while in the presence



of a high-frequency, high-voltage, low-amperage electrical field. A subject appears to be surrounded by a multicolored nimbus of light in resulting photographs. According to parapsychologists, this nimbus represents the aura of the subject, although critics claim that it is simply the effect of high-voltage electricity on air molecules.

medium: A psychic who is able to perceive and communicate with *discarnate entities*. Most mediums deal exclusively with ghosts, although some mediums claim to deal with other types of discarnate entities. Mediums typically act as facilitators, helping the living and the dead to communicate. Many mediums have the power of *channeling*, whereby a medium can help a discarnate entity materialize or even act through the medium's body.

miracle: A paranormal event ascribed to divine power. Many parapsychologists theorize that miracle-workers are simply psychics who are conditioned to believe that their powers depend on how successfully they adhere to the moral code of their faith. Actual miracle-workers scoff at such attempts to diminish what they clearly see as proof of heavenly blessing.

morphic resonance: According to Cambridge biochemist Rupert Sheldrake, the racial memory of all living creatures of the same species, possibly related to the *Universal Unconscious*. Parapsychologists speculate that morphic resonance is the factor that permits one's mind to intuitively remember the shape of its body, explaining why ghosts tend to look as they did in life and why astral projectors can sometimes alter the appearance of their spectral forms.

orgone energy: An ambient energy source, essentially the life force of the planet and everyone on it, as theorized by psychologist Wilhelm Reich. According to Reich's theories, orgone is contained both in the atmosphere and in all living beings. Reich also believed that it was possible to detect and harness orgone energy through devices called orgone accumulators, and that such energy could be used to treat illnesses or to even manipulate the weather.

parapsychology: The scientific study of psychic phenomena, as well as other unexplained and possibly supernatural phenomena.

poltergeist: German for "noisy ghost." Poltergeist activity takes the form of strange noises, inexplicable movement of objects, spontaneous combustion and acts against people that appear to be caused by invisible attackers. Poltergeist phenomena typically focus on a specific individual, usually a young child or adolescent. Many parapsychologists speculate that such phenomena are actually symptoms of latent psychokinetic abilities possessed by a child and unconsciously directed against himself or others.

precognition: The psychic ability to perceive future events. The ability to perceive past events is called postcognition.

psychometry: The psychic ability to obtain knowledge about physical objects by touching them. Sometimes referred to as object sensing.

séance: An attempt by a *medium* to communicate with *discarnate entities*, most commonly ghosts, while surrounded by a small group of believers who hopefully augment the powers invoked.

sheep-goat effect: A theorized effect whereby the powers of a psychic are augmented when she is surrounded by "sheep" who believe in psychic or supernatural phenomena,

but her powers are also severely inhibited by "goats" who strongly disbelieve in them.

telekinesis: The psychokinetic movement of physical objects through thought alone.

teleportation: The psychokinetic transportation of objects or persons from one location to another, apparently without crossing the intervening distance.

Universal Unconscious: The collective memories of the experiences of every human being who has lived since the beginning of time. Sometimes referred to as the "Akashic Records" by Edgar Cayce and others.

Zener cards: A set of cards designed by psychologist Karl Zener for use in ESP experiments. There are 25 cards in a deck consisting of five cards each showing a different symbol: a circle, square, Greek cross, five-pointed star and three wavy lines.

Psychic Power in General

Only over the last century have serious parapsychologists attempted to classify and define various psychic powers and phenomena using scientifically rigorous experiments and methodology. Unfortunately, such efforts are hampered by the widespread presence of quacks, charlatans and New Age dilettantes who use inconsistent terminology to describe psi phenomena. For the purposes of this book, we use the following four terms to classify and organize various psychic powers. *Extrasensory Perception (ESP)* includes all psychic powers that permit a psychic to perceive things outside the range of the normal five senses. *Mediumism* includes all powers that allow a psychic to gain knowledge or insight by allowing his body to serve as a vessel for what might appear to be an outside entity or force. *Telepathy* includes all powers that permit a psychic to interface his own mind with that of another living being. Finally, *psychokinesis* includes all powers that allow a psychic to affect physical matter, living beings and even energy, all through the power of his mind.

Origins of Psychic Power

We leave it to the Storyteller to decide exactly what the true origin of psychic phenomena is in your chronicle, or even if a scientific explanation is possible. Some theories are offered below. It's perfectly possible that different powers might have different explanations or that multiple explanations might apply. Ultimately, the validity of any specific theory depends upon what sort of story you want to tell.

Psychics are "embryonic mages." In this scenario, a psychic is a Sleeper who has begun the process of Awakening, but has not yet heard the call of the Watchtower to which her soul is attuned. At this embryonic stage, a psychic actually accesses primitive rites without having any true Gnosis or understanding of the Arcana (and of course, without using the mechanical rules associated with mage spells). If this option is used, a psychic might "wake up" at some dramatic point in the chronicle and become a full-fledged mage, possibly converting experience spent on her psychic Merits into Arcana.

Psychics are the creations of a hidden conspiracy. In this scenario, psychics are ordinary people who have been permanently altered by the machinations of some other party, perhaps by a cabal of mages or an Ordo Dracul conspiracy. The films *Scanners* and *Firestarter*, while not invoking the supernatural, feature psychics who come into existence through “weird” science experiments performed by antagonists, a sinister corporation in the first case and a shadowy government agency in the second.

Psychics are conduits for angels, demons, aliens or other entities. Many psychics, especially mediums, claim that they’re able to accomplish feats through the intercession of otherworldly entities viewed as either guardian angels or friendly ghosts. Other psychics claim to have gained powers after an alien abduction. History is replete with examples of psychics accused of witchcraft. Even today, many religious figures condemn psychic phenomena as having Satanic origins. In this scenario, such theologians may well be correct — psychics don’t have any intrinsic powers, but serve as conduits for entities that exist outside our frame of reference. A psychic might be the chosen agent of a heavenly messenger, or the unwitting servant of a demon or even alien invader. The newly returned abductees of the television series *The 4400* are individuals who receive paranormal abilities through the machinations of mysterious beings outside of normal human experience, while the Laura Means character on the television series *Millennium* is a psychic who believes her powers are the result of angelic visitation.

All humans are latent psychics, but only a few have access to their powers. In this scenario, anyone can be taught to access his latent psychic powers through training. Exactly

how an ordinary person receives such training depends on the type of story you want to tell. Possible training might involve a sinister government conspiracy that coerces characters into serving as psychic agents. A private foundation such as the Society for Psychical Research (see below) devoted to paranormal studies, which may or may not have a hidden agenda. Or even a reclusive master of transcendental techniques. The movies *Dreamscape* and *The Fury* both depict secret conspiracies privately and governmentally funded, which help young psychics develop their abilities. While the pulp-noir setting is atypical for contemporary World of Darkness chronicles, *The Shadow* demonstrates how an ordinary man who undergoes rigorous training could develop psychic powers.

Psychics represent a new subspecies of humanity. This scenario is perhaps the most divergent from the general themes of the World of Darkness, as such a theme risks crossing the line from personal horror into the realm of comic-book superheroes. Thematically, the *X-Men* comics and films are the most familiar example of a conflict between normal humans and a more powerful subspecies to determine who is dominant. For a more subtle take on this theme, consider the *Tomorrow People*, a 1970s British television series later remade in the 1990s for the Nickelodeon channel. *Tomorrow People* focuses on the adventures of a group of teens who independently develop psychic powers through a spontaneous evolutionary jump. While the TV show is conceptually similar to the *X-Men*, in the *Tomorrow People* humanity is generally unaware of the existence of psychics, who secretly work to guide humankind into the next phase of its evolution. John Wyndham’s *The Midwich Cuckoos*, later made into the film *Children of the Damned*, shows the other side of this coin,



as ordinary people must deal with the frightening threat of children with incredible powers.

Psychic phenomena simply “is.” In this scenario, psychic phenomena cannot be explained by any scientific (or even mystical) means. Perhaps psychic powers are an evolutionary adaptation to allow ordinary people to defend against the supernatural predators that stalk the night. Perhaps psychic powers are a throwback to a time of legend when all people had some degree of supernatural power. Perhaps miracle-workers are right, and psychic phenomena are simply a gift from God. The most frightening explanation of all might simply be that there is no explanation.

Story Hook: Agents of the SPR

Both the British and American Societies for Psychical Research exist in the real world, and both are fairly wealthy non-profit entities dedicated to research into paranormal. In the *World of Darkness*, either of these seemingly benign organizations might have more sinister overtones. Psychic characters might be recruited (or even press-ganged) by the SPR to serve as agents or paranormal investigators. Or the characters might find themselves in opposition to the SPR, which in both its British and American incarnations is a wealthy and well-connected conspiracy that brooks no interference from independent psychics.

History of Psychic Phenomena

People with psychic abilities have undoubtedly existed for much of human history, forming the basis of myths about seers and witches. Depending on the culture into which a psychic was born, she might have been venerated as an oracle of the gods or burned at the stake. Such primitive psychics, regardless of their fates, were invariably viewed through the lens of superstition and ignorance, or else misdirected “wisdom.”

Serious inquiry into what would eventually become parapsychology did not begin until the 17th century with the experiments of Viennese physician Franz Anton Mesmer, who pioneered the development of hypnosis, or as he referred to it “mesmerism.” Mesmer noted that although almost any subject could be placed into a trance-like state through his techniques, some subjects demonstrated unusual abilities while in a trance, most commonly clairvoyance and occasionally accelerated healing. He hypothesized that an ambient energy phenomenon he called “animal magnetism” was responsible for these effects, and that it might be harnessed for therapeutic purposes. Unfortunately, Mesmer was unable to duplicate the results of his experiments before the French

Royal Society of Medicine and or French Academy of Sciences, both of which denied the validity of his claims.

Mesmer’s approach — using hypnotic techniques to induce psychic episodes in somnambulant subjects — largely died out in the 1850s to be replaced by an emerging spiritualist movement in both Europe and the United States. Spiritualists claimed to be able to enter states of heightened awareness without use of mesmerism, and to be able to manifest a wide variety of psychic phenomena such as communication with the dead. While many spiritualists claimed their powers were based on mysticism and magic, others claimed a scientific basis. In response to the growth of this movement, many scientists and thinkers began serious investigation, some with the goal of debunking the movement, others with a genuine belief that spiritualism and psychic phenomena could be reconciled with modern science. The first such group was the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), founded in London in 1882 with no fewer than eight members of the British Royal Society serving as directors. An American SPR soon followed. Although never a member of the SPR or any other psychical organization, American stage magician and escape artist Harry Houdini began his own investigation into psychic phenomena and mediumism, offering substantial rewards to anyone who could demonstrate real psychic powers, and debunking those who could not pass his rigorous testing.

In the early 20th century, the pre-eminent psychic in the United States was Edgar Cayce. In a manner reminiscent of Mesmer’s techniques, Cayce could will himself to enter a trance and demonstrate psychic abilities. Cayce’s powers included not only clairvoyance and precognition, but access to knowledge that he did not otherwise possess through a link to what he called the “Akashic Records,” a metaphysical storehouse of all knowledge ever accumulated in the history of the world. Psychologist Carl Jung suggested the existence of a similar phenomenon called the “Universal Unconscious,” or simply the “Universal Mind.” Using his link to the Akashic Records, the somnambulant Cayce could advise doctors on new techniques to cure difficult ailments, and he claimed to have insights into the past lives of the subjects of his readings, which he believed was proof of the existence of reincarnation. In 1931, Cayce founded the Association for Research and Enlightenment (ARE) for the purpose of exploring and expanding upon his work in the fields of holistic health, dream research and reincarnation. The group was also to maintain a record of the more than 14,000 readings Cayce would make in his life, the last of which was supposedly an accurate prediction of his own demise.

The application of modern scientific methodology to parapsychology did not begin until the 1920s. Developments in the field of statistical analysis allowed researchers to devise tests for psychic phenomena in which the subjects’ accuracy could be compared to what anyone could achieve through random guesswork. During this period, American researcher J.B. Rhine also helped popularize the terms “parapsychology” and “extrasensory perception” or “ESP,” the last having first been coined by Sir Richard Burton more than a century before. More importantly, Rhine founded the first laboratory devoted to parapsychological research at Duke University,

and was a co-founder of the *Journal of Parapsychology*. In 1962, Rhine abruptly retired from Duke to open a private foundation dedicated to the study of parapsychology, financed by million-dollar endowments from anonymous corporate donors. Today, people who drive by the Rhine Research Center, a nondescript, two-story building in Durham, North Carolina, have no idea that its placid exterior conceals the world's foremost research facility into psychic phenomena. The foundation's discoveries are reported directly to some of the world's wealthiest men.

In 1942, Dr. Gertrude Schmeidler, a psychology professor at New York City University, first identified the phenomenon she dubbed the sheep-goat effect. Prior to testing a diverse group of subjects with Zener cards, Schmeidler questioned each of them regarding their beliefs about psychic phenomena. She divided the subjects into two groups: "sheep," who believed in the existence of psychic events, and "goats," who disbelieved. The results demonstrated that those subjects who believed scored well above what statistics indicated could be achieved through random guessing. More importantly, Schmeidler discovered that the goats scored significantly below the statistical mean. Based on these results, Schmeidler theorized that a person who possessed latent psychic powers, but who intellectually denied their existence, might subconsciously ignore psychic impressions and thus be more likely than normal to choose the wrong answer. Ironically then, extremely poor results on a psi test might be just as strong an indicator of psychic ability as positive results.

The Sheep-Goat Effect

The ramifications of the sheep-goat effect are more significant than Schmeidler and other parapsychologists may have imagined. Not only do fervent non-believers with latent psychic abilities score abnormally low on psi tests, the mere presence of such non-believers can inhibit the performance of active psychics. This effect is represented in several ways. Many unbelievers, particularly scientists and professional debunkers, can possess the Doubting Thomas Merit (p. 65). This Trait is possessed by persons with latent psychic powers, but who insistently reject the possibility that such powers exist. The result of this dichotomy is a sort of "psychic feedback" that inhibits any nearby psychic from using his capabilities. Each non-believer inflicts a cumulative -2 penalty on all attempts to use psychic phenomena. For some individuals, this dichotomy is even more pronounced and is represented by the Anti-Psi Merit (p. 65), which automatically reduces any nearby psychic attempting to use her powers to a chance die.

More generally, the sheep-goat effect imposes a societal limitation on the active use of psychic powers. Whenever a psychic openly uses any pow-


ers in the presence of ordinary people, particularly in a social context in which the application is wildly out of place (a laboratory, a convention of physics professors, a fundamentalist church), the psychic suffers a dice penalty determined by the situation. This penalty does not apply when the psychic uses a subtle power in a discreet fashion, such as quietly using telepathy on another student in a college classroom. Rather, social limitations imposed by the sheep-goat effect are triggered only when the psychic uses an extremely obvious power, such as telekinesis or pyrokinesis, or when the psychic openly asserts that she is using paranormal abilities, as when a telepath proudly claims to be able to read minds, effectively daring those nearby to disprove her assertions.

The practical result of the sheep-goat effect is to make it extremely difficult for psychics to prove the existence of their powers in any setting where those powers are openly doubted. Thus, a carnival palm reader faces little to no penalty, since only a small group of people are likely to observe her powers and any unbelievers are likely to ascribe events to luck or trickery. And yet, a psychic experiences a much more severe penalty if he attempts to demonstrate the existence of telekinesis in a laboratory to a group of cynical researchers who actively debunk his claims. The factors that penalize a psychic's abilities are listed below.

Dice Modifier	Witnesses
0	The psychic feat is performed as a séance, stage-magic show or in some similar situation in which strange happenings are expected.
0	None of the witnesses is particularly well educated, and most are fairly superstitious.
-1	The psychic feat is to be performed in front of more than five people.
-1	All of the witnesses are relatively well educated and fairly rational.
-2	The psychic feat is to be performed in front of more than 20 people.
-2	Per Doubting Thomas present. (See the Doubting Thomas Merit on p. 64).
-3	The psychic feat is to be performed in front of more than 100 people.
-3	The psychic feat is to be performed in a setting where locals strive to think in a highly rational manner, such as a college classroom or a laboratory.
-5	The psychic feat is being televised and broadcast over a large area.
-5	The psychic feat is performed in front of scientists or debunkers who actively look for any signs of trickery or deceit.

As a final blow, the sheep-goat effect renders non-believers strongly predisposed to view any supposed psychic phenomena as fraud or trickery. Whenever a psychic

openly proclaims his intent to use a psychic power, and he suffers a dramatic failure in the attempt, any non-believers tend to develop a mild aversion to the psychic. Depending on the personality of the unbeliever, she might be utterly convinced that the psychic is a fraud, even to the point of refusing to acknowledge obvious paranormal effects that the psychic is subsequently able to create, insisting that they are the result of trickery. A psychic suffers a -2 penalty on all Social rolls with non-believers for the remainder of the scene when he suffers a dramatic failure.



In the 1930s, psychologist Wilhelm Reich, a former protégé of Sigmund Freud, hypothesized the existence of an ambient energy called “orgone,” which he asserted was a byproduct of living organisms. As Reich’s experiments progressed, he expanded his orgone theories to suggest that the energy was actually a primordial “cosmic power,” and that instead of being produced by life, orgone influenced the growth of life, as well as weather patterns, gravity and many other phenomena. In 1941, Reich actually persuaded physicist Albert Einstein to test one of Reich’s “orgone accumulators,” and Einstein initially reported that the device was seemingly able to produce heat without any discernible source of energy, supporting Reich’s claim that the device could draw ambient orgone energy from the atmosphere. Einstein abruptly reversed himself in early 1942, however, and declared that the heat seemingly produced by the accumulator was actually the result of thermal convection. More than 60 years later, MIT researcher Eugene Mallove claimed to have disproved the thermal-convection explanation shortly before his 2004 murder. None of Mallove’s notes pertaining to his orgone research have been recovered. As for Einstein, he went into seclusion shortly after his abrupt break with Reich. According to some accounts, Einstein’s copies of Reich’s notes and the prototype orgone accumulator were turned over to scientists affiliated with the Manhattan Project.

After Reich’s affiliation with Einstein, both the Federal Drug Administration and the Federal Bureau of Investigation opened an intensive investigation into Reich and his accumulators, which the researcher claimed had curative properties. The FBI quickly abandoned its investigation, publicly stating that it found neither any sign of subversion nor any evidence of a national-security risk. The devices taken by the FBI for study were never returned, and Reich’s FBI file remains classified to the present day. The FDA, for its part, accused Reich of peddling a quack cancer cure, without making any inquiry into the scientific validity of orgone theory. The FDA destroyed all of Reich’s accumulator models, books and research notes, and secured an injunction against him writing about or marketing anything pertaining to “orgone energy.” In 1957, Reich was charged with defying the injunction when one of his research assistants shipped an orgone accumulator from his office in Maine to his home in New York. After 15 minutes of deliberation, the jury convicted Reich of criminal contempt, and he was sentenced to two years in Danbury Federal Prison, where he died the day before he was eligible for parole. Reich’s daughter Eva claimed that her father was

poisoned, but no autopsy was performed. The assistant who actually violated the injunction served one year in jail and apparently committed suicide shortly after his release.

Government-sponsored inquiry into parapsychology began in earnest in the 1950s, when the Soviet Union trained espionage agents in ESP and clairvoyance, and experimented with telepathy in interrogation. The United States was slow to follow, but in the 1970s the CIA initiated a number of studies on the existence of clairvoyance, the most prominent of which was Project Star Gate. It explored the feasibility of remote sensing as a tool for spying on Russian military installations. Officially, these experiments were “inconclusive,” and Project Star Gate ended in the early 1980s. Now, information on Project Star Gate acquired under the Freedom of Information Act is severely redacted for national security reasons. Conspiracy theorists allege that the project was only the public face for the government’s study of psychic phenomena, that the government was really involved in espionage via telepathy and clairvoyance, manipulation of global stock markets through precognition and even psychically-powered assassination squads.

Since Project Star Gate ended, other programs have come and gone, all of which are uniformly resistant to Freedom of Information Act requests. Most recently, the U.S. Air Force commissioned a report on the feasibility of psychic teleportation, which ultimately recommended the expenditure of \$7.5 million in government funds to conduct teleportation experiments. Officially, the Air Force has announced that it has no plans to continue research, but the full details of its budgetary allocations for R&D are highly classified. Researchers who first suggested this area of inquiry have, such as J.B. Rhine before them, “taken an early retirement.”

In the private sector, belief in psychic powers entered the mainstream in the 1970s, due in large part to the career of Israeli-born mentalist Uri Geller, who specialized in bending spoons and keys in front of crowds. Indeed, a number of television viewers came forward after watching Geller’s TV specials in Britain to claim that spoons and keys in their homes spontaneously bent in response to his powers, and that broken clocks miraculously worked again.

Gellar’s popularity was so widespread that both British and American governments rushed forth experts to “prove” that he was a fraud. The most prominent was James Randi, also known as “The Amazing Randi,” a stage magician and professional debunker who staged his own performances in which he duplicated all of Geller’s allegedly psychic feats through conventional sleight of hand and stage trickery. Geller attempted to sue Randi for libel, but the case was thrown out on suspicious legal grounds. Finally, in 1973, Geller’s career as a professional psychic ended when he was “ambushed” on *The Tonight Show* by then-host Johnny Carson, who unexpectedly produced silverware that had been prepared by Randi and challenged Geller to bend them telekinetically in front of a live audience. Geller was unable to do so, and his claims that he was somehow prevented from exercising his powers in the studio setting were derided by the media. Embittered, he retired from the public spotlight.

The conflict between Randi and Geller has been played out many times over the years, with professional debunkers

pursuing genuine psychics, frauds and charlatans. For many such debunkers, the passionate drive to expose the truth is more than just an earnest calling. It may also be a powerful psychological imperative caused by repressing one's own latent psychic powers. Many such individuals possess the Doubting Thomas Merit, and a few might even be classified as Anti-Psi. Tormented by the subconscious knowledge that they themselves may possess latent psychic powers, these people cling monomaniacally to the belief that psychic feats are not real.

Story Hook: Family Matters

If a character is at all public about her powers, such as operating openly or even indiscreetly as a police advisor, she may attract the attention of a paranormal investigator bent on exposing the “fraudulent” nature of her powers. Such a nemesis might be a famous magician or scientist on a general crusade against “New Age claptrap.” He might have sprung up closer to home, though — perhaps as a sibling, former lover or someone else from the psychic’s “normal life” who rejected his own latent psychic powers, maybe after being forced to grow up exposed to the character’s weird lifestyle. The nemesis feels compelled to help the psychic to “grow up,” to become “normal” or perhaps to “stop embarrassing the family.” He doggedly follows the character, challenging her claims and attempting to guilt trip her into rejecting her paranormal claims, all the while resolutely denying any evidence of psychic ability that crosses his path. Such an adversary might reduce a psychic to a chance die on an important roll, perhaps resulting in a dramatic failure that could be humiliating or deadly, depending on the circumstances.

The early years of the 21st century saw the rise of John Edwards, a psychic medium and host of the television program *Crossing Over*. Edwards claimed to communicate with the dead on behalf of audience participants. The show was canceled in 2003 amid accusations that he was a fraud who deceived his audience through cold readings and other stage-mentalistic tricks. Nevertheless, Edwards retains considerable popularity and influence; several of his books on spiritualism and New Age philosophy are bestsellers. Many other lesser psychics and mentalists have also come and gone in recent years, with some purported psychics becoming quite wealthy as advisors to celebrities and politicians, or as the public faces of various “phone psychic” networks. The most famous such personality was Youree Harris, better known as “Miss Cleo” of late-night infomercials for “Miss Cleo’s Mind and Spirit Psychic Network.”

The opinions of less-famous psychics about these two personalities are mixed. Some characters might be pleased to have pop-culture “lightning rods” who draw the at-

ention of debunkers from the characters’ own activities. Other characters are disgusted at the sensationalism of these “professional psychics,” even if their capabilities are legitimate. In general, most psychics avoid public notoriety. Some quietly aid law-enforcement officials with visions. Other psychics conceal abilities entirely, using them to gain competitive advantages in conventional jobs. Finally, some seek to avoid use of their powers entirely, hoping they can escape the perpetual weirdness that follows in their wake.

From Cayce to Geller to Edwards, the 20th and early 21st centuries have been a golden age for psychics, or at least for people who claim to be psychic. The attitudes that might have sent a nascent psychic to the stake just a few centuries ago are now rejected as ignorant and superstitious, although modern psychics are still wise to avoid exercising their powers amid rural, uneducated people in rustic areas. Regardless, every individual with psychic power, from earth-shaking telekinetics to lowly Tarot readers, inevitably finds that his talents lead into dark places amid strange events.

Psychic Merits

Psychic powers are roughly divided into four distinct categories for our purposes: ESP, mediumism, psychokinesis and telepathy. This division is mainly organizational, and nothing prevents a character from having Merits in different categories, provided the Storyteller approves. All psychic powers are described mechanically as psychic Merits. Some have multiple dot scores, with higher ratings representing greater potency. Others simply modify related powers, giving a psychic new ways in which use existing abilities. Many of the Merits listed also have prerequisites, typically other more common powers within the same category.

Generally, the Merits in this chapter should be available at character creation only, and cannot be purchased during play with experience. And yet, Storytellers may choose to allow players to later purchase additional psychic Merits at normal costs to represent a character branching out into other areas of mental development. Or Storytellers may permit players of psychics and even ordinary people to purchase psychic Merits in response to miraculous or tragic in-character events, such as exposure to weird chemicals or supernatural phenomena awakening latent capabilities. Regardless, players should never purchase psychic Merits without Storyteller approval.

Options

Some Merits list “Options,” which are alternative versions of a power that limit it in some way, such as an optional version of Precognition that can be used only with a focus such as Tarot cards or a crystal ball. If a player chooses one of these optional variants, he gains one or more bonus dice on all attempts to use the limited power. *Unless a Merit states otherwise, all options confer a +1 die bonus to uses of the power.* Thus, a fortune-teller who uses Tarot cards receives a +1 bonus on all fortune-telling attempts, but is not able to use her precognitive abilities without Tarot cards. In some cases, more than one option for a particular power may be taken or a single option may be taken more than once. In



other cases, particular options are mutually exclusive. Use common sense in permitting combinations of options.

Defending Against Psychic Powers

Psychic powers that affect other beings generally have some type of Resistance Trait associated with them. If a power's effect is binary — that is, it either works or it doesn't — then it is subject to a contested roll (with a Resistance Attribute + any applicable Supernatural Advantage such as Blood Potency, Gnosis or Primal Urge being rolled for the target). If a power's effects are measured in degrees of success, such as with damage in combat, the power is subject to a dice-pool penalty. Most commonly, Defense is subtracted from directed attacks that are capable of being evaded, Stamina is subtracted from psychic effects that alter a target's physical body, Composure is subtracted from effects that manipulate a target's emotions and Resolve is subtracted from effects that seek to control a target's mind. A character defending against a mind-altering attack (but not a psychic attack targeting his body) can opt for an All-Out Mental Defense, which is a determined effort to resist a power turned against him, bringing all conscious drive and effort to bear. The effort doubles his Resolve or Composure (whichever is subtracted from the psychic's dice pool), but the subject can take no other action during the turn except move up to his Speed. An All-Out Mental Defense cannot be performed if the subject has already performed an action in a turn. Think of this effort as a mind-based form of dodging a physical attack.

Concentration Powers

Some powers require concentration to use. While a psychic concentrates fully on maintaining an effect, he can take no actions except for simple movement (up to his Speed in a turn; he cannot run), and he loses his Defense against attacks, although he can seek cover from ranged attacks. If the character is harmed or otherwise affected in some way that might break his concentration, such as with a sudden loud noise or an argument breaking out among others in a room, the player must successfully roll Resolve + Composure in order for the character to maintain concentration.

Trance States

Some powers require a psychic to enter a trance state before they can be used. Such effects note if a trance is required in their descriptions. While a psychic is in a trance, he is at a -5 penalty to all Perception rolls, he loses his Defense and he can take no action other than to use his psychic powers unless he ends the trance. If the psychic fails in a Perception roll to detect someone approaching, he may even be susceptible to a killing blow (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 168). Unless a psychic ends a trance prematurely, the effect persists for a scene, or for the lesser of the psychic's Stamina or Resolve in hours with an exceptional success.

Entering a Trance

Dice Pool: Composure + Wits + equipment

Action: Extended (10 successes; one roll per turn as a full-turn action)

Suggested Equipment: Yoga mat (+1), prayer beads (+1), meditative music or relaxation tapes (+2), meditation room (+3)

Possible Penalties: Loud noises (-1), nearby children (-1), uncomfortable environment (-1), lack of food (-1 to -3), being in danger or in combat (-3 to -5)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character fails to enter a trance and is unable to try again until the next scene.

Failure: No successes are accumulated in the latest effort, but another roll may be allowed in the next turn. The effort may be prohibited altogether if time or conditions don't permit.

Success: Successes are accumulated toward the effort, and if the required number is met, the character enters a trance state.

Exceptional Success: You gather five successes in excess of the 10 needed. The character slips into a trance state so easily that you gain a +1 bonus on any psychic powers used during the session.

ESP Merits

ESP Merits permit a psychic to perceive things that lie beyond the mundane senses of normal people. The most common form of ESP allows one to perceive contemporaneous events happening far away. Other powers allow a seer to cast her senses through time instead of space, observing the past of objects or the future of individuals. People who exercise ESP Merits are sometimes referred to as clairvoyants, seers or ESPers.

Note: Some supernatural effects may make it more difficult to use an ESP Merit to learn about a specific subject. For example, a mage's Occultation Merit imposes a dice penalty equal to its dots to any psychic attempts to locate or observe the mage through clairvoyance, pre- or postcognition or through psychometry. Alternatively, at the Storyteller's discretion, such plainly supernatural effects might not prevent the psychic from observing a mage's location, but the psychic might automatically fail to perceive a shielded character present at the scene.

Astral Projection (●●●)

Prerequisites: Clairvoyance. A clairvoyant who has the "Uncontrolled Clairvoyance" option cannot learn to project astrally.

Effect: Astral Projection allows a clairvoyant to completely free his consciousness from his physical form and travel mentally to distant locations while leaving his body behind. The psychic must first enter a trance state (see "Entering a Trance," p. 35). Then, the player makes a reflexive Stamina + Composure roll to determine how long the character can remain away from his body. Once separated, the psychic can instantly travel to any location he is capable of perceiving with a normal Clairvoyance roll (Wits + Composure; see p. 37).

Once at a desired location, a psychic can move around freely but is generally intangible and invisible. He can, however, be perceived through any appropriate psychic means (such as Aura Reading ●●●●●). Other astral projectors or other beings existing in Twilight — an ephemeral state in the material world, such as a ghost's — can perceive him nor-

mally. Returning to his body requires an instant action and a successful Wits + Composure roll, or the clairvoyant can return to his body reflexively with an exceptional success.

If the psychic's physical body is tampered with while he is "gone," he may sense the intrusion with a successful Intelligence + Composure roll. The psychic always feels actual pain inflicted on his physical body and may react accordingly. However, an astral projector's physical body may be subjected to a killing blow if the body is left unprotected (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 168).

If a psychic using Astral Projection uses the optional form of Clairvoyance that grants only one sense, he is able to use only that one sense while projected. A projector who has only clairaudience is at a severe disadvantage, as he arrives at a location and is functionally blind. Characters whose Clairvoyance grants only vision are slightly less handicapped, but are still effectively deaf. While astrally projecting, a psychic is free to use any other ESP or telepathic Merit he possesses. Thus, a "deaf" projector with Mind Reading can attempt to "ride the senses" of someone nearby, while one with Animal Empathy could do the same to a nearby animal.

Cost: 1 Willpower to project. None to navigate.

Dice Pool: Stamina + Composure (to determine the duration of the projection). Wits + Composure (to navigate astrally to the desired location)

Action: Extended to enter the trance state. Instant to release the astral form and navigate to the desired location.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic is rendered unable to use his Astral Projection power until he has rested for at least eight hours. A dramatic failure on a navigation roll means he is lost and has traveled to some unintended and possibly dangerous location.

Failure: The psychic fails to project, but can try again. A failure on the navigation roll means that the ESPer has missed his destination, but is close enough to try again.

Success: The psychic can maintain his astral form for up to 10 minutes per success. A success on the navigation roll means that he finds the location he was seeking.

Exceptional Success: The psychic maintains his astral form for the duration of his trance. An exceptional success on a navigation roll gives the psychic a +2 bonus on all Perception rolls while at the desired location, as well as a +1 bonus on any other psychic powers used astrally.

Combat on the Astral Plane

An astral traveler remains in the material world but is said to be in "Twilight," which psychics generally interpret to mean out of phase with physical reality in a manner similar to ghosts. Generally, astrally projected beings are intangible and invisible with respect to anything and anyone in the physical plane, and are visible but still intangible to each other. Thus, an astrally projecting psychic could not, for example, get into a brawl with either a ghost or another astrally projecting

psychic. Such beings could still use psychic powers or Numina against each other as normal, though.

An astrally projecting psychic who also possesses the Ghost-Calling Merit (see p. 45) can choose to become solid with reference to a ghost with the expenditure of a Willpower point. If the psychic does so, his normal Attributes are used for determining dice pools for any of his psychic powers. In direct combat against ghosts or spirits, assume that an astrally projecting psychic has a Power equal to the higher of her Intelligence or Presence, a Finesse equal to the higher of her Wits or Manipulation and a Resistance equal to the lower of her Resolve or Composure. In any event, astrally projecting psychics and vampires using the Auspex Discipline called Twilight Projection are never solid with reference to each other (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 123). Although a vampire and a projector are capable of perceiving each other and communicating, the psychic can never affect or be affected by the vampire.

Clairvoyance (••••)

Effect: When most people discuss ESP, they really refer to clairvoyance — the power to perceive things beyond the normal range of human senses. The default form of clairvoyance permits a seer to project all of her senses to a distant location, observing what happens there as if she were physically present. The events witnessed happen contemporaneously. The seer can neither see into the future nor into the past of the location viewed, unless she also has precognition and/or postcognition. A person who possesses this Merit is often referred to as a clairvoyant. While this power is in use, a player is at a -2 penalty to all Perception rolls pertaining to both the status of her character's body and anything going on in the character's immediate surroundings.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Composure

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character receives erroneous or misleading information.

Failure: The character is unable to project her senses.

Success: The character can perceive events at the location she wishes to observe for up to one scene.

Exceptional Success: The character can “move around,” changing the vantage point of her vision at will. She can even “pause” and “rewind” as needed, although she cannot see what happened before her vision began (see “Postcognition,” below).

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

+2 The intended vision is of a person or place with which the clairvoyant has a strong emotional attachment, such as with a loved one or home.

- +1 The intended vision is of a person or place with which the clairvoyant has some emotional attachment, such as with a friend or workplace.
- +1 The clairvoyant holds some object or is in the presence of someone with a strong emotional attachment to the subject of the desired vision, or is in a location strongly resonant with the desired vision (such as the last place a missing person was seen).
- 0 The clairvoyant attempts to perceive someone she knows personally and whose location is currently known.
- 1 The clairvoyant either does not know the person whom she attempts to scry or she has no idea of the location she attempts to scry. If both situations apply, the penalty is -2.
- 2 The person or location that's the subject of the intended vision is not currently resonant with strong emotion. That is, it is hard to scry a location if nothing interesting is happening there at the moment, and it is hard to scry a person if he is simply asleep or watching TV as opposed to running for his life. This penalty may also apply if the intended subject of this vision is dead, although that may depend on the situation and the Storyteller.

Option [Crystal Gazer]: The clairvoyant can perceive only the target location while focusing on some type of special surface such as a mirror or crystal.

Option [Eyes of Another]: The psychic can view a scene only through the eyes of someone witnessing that scene. Thus, the clairvoyant cannot scry a location if no one is present there. The clairvoyant can get a +1 bonus if she can simply choose any person to view through, or she can get a +2 dice bonus if she is limited to only seeing through the eyes of a certain class of individuals. For example, the title character in *The Eyes of Laura Mars* had the power to observe murders taking place, but only through the eyes of the murderer and only in an uncontrolled manner. A character with those options gains +4 bonus on all Clairvoyance rolls — +2 for the Eyes of Another option and +2 for the Uncontrolled option (see below).

Option [One Sense Only]: The clairvoyant can perceive the target location with only one of his senses, most commonly vision or hearing (i.e., clairaudience).

Option [Trance Only]: The psychic can use his clairvoyant powers only while in a trance state (see p. 35). While the psychic is using his powers, he suffers the -5 penalty for Perception rolls inflicted by trances, instead of the normal -2 penalty. A psychic with this option gains a +2 dice bonus to activate this power.

Option [Uncontrolled]: A psychic whose powers are uncontrolled has visions only at times of the Storyteller's choosing, although the psychic should generally have at least one vision per session. A common form of Uncontrolled Clairvoyance causes the ESPer to perceive only visions of nearby individuals who are in danger. Another form might be combined with the Eyes of Another option (see above) to cause the ESPer to involuntarily see “through the eyes” of

another person, perhaps a serial killer who stalks prey. The psychic can attempt to force a vision, but doing so reduces the player to a chance die. The psychic's player spends a Willpower point only on Clairvoyance rolls if a vision is forced.

Story Hook: The Vision Thing

Many ESP Merits give Storytellers a chance to draw characters into stories automatically. If a character has the power of psychometry, any object he touches might provide clues to its past, motivating investigation. Precognition allows the Storyteller to give a player vital clues to some future event that must be prepared for — and apocalyptic visions if the character refuses to investigate. Clairvoyance might curse a character to know when an innocent person is in danger, and these visions of calamities (past or future) might compel him to intervene. Of course, the best example of using ESP as a story hook comes from Stephen King's *The Dead Zone*. How will a character react when, upon casually shaking another person's hand, he learns that this seemingly respectable public figure is poised to do something horrible, whether murder a child or declare World War III?

Dowsing (●)

Prerequisites: Clairvoyance, Cayce Channeling or Spirit Channeling

A limited form of divination, dowsing is a technique that lets a psychic to search for hidden objects. Traditionally, dowsing was used to search for good places to dig wells for fresh water, although it was also used to find gold and oil with varying degrees of success. The procedure requires a psychic to walk around and concentrate on the object or substance to be found, while holding either a swinging pendulum or a stick called a divining rod. If the psychic is successful, the rod or pendulum swings slightly in the direction of whatever is sought. Exactly how dowsing works is unclear, even to psychics. Some say it is a form of clairvoyance, others a form of mediumship (with spirits moving the divining rod in the same way a ghost might affect a Ouija board). Still others say the practice calls upon the Universal Unconscious. Generally, dowsing can find things and not individuals, although the Storyteller might permit a psychic to perform feats such as find a missing person with a divining rod if the performer has some personal possession belonging to the subject.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult

Action: Extended. The number of successes required is determined by the Storyteller based on how well hidden or distant the substance is. A hidden safe might require three successes, while a fresh water source in the Sahara might require 20 or more. Each roll represents 30 minutes of dowsing.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic is led on a wild-goose chase far from his desired goal. He also loses all accumulated successes.

Failure: The current dowsing attempt is unsuccessful, but more rolls may be made.

Success: When the player has accumulated the number of successes required, the attempt succeeds.

Exceptional Success: The psychic might also gain insight into some other prize hidden nearby.

Dream Travel (● to ●●●●)

Prerequisites: Astral Projection, Mind Reading (either version) and Thought Projection (either version)

Effect: Dream Travel is a refinement of Astral Projection, combined with elements of telepathy. A dream traveler can cause her astral form to enter the mind of a sleeping person and interact with the sleeper during his dreams. The psychic must first astrally project using the normal rules for that Merit. She must then navigate astrally to the physical location of a sleeping person, although doing so may not require any roll if the sleeper is physically near the psychic's body. Once the psychic locates her subject, she can enter the subject's dreamscape and communicate with the sleeper as if the two were in the same physical location.

To the dream traveler, the dreamscape is exceptionally realistic, even more so than it is for the person who is actually having the dream. Anything encountered by the psychic in the dreamscape is "real" to her and potentially capable of causing her injury. Normally, this harm occurs only if the psychic enters a nightmare, the dream of a mortal who is a lucid dreamer able to defend himself against an intruder or if the traveler encounters someone else intruding in the same mind.

If a psychic is caught within another's nightmare, the psychic may be subjected to an attack, depending on the nature of the nightmare and how the psychic responds to it. If the dreamer possesses the Lucid Dreamer Merit (p. 67), he may be able to initiate dream attacks at the expense of one Willpower point per attack. (Anyone with Dream Travel can initiate attacks in her own dreams without the expenditure of a Willpower point.)

Regardless of the form the dream attack takes, all attacks are represented by a Wits + Resolve + Dream Travel pool, from which the target's Composure is subtracted. Even if the attack is the result of an ordinary person's nightmare, the nightmare itself may attack the intruding psychic using the dreamer's Wits + Resolve pool. Each success inflicts one point of "phantom damage" to the target.

Any phantom damage inflicted has no lingering effect once a psychic withdraws to her own body, *unless* the phantom damage is enough to kill her in a dream. In that case, the psychic's physical body dies instantly, usually of a heart attack or cerebral hemorrhage. Attacks initiated by lucid dreamers or by other dream travelers customarily inflict bashing damage. A psychic with Dream Travel ●●●● or higher can inflict lethal damage. No form of dream attack can inflict aggravated damage.



While a psychic uses this Merit, she is subject to all the limitations of Astral Projection, including limited awareness of her body's surroundings and vulnerability to a killing blow. The length of time a psychic can remain free of her body is determined by your initial Astral Projection roll. A dream traveler can remain within her subject's subconscious only while a dream takes place, however. Generally, REM cycles last between five and 45 minutes, so any attempt to enter and manipulate a dream does not usually last beyond a scene.

If a dreamer wakes or dies, any dream travelers present are expelled back to their bodies. A psychic can make minor cosmetic changes to the dreamscape with an instant Wits + Resolve roll. At the Storyteller's discretion, particularly vivid, evocative or just plain cool descriptions of how a psychic manipulates a dreamscape may translate into bonus dice.

Cost: 1 Willpower to project into another's dream. None to initiate dream attacks. Characters with the Lucid Dreamer Merit can initiate attacks by spending one Willpower point, but only in their own dreams.

Dice Pool: Wits + Resolve to enter a sleeping person's dream and to manipulate it. Prior to an entry effort, a psychic must successfully use Astral Projection in order to leave her body and travel to the target's location; Astral Projection typically requires a character to enter a trance first.

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic fails to enter the sleeper's mind and cannot try again until the sleeper's next

REM cycle. In dream combat, the psychic inflicts one point of phantom damage on herself.

Failure: The psychic simply fails to enter the sleeper's mind, or no damage is inflicted.

Success: The psychic successfully enters the sleeper's mind. Each success in dream combat inflicts a point of damage.

Exceptional Success: The psychic enters the sleeper's mind and gains a +1 bonus die to all other rolls for the duration of her stay.

Story Hook: Nightmares Given Form

Some psychics gifted with the power to travel the dreamscape claim to have encountered inhuman entities roaming the minds of subjects, beings that can track a projector back through astral space to her own body. According to such stories, a dream-traveling psychic generally encounters some sort of hostile entity within a subject's mind, the being terrorizing the subject with nightmares. Unless the psychic can destroy the entity where she finds it, the creature can follow the psychic back to her own body. Thereafter, the entity, sometimes referred to as a "Freddie" by horror-movie aficionados, is a constant fixture in the psychic's subconscious, able to manifest in any of her

dreams and attack her in sleep through terrifying nightmares that sometimes cause real damage. Worse, a Freddie may become contagious, able to infect anyone with whom a psychic has a strong emotional bond, inspiring deadly nightmares in that person. Opinion is divided on what these creatures are or from where they come, but whether they are alien entities or creatures from the id of the Universal Unconscious, they hunt their chosen prey with malefic

Postcognition (● or ●●●)

Prerequisites: Postcognition for the ● version. None for the ●●● version.

Effect: Your psychic has the ability to see into the past. If the roll to activate this power is successful, you are allowed to ask a variable number of questions about a past event based on your successes. The effort suffers a dice penalty based on temporal proximity, and the Storyteller should *always* roll for the player who uses Postcognition, since the player may be able to deduce when something might have occurred by noting the penalty applied, even if the roll is unsuccessful. Each success on the roll allows the player to ask one question about the past event viewed.

Dice Modifier	Proximity
0	Within a day
-1	Within a week
-2	Within a month
-3	Within a year
-4	Within 5 years
-5	Within 10 years*

* Each additional 10-year increment intensifies the dice penalty by -1.

The effort faces additional penalties if the character lacks any sort of sympathetic connection to the scene he wishes to view. If the psychic is present at the location where the past event took place, he suffers no penalty. If he is in the presence of a person who was present at the past event, the player suffers a -2 penalty. If the psychic is in possession of an object that was present at the scene of the past event, he suffers a -4 penalty. At the Storyteller's discretion, these penalties might be reduced, depending on the situation. For example, if a psychic attempts to view a violent murder by handling the murder weapon, he might suffer only a -2 penalty, while touching the actual murderer could eliminate any penalty.

Example: *Detective Halloran, who secretly uses his Postcognition abilities to help him solve crimes, examines a bloody knife used in a brutal homicide. The Storyteller rolls Halloran's Wits + Occult, applying a -1 penalty (due to the fact that the murder took place more than a day but less than a week ago) and a -2 penalty (for not actually being at the crime scene, but simply holding the murder weapon). The roll yields three successes, and Halloran gets a brief glimpse of the murder itself. His player can ask three questions about the vision. Triggering the vision costs the player one Willpower point.*

Psychics with this Merit commonly possess the Precognition Merit, too. If the psychic does have the Precognition

Merit, the cost of Postcognition is only one Merit dot. If the psychic acquires the three-dot version of this power, he does not need Precognition as a prerequisite.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The seer has a wildly false or misleading vision. Since the Storyteller makes the roll on the player's behalf, allow the player to ask an arbitrary number of questions, say one to three, and invent erroneous or misleading information about the scene observed.

Failure: Failure indicates that the seer fails to produce a vision.

Success: The character has a postcognitive vision. The player may ask one question about the vision per success. No more than one successful vision about a specific scene may be had every 24 hours.

Exceptional Success: Additional successes are their own reward. The Storyteller may point out significant details about which the player does not think to ask.

Precognition (●●●●)

Effect: Precognition represents the power to predict the future. This power is perhaps the most difficult to incorporate into games, and the Storyteller should proceed cautiously. Precognition is also difficult for characters to use properly. While precognitive visions might give a psychic a clear vision of a future event, the future changes constantly based on people's actions. Thus, when a psychic receives a completely "accurate" vision of the future, time remains in flux, and a seer can never be entirely sure whether his actions in response to the vision will prevent it from coming to pass or ensure that it will do so. Even with an exceptional success, a character's vision can still be distorted, blurry or possibly even wrapped in symbolism, particularly in the case of dream precognition or precognition through a focus. Characters must generally use the Occult Skill to interpret what they perceive. Psychics who possess the Precognition Merit are sometimes called "precogs." Those who require foci such as cards or tea leaves are sometimes referred to as "seers" or (often disparagingly) "fortune-tellers."

A precog can never predict the immediate future (i.e., what will happen next within the current scene). That is more the purview of the Danger Sense Merit (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 108). A roll to see the future suffers a penalty based on temporal proximity, and the Storyteller should *always* roll for a character who uses Precognition, since the player may be able to deduce when something might occur from noting the penalty applied, even if the roll is unsuccessful. Each success on the roll allows the player to ask one question about the future event.

Dice Modifier	Proximity
0	Within a day
-1	Within a week
-2	Within a month
-3	Within a year
-4	Within 5 years
-5	Within 10 years

* Each additional 10-year increment intensifies the dice penalty by -1.

Example: Madame Zora tells the fortune of a young girl who wants to know when she'll be married, and to whom. The Storyteller knows the girl will most likely get married in about three years, so a -4 penalty is applied to Zora's dice pool, which is rolled by the Storyteller. Zora gets two successes, and Zora's player can ask up to two questions about the girl's wedding. Triggering the vision costs Zora one Willpower point.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The seer has a wildly false or misleading vision. Since the Storyteller makes the roll on the player's behalf, allow him to ask an arbitrary number of questions, say one to three, and invent erroneous or misleading information about the scene observed.

Failure: Failure indicates that the precog fails to produce a vision.

Success: The character has a precognitive vision. The player may ask one question about the vision per success. No more than one successful vision about a specific scene may be had every 24 hours.

Exceptional Success: Additional successes are their own reward. The Storyteller may point out significant details about which the player does not think to ask.

Option [Precognitive Dreams]: The psychic's visions come to him in the form of dreams. Thus, he can trigger visions only after entering a trance state (see p. 35).

Option [Required Foci]: The psychic requires some form of divination tool in order to predict the future. Common types of divinatory tools are listed in the "Tools of the Fortune-Teller" sidebar. The psychic can attempt to force a vision without using such tools, but doing so reduces the effort to a chance die.

Option [Touch Precognition]: The psychic can predict the future of other people only while physically touching them. The psychic can predict a person's future with some object close to that person if the seer also has the Psychometry Merit. Otherwise, the psychic can only try to force a vision, which reduces the effort to a chance die. All attempts by a psychic to predict his own future are reduced to a chance die.

Option [Uncontrolled Precognition]: A psychic whose powers are uncontrolled has precognitive visions only at times of the Storyteller's choosing, although the psychic should generally have at least one vision per session.

Tools of the Fortune-Teller

Professional and amateur fortune-tellers have employed a dazzling array of tools throughout history to aid them in their arts, from Tarot to the *I Ching* to the bloody entrails of barnyard animals. Characters who take a Specialty in Occult [specific divination technique] gain a +1 bonus on all Precognition rolls. A character who takes the Required

Focus Option and who can predict the future *only* when using a particular divination tool gains an additional +1 bonus. The list below is just a sample.

Arithmancy: Divination through the interpretation of numbers.

Astrology: Divination through tracking the movements of heavenly bodies in relation to important dates in a subject's life.

Bibliomancy: Divination by randomly choosing passages from a book, most commonly the Bible.

Carrromancy: Divination by interpreting melted wax poured into cold water.

Cartomancy: Divination using Tarot cards or modern playing cards.

Crystalomancy: Divination through scrying in a crystal sphere.

Gyromancy: Divination through spinning about until the psychic enters an ecstatic state, as performed by dervishes.

Heiromancy: Divination through the entrails of sacrificed animals.

Oνειromancy: Divination through dreams.

Palmistry: Divination through examining the shape of lines on a person's hand.

Pyromancy: Divination by interpretation of fire, smoke or burning objects.

Sortilege: Divination through the casting of lots, bones or *I Ching*.

Psychometry (●●● or ●●●●)

Effect: Psychometry is a subset of clairvoyance that deals with perceiving the history of physical objects. Also known as "object reading," psychometry permits a psychic to handle an object for several seconds and then undergo a brief vision of important moments in the object's history. Exactly what the most important moments are is a matter for Storyteller discretion, but, as a general rule, the stronger the emotions connected with the item, the more clearly the psychometrist can see events connected to those feelings. Negative emotions tend to resonate more than positive ones, so the fact that a little girl loved her teddy bear will usually be overshadowed by fact that she was holding it as she watched her mother's murder.

Psychometry is generally tied to objects, not places, and an object must generally be small enough to fit in both hands. For every point of Size an object has over three, the psychic suffers a -1 penalty in addition to the penalties listed below. With the four-dot version of this Merit, location and size limitations do not apply. The psychometrist can perceive the history of any object he can touch, or he can simply walk into a location and "see" the most emotionally charged moments in the recent history of the place.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Composure

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic gets a “mixed message” or a very believable but entirely false impression. The Storyteller should always make chance-die rolls on behalf of players whose characters use this power.

Failure: Failure indicates that no impressions come through.

Success: Success yields a sense of the most emotionally charged event or person connected with the object read, as well as a reliable vision or sense of the memory in question. Only one successful reading of an object is allowed every 24 hours in order to see more events.

Exceptional Success: An exceptional success provides a comprehensive or extended chronological understanding of an object and its past, such as an entire slideshow of images.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

- | | |
|----|---|
| +1 | The character has drawn a psychic impression from the object before. |
| — | Recent and intense (a murder weapon used a few hours ago) |
| -1 | Recent but mild, or old and intense (a dusty family heirloom in a chest) |
| -2 | Emotionally shallow or long forgotten (a leisure suit found at a secondhand clothing store) |
| -3 | Disconnected or spiritually muted (a set of keys found several weeks ago) |
| -3 | Object read during a fight or other stressful circumstance |

Story Hook: The End Is Here

This story works best if one or more characters has some form of precognitive ability. As the chronicle begins, the precog's powers function normally. At some point in a story, however, she is asked to read the future of a Storyteller character. Regardless of what information the character wishes to know (and also regardless of the dice roll), the psychic perceives that the character will die on a particular day about six years in the future. No information about the character's death can be gained other than a certainty that the character will die, horribly and in great terror, on that particular date. The psychic probably finds this reading disconcerting. She finds it much more disconcerting when she attempts to read the future of other people, including friends and family, and learns that, save for those who will die even earlier, everyone whose future she reads is destined to die on the exact same day, horribly and in great terror. What apocalyptic event looms on the horizon, and is it possible for the psychic to avert it?

Mediumist Merits

A medium is a psychic able to use her own body as a vessel for acquiring unconscious knowledge or for interacting with spirit entities. Most parapsychologists point to the abilities of mediums as proof of other stages of existence — ghosts, past lives, even the Universal Unconscious. A few parapsychologists, however, reject these theories as scientifically unverifiable, and argue that a medium is simply a clairvoyant who is unaware that the source of her insights and abilities lies within her own subconscious.

It's even possible to define mediumship in terms of the mind and the soul. The former occurs as a result of conscious and unconscious thought being able to access the same from ghosts and spirits, entities beyond physical form. The latter type of mediumship involves a direct bond between the souls of psychic and entity, typically achieved through religious or ritualist means. This book defines two types of mediums: ones who possess Psychic Merits, their powers deriving from the mind, and ones who possess Spiritual Merits, their powers deriving from the soul. Faith and ritual-inspired mediums are defined as possible characters in Chapter 3.

Automatic Writing (••)

Effect: Automatic Writing permits a medium to access a source of paranormal knowledge through indirect means. Individual mediums disagree on whether they commune with spirits or the Universal Unconscious, or if they simply use clairvoyance. In any case, the mechanical effects are the same. The psychic must first enter a trance state (see p. 35). As she does so, she also randomly draws on paper, usually in a spiral pattern. As her trance takes hold, her writings become less random, and she draws pictures symbolic of whatever questions she seeks to answer. She continues to draw until the trance ends (usually an entire scene unless someone interrupts her), by which time she is typically surrounded by crudely scribbled drawings that may direct her to whatever she wants to find. The precise source of this knowledge is left to the Storyteller's discretion, but if a psychic possesses the Channeling or Clairvoyance Merits, they may grant a +2 bonus on automatic writing attempts.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Composure + Craft

Action: Instant; although the psychic must first enter a trance state

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic's drawings contain false or misleading information. The Storyteller should make any chance-die rolls for the player.

Failure: The automatic drawing attempt is unsuccessful.

Success: The psychic's drawings contain vital clues to whatever mystery she seeks to solve.

Exceptional Success: The drawings are particularly clear, giving a +1 modifier to any subsequent Investigation rolls pertaining to the drawings' subject matter.

Suggested Equipment: Any item that has a strong connection to the subject about which the psychic seeks information (+1 to +3, depending on the strength of the connection).

Story Hook: Messages from Beyond

A psychic capable of automatic writing must usually enter a trance in order to draw. Daydreams sometimes duplicate the effect of a trance, though, and a bored character doodling in a college classroom might be startled to see what she has written in the margins of her notes. Such random messages spawned by the psychic's power might include the secret thoughts of the professor teaching the class, a quick sketch of one of the other students lying murdered in his dorm room or perhaps just a brief message from persons unknown: "This time tomorrow, I'll kill you all!"

Channeling (●●●)

Prerequisites: Ghost-Calling for Spirit Channeling. None for Cayce Channeling or Past-Life Channeling.

Effect: Channeling represents a psychic's capacity to paranormally gain abilities that he does not normally possess. There are three distinct forms of channeling: Cayce Channeling, whereby the psychic accesses the Universal Unconscious to gain the knowledge he seeks; Past-Life Channeling, with

which he accesses the talents he possessed in a former life; and Spirit Channeling, with which a psychic allows a ghost to possess his body and give him access to its wisdom. The three versions are grouped together because the mechanical effects are the same. The psychic must successfully enter a trance before he can channel effectively to gain new Traits (see "Entering a Trance," p. 35). Skills gained last until the psychic next sleeps or until he attempts to channel again.

Cayce Channeling: With this technique (named for Edgar Cayce), the psychic enters a trance state in which he can access the Universal Unconscious, the sum total of accumulated human knowledge. Theoretically, anything that has ever been known can be rediscovered through this power. Few modern practitioners have psychic powers on par with Edgar Cayce's and are thus unable to utilize his techniques to their full extent. Cayce Channeling alone cannot be used to learn personal or secret details about people and places outside the psychic's vicinity. Clairvoyance and precognition are more useful for that purpose; Cayce was also skilled in both of those powers. Finally, while Cayce Channeling can give a psychic access to potentially any empirical knowledge, Cayce Channeling cannot convey talents that require kinesthetic training (i.e., Physical Skills). A psychic might be able to use this power to identify a particular sword as a 15th-century Japanese katana, but he could not use the power to gain any proficiency in swordsmanship. The Skill dots acquired through this power take the place of any dots a character already possesses. Thus, if a player wishes to raise his character's Skill above what it currently is, he must roll more successes than the character's current Skill dots.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult



Action: Instant; although the psychic must first enter a trance

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic is trapped in his trance state for hours as he contemplates the infinite mysteries of the Universal Unconscious. Waking requires a number of successes on an extended Intelligence + Resolve roll equal to the psychic's combined Stamina + Composure, with each roll taking one hour. Alternatively, the psychic is unable to access this Merit again until 24 hours pass.

Failure: The effort is unsuccessful.

Success: Each success is converted into one dot of a single Mental or Social Skill selected by the player. The number of successes must exceed the character's current Skill dots, if any, in order for him to gain any benefit from the power. The new rating lasts until the psychic next sleeps or until he next uses this power.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the normal benefit of extra successes, the psychic receives one bit of useful knowledge that he randomly comes across in the infinite Universal Unconscious, although the true significance of this nugget might not be immediately clear. If the successes exceed five, any more can be assigned to another single Mental or Social Skill of the character's choosing.

Past-Life Channeling: The psychic has a preternatural awareness of his own prior incarnations. After entering a trance state, he can summon forth the collective life experiences of one of his prior selves, merging it with his own personality. Although each person conceivably has countless past lives, the more recent they are, the more progressively difficult to channel. Most past lives capable of being channeled are from primitive eras, so this Merit cannot be used to access abilities that require a modern education. Mechanically speaking, Past-Life Channeling cannot be used to gain Mental Skills.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult

Action: Instant; although the psychic must first enter a trance

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic assumes a personality from a previous life. He manifests a new Storyteller-assigned personality and background for the duration of the scene, including a new Virtue and Vice. He may (or may not) retain the ability to speak his normal languages, and has no knowledge of any friends, his current situation or, indeed, anything about modern life, viewing everything through the lens of a Roman centurion, a courtesan from the era of Louis XIV, a Mississippi plantation owner on the eve of the Civil War or anything else of which the Storyteller can think.

Failure: The past-life regression was unsuccessful.

Success: Each success is converted into one dot of a single Physical or Social Skill selected by the player. The number of successes must exceed the character's current Skill dots, if any, in order for him to gain any benefit from the power. The new rating lasts until the psychic next sleeps or until he next uses this power.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the normal benefit of extra successes, the psychic can access the personal memories of the past life sharing his body. These new memories are lost when the power's effect ends. If the successes exceed five, any more may be assigned to another single Physical or Social Skill of the character's choosing.

Spirit Channeling: A medium uses his powers to commune with the dead to summon a ghost capable of providing the capabilities that he needs. After entering the necessary trance state, the medium invites a ghost with useful traits into his body. Spirit Channeling is also used by professional mediums to allow ghosts to commune directly with bereaved loved ones. The weakness of Spirit Channeling is that ghosts generally lack the capacity to interact normally with the living. Spirit Channeling can never be used to gain dots in Social Skills.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult

Action: Instant; although the psychic must first enter a trance

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The ghost summoned is instinctively hostile toward the psychic or the effect summons a different and more malevolent entity than intended. The hostile spirit can automatically succeed on a roll to possess the psychic (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 212).

Failure: The medium was unsuccessful.

Success: Each success is converted into one dot of a single Physical or Mental Skill selected by the player. The number of successes must exceed the character's current Skill dots, if any, in order for him to gain any benefit from the power. The new rating lasts until the psychic next sleeps or until he next uses this power.

Exceptional Success: In addition to the normal benefit of extra successes, the psychic can access the personal memories of the ghost who shares the psychic's body. If the successes exceed five, any more can be assigned to another single Physical or Mental Skill of the character's choosing.

Death Sight (●●●●)

Effect: Your medium can see dead people. The psychic may perceive and communicate with any ghost she encounters. The power allows only perception of and communication with ghosts in Twilight — ghosts tied to the material world and not to any otherworldly spirit world. The power affords no ability to contact spirits from the Shadow Realm that have entered the material world and that exist in Twilight. This Merit does not permit the psychic to aid ghosts in manifesting in the physical world (which requires the Ghost-Calling Merit). Most ghosts instinctively realize when a mortal can perceive them, and psychics who possess this power are often inundated by requests from desperate beings seeking help to resolve their earthly affairs.

A character who possesses the Ghost Ally Merit can acquire a limited version of Death Sight capable of letting her see and communicate with his ally by increasing the normal cost of the Ghost Ally Merit. (See "Ghost Ally," p. 65.)

Cost: None to sense the presence of ghosts. One Willpower to initiate communication with them.

Dice Pool: Wits + Composure

Action: Reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The medium is unable to use this Merit for the rest of the scene. Alternately, she may suffer horrific visions of some hellish underworld, inflicting a -2 penalty on all actions for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The attempt to activate Death Sight is unsuccessful.

Success: Your character can perceive and communicate with any ghost in her vicinity for the remainder of the scene. Such ghosts remain intangible to her, however.

Exceptional Success: The medium may gain a +2 bonus on all rolls made in dealing with ghosts during the scene.

Option [Permanent Death Sight]: The medium's ability to see the dead is always active. The stress of constantly being surrounded by spectral beings inflicts a mild derangement, such as Depression, Phobia, Irrationality or Avoidance. The player must still roll Wits + Composure in order to communicate with ghosts, but with this option, such rolls gain a +3 bonus.

Story Hook: I See Dead People — and Do Stuff for Them

Several movies, such as *Ghost*, *The Frighteners* and *The Sixth Sense*, depict the problems faced by psychics who can see the restless dead. Such entities are tied to the material world by powerful emotional anchors, unable to move on to the afterlife until the ghosts resolve whatever lingering issues tie them to the land of the living. When such a ghost encounters a psychic with the power to see her and even understand her entreaties, the ghost typically begs for aid in resolving her ties. If the psychic is initially unwilling to help, the ghost might become *insistent*, actively haunting him until he complies with her wishes, some of which may be immoral, illegal or potentially deadly. How is a psychic, whose only power is to perceive nearby ghosts, supposed to avenge a spook's death by killing the Mafia don — or worse, the vampire elder — who murdered her?

Ghost-Calling (●●●)

Effect: Your medium is capable of more than merely perceiving the dead; he can summon them to his presence and even assist them in crossing over to the physical world. A sufficiently talented medium can call out to an existing ghost and draw it to his location. By doing so, he can also

help the entity to “cross over,” aiding it in manifesting in the physical world or in using other ghostly powers that affect the material realm. Mediums who possess this Merit and Astral Projection (p. 36) have the option of physically interacting with ghosts and other beings in Twilight with the expenditure of a Willpower point. Ghost-Calling can only summon ghosts; other supernatural beings existing in Twilight are not affected.

Roll Wits + Occult for your character to make spiritual contact with an existing ghost. Not all deceased persons continue to exist as ghosts, and few ghosts persist more than a few decades after their demise. If a ghost is still in existence, the medium can potentially contact the ghost wherever it roams. Once the connection is formed, the medium is considered to be a temporary anchor for the ghost, and it can instantly come to his vicinity from wherever it may be. If the ghost is unwilling to come to the medium, he can attempt to compel its attendance with a successful Presence + Occult roll versus the ghost's Resistance in a contested action. Whether the ghost comes willingly or not, a Willpower point need not be spent for the ghost to travel to its new anchor. A medium cannot control a ghost in any meaningful way. A character with this Merit cannot automatically detect ghosts unless he also has the Death Sight Merit. If he does have that Merit, he receives a +2 bonus on all Ghost-Calling rolls.

When a medium forms a psychic connection with a ghost, the medium continues to serve as the ghost's anchor for the duration of the scene. If the medium attempts to sever the connection early, a successful Wits + Occult roll must be made versus the ghost's Power in a contested action, unless the ghost consents to the severing. When a medium no longer serves as an anchor, a ghost returns instantly to wherever it was prior to the summoning. Severing the psychic connection does not harm the ghost in any way.

While a connection is in force, a medium is considered an anchor for all purposes. Thus, the ghost can manifest in the psychic's vicinity without need for a roll. A medium may place himself in grave danger if he does not know with what sort of ghost he deals.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult versus an unwilling ghost's Resistance to become a temporary anchor to a ghost (resistance is reflexive). Presence + Occult versus an unwilling ghost's Resistance to forcefully summon one to the medium's vicinity.

Action: Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: A psychic connection is forged with some entity other than the one the medium sought. The medium may be unable to sever the connection or may even become a permanent anchor to a hostile ghost.

Failure: You fail to get more successes than the ghost. The attempt to contact or summon is unsuccessful.

Success: On a contact roll, more successes are rolled for the medium than for the ghost. The medium is considered an anchor for the remainder of the scene unless the effect is ended early. On a summoning roll, the ghost is compelled to come to the medium's vicinity.

Exceptional Success: On a contact roll, the player gets five or more successes, more than rolled for the ghost. The medium gains a +2 bonus on all rolls made in dealing with the ghost during the scene.

Dice Modifiers	Situation
+1 per extra person (max +3)	The medium attempts to summon a ghost during a séance in which he is assisted by believers (see “Believers,” on p. 64). During a séance, a ghost’s loved ones are considered to be believers unless they categorically reject the possibility of life after death.
+1	The medium has summoned this particular ghost before.
+1	The medium has some object or person (other than an anchor) important to the ghost during its life.
+3	The medium possesses another anchor of the ghost to be summoned.
-1	Per 50 years that the ghost has been dead.

Option [Spiritualist Medium]: The medium can interact with the dead only in the context of a séance. In order to utilize this power, she must be assisted by one or more people. The medium gains a die bonus equal to the total number of believers in the séance up to a maximum of +5.

Psychokinetic Merits

Psychokinesis governs the ability to affect physical objects and materials through the mind alone. By far the most common form of psychokinesis is telekinesis, which is the power to move objects without touching them. Less common are biokinesis, which allows a psychic to exert control over his own body and those of others; pyrokinesis, which allows a psychic to cause objects to spontaneously combust; and thermokinesis, which allows a psychic to manipulate ambient temperature. To the uninitiated, pyrokinesis and thermokinesis seem to overlap, as both can be used to start fires. In practice, however, pyrokinesis causes objects to burst into flames without first increasing temperature to ignition level, while thermokinesis raises the temperature around an object to be burned until it ignites. This subtle distinction plays an important role in how the two powers function in the field. Other more rare forms of psychokinesis are also discussed here. In general, psychics with any form of psychokinesis are referred to as psychokinetics, while those with specific powers are often called telekinetics, pyrokinetics or by similar terms.

Biokinesis (● to ●●●●●)

Effect: Biokinesis governs a psychic’s ability to manipulate the biological processes of living things. The scientific explanation for biokinesis eludes most parapsychologists. The most commonly accepted explanation relies on Wilhelm Reich’s theories regarding orgone energy, which are consistent with biokinetics’ claims that they can perceive and manipulate some form of ambient “life energy.” Biokinesis permits a psychic to manipulate his own personal life force to alter his body in three ways. First,

Biokinesis is a prerequisite for a number of other powers that allow a psychic to manipulate life energy. Second, the power can aid a psychic in attempts to control his own mind and body. Each dot in Biokinesis is added as a bonus die to all attempts to either meditate (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 51) or to enter a trance state (see p. 35).

Finally, Biokinesis allows a psychic to make minor alterations to his own physical body, temporarily affording him the benefit of certain Physical or Mental Merits, including some from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** and others listed here. Each Merit gained this way has a “success cost” equivalent to the Merit’s normal rating. The player must make an extended Intelligence + Composure roll with each roll representing a number of minutes equal to the success cost of the desired Trait. A Merit gained through Biokinesis lasts for the duration of a scene unless stated otherwise. Normally, the psychic can gain only a single Merit with a roll, but a biokinetic’s successes can be spent on multiple Merits with an exceptional success. In order to be able to use a Merit, the psychic must meet any prerequisites for that trait, and the psychic must have Biokinesis dots equal to [the success cost of the Merit +1]. The Merits that can be acquired through this power include the following:

Eidetic Memory (Two successes): See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 108. This Merit lasts for one scene.

Fast Reflexes (One or two successes): See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 110. This Merit lasts for one scene.

Fleet of Foot (One to three successes): See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 112. This Merit lasts for one scene.

Fresh Start (One success): See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 112. This Merit lasts for one scene.

Hysterical Strength (Variable successes): The psychic can trigger a massive surge of adrenaline, temporarily boosting his own Strength. For every success spent to purchase Hysterical Strength, the psychic increases his Strength by one dot to a maximum of 5. Doing so is very taxing and potentially life threatening. Every *turn* in which the psychic actually uses his augmented Strength (for example, to lift something heavy or to strike a powerful blow), he suffers one point of bashing damage. The increase in adrenaline also makes the psychic extremely excitable, and he is at a -1 penalty on all Composure-based rolls to resist provocation to anger while the power is in effect. This Merit lasts for a number of turns equal to the psychic’s Biokinesis rating.

Improved Awareness (One to three successes): For each success spent, the psychic gains a +1 bonus on all Perception rolls. This Merit lasts for one scene.

Improved Immune System (Four successes): While this Merit is active, the psychic can attempt to cure himself of diseases, poisons or drug effects by temporarily heightening the effectiveness of his immune system. The player must make an extended Stamina + Resolve roll, with each roll reflecting one hour recovering from a drug or poison or one day spent recuperating from an illness. During this period, the character can take no action more strenuous than walking, and, ideally, should have complete bed rest. The number of successes required is determined by the severity of the disease, drug or poison from which the psychic seeks to recover. Generally, common colds require three to five, while cancer, AIDS and



other persistent or deadly diseases might require as many as 30 successes to send into remission. Similarly, a single success might be required to overcome the effects of alcohol or minor food poisoning, while five or so might be required to overcome the effects of LSD or a rattlesnake bite. Note that if a poison or toxin is especially fast acting — having a lethal effect within turns or minutes rather than hours or days — this capability may be of no use against it.

This power can affect only mundane diseases, drugs and poisons. It cannot aid the psychic in curing himself of a blood bond. This power also does not affect any supernatural diseases or poisons. It also has no affect on psychological addictions, although it can cure the physiological effect of an addiction.

Iron Stamina (One to three successes): See the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 113. This Merit lasts for one scene.

Iron Stomach (Two successes): See the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 113. This Merit lasts for one scene.

Natural Immunity (One success): See the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 113. This Merit lasts for one day per dot of Biokinesis or until the psychic uses his Biokinesis again, whichever comes first.

Pain Resistance (Three successes): The psychic becomes extraordinarily resistant to the physical side effects of pain and injury. Wound penalties are reduced by one, and the character gains a +1 bonus on rolls to stay conscious after all Health boxes have been filled with bashing damage, all for the duration of the scene.

Quick Healer (Four successes): See the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 113. This Merit lasts for one day per dot of Biokinesis or until the psychic uses his Biokinesis again, whichever comes first.

Strong Back (One success): See the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 113. This Merit lasts for one scene.

Strong Lungs (Three successes): See the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 113. This Merit lasts for one scene.

Toxin Resistance (Two successes): See the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 113. This Merit lasts for one day per point of Biokinesis or until the psychic uses his Biokinesis again, whichever comes first.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Composure

Action: Extended

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic suffers one point of bashing damage due to painful psychic feedback. He cannot attempt to use his Biokinesis powers for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The psychic fails to accumulate any successes for now, but may keep trying, or utterly fails to manifest any biokinetic benefits.

Success: Accumulated successes can be used to temporarily acquire a single desired Merit, provided the psychic meets any prerequisites and his Biokinesis dots equal or exceed the desired Merit's success cost, plus one.

Exceptional Success: Accumulated successes can be used to acquire multiple Merits temporarily, with successes allocated for dots as the player chooses.

Cryokinesis (● to ●●●●●)

Prerequisites: A character's dots in this Merit cannot be higher than the lesser of her Resolve or Stamina.

Effect: Cryokinesis permits a psychic to decrease ambient temperature. The player must spend one Willpower point to activate, and then roll Intelligence + Composure. The effectiveness of the cryokinetic's power is based on her Merit dots, with successes rolled lowering the temperature according to this chart.

Merit Dots	Temperature Ranges
•	2 degrees per success
••	5 degrees per success
•••	10 degrees per success
••••	15 degrees per success
•••••	25 degrees per success

When used to attack a moving target, treat Cryokinesis as a ranged attack. Defense does not apply, and the temperature shift bypasses armor unless the protection has some type of thermal aspect or the protection is a supernatural armor capable of protecting against cold. The attack also ignores cover, since the character can potentially lower the temperature over an area big enough to encompass even someone behind full cover. Cryokinesis affects the temperature of everything within the affected area, so living targets suffer a drop in body temperature commensurate with successes rolled.

Short range for a cryokinetic attack is equal to a psychic's Intelligence + Wits + Cryokinesis dots in yards. Medium range is twice that distance and imposes a -2 penalty on an attack dice pool. Long range is up to twice medium range and imposes a -4 penalty on an attack dice pool. The Size of the area to be affected is subtracted from the cryokinetic's dice pool. Thus, an attempt to freeze a human-sized target suffers a -5 penalty. However, physically touching the object to be affected confers a +2 bonus on the roll.

Once a psychic has successfully lowered the temperature in a given location, he can do one of three things: (1) maintain the reduced temperature as long as he concentrates, (2) release his concentration and let temperature equalize normally or (3) use his Cryokinesis powers again to lower the temperature even further. Thus, with time and a prodigious amount of Willpower, a cryokinetic can reduce ambient temperature to low levels, although the absolute lowest temperature that any cryokinetic can achieve is about -400 degrees, well above absolute zero.

Cryokinesis is potentially deadly to living beings. The record for the lowest body temperature in a human is approximately 60 degrees Fahrenheit, although that patient lost all four limbs as a result. When Cryokinesis is used against a human, the victim suffers nothing more than discomfort until her internal body temperature is reduced by 10 degrees. At that point, the victim suffers a -1 penalty to Dexterity, Strength and Wits (and consequently, a -1 penalty to Initiative and potentially Defense, and a -2 penalty to Speed). For every additional five degrees of reduction, this Attribute penalty intensifies by an additional -1. If any of a victim's Dexterity, Strength or Wits is reduced to zero, the victim is immobilized due to the onset of hypothermia. Also, if a victim's body temperature is reduced by 20 degrees or more, she takes one point of lethal damage per turn spent subjected to the cryokinetic attack. If this lethal damage crosses over into aggravated damage, the victim suffers frostbite and may lose Attribute dots or gain Flaws to represent the loss of fingers or even limbs.

Most physical objects suffer no direct damage from low temperatures, but pipes can burst from frozen water, and machines that depend on lubricants may seize up if ambient temperature drops below freezing. At temperatures of 50 degrees below zero, trees snap and splinter spontaneously as heavy ice accumulates on their branches. Ice accumulates on streets and bridges, making travel hazardous. At 100 degrees below zero, almost any amount of water within an area is flash frozen, and living creatures are killed almost instantly unless protected somehow. Vampires and the undead are almost completely immune to low temperatures, but at temperatures of -100 or lower, a vampire's body might well freeze solid. Unless she can thaw herself out (through the use of blood or Disciplines), she may well remain paralyzed when the sun comes up the next morning.

Once a psychic ceases to focus her attention on a specific location, temperatures equalize normally. In the case of extreme temperature changes in excess of a 400-degree difference from the surrounding area, "equalize normally" may mean an explosive reaction, inflicting two dice of bashing damage on everyone within a radius equal to the Size of the area initially affected x5. The explosion also causes knockdown (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168). If the temperature shift is less than 400 degrees, the affected area returns to normal temperature at a rate of 10 degrees per minute.

Cryokinetics also have an improved resistance to environmental temperature extremes. A psychic with this power is automatically immune to natural temperature extremes ranging from zero to 100 degrees, plus an additional temperature range equal to plus or minus [Merit dots x20] degrees. A cryokinetic is automatically immune to the temperature-based attacks of other cryokinetics whose Merit dots do not exceed her own.

Cost: 1 Willpower per roll to affect temperature. None to resist temperature.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Composure (- Size of area to be affected) to reduce the ambient temperature. The cryokinetic can resist low temperatures without a roll.

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic fails to affect the ambient temperature and suffers one point of bashing damage as his own internal body temperature goes haywire.

Failure: The psychic fails to affect ambient temperature.

Success: Each success lowers the ambient temperature as described above.

Exceptional Success: Additional successes are their own reward.

Option [Emotional Cryokinesis]: Whenever the cryokinetic is in the grip of strong emotion, Resolve + Composure must be rolled with a penalty equal to the level of the emotion as described by the Emotional Response table on p. 60. If the roll is unsuccessful, the cryokinetic's powers function uncontrollably, raising or lowering the ambient temperature in random ways. A dramatic failure means that this wild activity might flare up at random intervals over the next several days whenever the psychic becomes agitated, causing freakish "cold spots." Such uncontrolled power may have catastrophic effects for powerful cryokinetics. These random phenomena do not require the expenditure of a Willpower point.

Plant Empathy (●)

Prerequisites: Biokinesis ●+

Effect: Plant Empathy makes a psychic a natural “green thumb,” giving him almost supernatural talent at cultivating plants. There is no roll associated with this power. Instead, the power gives the psychic a bonus to any dice pools pertaining to the cultivation of plant life (most commonly Intelligence + Crafts) equal to the number of dots he has in the Biokinesis Merit. Additionally, the growth rate of plants under the psychic’s care is multiplied by [1 + the psychic’s Biokinesis Merit dots]. Thus, a plant empath with Biokinesis ●●● can cause plants to grow at four times their normal rate.

Psychic Healing (●●● or ●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Biokinesis ●●● (to heal oneself) or Biokinesis ●●●●● (to heal another)

By building on the psychic’s underlying facility with Biokinesis, a psychic can now heal herself and others. The three-dot version of this Merit allows the character to accelerate her own healing, cutting all times in half. This power is cumulative with the Quick Healer Merit, so a character with both heals all injuries in 1/4 the normal time. With the five-dot version, the healer can extend this power to others. Thus, a patient heals all injuries in 1/2 the normal time or 1/4 the normal time if he has the Quick Healer Merit. Using either version of this power requires a player to roll Stamina + Resolve. If a character attempts to heal someone who resists or who rejects the existence of psychic phenomena, the subject can resist with Composure + Supernatural Advantage as a reflexive action in a contested roll.

The healer can also use her gifts to facilitate recovery from disease, poison or drugs. A psychic with the three-dot version of this Merit gains the benefits of having an Improved Immune System (see p. 46). With the five-dot version, she confers the benefits of an Improved Immune System to another.

A point of Willpower must be spent for a psychic to activate either version of this power. The duration is [the psychic’s Biokinesis dots x 12] hours per application. Using this power on another requires the healer to touch the patient. Although healing someone fully with Psychic Healing may require multiple applications of this power, even one application is considered providing medical attention and thus prevents a dying patient from expiring while the Merit’s effects last. Repeated applications of this power might be necessary to recover from serious diseases, but one application is usually enough to cure someone subjected to drugs or poison. This power does not heal or cure supernatural diseases, drug addictions or other otherworldly effects.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Stamina + Resolve (versus Composure + Supernatural Advantage if the subject resists healing)

Action: Instant (willing) or contested (unwilling)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic suffers one point of lethal damage due to painful feedback. Alternately, the

subject of the attempt might take additional damage or simply develop a strong antipathy toward the healer.

Failure: The psychic fails to heal the subject.

Success: The subject’s healing rate is doubled for [the psychic’s Biokinesis rating x 12] hours. If Psychic Healing is used to cure poison, drugs or illness, either the character or the subject gains the benefits of an Improved Immunity System for [the psychic’s Biokinesis dots x 12] hours.

Exceptional Success: The psychic’s Biokinesis is treated as if one dot higher for purposes of determining the duration of the healing.

Option [Empathic Healing]: The psychic cannot cure the effects of poison, drugs or illness on others, although he can still cure them within himself. When healing another of physical injuries, the psychic feels the pain suffered by his patient. When the power is activated, the psychic suffers one point of “phantom” bashing damage for every point of bashing damage the patient currently has. Phantom bashing damage heals at a rate of one point per turn. Each point of lethal damage the patient has inflicts one point of bashing damage on the psychic, which heals at the normal rate. Each point of aggravated damage to be healed inflicts one point of lethal damage on the psychic, which heals at the normal rate. This damage is inflicted on the healer every time he initiates a healing attempt on anyone other than himself. On the positive side, a healer with this option gains a +2 bonus on all healing attempts, and his Biokinesis is considered to be one dot higher for purposes of determining the duration of the improved healing rate.

Option [Faith Healer]: The psychic’s healing powers are irrevocably tied to her religious faith and she considers her healing powers to be a gift from God, which unbelievers are unworthy to experience. Any attempt to cure or heal someone whom the psychic considers to be immoral or who clearly does not share the psychic’s faith suffers a –2 penalty. Also, if the psychic fails to maintain a Morality of 7 or higher, she suffers an additional penalty equal to [7 – new Morality] on her healing attempts. Thus, a faith healer whose Morality is reduced to 5 suffers a –2 penalty on all healing rolls. When the healer attempts to cure someone who does share her faith, however, the healer gains a +1 bonus, and she gets a +1 bonus on all healing rolls for each point by which her Morality exceeds 7.

Option [New Age Healing]: The psychic must channel her biokinetic energy through some type of focusing mechanism, most commonly a crystal or perhaps herbal remedies or even magnets. Psychics who adhere to New Age religions typically believe that the actual healing power comes from whatever focus is used, instead of from the psychic. Whether such paraphernalia is actually necessary or merely a crutch cannot truly be determined. Regardless, the healer cannot use her power without entering a trance state while meditating on a crystal or using some other type of New Age trapping. Healers with this option gain a +2 bonus on all healing attempts.

Psychic Vampirism (●●●● or ●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Biokinesis ●●●● for the four-dot version. Biokinesis ●●●●● for the five-dot version.

The inverse of Psychic Healing, Psychic Vampirism allows a psychic to take life as well as restore it, draining orgone energy from victims to replenish one's own Willpower. There are two versions of this Merit, both of which require physical contact with the victim. (See "Touching an Opponent," the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 157.) The four-dot version allows a psychic to drain a target of temporary Willpower points. The Willpower is lost. With the five-dot version, the psychic regains one point of Willpower for every two points of Willpower stolen. The psychic cannot gain more Willpower points than he has permanent Willpower dots.

Both versions of this power automatically fail when used against mages, werewolves or vampires. Storytellers should be cautious that players of characters with the five-dot version do not rely on it to regain Willpower to the exclusion of their own Morality.

Dice Pool: Wits + Resolve (— the target's Resolve). The psychic vampire must also successfully touch a victim.

Cost: None

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic fails to steal any Willpower points and actually loses one Willpower point instead.

Failure: The psychic's attempt fails.

Success: The psychic drains the victim of one temporary Willpower per success.

Exceptional Success: Additional successes are their own reward.

Story Hook: The Angel of Death

Mercy Cross Hospital has a rather unusual reputation. On one hand, the hospital has a terrible track record with elderly patients who are brought in from local nursing homes. No fewer than 10 such patients have died within a day of admission within the last two years. On the other hand, the hospital's burn and pediatric wards have been sites for what can only be considered miracles, as dozens of burned people and dying children have made astonishing recoveries. The connection between the situations is a woman named Maria Delgado, a Nicaraguan immigrant working as a night janitor. A powerful psychic healer, Maria has cured dozens of people as they have slept. Unfortunately, such healing takes prodigious Willpower, and Maria has reluctantly replenished herself the only way she can — by using her Psychic Vampirism to drain the life from elderly patients. Maria believes that she is justified in taking life from those at the end of their lives to heal those at the beginning, but the strain of deciding who lives and who dies frays her sanity. The numerous deaths of elderly patients also attracts attention, and Maria considers finding

some other source of people who need to die so that *los niños* might live.

Pyrokinesis (●●●●●)

Effect: Pyrokinesis represents the ability to cause objects to spontaneously combust. Psychics with this power are usually referred to as pyrokinetics. Pyrokinesis is separate and distinct from Thermokinesis (see below), the latter of which permits a psychokinetic to actually manipulate ambient temperature. Pyrokinesis does not directly produce heat. Instead, this power triggers a chemical reaction that causes a given material to burn. A fire triggered by this power continues to burn until its fuel has been exhausted or until the fire is put out normally. A pyrokinetic can also extinguish an existing flame (whether or not she started it), but stopping a fire may be more difficult than starting one, as a fire may quickly spread to encompass a bigger area than where it was ignited. Once a fire is set, it follows all normal rules for fire damage. (See the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 180.)

A character with Pyrokinesis must overcome three difficulties in starting a fire: the size of the fire to be set, the desired heat level of the flame and the relative flammability of the material to be ignited. The modifiers applied to an attack roll for each of these criteria are listed below.

Dice Modifier	Size*
0	A candle wick or match. About a three-inch radius.
-1	A torch. About a six-inch radius (+1 lethal damage).
-2	A small campfire. About a one-foot radius or a Size 1 object.
-3	A large campfire. About a two-foot radius or a Size 2 object.
-4	Roughly the size of a man. About a four-foot radius or a Size 5 object.
-5	A bonfire. About an eight-foot radius or a Size 10 object (+2 lethal damage).

* A pyrokinetic cannot create a fire larger than a bonfire with a single application of this power.

Dice Modifier	Intensity*
0	Candle heat sufficient to cause a first degree burn.
-1	Torch heat sufficient to cause a second degree burn (+1 lethal damage).
-2	Bunsen burner heat sufficient to cause a third degree burn (+2 lethal damage).

* Thermokinesis is required to create temperatures hotter than a Bunsen burner, such as a chemical fire or molten metal.

Dice Modifier	Fuel*
+2	A flammable gas (butane, hydrogen, pure oxygen)
+1	A flammable liquid (gasoline, kerosene)
0	An easily flammable solid (match heads, oily rags, wax, fireworks)

- 1 Dry and lightweight flammable materials (paper, dry leaves, cotton)
- 2 Wood, cardboard, most clothing, vampires
- 3 Wet wood or clothing, hair
- 4 Plastic, fire retardant cloth, human flesh

* Igniting anything more flame resistant than this requires Thermokinesis.

The roll to start a fire involves Wits + Resolve. When the pyrokinetic seeks to ignite a person or some other target capable of movement, the attempt is treated as a ranged attack. Defense does not apply, but the pyrokinetic suffers a -2 penalty when attempting to ignite a moving target. Short range for a pyrokinetic attack is equal to a psychic's Intelligence + Wits + Pyrokinesis dots in yards. Medium range is twice that distance and imposes a -2 penalty on an attack dice pool. Long range is up to twice medium range and imposes a -4 penalty on an attack dice pool.

The damage inflicted with a successful pyrokinetic attack is equal to one point of lethal damage for each success. This damage pool (minus the benefits of any heat-resistant armor) is inflicted every turn on anyone set ablaze until the fire is put out.

Once a fire is set, it can be put out normally or extinguished instantly with another application of Pyrokinesis. Putting out an existing fire requires an extended Stamina + Resolve roll with the number of successes required equal to the Size of the blaze +1, with each roll taking one turn's action.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Wits + Resolve to start a fire. Stamina + Resolve to snuff one out.

Action: Instant to start a fire. Extended to snuff out a fire, with each roll representing one turn.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic suffers one point of lethal damage due to painful psychic feedback. Alternately, the psychic might produce a flame of the desired intensity but not where he wants it to combust. A pyrokinetic attempting to snuff a flame might make it larger instead.

Failure: The attempt to start or extinguish a fire is unsuccessful.

Success: The pyrokinetic ignites his target. If attempting to snuff out a flame, the pyrokinetic accumulates a number of successes equal to the Size of the fire +1.

Exceptional Success: Additional successes are their own reward.

Option [Emotional Pyrokinesis]: Whenever a pyrokinetic is in the grip of strong emotion, the Storyteller may direct the player to roll Resolve + Composure with a dice penalty equal to the intensity of the emotion as described by the Emotional Response table on p. 60. If the roll is unsuccessful, the pyrokinetic's powers function randomly, igniting small, nearby flammable objects. A dramatic failure means that this pyrokinetic activity might flare up at random intervals over the next several days whenever the pyrokinetic is agitated. Such wild phenomena do not require the expenditure of a Willpower point. A pyrokinetic with this option gains a +2 bonus on all deliberate uses of this power.



Pyrokinetic Immunity (•• or •••••)

Prerequisites: Pyrokinesis

Effect: Your pyrokinetic is highly resistant if not completely immune to fire. With the two-dot version, make a reflexive Stamina + Resolve roll when your character is exposed to mundane fire, with each success providing one point of armor that protects against only fire damage. With the four-dot version, you need only spend one Willpower point to render your character totally immune to fire damage. If any Doubting Thomas (see p. 65) is present when the four-dot version of this Trait is invoked, a successful Stamina + Resolve roll subject to normal penalties is required for unilateral protection to activate.

The effects of either version last for one scene, although clothes and possessions are not protected. No protection is provided against supernaturally induced fires or flames.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Stamina + Resolve for the two-dot version. None for the four-dot version, unless a Doubting Thomas is present.

Action: Reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic is not protected from the flames, and fire damage is increased by one.

Failure: The psychic is not protected from the flames, but she can try again in the next turn as a subsequent attempt.

Success: Each success provides one dot of armor with the two-dot version. With the four-dot version, total immunity is conferred despite the presence of a Doubting Thomas.

Exceptional Success: With the two-dot version, additional successes are their own reward. With the four-dot version, any Doubting Thomases present are treated as ordinary people for the duration of the scene and do not inflict any further dice penalties on the psychic during that time.

Pyrokinetic Shaping (•••••)

Prerequisites: Pyrokinesis and Pyrokinetic Immunity •••••

Effect: A pyrokinetic can manipulate how an existing fire (whether natural or created by psychic powers) grows. By pointing toward an existing flame and gesturing in the direction of a gas main, a psychic might cause a jet of flame to spread across the ground in a straight line, as if there were a trail of gasoline to burn. The pyrokinetic cannot truly shoot fireballs, as a fire must still have a fuel source and must generally spread along a surface of some kind. Within those limitations, the psychic can manipulate a fire as she wishes, using this power to “sculpt” the flames according to her desire.

Shaping a fire requires concentration, so a pyrokinetic loses her Defense and can take no action other than movement up to Speed per turn. If the pyrokinetic’s concentration is broken, she loses control of the flames. An additional Willpower point must be spent and a new activation roll made to regain control. If a pyrokinetic attempts to direct a flame toward a target capable of movement, the attack is treated as a normal ranged attack, with Wits + Crafts rolled to make the attack. Short range for this action equals your

character’s Dexterity + Composure in yards, with medium range double that distance (and at a –2 penalty) and long range double medium range (and at a –4 penalty). Although the fire moves quickly, it is still slow enough to be evaded, so the target’s Defense applies. Each success on an attack roll inflicts one point of lethal damage.

Cost: 1 Willpower to activate this power for a scene or until all nearby fires have been extinguished, whichever comes first.

Dice Pool: Wits + Crafts to shape flames. Wits + Crafts (— target’s Defense) to attack with a flame.

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic suffers one point of lethal damage due to painful psychic feedback. Alternately, the psychic might send the flames to a different location than intended.

Failure: The attempt to shape the fire is unsuccessful.

Success: The pyrokinetic manipulates the fire to his desires, determining the direction in which it spreads and perhaps even shaping it into simple forms. If used as an attack, the flames inflict one point of lethal damage per success.

Exceptional Success: In addition to damage inflicted, the target is set ablaze and continues to take lethal damage per turn until the fire is extinguished.

Dice Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	The pyrokinetic created the flames with his Pyrokinesis Merit, and they are now manipulated.
0	The flames being manipulated are natural fire.
–1	The flames being manipulated were created by another pyrokinetic.
–3	The intended manipulation is something wholly unnatural to fire, such as shaping it into a face or into the form of an animal.

Telekinesis (• to •••••)

Prerequisites: A telekinetic can possess but cannot use more dots in this Merit at one time than he has Resolve.

Effect: The power to move physical objects by mind alone. The psychic can lift objects, assuming they are light enough for his Telekinesis to handle. He can also throw objects that he is capable of lifting at a target. At high dots, a telekinetic can immobilize someone with a telekinetic grapple or even strike someone with a telekinetic blow.

Lifting an Object

The simplest use of Telekinesis is to lift objects. The player must first spend a Willpower point to activate the power. Each dot gives a character one dot of Strength that can be applied to move any physical object within the telekinetic’s direct line of sight, pursuant to the lifting/moving objects chart in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 47.

When attempting to lift something, consult the chart and compare the psychic’s Telekinesis dots to the item. If the telekinetic’s dots exceed the Strength required to lift the object, he can move it freely. If his Merit dots equal the Strength required, he can slide the object across the floor at about a yard per turn. If the telekinetic seeks to lift something even bigger, roll Resolve + Composure reflexively, with each success adding to the telekinetic’s Merit dots for the action.

Telekinesis is both physically and mentally taxing; a character can hold up an object for a number of turns equal to the lesser of his Stamina or Resolve. After that, he must either drop the object or another Willpower point must be spent to retain control. A telekinetic can lift objects smaller than Size 1, but he must still be able to see the object directly.

Cost: 1 Willpower + 1 additional Willpower after every [lesser of Stamina or Resolve] turns

Dice Pool: No roll is required to lift an object, provided that the psychic's Telekinesis Merit dots are sufficient to do so. If the object is too big, a Resolve + Composure roll is required.

Action: Reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The item is dropped and/or the telekinetic suffers one point of bashing damage due to psychic feedback from the effort.

Failure: The telekinesis attempt is unsuccessful.

Success: Telekinesis dots increase by one per success.

Exceptional Success: The telekinetic increases his Merit dots by five or more and gains a +1 bonus on any attempt to manipulate the item, such as throwing it. Also, the telekinetic can continue to manipulate the object for a number of turns equal to the *greater* of his Stamina or Resolve before needing to set the object down or spend another Willpower.

Throwing an Object

If the telekinetic wishes to hurl an object at a target, he must first lift it. An object can be lifted and thrown as part of the same instant action, provided the character's total Telekinesis dots exceed those required to lift the item. A non-aerodynamic object (such as a clay pot or tire) can be thrown a distance in yards equal to Wits + Resolve + total Telekinesis dots, minus the object's Size. This distance is considered short range. Medium range is double that, and long range is twice medium range. So, a character with 4 Wits, 3 Resolve and an unmodified 2 Telekinesis can throw a tire with 2 Size a short distance of 7 yards, a medium range of 14 yards and a long range of 28 yards. Aerodynamic objects can be thrown double those distances, but an object whose Size exceeds the psychic's modified Telekinesis dots cannot be thrown no matter how aerodynamic it is.

Hitting a target requires you to roll Wits + Resolve, -2 for medium range and -4 for long range. The Damage of the object thrown (usually the lesser of its Size or Durability) is added to the dice pool, and the target's Defense applies. A character can hurl an object up to twice long range, but is automatically reduced to a chance die.

Cost: None, although 1 Willpower is required to lift the object

Dice Pool: Wits + Resolve + Damage bonus of thrown object (- target's Defense)

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character loses control of the item. If it is large or heavy (Size 4+), he loses his telekinetic grip and drops it, possibly hurting himself or others. Smaller objects land wildly off the mark.

Failure: The telekinetic attack misses its target.

Success: The telekinetic hits his target, inflicting one point of damage per success.

Exceptional Success: The telekinetic hits his target with great accuracy and force.

Suggested Equipment: See the Damage ratings of possible thrown objects on p. 150 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*.

Grappling a Target (Telekinesis ●●●+)

Seizing a human-sized or larger target and attempting to hold him steady requires at least three Telekinesis dots. The player rolls Stamina + Resolve, minus the target's Strength. If the roll is successful, the target is not only grappled, but he is automatically immobilized. If the target has any psychic or supernatural powers that can be brought to bear against the telekinetic, such powers suffer no penalty due to immobilization. As usual, an additional Willpower point must be spent after every [lesser of Stamina or Resolve] turns in order to keep a target immobilized, and no other actions are allowed except moving up to Speed in that time. A victim of this effect is allowed no Defense against attacks from others. A victim can try to break free each turn as a contested action. Strength + Resolve is rolled in an instant action, with the telekinetic's Merit dots subtracted from the victim's dice pool. In order to escape, a number of successes must be rolled for the victim in excess of those rolled for the telekinetic when the hold was achieved.

Cost: None, although one Willpower must be spent to initially activate the power

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Stamina + Resolve (- the target's Strength)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The grappling attempt is unsuccessful, and the telekinetic suffers one point of bashing damage due to psychic feedback from the failed effort.

Failure: The telekinesis attempt is unsuccessful.

Success: The telekinetic successfully grapples the target, pinning her or lifting her off the ground. The telekinetic can keep the target immobilized for a number of turns equal to the lesser of his Stamina or Resolve, unless the subject escapes earlier. Spending Willpower extends the period in which a victim may be held.

Exceptional Success: The telekinetic can restrain his target for a number of turns equal to the *greater* of his Stamina or Resolve.

Telekinetic Blow (Telekinesis ●●●●●)

A psychic with five dots of Telekinesis can strike a target with a blast of pure kinetic force. Treat the blow as a ranged attack to which Defense does not apply. The blow inflicts bashing damage, and armor protects the target as normal. Short range equals Wits + Resolve + Telekinesis dots in yards. Medium range is double that, and long range is double medium range. Hitting a target requires you to roll Wits + Resolve, -2 for medium range and -4 for long range. A character can strike up to twice long range, but the player is automatically reduced to a chance die.

Cost: 1 Willpower per attack

Dice Pool: Wits + Resolve

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The attack is unsuccessful and the telekinetic suffers one point of bashing damage due to



psychic feedback from the failed effort. Alternately, the telekinetic might inadvertently hit someone or something other than his intended target.

Failure: The telekinesis attack is unsuccessful.

Success: The telekinetic strikes his target with a blast of pure kinetic force, inflicting one point of bashing damage per success.

Exceptional Success: In addition to bashing damage inflicted, the target must also roll to avoid knockdown (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 168).

Option [Emotional Telekinesis]: Whenever the telekinetic is in the grip of strong emotion, Resolve + Composure is rolled with a dice penalty equal to the level of the emotion as described by the Emotional Response table on p. 60. If the roll is unsuccessful, the telekinetic's powers function randomly, flinging small objects around the room in what onlookers might mistakenly ascribe to the actions of a poltergeist. A dramatic failure means this activity might flare up at random intervals over the next several days. Such "poltergeist activity" does not require the expenditure of a Willpower point. If a telekinetic has this option, he gains +1 on all deliberate uses of telekinesis.

Option [Limited Telekinesis]: The telekinetic can manipulate only certain types of objects. At the Storyteller's discretion, such limitations might include objects of Size 3 or less, only "soft" objects such as cloth or cardboard and nothing harder, only living material, or only earth. Depending on just how limited this telekinesis is, the Storyteller might permit the dice bonus accompanying the option to be +1, +2 or even +3.

Thermokinesis (● to ●●●●●)

Prerequisites: A character's dots in this Merit cannot exceed the lesser of her Resolve or Stamina.

Effect: Thermokinesis permits a psychic to increase ambient temperature. The player must first spend one point of Willpower to activate the power and then roll Intelligence + Resolve. The effectiveness of the thermokinetic's power is based on her dots in this Merit, with each success increasing the temperature according to the chart below.

Merit Rating	Temperature Ranges
●	2 degrees per success
●●	5 degrees per success
●●●	10 degrees per success
●●●●	15 degrees per success
●●●●●	25 degrees per success

When Thermokinesis is used to attack a moving target, treat the power as a ranged attack. Defense does not apply, and the temperature shift bypasses armor unless it has some type of thermal protection aspect or is a supernatural armor capable of protecting against heat. The attack also ignores cover, since the character can potentially lower temperatures over an area big enough to encompass even someone behind full cover. Thermokinesis affects the temperature of everything within the affected area, so living targets caught in the hot spot suffer an increase in body temperature commensurate with successes rolled.

Short range is equal to a psychic's Intelligence + Wits + Thermokinesis dots in yards. Medium range is twice that

distance, and inflicts a -2 penalty on the psychic's dice pool. Long range is twice medium range, and inflicts a -4 penalty on the psychic's dice pool. The Size of the area affected is subtracted from the cryokinetic's pool. Thus, an attempt to heat a human-sized target suffers a -5 penalty. However, if the psychic can touch the object to be heated, a +2 bonus to the roll is gained.

Once the psychic has successfully raised the temperature in a given location, he can do one of three things: (1) maintain the increased temperature as long as he concentrates, (2) release his concentration and let the temperature equalize normally or (3) use his Thermokinesis powers again to raise the temperature even further. Thus, with time and a prodigious amount of Willpower, a thermokinetic can raise ambient temperature to incredibly high levels, although the absolute highest temperature that any thermokinetic can achieve is roughly 2000 degrees Fahrenheit.

Thermokinesis is especially deadly against humans, as a normal mortal caught within the area of effect is physically heated up as if caught in a giant microwave. Normal human body temperature is 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. When Thermokinesis is used, a victim suffers a -1 penalty to Dexterity, Strength and Wits (and consequently, a -1 penalty to Initiative and possibly Defense, and a -2 penalty to Speed) for every five degrees of temperature increase for the duration of the thermokinetic effect. If any of the victim's Dexterity, Strength or Wits is reduced to zero by a thermokinetic attack, the victim is immobilized due to heat prostration. If a victim's body temperature is increased by 15 degrees or more, he suffers a point of lethal damage per turn spent subjected to the thermokinetic attack.

At temperatures of 200+, all living things suffer one point of aggravated damage per turn. Most paper and cloth combusts at just over 400 degrees, and wood catches fire and lead begins to melt at around 600 degrees. Surprisingly, vampires and other undead creatures are immune to ambient temperatures below 1500 degrees. However, in most cases, an undead creature's clothing ignites somewhere between 350 and 500 degrees, inflicting aggravated damage as normal.

Once a psychic ceases to focus her attention on a specific location, the site's temperature equalizes normally. In the case of extreme temperature changes in excess of a 400-degree difference from the surrounding area, "equalize normally" may mean an explosive reaction, inflicting two dice of bashing damage on everyone within a radius equal to the Size of the area initially affected x5 in yards. The explosion also causes knockdown (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168). If the temperature shift is less than 400 degrees, the affected area returns to normal temperature at a rate of 10 degrees per minute.

Thermokinetics also have an improved resistance to environmental temperature extremes. A psychic with this power is automatically immune to natural temperature extremes ranging from zero to 100 degrees, plus an additional temperature range equal to plus or minus [Merit dots x20] degrees. A thermokinetic is immune to high-temperature attacks unless the attacker's Thermokinesis dots exceed his own.

Cost: 1 Willpower per roll to affect temperature. None to resist temperature.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Resolve (- Size of the area to be affected) to increase temperature. No roll to resist temperature extremes.

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic fails to affect ambient temperature and suffers one point of bashing damage as his own internal body temperature goes haywire.

Failure: The psychic fails to affect the ambient temperature.

Success: Each success raises the ambient temperature as described above.

Exceptional Success: Additional successes are their own reward.

Option [Emotional Thermokinesis]: Whenever the thermokinetic is in the grip of strong emotion, Resolve + Composure is rolled with a dice penalty equal to the level of the emotion as described by the Emotional Response table on p. 60. If the roll is unsuccessful, the thermokinetic's powers function uncontrollably, raising ambient temperature in random ways. A dramatic failure means this activity flares up at wild intervals over the next several days whenever the psychic becomes agitated, possibly causing small fires. With powerful Thermokinesis, catastrophic effects may occur. These random phenomena do not require the expenditure of a Willpower point.

Telepathic Merits

Telepathy is a catch-all term for psychic powers that permit one to perceive or affect the thoughts or emotions of other beings. All Telepathic Merits require a psychic to be able to clearly see his target within direct line of sight. A psychic cannot read another's thoughts or use any other Telepathic Merit over the phone or by watching his target on TV, for example. A telepath capable of Astral Projection can read the thoughts of someone in whose presence the telepath projects himself, while a clairvoyant with telepathy can read the thoughts of someone she can view remotely. These two are the only ESP Merits that can be combined with telepathy in this way, however. A precog might be able to see someone acting in the past or future, but is not able to read that person's thoughts, while a psychic using psychometry could read the mental impressions associated with an object, but not probe the mind of someone who handled it. Psychics who demonstrate Telepathic Merits are typically referred to as telepaths.

Animal Empathy (•• or •••••)

Effect: Although Animal Empathy is sometimes considered a rare gift, some parapsychologists speculate that it is more common than it appears, since the average observer cannot readily distinguish between a psychic with the innate ability to communicate with non-sentient creatures and an ordinary "horse whisperer" who is simply "good with animals." Regardless, this Merit combines a wide number of psychic effects, including Mind Reading, Thought Projection and Emotion Control under a single power, albeit one

which can affect only animals. The two-dot version allows a psychic to affect a single species of animal such as dogs, cats or rats. The four-dot version permits a psychic to affect any type of animal. Either version can allow a psychic to affect multiple animals at once, although the power usually inflicts a dice penalty on a roll. Also, a psychic attempting to control large numbers of animals at one time must give the same instructions to all of them, and cannot send different animals off on individual missions without a separate roll for each of them. There is also a separate Merit called Animal Rapport that creates a permanent psychic link with a single animal. No version of this power can affect truly sentient animals or other beings that have transformed into animals.

Cost: None if the psychic has time to interact with the animal and achieve some kind of rapport. If the psychic has never seen the animal before or it is currently hostile, one Willpower point must be spent to instantly seize control of the animal. One point of Willpower must be spent to control multiple animals simultaneously.

Action: Instant or contested

Dice Pool: Wits + Animal Ken to communicate. Manipulation + Animal Ken (versus animal's Resolve rolled reflexively) to control.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character triggers psychic feedback in the animal, making it immediately hostile. Further attempts to use Animal Empathy against the animal fail automatically for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The character fails to influence the animal in any way.

Success: The psychic can intuitively understand the animal's mood and thought processes. Although true communication is not yet possible, the psychic can intuit crude impressions such as "I'm hungry," "I want to play" or "That man beats me." With Manipulation, the psychic can command the animal to follow simple instructions such as "Heel," "Fetch" or "Tear him apart!" Animals that were previously hostile become docile, and trained guard dogs let an intruder walk right by.

Exceptional Success: The psychic can freely communicate with the animal, almost to the point of sharing its senses. The psychic can also give relatively complex instructions and expect them to be obeyed, such as "Go fetch Timmy! He's in town at the movie theater, in the third row!"

Dice Modifiers

Modifier Situation

+1	The psychic has previously used this power successfully on the same animal(s).
0	The animal is a mammal or bird.
-1	The animal is a common fish or a group of up to three mammals.
-3	The animal is a single insect, a school/swarm of up to 25 fish or vermin or a group of up to 10 larger mammals.
-5	The animal is a swarm of insects with a hive mentality, or a collective group of up to 100 small creatures or up to 25 larger mammals.

Animal Possession (●●●●)

Prerequisites: Animal Empathy ●● or ●●●●. If the psychic has only the two-dot version of Animal Empathy, he is limited to possessing the type of animal with which he is attuned. The four-dot version allows possession of any type of animal.

Effect: Animal Possession builds on the power of Animal Empathy to actually allow a psychic to possess a particular animal, totally controlling its body and perceiving through all of its senses. The psychic's own body is completely inert and helpless while this power is in effect, and she cannot perceive anything about her body's surroundings unless the possessed animal is nearby. If the character's body is damaged, though, she knows it and can reflexively end the possession after taking any damage, although she may be subject to a killing blow (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168) in the duration of the possession. If the character's physical body is killed while possessing an animal, her mind dies as well. If the animal is killed during the possession, the psychic's mind is immediately sent back to her body.

This power requires the animal to be possessed to have at least the intelligence of a small rodent or fish. Simpler creatures such as insects cannot be possessed. Possession lasts for one scene, but can be extended at the cost of one Willpower point per scene. Under no circumstances can the time of possession last beyond a number of hours equal to the lesser of the psychic's Stamina or Resolve. This power cannot be used against sentient creatures, including mages, vampires or werewolves who have simply assumed the forms of animals. The psychic can never possess more than one animal at a time. The psychic also cannot possess an animal smaller than a mouse. Animals larger than Size 5 confer a penalty on the roll.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Animal Ken versus animal's Resolve; resistance is reflexive

Action: Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character triggers psychic feedback in the animal, making it immediately hostile. Further attempts to use Animal Possession against the animal fail automatically for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The character fails to possess the animal.

Success: The psychic projects his own consciousness into the animal, totally controlling its body and replacing its Mental (but not Social) Attributes with his own. The psychic cannot use any other psychic powers while possessing the animal, although he can end the possession at any time. The animal's Physical Traits prevail.

Exceptional Success: The psychic can maintain the possession for up to the lesser of his Stamina or Resolve in hours without paying any additional Willpower.

Dice Modifiers

Modifier Situation

+1	The psychic has previously used the Animal Possession power on the animal to be possessed.
—	The animal is a mammal or bird.
-1	Per point of the animal's Size in excess of 5.

- 2 The animal is a reptile or sophisticated aquatic life form such as a dolphin or shark.
- 4 The animal is a fish.

Story Hook: A Boy and His Dog

Psychic communication with animals is typically limited to simple concepts. How, then, should a character react when confronted by an animal such as a dog or cat that responds to telepathic communication with a sophisticated vocabulary — and the power to initiate telepathic communication on its own? Such a rare animal might be the result of corporate or government experimentation, or perhaps something even stranger, and the psychic might soon find himself on the run from his new best friend's enemies. Or the psychic might be surprised to realize that his new pet's capabilities are equal to or greater than the psychic's own. He might be disturbed to realize just how inhuman man's best friend can be if given human intellect and mind-control powers, particularly if the character never seen a cat toy with a mouse. Worst of all, these scenarios presume that the animal encountered is a dog, a cat or some other animal with which humans have traditionally bonded. How does the psychic react when he finally realizes that the faint whispers he hears at night are being made by colonies of sentient rats or spiders? How does he react when he overhears a whispered voice suggest that the colony needs "a new host?"

Animal Rapport (variable)

Prerequisites: Animal Ken ••+

Effect: This Merit acts as a version of Animal Empathy. The character has an innate mental bond with a single animal. The character can communicate with the creature, understanding its barks or hisses as speech and allowing the animal to comprehend the character's normal language. The character must speak to the animal to communicate with it, but the expenditure of one Willpower point allows the character to communicate non-verbally with his pet. The cost of this Merit is determined by the Size of the animal, based on the chart below.

Merit Dots	Size of Animal
3	Size 3 or smaller
4	Size 4 to Size 5
5	Size 6 to Size 10

No roll is ever required for verbal communication, but the character does not have the capacity to control the

creature outright. If he wishes it to do something that the animal might consider dangerous, you must win a contested roll against the animal, which, while generally loyal, does not normally commit suicide on its master's behalf. Resolve or Composure is rolled reflexively for the animal, while Manipulation or Presence + an appropriate Skill is rolled for the character.

The animal with which the character has a bond is a normal example of its species, but a side effect of the rapport permanently increases the animal's Intelligence by one. If the character seriously mistreats his pet, it is capable of turning, at the Storyteller's discretion. The character must be within line of sight to communicate freely with the animal, but if the animal can hear the character even at great distance (such as Timmy yelling from down a well a half-mile away), the animal likely travels as quickly as it can to its master's location.

If the animal is ever lost or killed, experience spent or dots assigned to this Merit may be lost or reassigned at the Storyteller's discretion. The character may even forge a bond with another such amazing animal, assuming one can be found.

Aura Reading (•• or •••••)

Effect: Aura Reading blurs the distinction between telepathy and ESP, as Aura Reading represents a form of psychic perception, but also has elements of mind reading. According to telepaths who have this Merit, all living things (and some "unliving" things) are surrounded by a nimbus of energy that is perceptible by psychic means or by Kirlian photography. Aura Reading allows a psychic to perceive this otherwise invisible halo, and with experience interpret its constantly changing hues to gain insights into a subject. Vampires and mages have access to a similar power known as Aura Perception. Aura Reading, however, does not carry with it the same level of sophistication. And yet, a talented psychic can deduce a target's general emotional state and perform such feats as determining whether the person is lying.

With the five-dot version, a knowledgeable telepath may use this power to recognize supernatural entities. To a trained telepath, vampires are recognized by their extremely pale auras, werewolves by their vibrant intensity and mages by sparkling lights that appear in the patterns. Dematerialized ghosts and spirits are also visible with this power, as are astral projectors, but only faintly, and a psychic cannot communicate with them without use of other powers. Regardless of the type of supernatural subject, a telepath must have some familiarity with a sort of being to identify it. A psychic who has had opportunity to perceive the auras of vampires might know that a mage is "not right" and also knows that she is not a vampire, but he would not specifically realize that she is a mage unless he also had some familiarity with the auras of willworkers.

Both versions of this Merit require the expenditure of one Willpower point and an Intelligence + Empathy roll, contested by a target's Composure + Supernatural Advantage; resistance is reflexive. The two-dot version requires the psychic to scrutinize the target for a number of turns equal to the target's Composure prior to the roll, and a target may be suspicious of someone staring intently at her if a reflexive Wits + Composure (or possibly Wits + Occult) roll for her

succeeds. The two-dot version automatically fails against supernatural beings. The five-dot version can be used against supernatural beings, but otherwise functions as the two-dot version. Once a psychic successfully reads a target's aura, the psychic can continue to view it so long as she maintains concentration, allowing her to observe the target for possible deception or even to predict an imminent attack.

A failure on an attempt at Aura Reading means that the psychic is unable to discern an aura at all, while a dramatic failure means she receives false or misleading information. Thus, the Storyteller should always roll for the player when the possibility of a dramatic failure applies. A telepath who successfully reads the aura of someone in the act of lying may recognize that the subject speaks falsely by rolling Intelligence + Empathy + [the successes gained on the initial Aura Reading roll] versus the subject's Composure + Subterfuge in a contested action. If the psychic wins the roll, he recognizes the lie.

Applied toward reading the mood of potential combatants, this power grants its user a bonus to Initiative equal to the number of successes rolled in activating the effect, *provided* the telepathic is actively reading the aura of a target at the time that person initiates an attack.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Empathy versus target's Composure + Supernatural Advantage (resistance is reflexive)

Action: Reflexive (though a subject may have to be studied in advance of making a roll)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character gleans utterly misleading and wholly inaccurate information. The Storyteller may wish to make any chance-die rolls for a player, to keep the true results secret.

Failure: The character can distinguish no information at all.

Success: The character can determine the target's general mood and nature, possibly picking up details about a supernatural being's nature or whether a particular target is lying.

Exceptional Success: The character gains all the benefits of a normal success. In addition, the character gains an additional +2 dice on all Social rolls made against the target for the remainder of the scene due to his being so in tune with her personality.

Story Hook: The Girl with the Washed-out Soul

Aura Reading, especially the five-dot version, is a constant source of potential story seeds. A psychic's encounter with a sexy woman with a pale aura who offers him a drink at a bar can lead to his first exposure to vampires' existence. It might also lead to his first confrontation with vampire hunters who, upon learning of the psychic's gifts, might force him to act as a bloodhound. Depending on his reaction toward the undead, the character

might be eager to help. But what is his attitude when he realizes that the vampire hunters are even more ruthless and bloodthirsty than their targets? And if the psychic attempts to break with his "allies," can he survive being caught between hunter and prey? Such a hunt might not be limited to vampires, but could extend to other individuals whose auras brand them as "wrong."

Mental Blast (●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Thought Projection ●●●●

Effect: An extremely rare and dangerous power, Mental Blast allows a telepath to damage the mind of another being by force of will. The psychic uses Thought Projection with such force and intensity that it overwhelms the victim's brain, potentially causing a stroke or cerebral hemorrhage. Each success achieved on the attack inflicts one point of bashing damage on the target in the form of a blistering migraine. A sustained attack may have lethal results. Fatalities inflicted with Mental Blast generally appear to be strokes or similar maladies, but in some cases the power quite literally causes a victim's head to explode. Once this power is initiated, the psychic can maintain the assault, the player rolling again every turn so long as the attacker can maintain concentration. While concentrating on the target, the psychic loses his Defense and can take no action other than maintaining the assault and moving up to Speed in a turn. If the psychic's concentration is broken, another Willpower must be spent to initiate a new Mental Blast.

Cost: 1 Willpower on the first turn of a Mental Blast. The psychic can continue to inflict damage as long as he can maintain concentration on his target.

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation – subject's Stamina

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character suffers one point of bashing damage from psychic feedback and is unable to use the power for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The character fails to inflict any damage.

Success: The character inflicts damage as noted above.

Exceptional Success: Additional successes are their own reward. Also, the target must roll her Stamina to avoid knockout (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 168.)

Mind Breaker (●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Thought Projection ●●●●

Effect: Mind Breaker does not inflict any damage on a victim. Instead, it inflicts either a temporary or permanent derangement. Generally, the user simply inflicts madness, with the precise form of ailment is determined by the Storyteller. If the psychic has specialized training as reflected by Science ●●● or higher with a Specialty in Psychology or some similar field, the Storyteller may permit her to deliberately tailor the victim's madness. Derangements gained through use of this power cannot be removed by raising one's Morality trait.



Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Presence + Empathy versus the subject's Resolve + Supernatural Advantage. Intelligence + Science may be rolled instead for characters with specialized training in psychology or something similar, with a successful roll permitting a telepath to tailor the derangement to his desire.

Action: Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character suffers one Storyteller-chosen derangement for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The character fails to inflict madness on his target.

Success: The character gets more successes than the target, who suffers one mild derangement for the remainder of the scene.

Exceptional Success: The character gets at least five successes and exceeds those of the target. If the psychic wishes, the derangement inflicted may be severe instead of mild. Alternatively, the target can be subjected to a permanent mild derangement that can be removed through only roleplaying.

Mind Control (●●●●●)

Prerequisites: The psychic must deliver his instructions verbally unless he is capable of projecting his thoughts.

One of the most insidious manifestations of psychic power, Mind Control permits a telepath to project his mind to overcome a subject's will and render the subject open to suggestion. Unless the character also has Thought Projection or some similar advantage, he must verbally tell his subject what he wants her to do, effectively making

this power a form of paranormal hypnosis. Combined with Thought Projection, the psychic can make anyone a puppet, silently seizing a victim's will from across a room and making her his slave. If he has both Thought Projection and Clairvoyance, he can command the mind of someone from across a city like a modern-day Svengali.

Commands that force a subject to violate deeply held beliefs, to act against Virtues, or to harm loved ones impose a penalty to the roll made for the psychic. Mind Control is effective only against ordinary people and other psychics. A Mind Control attempt automatically fails against anyone who is the subject of a supernatural template (such as mages, vampires and werewolves). However, ghouls, wolf-blooded and similar beings may be affected, although they may gain bonus dice to resist in some circumstances (such as when a ghoul is mentally controlled to betray his undead master).

The benefits of the Striking Looks Merit (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 117) apply to Mind Control attempts, and psychics with the Hypnotic Voice Merit (see p. 66) gain a +2 bonus on all uses of this power. The psychic must concentrate fully on his subject while conveying his instructions, suffering all the normal penalties for concentration. How long this effort takes depends on the complexity of the instructions, and may last for several turns. Once the command is issued, the psychic does not need to continue concentrating. The telepath's command must be something that can be completed within the scene or the attempt fails, *unless* the telepath achieves an exceptional success.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion versus subject's Resolve (resistance is reflexive)

Action: Contested; requires concentration while instructions are conveyed

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character triggers psychic feedback in the target, making him instinctively withdraw or distrust her. The target is also rendered immune to further Mind Control attempts by the psychic for the next day.

Failure: The target ignores the character's command.

Success: The target obeys the character's command, provided that the order can be fulfilled within one scene.

Exceptional Success: The player gets five or more successes and they exceed those of the target. There is no time limit on how long the command can take to be executed.

Dice Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	The psychic has successfully used Mind Control on the subject within the last week.
-1	The command forces the subject to act against a loved one or to violate deeply held personal beliefs.
-2	The command forces the subject to harm a loved one or to act against a Virtue.
-4	The command forces the subject to kill a loved one or perform an action that might cause her to lose Morality.
-5	The command is clearly suicidal.

Mind Reading (●●● to ●●●●●)

Effect: Mind Reading is the essential telepathic power; the ability to read the thoughts of others. The three-dot version permits a telepath to read the surface thoughts of an ordinary person, although the telepath cannot yet perceive information that a subject does not currently think about. The four-dot version permits the telepath to probe the mind of an ordinary person for buried information or even subconscious thoughts, or to perceive the surface thoughts of beings who are the subject of a supernatural template, such as mages, vampires or werewolves. The five-dot version permits the telepath to probe the buried thoughts of even supernatural beings. This last version also allows a telepath to perform "light scans" of multiple minds at once to discover who among several thinks something in particular (such as identifying which of several murder suspects thinks, *I killed her.*)

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Empathy versus the subject's Composure + Supernatural Advantage (resistance is reflexive)

Action: Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character triggers psychic feedback in his target, making her instinctively withdraw or distrust him. The target can also automatically resist any use of Telepathic Merits by the psychic for the next day.

Failure: The character fails to read the target's mind.

Success: The character can perceive the target's thoughts, and the player is allowed to ask one question about them per success. Surface scans are limited to what a subject currently thinks about, although a telepath can attempt to manipulate a subject into thinking about something in

particular with a successful Manipulation + Subterfuge roll (contested by Wits + Subterfuge if the subject is aware of the telepath's capabilities). If the psychic is capable of deep scans, the player can ask questions about any topic, including questions about a subject's buried memories or even subconscious thoughts of which the subject is not even aware.

Exceptional Success: Extra successes are their own reward. Also, the Storyteller may rule that the telepath discovers some useful tidbit of information in the subject's mind for which he wasn't even searching.

Dice Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	The psychic has successfully used Mind Reading on the subject within the last week.
+1	The psychic touches the subject.
+1	The subject willingly consents to a telepathic probe.
+2	The subject willingly consents to a telepathic probe and also has this Merit, or, at the Storyteller's discretion, has some other supernatural or psychic power that conveys telepathic abilities.
-1	The subject actively resists the telepathic probe and also has this Merit, or at the Storyteller's discretion has some other supernatural or psychic power that conveys telepathic abilities.

Psychic Empathy (●●●● or ●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Aura Reading and Thought Projection (either version)

Effect: Psychic Empathy builds on the underlying power of Aura Reading, as the telepath moves from merely perceiving the emotional aura of a target to actively manipulating it and thereby affecting the subject's mood. In order to use Psychic Empathy, a character must first successfully use Aura Reading on a target. Once the character can clearly see the target's aura, he can psychically "adjust the colors," affecting her mood. The four-dot version is only capable of short-term manipulations, while the five-dot version can hardwire a victim to feel a particular emotional response for extended periods.

The intensity of any particular emotional state is determined by the chart below.

Emotional Response

0	No discernable signs of the emotional state.
-1	Noticeable signs of the emotional state.
-2	Obvious signs of the emotional state. A Resolve + Composure roll for the subject must succeed to avoid acting on the emotion in minor ways (snide comments toward someone he dislikes, flirting with the person for whom he now feels sexual attraction) every time he has an opportunity to do so.
-3	Unambiguous signs of the emotional state. As with the previous entry, except that the target must get at least as many successes on the Resolve + Composure as the empath does on the Psychic Empathy roll to avoid acting out on the emotion in a very obvious way (picking

a fight with a person he now hates, acting in a subservient manner toward a person he now loves).

–4

Overwhelming signs of the emotional state.

The emotional state approaches or even exceeds the level of a derangement (homicidal rage, suicidal depression, obsessive stalking). A Willpower point must be spent for the subject to even attempt a Resolve + Composure roll to contest the emotional compulsion, and he must still get as many successes as the empath does on the activation roll. The target seeks out opportunities to act on the emotion in obvious ways, and any attempt to conceal his state is automatically reduced to a chance die.

Any attempt to manipulate a subject's emotional state is penalized by the intensity of the emotion to be created or suppressed. Thus, if an empath wanted to make a total stranger fall in love with her (i.e., moving from *no discernable signs* (0) of love to *unambiguous* (–3) signs of love), the dice pool suffers a –3 penalty. Or if an empath wants to totally suppress an enemy's *overwhelming* (–4) hatred of her in order to allow for peaceful interaction, the dice pool suffers a –4 penalty. Often, an empath seeks to produce an emotion that is the opposite of one a target currently feels, such as causing a man to hate his beloved wife, or when she wants a suicidal person to suddenly feel happy about his life. In such cases, the penalty is the total associated with the previous emotion, plus the new one. Thus, converting a subject's *unambiguous* (–3) love for his wife into *unambiguous* (–3) hate inflicts a total –6 penalty.

Emotions produced with the four-dot version of this power last while the empath concentrates, or for the duration of an entire scene if the empath achieves an exceptional success. The five-dot version automatically lasts for at least a scene, and applies for a day with an exceptional success. With either version, the dice pool for affecting emotions is Manipulation + Empathy, contested by the subject's Resolve + Composure. The five-dot version is capable of affecting a being with a supernatural template, but the four-dot version automatically fails against such beings.

Any emotion can be affected by this power, and its parameters are limited mainly by the Storyteller's discretion and a player's innovation. A few of the more commonly affected emotions include anger, happiness or sadness, love, sexual libido, possessiveness (for an object or a person) and compassion. Only one successful attempt can be made to alter a subject's emotions per scene.

Cost: 1 Willpower per use. One Willpower must also be spent to activate the character's Aura Reading powers prior to manipulating a subject's emotions.

Dice Pool: The psychic must first successfully use Aura Reading on the subject (see "Aura Reading" on p. 57). The roll to alter emotions is Manipulation + Empathy versus Resolve + Composure (resistance is reflexive).

Action: Contested

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character triggers psychic feedback in the target, making him instinctively withdraw

or distrust her. The subject is also immune to the psychic's Psychic Empathy for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The character fails to influence the target's emotions.

Success: The subject's emotions change according to the empath's desires.

Exceptional Success: The emotional change lasts for a longer period of time. With the four-dot version, the effect persists for a scene without concentration. With the five-dot version, the effect lasts for a day.

Option [Limited Empath]: The empath's powers are limited in some way, such as in the type of person affected, the type of emotion manipulated or the type of person or object that can be made the subject of an altered emotional connection. The dice bonus is determined by how specific and limited the empath's powers are. An empath who can affect only women might gain a +1 bonus, while one whose sole power is to trigger intense misogyny in other men might gain a +3 bonus.

Option [Touch Only]: With this option, the empath can affect another's emotional state only while physically touching the target, (although concentration is all that's required after contact is made). See "Touching an Opponent," the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 157.

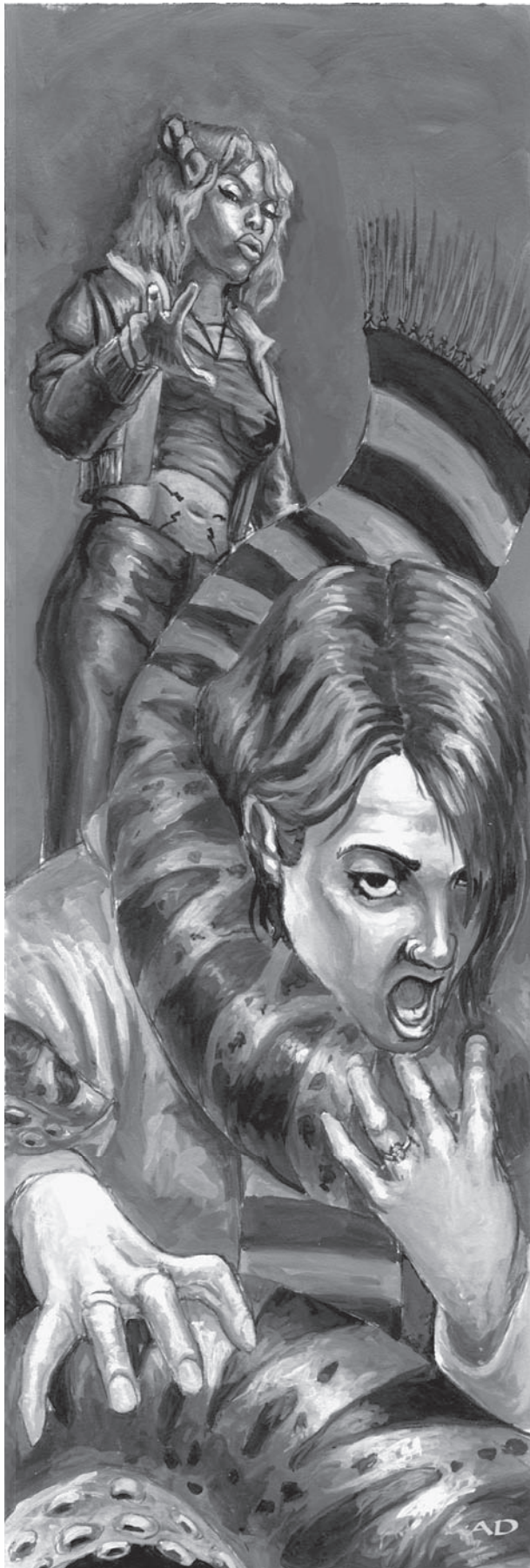
Option [Uncontrolled]: With this option, the empath's power is not totally under his control. Whenever he experiences a profound emotion, a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll must be made, with a penalty based on the emotion as determined by the response table, above. If the roll is unsuccessful, Presence + Empathy is rolled, *plus a bonus* equal to the emotion's rating, with everyone in his vicinity making a contested Resolve + Composure roll. Anyone who fails to get as many or more successes than the empath instantly experiences the same emotion as the character. Uncontrolled uses of Psychic Empathy do not require use of Aura Reading or the expenditure of a Willpower point. Deliberate uses of this power functions as normal, except that with this option, the empath has a +2 bonus.

Psychic Illusions (●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Mind Control and Thought Projection (either version)

Effect: This power represents a refinement of the Mind Control Merit. Instead of giving hypnotic commands to the target, a telepath causes the subject to see something that isn't there, or to misapprehend some element of his surroundings. The telepath must be able to see the person to be affected, although clairvoyance can substitute for direct observation. Cameras and videotapes are never affected by a psychic illusion. The illusions created can affect any normal senses that the illusionist possesses. The illusionist cannot create an image capable of deceiving psychic powers, so a clairvoyant remotely viewing the scene is not deceived. Likewise, a psychic cannot create an illusion of something he cannot perceive, such as a deaf character creating an illusion that includes an auditory element.

The default use of this power assumes that only one sense is affected, and each additional sense affected imposes a –1 penalty to the roll. The player's Manipulation + Persuasion roll is resisted by the Composure + Supernatural



Advantage of any observers (roll the highest pool for a mob of onlookers) in a contested action. Theoretically, the illusionist can fool any number of people with a particular illusion, but the maximum number of people who can easily be affected at the same time equals the psychic's Intelligence + Manipulation. Each additional person imposes a -1 penalty to the activation roll. Thus, the more people who are present, the greater the likelihood that some or all are able to see through the deception.

Normally, an illusion is static and cannot interact with beings. If the illusionist wishes his visions to interact with someone who is deceived by them (such as having a "phantom police officer" direct observers away from a crime scene), the player must roll Wits + Persuasion as an instant action. If this roll fails, onlookers see through the illusion, even if they had been previously fooled. Such follow-up rolls are only required when the illusion must be made to interact with an observer in a fairly direct manner. So, if the interactive police officer fools an observer, a reroll is required only if the observer actively tries to engage the police officer somehow (whether through communication or an attack), or if the psychic wishes to have the police officer interact in some new and different way, such as writing a ticket.

Regardless of how convincing an illusion is, it is never solid, although it "feels" solid to a deceived observer if the illusionist incorporates tactile sensations into the creation. An illusory chair is not capable of supporting an observer's weight, no matter how strongly she believes in it. An illusory wall does not prevent someone from passing through it if she leans against it, although both may feel perfectly solid to the casual touch. So, an illusory item cannot be used as a weapon; any attack with an illusory weapon fails.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion versus the target's Composure + Supernatural Advantage to create illusions (resistance is reflexive). Wits + Persuasion to manipulate existing illusions.

Cost: 1 Willpower. Also, the character must maintain concentration for the duration of the illusion, meaning that he can take no action other than moving Speed per turn, and he loses his Defense.

Action: Contested to activate; instant to manipulate
Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character triggers psychic feedback, making every potential observer in the vicinity instinctively withdraw or distrust her. Also, the illusionist is unable to use this power again for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: The psychic fails to create any illusion at all.

Success: Any affected targets perceive whatever sensory effect the psychic desires.

Exceptional Success: The illusions created are highly realistic. The psychic no longer needs to maintain concentration, although a Wits + Persuasion roll must still be made to cause the illusion to move or react in any way.

Psychic Invisibility (●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Mind Control and Thought Projection (either version)

As the name suggests, Psychic Invisibility represents a psychic's ability to "cloud men's minds" so that onlookers cannot perceive him. The character is not truly invisible; cameras are not affected by this power and anyone sufficiently perceptive can see through the deception. The psychic cannot disappear from view if he has already been seen, but any witnesses he encounters after the power is activated are typically unable to see him unless he does something to call attention to himself. If the psychic affects any physical object while a potential observer is looking, or he makes any particularly loud sound, the invisibility ends automatically for observers. Also, the character must maintain concentration for the duration of the power's use. He loses his Defense and can take no actions other than moving up to Speed in a turn.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Stealth versus an observer's Resolve + Supernatural Advantage (resistance is reflexive). If a mob is affected, make one roll for the group using the highest dice pool of its members.

Action: Contested, and requires concentration

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The psychic is convinced that she is invisible and acts accordingly, even though any onlookers are able to see her.

Failure: The psychic fails to hide her appearance.

Success: The psychic activates her psychic invisibility power. If anyone in a group points the character out, all onlookers can see her.

Exceptional Success: The psychic no longer needs to concentrate to maintain invisibility and can take other actions (although any interaction with her environment may end the effect). If she performs no actions, the effect lasts for the remainder of the scene.

Telepathic Communication (•••••)

Prerequisites: Thought Projection ••••

Having mastered both Mind Reading and Thought Projection, the telepath can now initiate two-way telepathic communication with another person. The contact must be within line of sight unless the psychic has a Telepathic Rapport with the other party (see below). This power fails automatically if the other party does not wish to communicate. The psychic cannot perceive any thoughts other than those a subject wishes to send, unless the psychic also uses Mind Reading, even if the other party is willing. Each use of the Merit lasts no longer than one scene, even if both sides remain within sight of each other.

Cost: 1 Willpower to allow communication for the rest of the scene

Dice Pool: Presence + Empathy

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character triggers psychic feedback in the subject, making her instinctively withdraw or distrust him. Also, the character might transmit his thoughts to a different party than he intends, or even send thoughts that he did not intend.

Failure: The character fails to initiate communication, but can try again.

Success: The character successfully initiates psychic communication with his target. He can freely send thoughts to the other party, and he can freely hear whatever thought messages the other party wishes to send back.

Exceptional Success: The character gains a +2 bonus on any subsequent use of a telepathic Merit in regard to the other party for the remainder of the scene.

Telepathic Rapport (••••)

Prerequisite: Telepathic Communication

The telepath can establish a permanent telepathic connection with the mind of another person, allowing the character to form a psychic link with the subject from anywhere in the world with the expenditure of a Willpower dot. This Merit can be taken multiple times to reflect having more than one rapport, up to a maximum number at one time equal to the psychic's Intelligence. If the other party to a rapport dies, the dot spent is lost. The other party may never sever the rapport once it's formed, but the telepath may voluntarily end it, still losing the Willpower dot spent. Only the character who possesses this Merit can freely initiate telepathic communication, and the other party must develop this Merit himself in order to initiate a link on his own, assuming he is even someone capable of doing so. A telepathic rapport cannot be forged with an unwilling target, or with someone the psychic doesn't know closely.

Any telepath who meets the prerequisites can forge a new rapport, but the telepath must successfully use Mind Reading and Thought Projection on the other party and spend a permanent Willpower dot. Once the link is achieved, the telepath can activate the rapport without a roll. Also, if anyone with whom a telepath has a rapport experiences intense emotion, such as being in great danger, the telepath may be able to sense the emotion at any distance with a reflexive Wits + Empathy roll. This roll should be made by the Storyteller.

This Merit allows a character to forge a new rapport whenever she wishes, and a significant number of other Merits are required as prerequisites. At the Storyteller's discretion, a character can develop a single Telepathic Rapport as a two-dot Merit at character creation, without possessing the prerequisite Merits or indeed any other psychic Merits. This rapport must be with some other person close to the character, such as a parent or twin sibling, and represents a paranormal bond not dependent on the character's facility with telepathy. The character is not able to create any new rapports unless she acquires the full, three-dot Telepathic Rapport Merit and all its prerequisites.

Regaining Willpower dots lost from broken rapports costs eight experience points each.

Cost: 1 Willpower point per scene to activate communication with a single subject

Dice Pool: None to activate, as once the rapport is purchased, it can be turned on and off at will. Wits + Empathy (rolled by the Storyteller) to know when the other party is in danger or undergoes intense emotion.

Action: Reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The telepath grossly misinterprets the emotions experienced by the other party.

Failure: The telepath fails to sense the other party's emotional state.

Success: The telepath intuitively knows that the other party is experiencing pain, fear or some other intense emotion.

Exceptional Success: The telepath gains limited insight into exactly what situation the other party faces, even if the subject is unable to communicate such information directly. For example, instead of simply knowing that the other experiences fear, the telepath knows he is afraid of a pack of guard dogs that pursues him. If the subject experiences pain, the telepath realizes he has just been stabbed. Also, the telepath has an intuitive idea of where the other party is.

Thought Projection (●●● or ●●●●)

Prerequisites: Mind Reading ●●●●

Effect: The telepath can move beyond simple mind reading to actually projecting his thoughts into the mind of another. A telepath cannot usually transmit thoughts beyond his line of sight. With the four-dot version, however, he can communicate with individuals outside his line of sight at a penalty determined by his degree of psychic connection to a target. Even with the three-dot version, a telepath can communicate with someone in a distant location if he is able to perceive the subject through clairvoyance. If the psychic also wishes to read the thoughts of the person to whom he sends, he must also activate his Mind Reading Merit (p. 60), which normally requires the expenditure of a second Willpower point in a subsequent turn.

Cost: 1 Willpower to allow thought transmission to a single subject for the rest of the scene. If thoughts are to be sent to someone else in that time, the first connection must be broken. The new connection costs another Willpower point. If the first connection is to be re-established, yet another Willpower must be spent.

Dice Pool: Presence + Empathy [versus Resolve + Supernatural Advantage if the subject is unwilling (resistance is reflexive)]

Action: Instant if the subject is willing; resisted is he's unwilling

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character triggers psychic feedback in the subject, making her instinctively withdraw or distrust him. Also, the character might transmit his thoughts to a different party than he intended, or even send thoughts that he did not intend to send.

Failure: The character fails to transmit his thoughts, but can try again.

Success: The character successfully transmits his thoughts to his target. He can continue to send thoughts for the rest of the scene.

Exceptional Success: The gains a +2 bonus on any subsequent use of a telepathic Merit against the other party for the remainder of the scene.

Dice Modifier Psychic Connection

—	The target of the telepathic communication is within line of sight. No connection is necessary.
-1	<i>Intimate.</i> The target is a longtime friend or close family member.
-3	<i>Known.</i> The target is a friend or co-worker about whom a great deal is known.
-5	<i>Acquainted.</i> The telepath has met the target several times. This is the weakest level of connection that allows long-range telepathic communication.

Other New Merits

The following Merits are not psychic powers, but are Traits available to any character (and in some cases, to only non-psychic characters).

Anti-Psi (●●●●●)

Prerequisites: None, but the character can have no other Merits that confer psychic powers.

Effect: Anti-Psi is a rare ability, the existence of which has only recently been theorized by parapsychologists. A person gifted with Anti-Psi (who can never be an active psychic) has the power to greatly inhibit psychic powers by her mere presence. Any individual who strongly disbelieves in psychic phenomena can impose a -1 or -2 penalty on a psychic's abilities (see *Doubting Thomas*, below), but an Anti-Psi goes even further, literally jamming a psychic's ability to function at all. Any psychic in the presence of an Anti-Psi is automatically reduced to a chance die on any attempts to use psychic powers. A person with this Merit likely has no idea that she has any special abilities, and simply ascribes any failure of psychics to perform in her presence as proof of the fraudulent nature of such phenomena. This Merit has no effect on the paranormal abilities of supernatural creatures.

Drawback: Any character with this Merit also suffers from a severe derangement triggered by the presence of overt psychic phenomena. Whenever the character is confronted by another person claiming to have psychic powers, or by clear evidence of psychic phenomena, the Anti-Psi manifests an intense hostility toward the object of the offense. Exactly how this derangement plays out is for you to decide, but the character is likely obsessed with debunking the psychic's claims and exposing him publicly as a fraud. Possible derangements include Hysteria, Megalomania, Paranoia and Anxiety (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, pp. 97-98).

Believers (● to ●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Any Psychic Merit

Effect: Believers are typically Storyteller characters who serve as assistants to a psychic character and who unconditionally believe in the psychic's powers. Believers are essentially the same as Retainers (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 116), except that the Believers' strong belief in psychic phenomena allows them to aid the character in using his powers. When a psychic is assisted by Believers, he gains a +1 bonus

to a power's roll for each dot in this Merit, assuming that at least the same number of such people are present. Normally, this bonus is limited to a +3. Some Merit options can allow the bonus gained from Believers to go as high as +5. So, if Believers ●●● is possessed and only two such people are actually present, a +2 bonus is gained. If seven Believers are present and only three dots are possessed when using another Merit, only +3 is gained. If a psychic suffers a dramatic failure while using a power, the results never cause a Believer to withdraw or develop an aversion to the psychic.

Doubting Thomas (●)

Prerequisites: None, but the character can have no other Merits that confer psychic powers.

Effect: A Doubting Thomas is a mortal who strongly and emphatically rejects the existence of psychic phenomena. Almost anyone can simply doubt the existence of such possibilities, but a Doubting Thomas is almost pathological on the subject, as the character himself has a latent potential for psychic powers that he cannot use due to a persistent mental block. The character's latent abilities are channeled into negating any actual psychic powers in his vicinity in order to help preserve his belief that the possibility is not real. Any attempt to use obvious psychic powers in the Doubting Thomas' presence automatically suffers a -2 penalty, as he constantly watches the psychic for the slightest hint of fraud. If multiple Thomases are in a psychic's presence, the penalties they impose are cumulative.

Drawback: A Doubting Thomas also suffers from a mild derangement triggered by assertions of psychic phenomena.

Precisely how this ailment manifests is determined by you, but a Doubting Thomas confronted by phenomena purported to be psychic is likely compelled to confront the performer and try to debunk her claims. Common derangements for Doubting Thomases include Fixation, Suspicion and Irrationality (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, pp. 97–99).

Ghost Ally (●●● to ●●●●●)

Effect: Unlike the Allies Merit available in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, which represents influence in a particular field or area, a Ghost Ally represents a specific being — a ghost who is able and willing to aid the character in her endeavors.

A Ghost Ally is built as follows. First, he has seven dots in Attributes, divided among Power, Finesse and Resistance. These Attributes are used to determine the rest of the ghost's Advantages according to the rules outlined on p. 208 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*. The Ghost Ally has both a Virtue and a Vice, but no Skills. The Ghost Ally has a maximum Essence pool of 10 that is used to fuel Numina. The Ghost Ally has one Numen, chosen from those listed in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*. The Ally also has a single anchor that must be the character with whom the being is connected.

Finally, a Ghost Ally has a set number of bonus points used to flesh out the restless-dead character. With this Merit at three dots, a Ghost Ally has six bonus points, while the four-dot Merit offers 12 bonus points, and the five-dot version offers 18. These bonus points can be spent as follows: six points per additional Attribute dot, three



points per additional anchor and six points per additional Numen. Also, for six points, the bond between ghost and character is made so strong that the character can see and hear the ghost when it is present, even without any psychic abilities. Without such a bond, the character cannot perceive the ghost unless it manifests or otherwise makes its presence known.

Hypnotic Voice (••••)

Prerequisites: Persuasion ••• or Science ••• (with a Specialty in Hypnotherapy or a related field)

Effect: Although not truly a psychic power, Hypnotic Voice is certainly capable of eerie effects. Whether through training in psychology or simply through having a deep, soothing voice, a character with this Merit is capable of hypnotizing others into trance states. The character can hypnotize anyone given the opportunity, but it is much easier if the subject is willing. While in a hypnotic trance, a subject can be given suggestions or forced to confront repressed memories, possibly memories stolen by vampiric Disciplines or repressed due to Lunacy triggered by werewolves, or Disbelief invoked by vulgar magic.

Inducing a Light Trance

In order to begin the process of hypnotizing a subject, Manipulation + Persuasion or Science (depending on which Skill is used as the prerequisite for the Merit) is rolled. If the subject is willing, the roll is extended but not contested, and the hypnotist must accumulate [subject's Resolve x5] successes, with each roll representing 10 seconds of induction. If the subject is unwilling, he can resist with Composure + Supernatural Advantage in contested rolls; resistance is reflexive. If the subject ever gets more successes in a single roll, he realizes what the hypnotist is attempting and any further attempts to hypnotize the subject fail automatically. If the subject and hypnotist ever get the same number of successes in a roll, the subject does not begin to enter a trance, but doesn't realize what the hypnotist attempts either, so the performer can proceed. If the hypnotist's successes on a roll are ever five or more and exceed the subject's in that period, the victim begins to enter a trance despite himself and suffers a -1 penalty on all subsequent contested rolls. The hypnotist must have a target's undivided attention. She cannot hypnotize someone carrying on a conversation with someone else, or who intently watches television while paying the hypnotist no mind.

Once the player accumulates enough successes, the subject is successfully placed into a light trance. The subject is not able to initiate any hostile actions until he wakes up, and is highly suggestible. The hypnotist can induce an entranced subject to give up any non-intimate information or to perform almost any non-hazardous action with a successful Manipulation + Persuasion roll. A light trance lasts for a scene before the subject comes out of it. The trance ends automatically if someone makes a loud noise or even physically shakes the subject, and the hypnotist can wake the subject whenever she desires. If the hypnotist attempts to get the subject to do something that violates her Morality or her Virtue, or that is obviously dangerous or suicidal, the trance ends immediately.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion or Science (Hypnotherapy Specialty), possibly contested by Composure + Supernatural Advantage

Action: Extended (subject willing) or extended and contested (subject unwilling). The hypnotist must accumulate successes equal to the target's Resolve x5, with each roll representing 10 seconds of speech.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hypnotist fails to entrance his subject and loses any accumulated successes. If the subject was unwilling, she automatically knows that the hypnotist was attempting to hypnotize her and may react accordingly. Any subsequent attempts to hypnotize the subject (or indeed, anyone else who saw what happened) fail automatically.

Failure: The character gathers no successes at this time.

Success: The character gets the required number of successes and the subject is placed in a light trance.

Exceptional Success: The character gathers five or more successes than required. The character gains a +2 bonus on any Social rolls against the subject for the remainder of the trance.

Dice Modifiers	Situation
+2	The subject is intoxicated, drugged or otherwise mentally impaired.
+1	The subject is under peer pressure to submit to hypnosis, most commonly during a stage-hypnotist show.

Deepening the Trance

Once a subject is put into a light trance, the character can attempt to hypnotize him further. The player must roll Manipulation + Persuasion (- the subject's Composure). While such a deep trance lasts, the hypnotist gains a +2 bonus on all Social rolls against the subject (+5 with an exceptional success), she can persuade him to perform almost any non-dangerous action, and she can give post-hypnotic suggestions that can affect the subject's perceptions or even beliefs (such as the stereotypical depiction of the hypnotist making a subject bark like a dog). A deep trance lasts for a scene, after which the subject goes into a normal sleep and stays out for hours unless awoken by mundane means.

While the subject is in a deep trance, the hypnotist can attempt to get him to perform actions that violate his Morality or Virtue, or that are obviously dangerous or suicidal. The hypnotist must phrase such commands in a manner calculated to work around the subject's beliefs, however. A conservative preacher might rebel at being ordered to strip down in front of strangers, but if persuaded that he was a male dancer, such inhibitions can be overcome. Commands calculated to overcome Morality or Virtue or that place a subject in grave danger suffer a penalty in a Social roll based on how well the hypnotist works around the subject's inhibitions.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion - subject's Composure

Action: Instant, although the roll can be made only after at least five minutes of induction

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hypnotist fails to entrance the subject, who instantly awakens.

Failure: The character fails to induce the subject to enter a deep trance. Other attempts can be made if time permits.

Success: The subject is placed in a deep trance. The character gains a +2 bonus on any Social rolls against the target for the remainder of the trance.

Exceptional Success: The subject is placed into an exceptionally deep trance. The character gains a +5 bonus on all Social rolls against the subject for the rest of the trance.

Dice Modifiers Situation

+2 The subject is intoxicated, drugged or otherwise mentally impaired.

+1 The subject is under peer pressure to submit to hypnosis, most commonly during a stage-hypnotist show.

Memory Recovery

Once a subject has been put into a deep trance, the hypnotist can attempt to help him to recover repressed or stolen memories, although doing so might be highly traumatic for the subject depending on the experiences' nature. The player must roll Manipulation + Persuasion, resisted by the subject's Resolve + Supernatural Advantage, and accumulate [the subject's Resolve x5] in successes, all as part of an extended and contested action. The player's dice pool also suffers a penalty according to the nature of the memories recovered. The hypnotist must achieve an exceptional success (gather five or more successes than needed in the time allowed or under the circumstances) for the subject to be able to recall the repressed memories after waking from the trance. If more successes are ever achieved for the subject in any contested roll, that memory cannot be restored by the hypnotist in this effort. Another attempt may be made after 24 hours.

Cost: None

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion versus the subject's Resolve + Supernatural Advantage (resistance is reflexive)

Action: Extended and contested, with each roll representing 30 minutes of hypnotherapy

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The hypnotist's attempts to dredge up the lost memories traumatizes the subject, inflicting a mild derangement on him.

Failure: The character gathers no successes at this time.

Success: The character gets the required number of successes. The subject is able to recall the lost memories while under a trance, but does not recall them while awake.

Exceptional Success: Five or more successes than required are accumulated. The subject recalls the lost memories after awakening.

Dice Modifier Lost Memories

— Non-traumatic events that have simply been forgotten.

-2 Traumatic but mundane events such as childhood circumstances or a sexual assault.

-4 "Unintentional" supernatural influences that have affected the subject's memories, such as Disbelief triggered by the actions of a mage or Lunacy triggered by a werewolf.

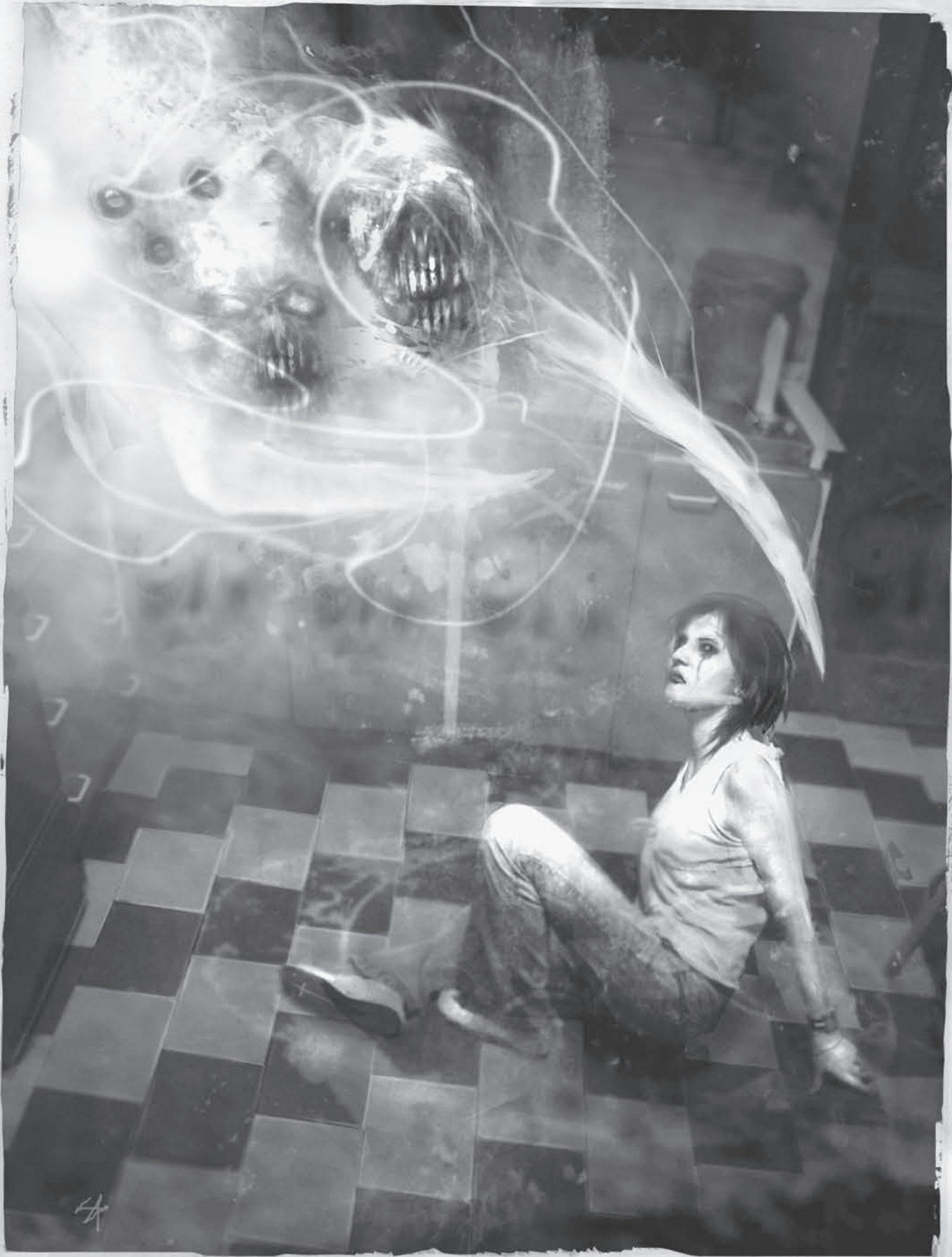
-5 "Deliberate" supernatural effects intended to alter the subject's memories, such as vampiric Disciplines or effects created with the Mind Arcana.

Lucid Dreamer ,(●)

Effect: The Lucid Dreamer Merit is common among both ordinary people and psychics. It represents the capacity to realize that one is dreaming and that such dreams cannot truly cause harm. Your character is rarely troubled by any but the most terrifying of mundane nightmares, although he remains vulnerable to supernaturally or psychically induced ones. The Dreamer can defend himself against attacks by psychics who have the Dream Travel Merit. When a Lucid Dreamer is psychically attacked within one of his own dreams, his Composure is considered to be +2 for purposes of determining whether a dream attack can harm him. Second, a Lucid Dreamer can initiate attacks against intruders of his dreams. One Willpower point must be spent per attack, and each attack is resolved according to the rules for Dream Travel described on p. 38. Unless a Lucid Dreamer has the power of Dream Travel, he can initiate these attacks only within his own dreams.

Psychic Resistance ,(● to ●●●)

Effect: Your character, either through extensive training or natural ability, has an innate resistance to invasive telepathic powers such as Mind Breaker, Mind Control, Mind Reading and Psychic Empathy. This resistance might take the form of performing math problems mentally, quoting nursery rhymes or even praying fervently. With even one dot, the character can tell if a psychic attempts to use a telepathic or other mind-affecting psychic power on him with a successful Wits + Composure roll (made reflexively by the Storyteller). The character's Psychic Resistance dots are also added to his Resolve or Composure when rolling to contest any psychic powers that affect his mind. Neither powers directed against his body (such as Psychic Vampirism or Telekinetic Grapples) nor psychic powers that affect the mind but that do not allow a contested roll (such as Mental Blast or Psychic Invisibility) are affected by this Merit. The benefits of this Merit do not apply to mind-controlling effects used by vampires, werewolves or mages.



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Chapter Three: Low Magic

MAGIC is the Highest, most Absolute, and most Divine Knowledge of Natural Philosophy, advanced in its works and wonderful operations by a right understanding of the inward and occult virtue of things; so that true Agents being applied to proper Patients, strange and admirable effects will thereby be produced. Whence magicians are profound and diligent searchers into Nature; they, because of their skill, know how to anticipate an effort, which to the vulgar shall seem to be a miracle.

– The Lesser Key of Solomon, an anonymous 17th-century grimoire

The inhabitants of the World of Darkness live among the artifacts of a forgotten history of which they are blissfully unaware. Unable to comprehend the flickers of the arcane that occasionally intrude upon their lives, human beings actively seek to dismiss these secrets. Most mortals are complicit in their own deception, willfully remaining asleep while alarms warning of the hidden world call for humans to rouse from the dream. And yet, a rare few risk a deep look into the darkness and actually become one of those secrets.

Thaumaturges

This chapter is a toolkit for Storytellers and players who wish to incorporate individuals who practice “minor” or “low” magic into their games. This magic is not designed to compete with the supernatural powers of vampires, werewolves or mages. This is magic of the subtle variety taught by those who believe in magic in the real world. Subtle is a relative term, of course. While none of the mystic abilities presented here equates to sucking blood or flinging fireballs from your fingertips, you will find that this magic can still prove quite potent.

Respect for Others

Many of the traditions of magic presented in this chapter are based on real-world beliefs. For millions of people, these are matters of religious faith not to be taken lightly. The World of Darkness is populated with the same religious groups, from Judeo-Islamic-Christian monotheism to Buddhist and Hindu karmic cycles to shamanic and vodoun spiritualism. In the real world, there are entire libraries dedicated to refuting or proving the tenets of various religious faiths, sometimes with great eloquence or outright hatred. Sooner or later, a Storyteller will be forced to decide where the comfort level of her players lies relative to what topics are engaging and fun to explore in a game.

In pursuit of intelligent entertainment, the World of Darkness asks, “Is there an interesting story in all of this?” Whether you (a real person) believe in Christ or not, Christianity may have gravity in your character’s life. Even if your Storyteller decides that the Buddha was merely the most influential, mundane religious voice of his era, the Buddhist faith may be a tangible force in his supernatural World of Darkness. Whatever you decide, you shouldn’t ever lose sight of the fact that, at the end of the night, this is a game. Don’t ignore or antagonize the religious convictions of your fellow players, or you may discover that you have lost friends. Conversely, don’t demand that skeptic friends pay homage to your beliefs, unless you are prepared to deal with intentionally critical questions (such as where Cain and Abel got their wives), or demands to prove your faith is real (to demonstrate that you can really cast Wiccan spells). No game is worth losing a friend.

In case it needs saying, White Wolf and the authors also mean no disrespect to the religious beliefs discussed here. The choice to include discussion of them in a book that is ultimately part of a game is not an attempt to trivialize them, but rather to recognize that they are widespread beliefs and that ignoring them would be the real insult. We also apologize if, through error or misunderstanding, we misrepresent any matter of anyone’s faith.

The Nature of Magic

In the World of Darkness, all manner of inhuman beings, from spirits to werewolves to vampires, can perform numerous feats of supernatural power with great ease. Ordinary mortals have no such innate connection to the supernatural. While the vast majority of mortals have neither the interest nor the ability to delve into these mysterious realms, a few daring and often foolish people spend the long years of study and practice necessary for them to call upon the powers of magic. Even the most accomplished and dedicated of these mortal thaumaturges will never be as proficient as even the weakest of supernatural beings. With the exception of the rare willworkers, humanity simply lacks a connection to any supernatural realms or powers. Nevertheless, mystics can learn to wield powers impossible for other mortals, and power is always tempting. Of course, witches are also more likely to draw the attention of supernatural beings and can find their lives filled with far more terrors and inexplicable violence than those of people who remain ignorant.

Magic in the World of Darkness

Magic is essentially an unnatural force that requires making contact with powers and beings that are completely outside the lives of ordinary people. Most societies that accept the existence of magic still consider magicians to be outsiders and often view them with suspicion or fear. Even magicians who are considered to be valuable members of a community are usually considered outside the social mainstream. Although many communities in isolated regions feel that shamans are important members of the community, those mystics still live on the edge of town, in huts that locals fear to approach. Similarly, while many peasants in rural China still seek out Taoist alchemists when seriously ill or troubled, most of these alchemists dwell apart from the common people, living as solitary hermits or in special monasteries with others who have dedicated their lives to the practice of spiritual or physical perfection.

In the industrialized world, the situation is even more extreme. Most people in North America, Western Europe, Japan, Australia and other “modernized” nations consider belief in magic to be superstition or delusion, and the vast majority of those who even recognize magic consider it an unholy abomination. As a result, magicians in these nations are extremely secretive and adept at concealing their practices. Unfortunately, doing so can create significant tension in one’s life.

All forms of thaumaturgy require several years of concerted study to learn. The vast majority of people who are willing to dedicate themselves are both fascinated by the occult and deeply committed to the practice of their particular magical traditions. Being unable to talk about something that takes up so much of one’s time and that is so central to one’s life separates mystics from others, and causes many magicians to be both secretive and paranoid.

The practice of magic is not without danger, either. Using some types of magic can anger powerful spirits or ghosts that can easily rend a witch’s body or soul. Almost any magical ritual can backfire in ways that can cause serious injury or problems. In addition, if a thaumaturge is not sufficiently secretive, practicing magic can attract the attention of desperate people willing to blackmail him into performing rituals for them. It can attract religious fanatics who consider all magicians to be monsters. Or blatant displays can attract powerful beings such as vampires and werewolves who may be interested in or annoyed by a practitioner’s work.

Magical Traditions

In addition to being fraught with risk, magic is inherently uncertain and inexact. It’s not a science. Two rituals that accomplish the same result may require thaumaturges to perform extremely different actions. Every magician uses rituals that are at least slightly different from those performed by any other ritualists, and there are a number of radically different traditions of magic. Each mystic tradition represents a wildly different approach to the study and practice of magic. Many of these practices are effective, but each one has its particular strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, studying a particular tradition requires both dedication and practice — no mortal can practice more than a single tradition of magic. The different traditions represent such fundamentally unique approaches to the supernatural that it is impossible to learn and use more than one. One of the most important elements of learning a magical tradition involves gaining a deep and intuitive understanding of how that tradition views magic and the supernatural. Learning a new tradition completely eliminates the ability of a thaumaturge to use any previous thaumaturgic tradition she had learned, because learning a new type of thaumaturgy requires a magician to effectively unlearn the ways needed to perform the magic of her old path. There are six major magical traditions in the World of Darkness: apostles of the Dark One, ceremonial magicians, hedge witches, Taoist alchemists, vodoun and shamans.

Magicians in the World of Darkness

Even mortal thaumaturgy can be a powerful force, but learning to use it is a choice that drastically alters a person’s life. For thousands of years, magicians have written that their work sets them apart from other men and women, because of the power magicians wield and because of the lives that their magic forces them to live. Although some magicians foolishly believe otherwise, mortal practitioners in the World of Darkness are not magic-wielding superheroes or powerful champions against the darkness. They are ordinary men and women who have uncovered a portion of the mysteries among which they live. Many newly trained magicians revel in the knowledge they can wield over ordinary and unsuspecting people, but most

magicians eventually learn that the world is far stranger and more dangerous than they could have imagined. Their magic only serves to make them aware of the many greater dangers and mysteries that surround them.

While thaumaturges almost never learn the inner workings or details of the various supernatural beings that inhabit the world, the thaumaturges' magic and studies allow some to discover that centuries-old vampires and powerful Atlantean mages walk the streets. Other magicians learn of the existence of predatory werewolves and horrific spirits. Almost everything that mystics learn about supernatural beings is a mixture of truth and lies, and sometimes the only reason they learn it at all is their knowing is useful to some particular creature.

Thaumaturgy and Religion

Almost every faith addresses magic. The first priests and spiritual leaders were almost certainly shamans or other types of magicians. Indeed, in many remote portions of the world, magicians still hold important spiritual authority. This does not mean that thaumaturges are any more likely to be saintly or even generally good people, merely that the relationship between spirituality and magic is exceedingly close.

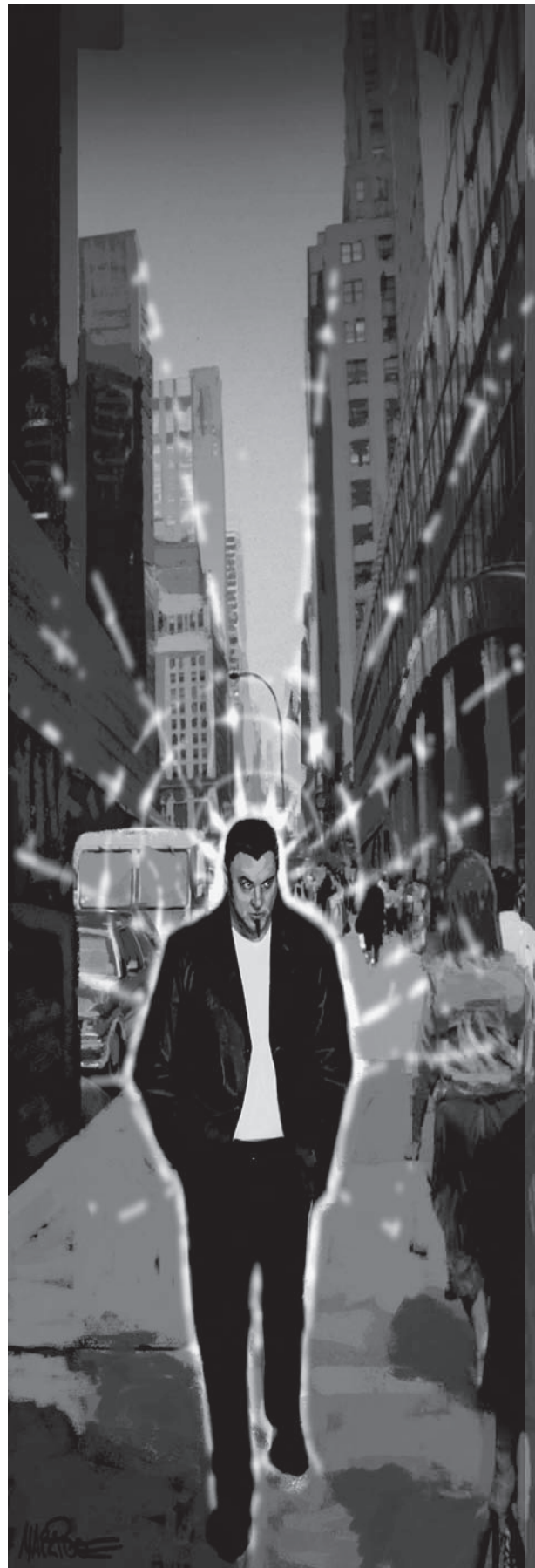
Today, some misguided mystics believe that they work with subtle powers in the same manner that scientists and engineers work with electrons and quantum forces. These mystics maintain that magic is essentially devoid of any religious or spiritual connotation other than that made by superstitious practitioners in the past. However, the fact that mystics regularly interact with ghosts and entities from *Twilight* and the Shadow Realm indicates that while magic may not be tied to any specific religion or path, practicing magic is intrinsically tied to religious questions of souls and morality. As a result, most magical traditions are closely associated with a set of spiritual or religious beliefs, and the majority of mystics are at least nominally religious.

What Makes a Thaumaturge?

One of the issues you may wish to consider as a Storyteller is how thaumaturges actually gain power over magic. If you prefer to leave the answer as a mystery, feel free. Sooner or later, however, you are likely to discover that certain questions arise in your game. Your answers ultimately determine the very fabric of magic in the World of Darkness that you present to your players.

Ritual Makes the Thaumaturge

Mystics' powers are activated through rituals that focus the magical energy of the material world (and perhaps the Shadow Realm). These rituals are the condensed wisdom of hundreds or even thousands of years of study by untold numbers seeking to understand and control the world. People saw that they grew old and died, so they looked for ways to live forever. They lost their friends and families to death, so sought to keep in touch with those they lost. Love-struck youths were rejected or jilted by the



objects of their affection, and hoped to gain the devotion they had been denied. Some discovered techniques that gave them the power to achieve these desires, to one degree or another. And so they taught others.

What does one teach, though? If magic can be invoked by the repetition of a ritual that can be taught, then it would seem (with a modicum of demonstration) everyone could perform magic on some level. After all, if a fisherman teaches you even the vague basics of the trick of fishing, then you are likely to experience at least occasional success in catching a fish, even if you never become an unerring master in your newfound art. It would appear, then, that more is involved than the physical repetition of a ritual.

Of course, you could very well decide that learning the exact sequential steps of a ritual is precisely what is required to be a thaumaturge. In this case, the mechanical form of the technique is all that's important. The practice of magic is ultimately a learned capability, even if it were as intellectually complex as computer programming, as physically demanding as Olympic competition, or both. If one can learn to perform the actions of his teacher *just so*, he can enact magic just as his trainer does.

Should you take this route, magic of the subtle thaumaturgy variety might be prevalent in your setting. If anyone can learn magic, provided that he is capable of duplicating the learned physical actions of a single teacher, then why hasn't the practice spread far and wide? The most reasonable answer suggests keeping in mind that this isn't baseball trivia or the evening's TV program schedule. A thaumaturge would be painfully aware that anybody else who learns the technique learns how to perform the magic. Responsible practitioners wouldn't be any more likely to broadcast the secrets of how to control the world than the Centers for Disease Control is to start stuffing packages of anthrax into mailboxes.

Belief Makes the Thaumaturge

Another common idea asserts that belief gives a magician control over the energies of the world. Certainly, some successful practitioners are likely to argue that the beliefs of human beings *always* have some effect on the world. Simply believing that something is true doesn't necessarily make it so, however. Not even in the World of Darkness.

Some studies suggest that anywhere from 1.7 to 2.2% of the United States' population may have mental disorders (*Psychiatric Times*, April 2002). As far as the rest of us can tell, the abnormal mental state of millions of humans doesn't appear to have ultimate power over the laws of reality. (Of course, this very idea may be the crux of your game, so don't let us ruin your fun.) If belief alone, no matter how powerful, fervent or obsessive (and even if held by millions of people) is not enough to usurp control of the world, then why should belief grant the power to shape the laws of the universe?

Of course, you could decide that belief is precisely what it takes to make thaumaturgy work. Dedication to the technique is what's important. If one believes that one can talk

to spirits, then one is able to talk to spirits. This approach introduces a certain horrific sense of mystery — if madmen can simply create magic from their broken minds, what sort of world do we inhabit? Perhaps the World of Darkness is a nightmare, because it's the dream of an unfortunate subset of society composed of victims trapped in straitjackets or doomed to wander the streets babbling things the rest of us would rather not hear. Or what if belief is an aggregate thing? The majority believes there is no magic, so there is no magic.

Also worthy of consideration is the power of religion. If belief is the defining characteristic of successful use of magic, then surely those practices supported by religious bodies dominate the occult world. If the masses of churchgoers can't call upon miracles when they believe in them, what does it say of their professed conviction? What might happen if the fundamentalist disdain for even the trappings of magic weakens (or even destroys) traditions that might otherwise desire to follow the Judeo-Christian philosophy? Those who follow such faiths wouldn't be able to tap into their own mystic potential. Imagine if shamanic, vodoun or Taoist alchemists were the dominant magical force simply because other cultures' magicians were crushed beneath the weight of disbelief on the part of the faithful.

The Power of Belief

Although the beliefs of mortals don't grant them the ability to write their names in the sky in giant fiery letters, or to turn back the clock on a spoiled jug of milk, beliefs do affect the world on some level. The human spirit is gifted with the remarkable ability to refute the existence of supernatural events that the spirit finds threatening or unfathomable. Consult the table below and apply the most severe applicable modifier (if any) as a penalty to rolls for rituals to perform thaumaturgy.

Dice Modifier	Witnesses
0	All witnesses believe in the power of the thaumaturge's tradition.
-1	Presence of one or more witnesses who don't believe in magic or don't believe in the mystic's tradition.
-2	More than 20 witnesses who don't believe in magic or don't believe in the magician's tradition.
-3	The ritual is performed in front of unbelieving witnesses (of any number) who strive to think in a highly rational manner, such as college students in a classroom or techs in a laboratory.
-3	More than 100 witnesses who don't believe in magic or don't believe in the thaumaturge's tradition.

- 5 The ritual is being televised and broadcast over a large area.
- 5 The ritual is performed in front of scientists or debunkers who actively look for any signs of trickery or deceit.

It Takes Two

Given the potential logical problems that arise when one tries to assess the idea of thaumaturgy coming from ritual or belief alone, some combination of the two likely applies. The successful practitioner learns the technique of the art, from the trappings that create sympathetic bonds to the physical motions that focus the will. A ritual is a tool, whether learned from a wise mentor with hopes for her student, from the pages of a tome of magical learning or even from years of experimentation and luck. If the thaumaturge needs a hammer, whether she makes it herself or buys it at the store doesn't matter.

If the ritual is a hammer, then belief is the hand that wields the hammer. A ritual works by focusing one's will according to a tradition of magic. The will cannot be focused to create magic without belief, however. If one has no confidence in the ritual, then the rite has no power. Luckily, new faith may be found where none existed, or to strengthen flagging conviction. Mentors pass on more than just the knowledge of rituals. Watching a ritual actually work is often enough to inspire the conviction necessary to perform the ritual oneself. Pulling off a thaumaturgical effect is enough to boost anyone's confidence. One success often leads to another, and then another. Of course, this process also leads to a thirst for knowledge of more rituals.

Or Maybe It Takes Three

Looking at the mystics of the World of Darkness, you probably see that they share knowledge of rituals and belief in their personal traditions of magic. Some traditions teach that this combination is all that's required to advance in the magical arts. Conviction and technique, hand in hand, provide one with command over the mystic energies of the world. This viewpoint is particularly popular with "left-hand" traditions of magical study. Left-hand paths emphasize free thought, teach that magic is personal, and assert that the individual must change rather than depend on outside forces.

Other practitioners suggest that there is a third element required to gain power. Many shamans, in particular, believe that the essence of magic descends from one or more spirits. Vodoun practitioners seek contact with the loa with every ritual. Even some apostles of the Dark One feel that communion is the source of their power, rather than an inevitable achievement of the pathway to personal divinity. Those who adhere to this philosophy believe that the final ingredient is a gift. The divine, in the form of one or more spirits or gods, grants a ritualist the power to perform magic. Thus, rites are a form of dedication to a higher power, and belief in that power is naturally required. For some, the gift is seen as a lesson of some kind. The higher power grants some previously secret method that unlocks one's ability

to draw power from rituals. Others see the gift as a granting of authority rather than knowledge. A thaumaturge's own will and knowledge of rituals was always capable of enacting magic, but the universe did not recognize her right to do so.

As with many matters of faith, this idea is nearly impossible to prove or disprove. A ritual that works approximately the same way every time lends credence to the idea that the ritual is important. The disruptive influence of non-believers also seems to support the strength of conviction. There is no way to know whether a spirit's interaction with a thaumaturge is actually necessary for the attainment of magical power, however. Perhaps the spirit's appearance merely inspires a shaman to finally believe in himself. Alternatively, perhaps the meeting is merely the missing piece in a puzzle of a ritual's technique. If a Taoist alchemist discovers the secrets of longevity without ever being approached by a spirit of the heavens, that doesn't prove that he didn't receive help. His success may have been mandated by beings that manipulate fate, or he may have been granted authority over the power of life by a decree of the divine. Maybe we aren't meant to know, or maybe this is a mystery just waiting for the right time to be solved.

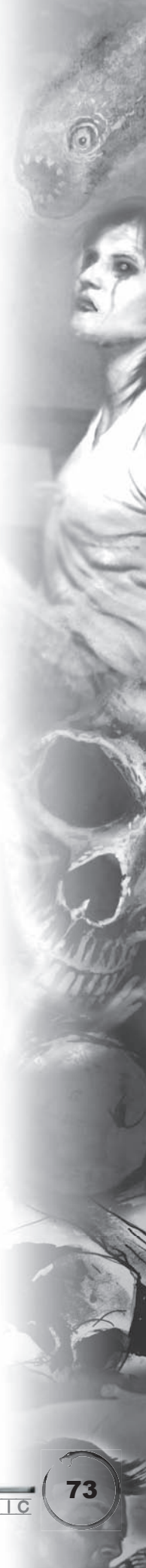
Thaumaturges Are Not Mages

If you own **Mage: The Awakening**, it may occur to you to ask, "What's the difference between mages and thaumaturges?" **Mage: The Awakening** presents rules for the inheritors of an ancient legacy of magic descendant from the fallen city of Atlantis. Mages draw their power from practices that predate the existence of the world's remnant civilizations. Specifically, the mages' method of performing magic involves drawing energy from otherworldly realms that lie outside the ken of human existence.

The magic of the Supernal Realms is not the only magic available in the World of Darkness, though. Mystic energies flow across the face of the Earth independent of any higher reality. Perhaps those forces have been unfettered, escaping long ago from their original source. Mages may even be responsible for this energy, having brought a bit of it into the physical world with every spell cast over the millennia. Or there are other supernatural beings that are not mages and yet possess miraculous powers. Ghosts, spirits, vampires, werewolves and who knows what else have mystic tricks of their own. Or maybe the world has always possessed some magic.

Whatever the reason for magic's presence, certain mortals have learned to tap into magic's power, even to control it to a degree. Though they do not wield the awesome powers held by mages or other supernatural beings, these mortals are capable of performing magic nonetheless. If it is less powerful, perhaps it's because they must make do with the mystic energy of the material world and its Shadow Realm rather than having access to wellsprings of higher reality. The result is that these wonder-workers can be quite resourceful.

As noted above, mages draw their power from practices predating the existence of the world's remnant civilizations. Thaumaturgy, on the other hand, is a product of the



civilizations of the world to some degree or other. A mystic draws his capacity to manipulate from traditions handed down through the generations, rather than suddenly gaining it in a moment of epiphany. That isn't to say that mages don't work for their power, but it would be hard to argue that thaumaturges don't have to work harder. If a mystic is wise, he saves himself a few of these trials by learning the lessons of his predecessors.

Or Maybe They Are

Of course, you could decide that there is no difference between thaumaturges and mages in your game. One way to do that is to treat the traditions of magic presented here as Legacies (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 344) with the special Thaumaturge Merits functioning as Attainments. Attainments are forms of magic a mage may perform without risking Paradox, or many of the other potential disadvantages of spell use. Alternatively, you could simply allow mages to have Thaumaturge Merits with the dots received during character creation, or with experience points. These Merits might represent practices that have become so intrinsic to a mage's arts that they do not require reaching into the higher realms for help.

Rather than subsuming mystic abilities into those of mages, you could go the other way. **Mage: The Awakening** is packed full of powerful Arcane and useful spells. You could treat each of them as a special Merit to be purchased for a witch and enacted only through ritual magic, as described in this chapter.

Or you could allow for both options to be equally valid. Mages would learn Thaumaturge Merits as Attainments for Legacies, or as intrinsic practices gained via Merits (or both). Thaumaturges would have access to all of the **Mage: The Awakening** rites, but would gain them only as singular practices bought individually as ritually performed Thaumaturge Merits.

Magical Groups

Thaumaturges sometimes work in small groups to enhance their magic. These circles are especially common among ceremonial magicians and hedge witches. In addition to being able to pool resources such as the Library or Magical Nexus Merits, members regularly cooperate to perform rituals. These groups tend to be relatively small and rarely include more than a dozen members, although the largest have as many as 20.

Because so few people believe in magic in most industrialized nations, magical groups are especially popular there because members cannot only work together on rituals, they can openly discuss their dedication with others who do not consider them foolish or deluded. Magical groups range from tightly knit private collectives such as neo-pagan covens united by both their shared spirituality and their magical tradition to informal and highly diverse gatherings of people from various traditions who keep in touch solely to share knowledge and occasionally perform group rituals. Other possibilities include secret and highly discreet organizations

within conventional religious groups or publicly known organizations such as the Freemasons.

The Internet allows thaumaturges to communicate with unparalleled ease. Unfortunately, the Internet also allows fakes, con artists, hecklers, insane people, untrained and would-be magicians and occasionally supernatural predators to pretend to be mystics or to simply observe discussions and spy on plans. Learning to separate actual magicians from the large numbers of fakes and fools is one of the talents that every magician online must learn. It is rarely difficult if a person is willing to talk about her beliefs and practices. Few magicians, however, know that supernatural predators and powerful willworkers also occasionally read and write about magic in hopes of attracting the attention of one or more thaumaturges. Because such beings almost always know far more about magic and the supernatural than even the most experienced mortal witch, there is no safe or easy way to tell them from ordinary magicians — a fact that a few learn far too late to save themselves.

Regardless of how members of a magical group meet, even contributors to a highly informal and somewhat distant group often grow close, simply by virtue of the fact that performing group rituals is an extremely powerful act of trust. Thaumaturges in the industrialized world live double lives, wherein they must avoid talking about and sometimes actively deny their activities to most people. Being able to let down these barriers naturally inspires closeness. Unfortunately, while many magicians describe magical groups as families, some families can be exceedingly dysfunctional. Such problems can be far worse when combined with the fact that the practice of magic exposes magicians to threats such as possession and supernatural control. Incidents of madness, violence and occasionally murder are not uncommon. Many mystics attempt to conceal such problems from outsiders for fear of being revealed for what they are.

Group Rituals

Cooperative magic is handled like any other action in which characters combine efforts (see "Teamwork" in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 134). The mystics involved must all possess the Merit needed to perform the ritual. If the particular ritual requires a performer to possess a certain number of dots, all participants must have at least that many.

One caster is designated as the leader, with the others as helpers. At the end of each turn of casting, a ritual roll is made for each of the helpers as if casting the spell themselves. Successes are added as bonus dice to the leader's ritual roll. A dramatic failure on the part of any participant causes the entire ritual to fail and all participants to suffer the affects of a dramatic failure. Although all members of the group need not be members of the same magical tradition, the leader suffers

a dice-pool penalty equal to the number of additional magical traditions involved in the ritual. If two ceremonial magicians and a hedge witch work together to perform a scrying ritual, the leader suffers a -1 penalty because there's a member of one additional magical tradition involved.

Magical Rituals

Because of limited access to powers, thaumaturges must perform complex and sometimes lengthy rituals to work magic. Such rites can take many forms that are influenced by both a mystic's personal style and his tradition. For example, shamanic rituals always involve a thaumaturge going into some form of trance, but he can achieve that state by drumming, ecstatic dancing or taking hallucinogens. Regardless of the form of a particular ritual or even of the magical tradition to which it belongs, all rituals require a magician to spend anywhere from a few minutes to several hours performing a set of symbolic actions.

These rituals all serve the same essential purpose — they allow a performer to focus his will on the magical task before him. Aleister Crowley defined magic as “the science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with the will.” Focusing will is only one part of magic, though. The World of Darkness is subject to subtle and pervasive supernatural influence. Spirits and ghosts occasionally trouble the lives of ordinary people, beasts unknown to science lurk in the wilderness and ordinary mortals can learn to influence everything from the emotions of fellow mortals to the weather by performing certain actions with specific symbolic associations. In addition to psychological usefulness, the actions involved in any ritual are constructed to allow a magician to indirectly manipulate some portion of reality or its inhabitants.

Performing Rituals

Not all magical rituals are equally difficult or time consuming. Some may require an hour or more to perform while others can be performed in a few minutes. Every ritual is an extended action (see “Extended Actions,” pp. 128–129 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*), in which the minimum number of successes required is equal to the number of dots of the Merit (so a power that is a three-dot Merit requires three successes to enact). The time between ritual rolls depends upon the type of ritual; see below for further information. If a character fails to complete a ritual in time (such as by being killed before accumulating enough successes) or decides to cancel the rite before garnering enough successes, the effect simply fails. Any Willpower or other expenditures made are not recovered.

While the nature and purpose of each ritual determines the exact results, the following general results apply to all thaumaturgy rituals.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The ritual fails spectacularly, inflicting some aspect of itself as a detrimental effect upon the caster. A ritual intended to damage a subject inflicts its damage upon the caster, for example, while a ritual designed to inflict an effect on its target visits the same upon the caster.

Failure: If the magician abandons or is forced to stop the ritual before it succeeds, the ritual fails entirely, but not dangerously. All actions are performed, but the ritual has no effect.

Success: If the mystic obtains the necessary number of successes to perform the ritual, it takes place as described.

Exceptional Success: If the thaumaturge obtains substantially more successes than the ritual requires (typically at least five more than required), the ritual takes place as described but is usually somewhat more powerful or long lasting. In some cases, extra successes are their own reward, causing additional damage or conferring extra duration, capacity or similar benefits.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

+1 to +2 The character uses especially elaborate tools and accoutrements. Characters must generally spend considerable amounts of time or money to track down suitable ritual tools and supplies. Thaumaturgic rituals cannot be performed if a character lacks proper tools, but some tools are unusually suitable or well made and grant bonuses to rolls made for a magician.

+1 to +2 The ritual is performed on a minor or major magical nexus (see below for further information)

— The character is unaffected by threats or distractions.

-1 or more Each point of damage suffered in a turn is a penalty to the next casting roll made for the character, in addition to any wound penalties that a caster might suffer.

-1 to -4 The character is rushed or distracted, such as by invoking a ritual in a locked room while enemies attempt to break down the door. This penalty is cumulative with multiple distractions (such as by casting a ritual in combat during a hurricane). Successes gained on a Meditation roll (see p. 51 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*) offset these interruption penalties on a one-for-one basis.

Limits on Rituals

Sometimes a magician cannot continue to perform a ritual indefinitely. If he performs a rite that requires him to see the target, he must complete the ritual before the target moves out of sight. Or some rituals may require an hour or more to perform, and a thaumaturge might have a deadline, such as completing a blessing before he gives an important speech or completing the ritual before the mystic must go to work. Finally, the Storyteller can always rule that a player is limited to a total number of rolls for a ritual equal to the magician's Attribute + Skill. If a number of rolls in excess of that total is required to perform a rite, the caster simply doesn't have the capability or attention span to accomplish it right now. Any of these cases can constrain a mystic's performance and dictate whether a ritual can be performed until completion or aborted early due to time or capability limitations.

Formal and Informal Rituals

Rituals can be categorized by the time and complexity required for each roll — no rite requires less than one minute per roll or more than one hour per roll. Rituals that require 10 or more minutes for each roll are complex and demanding tasks that are normally performed in a space where the character should face minimal disturbances or distractions. Such actions are collectively known as formal rituals because of their length and complexity. Formal rituals also usually require a character to carry at least a briefcase or shoulder bag full of necessary tools and equipment, and to find a vacant room or to go to her ritual space.

Modifiers for Formal Rituals

The following modifiers apply to all formal rituals. These modifiers are in addition to the modifiers stated above.

Modifier Situation

- The thaumaturge performs the ritual in private ritual space dedicated specifically to performing rites. This space has all of her needed tools and is decorated in a manner consistent with her tradition.
- The thaumaturge performs a ritual in a space that is relatively quiet and where she has spent at least 10 minutes arranging things to suit her needs.
- 2 The thaumaturge uses a space that she has not had time to prepare.

Modifiers for Informal Rituals

Rituals that require only one minute for each roll typically require a thaumaturge to do little more than concentrate on the goal and use a few small objects such as pens or bits of thread to perform one or two simple actions: say, drawing a sigil on a piece of paper while staring at the target of a rite. Such rituals are collectively known as informal because of their speed and simplicity. Informal rituals are simple and fast enough that characters can perform them while in a coffeehouse, a movie theater or any place where someone who sits quietly and stares off into space, talks quietly to herself or perhaps draws on a napkin for a few minutes is not noticed or disturbed.

The following modifiers apply to all formal rituals. These modifiers are in addition to the modifiers stated above.

Modifier Situation

- +1 The thaumaturge performs the rite in a private space that is dedicated specifically to performing rituals. This space has all of her needed tools and is decorated in a manner consistent with her tradition.
- +1 The thaumaturge performs a ritual in a space that is relatively quiet and where she has spent at least 10 minutes arranging things to suit her needs.
- The thaumaturge uses a space that she has not time to prepare, but is quiet and contains all needed tools.

Magical Connections

Because thaumaturges must often perform lengthy rituals, thaumaturges attempting to work magic on someone else may not have the luxury of having that person present. A witch must rely on the magical principles of *sympathy*

(that like affects like) and *contagion* (that two objects that were once in contact retain a mystical bond) to affect distant targets. The actual distance between a target and the thaumaturge is irrelevant. The only factor that matters is the type of magical connection possessed with the target. Some rituals, including those designed to curse or otherwise harm a subject, are almost always performed using a magical connection. Such rites almost always incur a -2 to -5 penalty caused by using a magical connection. Unless a thaumaturge knows the target exceedingly well, she must possess some sort of physical connection to him.

Dice Penalty Magical Connection

- *Sensory*: The caster can see, hear or otherwise sense the target directly, or performs a ritual upon herself. If a familiar is with the subject, a caster has a sensory connection to the target.
- 2 *Intimate*: The caster has a piece of the target's physical substance, such as hair, nail clippings or blood from a person or animal, a leaf or flower from a plant or a sliver of material from an object. Or the caster knows the target very well, such as a close friend or relative, a beloved pet or a prized possession.
- 4 *Known*: The caster has a photo or other accurate representation of the target; the caster has a personal possession belonging to the target. Alternatively, the caster can see the target on live video or hear the target over live audio.
- 5 *Acquainted*: The caster has a painting of the target or an object that the target once touched or that once touched the target.

People, objects or places that are even less familiar to a mystic lack a sufficient magical connection for a performer to be able to cause an effect. Thaumaturges cannot perform rituals on an object of which they have only heard a description, or on people they have briefly passed on the street.

Ritual Duration

Unlike supernatural beings whose magic can last for many days or weeks, few thaumaturgic rituals have effects that last longer than one day. Most last considerably less time. The most common durations for mortal magic are trance, one scene and one day. Magical effects that have a duration of trance function only while the performer remains comatose. Most trances last an hour or two; even the most dedicated and skilled magician can maintain a trance that lasts no longer than a day. If a mystic does not end a ritual sooner, any rite with a duration of trance automatically ends after one day, and the magician returns to his body (assuming he is still alive and able to return to his body). Maintaining a trance longer than 12 hours results in the magician coming out of it suffering from a Health point of bashing damage, and an additional point of bashing damage for every six additional hours after that. After 24 hours, a magician sustains three points of bashing damage when the rite ends automatically. This damage is caused by the hunger, thirst and muscle cramps produced by remaining in one position for hours.



Ritual Equipment

All thaumaturge rituals require a caster to engage in specific behavior or to utilize appropriate implements to focus the effort. Every tradition calls for typical tools, ranging from the ceremonial magician's dagger to the vodoun's ritual dances. The use of some ritual behavior or tool is a minimal requirement for thaumaturge magic. If a mystic is unable to include appropriate physical actions and tools in her performance, it fails automatically.

Some magicians attempt to perform rituals with whatever is conveniently at hand. This is likely if a performer is stuck somewhere with limited access to materials, say in an emergency. If the character's tools are of poor quality, her likelihood of casting failure increases. Vodoun, for example, often use *vévés*, which are intricate designs drawn in flour or cornmeal to represent the loa. Should a vodoun attempt an invocation with a hastily drawn design, perhaps done in packets of NutraSweet taken from a diner table, her ritual is difficult to perform.

And yet, sorcerers may use tools of particularly potent resonance, or engage in excruciatingly complex rituals in hopes of increasing the chances of success. If a shaman knows that a particular spirit likes blonde hair, he might go out of his way to bleach his hair before attempting to contact the being. Or a ceremonial magician may increase the efficiency of his spell by using a ritual dagger composed of pure silver.

Efforts to use ideal or improved tools is somewhat subjective, with the Storyteller deciding if a thaumaturge uses a normal type of tool and behavior, if the character takes

shortcuts or if he goes the extra mile and uses the finest materials available. Mere dancing is normal for a vodoun ritual of invocation, but an incredibly energetic and graceful dance might impress the loa and grant a bonus to the attempt to perform magic. High-quality materials should be very difficult to gain (requiring a character to put in interesting story time to achieve) or particularly expensive (in terms of Resources dots necessary to obtain them). Repeatedly using the same special tools or actions should raise the bar. If gear or practices becomes typical, they are the new "normal" and confer no bonuses. The Storyteller may reduce a bonus by one for each time the same action is repeated. Many of the ritual Merits in this chapter give examples of appropriate penalties and bonuses that might apply to a thaumaturge's magic.

Ritual Equipment and Behavior

Quality	Modifier
Poor tools	-1 to -3
Lazy or abbreviated ritual behavior	-1 to -3
Normal tools, normal ritual behavior	0
Excellent tools	+1 to +2
Incredible efforts	+3 to +5

Magical Nexus Points

Magic is not just something mortals and supernatural beings do. It's a force that pervades the landscape and collects in certain locations ranging from isolated groves to old

and unusual urban buildings. There are, therefore, places where the practice of thaumaturgy is easier than usual. Occultists and mystics classify these locales as minor and major nexus points. Minor points are relatively common; there are likely a dozen or more in any small city. These locations are simply places where thaumaturgy is slightly easier, and are usually of little interest to most supernatural beings. Minor magical nexus points are typically small; few are larger than a room, and none are larger than a small house or a cramped suburban backyard.

Major nexus points are considerably more rare, but are also easier to locate. Because they provide such a significant advantage to performing thaumaturgy, major points are much sought after, but many of them are also fraught with danger. Most major nexes are magical locations known to supernatural beings as Hallows, loci or Verges (see p. 60 in *Mage: The Awakening* and pp. 260–265 in *Werewolf: The Forsaken*). Verges are locations where spirits can appear spontaneously, while Hallows are of interest to mages and loci are important to werewolves. Very few mystics know any of this information. All they know is that some major nexus points are haunted and plagued by spirits, and that magicians who spend too much time there tend to vanish mysteriously or end up messily dead. Some thaumaturges consider major nexus points to be unlucky or cursed. Major nexes are rarely larger than a football field, and most consist of defined areas such as a hilltop, a grove of trees or a single mansion or apartment building.

Finding a nexus point requires a thaumaturge to learn of the location from a fellow mystic or to read about it in an old book. Alternatively, she can use one of several types of magic to locate such a place. The Scrying, Psychic Projection and Spirit-Seeing Merits (see below) all allow a practitioner to detect any magical nexes in the regions she observes, assuming the player makes a successful Wits + Occult roll. Unless this roll is an exceptional success, the character does not know whether the place is major or minor, only that it is some form of nexus. In addition, any familiar (see below) can instantly tell whether a location is a magical nexus and what type it is.

The easiest way to locate either sort of site is for a player to make a successful Meditation roll (see “Meditation,” p. 51 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*) while the thaumaturge is in a location. Once four successes have been accumulated, the character can tell if a place is a nexus point and if it’s major or minor. Unfortunately, meditating at a major magical nexus point can invite the attention of all manner of supernatural beings.

Magical Tomes

Many magicians, especially ceremonial ones (see pp. 83), seek occult books to help them perform their rituals. In addition to allowing mystics to gain additional dice for ritual dice pools, some occult books contain powerful and unique rites. All of these rituals are unique powers for which characters must have a book to perform. None of these rituals can be learned as Merits.

Some tomes contain rituals that can be performed by only practitioners of certain types of magic, while other tomes

can be used by any thaumaturge. Although these rites can be extremely powerful, all of these rites demand unusual or rare ingredients, and some demand various morally dubious practices. Some require large precious stones or objects such as the fresh heart of a lion or blood from a rhinoceros. Other, dark rites require human organs or occasionally even human or animal sacrifices. The capabilities of such rituals are many, from the ability to possess people or animals to the capacity to slay others to allowing one to transform into a powerful spirit.

All of these rituals require a total of 10 to 20 successes and a time of at least 10 minutes for each roll. Dramatic failure on any of these rolls has truly horrific and permanent effects. A few of the least powerful tomes can be duplicated using a copy machine or some similar means, but most contain much of their power in the fabric of their pages, and only someone who is using the actual tome can perform a ritual. Magicians do not know the origins of these tomes, but some suspect they are created by powerful spirits or frighteningly powerful magicians.

Types of Magical Tomes

Many magical tomes allow an owner to perform individual rites of the type found in Chapter 4: Reality-Bending Horrors. A tome might allow a thaumaturge to perform a rite such as Dread Voyage or The Gem in the Garden. Other tomes contain information on how to perform a ritual with an effect similar to a single mage rote, requiring between •• and •••• in a single Arcanum (see Chapter 3 of *Mage: The Awakening*). Magicians who use books that provide reality-bending rites may not have to make offerings to or have any contact with inhuman deities, but using these books may attract the attention of such beings.

Sample Book: Tome of the Dread Voyage

This volume allows a mystic to perform the rite of the Dread Voyage (see Chapter 4, p. 140).

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult

Ritual Length: 10 minutes

Minimum Successes Required: 10

Duration: One journey

Cost: 1 Willpower

Thaumaturge Characters and Special Rules

A mystic character is a mortal who has taken a step or two into the secrets of the World of Darkness. Through trial and error or sheer determination, he has learned a handful of those secrets himself. Standing in the shallows, the thaumaturge can choose to plunge into the darkness or cling to shore. Unfortunately, he may discover that one cannot wade in very deep without attracting sharks. This section presents rules for creating mystic characters, whether you’re a player who wants to portray one or a Storyteller who needs an important addition to her supporting cast.

Special Considerations

For the most part, creating a magician works just like creating any other mortal character with the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Thaumaturges are ordinary people with the same spread of Attributes, Skills, Merits and Advantages. Thaumaturges are subject to the same rules for Morality, and they're as subject to gaining derangements as anyone else. The traditions that some mystics follow, however, make demands of their dedication, training them so that certain traits are virtually required to follow those paths.

Character Creation Process

Use the character-creation rules from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** and add the following template to thaumaturge characters during Step Five.

Thaumaturges must have at least one dot of Occult Skill.

Choose a Thaumaturge tradition (see pp. 80-102).

The character gains a free defining Merit determined by her tradition.

The character gains a set of strengths and weaknesses determined by her tradition.

Thaumaturges can have additional Merits from a special Merits list (see pp. 102-121).

Thaumaturges use the Morality Trait. It starts at 7.

Step 1: Character Concept

The concept stage of character creation is the most important in the process. It's the foundation on which an entire character rests; it's the final answer to every question about who she is. Every decision you make during the remaining steps, and while you play, should be influenced by the concept you create now.

Thousands of hacks and frauds claim they can perform magic, and they seek to frighten or cheat people with their supposed powers. What makes your character different? Why can she actually make it work? Some spark of inspiration lies within your character, igniting her ability to achieve the miraculous. Was the discovery of magic a gradual evolution or a sudden event? Did further understanding come to her easily or was it hard-won through long years of study?

Think about the pivotal moment when your character first realized she could perform actions others saw as special or even impossible. Did she mimic the orisons of a village elder only to discover that she could see and hear ghosts? What was her childhood like when others learned she could talk to the dead? Did she always

believe in the teachings of her family and gain great satisfaction from following in others' footsteps? Was she angry or proud to find that her progenitors were only going through the motions, yet she could succeed where they failed?

When determining your character's concept, don't lose sight of her human side. It's unlikely that she was born a practicing mystic. (If so, however, that would probably be the single most important factor in her childhood.) Instead, think about the person that your character was before she discovered magic. The type of person a character is when she knows nothing about the supernatural, or when she merely regurgitates the dogma of her elders shapes the life she experiences when she opens her eyes to the modern gothic World of Darkness.

Finally, remember that the point of the game is for everyone to have fun. Obviously, make sure you will enjoy portraying your concept. But, just as important, be sure to create a concept that's compatible with your Storyteller's plans. If he isn't having fun, the entire game is going to suffer. Also, don't overlook other players. Talk to them and make sure your concept is interesting and well suited to the others'. Mild conflicts can be fascinating to explore, but few people want to sit around the table and fight with their friends. Bottom line: have fun as a group.

Steps 2 to 4:

Attributes, Skills and Specialties

Thaumaturges receive the same basic allotment of Attributes, Skills and Skill Specialties as every other mortal character. Remember, *thaumaturge characters must have at least one dot in Occult Skill*. The individual traditions also make suggestions for ways to tailor characters to those callings.

More Powerful or More Normal

The rules presented here are designed to create a thaumaturge who is competent in the basics of his tradition's primary magical arts, but with the potential to grow significantly. Some Storytellers and players may desire a different model for their games. The simplest way to achieve this is by increasing or decreasing your character's capabilities.

Increasing the power of the mystics in your game can be accomplished by using the Advanced Characters Option from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (see p. 35). Choose a number of experience points to award to characters and allow them to be spent before play begins.

The only edge over normal mortals that a thaumaturge gets (other than access to the Thaumaturge Merits list) is a free defining Merit. To create more "normal" characters, you might decide that characters do not gain this Merit for free, that it must be purchased with the dots gained in Step 7 of character creation. You might also ignore the strength and weakness that each tradition confers, causing characters to rely more heavily on their Attributes, Skills and Merits to reflect their personal expression of second sight.

Steps 5 to 7: Thaumaturge Template, Advantages and Merits

You choose a thaumaturge tradition for your character (see below) in Step 5. Choose a calling that best reflects the magical role and following you want your character to pursue. Once you've chosen a tradition, make a note of the defining Merit the tradition grants (in some cases you have a choice of one of two Merits). Record the strengths and weaknesses associated with your choice. Also note the path Merits that your choice offers, as it influences your decisions in Step 7 when you choose Merits.

Determining Advantages proceeds as normal. Nothing about thaumaturges requires any modification here. Apostles of the Dark One are subject to special considerations regarding Vice; it's of increased importance due to their strengths.

As an optional rule, Storytellers may also allow players to trade dots of Morality for experience points. This trade-in reflects some heinous past behavior a thaumaturge engaged in and learned from, but which also scarred him deeply. If this option is explored, players may sacrifice one dot of Morality for five experience points, dropping Morality as low as 5 (for a maximum of 10 extra experience points).

A thaumaturge gets seven dots of Merits, as normal. Thaumaturges have access to additional Merits not normally available to ordinary people (see the remainder of this chapter). All Thaumaturge Merits automatically call for the "Prerequisites: Thaumaturge Template."

Character Templates

World of Darkness characters begin as normal human beings by default, created using the rules on pp. 34–35 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Although playing a mortal stumbling onto dark secrets is a really fun game in its own right, various White Wolf books present options that add to the capabilities of a mundane character through specific templates. Some of these options mean drastic changes, destroying any real possibility of living a life resembling normality, while others merely offer a deeper look into the darkness without undoing the human experience. **Vampire: The Requiem** offers the vampire template, whereby your human character literally becomes a blood-sucking creature from myth. On a lesser scale, the book **Ghouls** presents rules for turning a hapless mortal into a crazed junkie addicted to and enhanced by the blood of the undead.

Second Sight provides the thaumaturge template to represent mortals who have learned a modicum of magic, but who are not privy to the Atlantean Arcana of **Mage: The Awakening**. If a thaumaturge somehow gains a new supernatural template, he loses the thaumaturge template and all of the abilities it offers. If the Storyteller chooses to allow it, a player may convert some or all mystic-specific dots into their experience-point equivalents to be spent on similar powers possessed by the type of being the character has become. So, if a magician possesses four dots in a Thaumaturge Merit, the player could have as many as 20 experience points to spend on appropriate vampiric powers. We recommend, however, that Storytellers using this option not allow the conversion of more than half of the experience points derived from lost Traits. A vodoun priestess might manage to

transfer some of her Invocation Merit into understanding of the Death Arcana should she Awaken as a mage, but the powers of a mage don't come from the same source. Something would be lost in the transition.

Thaumaturge Traditions

Although all magicians transcend mundane existence, the paths they pursue vary. The way in which one approaches the practice of magic shapes which magic one may learn and which Merits one may develop. The dedicated practice of thaumaturgy is a lifestyle, and each tradition confers certain strengths and weaknesses. Six different paths are offered here: ceremonial magician, hedge witch, shaman, vodoun, Taoist alchemist and apostle of the Dark One. With one exception, each of these practices enjoys adherents around the world and has deep roots in occult history.

Many of the supernatural beings of the World of Darkness possess magic that is almost completely independent of any cultural tradition. The powers of an African vampire are not necessarily so different from those of her Chicago counterpart. Mages who have awakened to Atlantean magic share the same powers of a higher realm, regardless of their origin. By comparison, the study of thaumaturgy involves learning an ever-increasing collection of rituals, and adopting a powerful belief in a way of life. This necessarily means absorbing the teachings of a culture. That culture may be as small and intimate as the lineage of a mentor or as massive and divisive as the Judeo-Christian faiths. Whatever the case, discussing thaumaturgy without describing the cultural cradle from which thaumaturgy is born is difficult.

Storytellers who want to include mystics with powers similar to those here, but with different cultural traditions, should easily adapt one or more of the following traditions to reflect other practices. Storytellers and players may create other callings using these as examples, but new traditions should have strong, unifying themes based on cultures of magical practice. If your goal is to tell stories in the style of **Second Sight**, choosing a nonsensical handful of Merits because they seem cool is likely to result in disappointing stories.

Tradition Traits

Defining Merit: This is the most important Thaumaturge Merit for a particular practice. A character gets this Merit for free at four dots.

Path Merits: A list of the Thaumaturge Merits that may be taken by a practitioner of the tradition. A mystic cannot possess Thaumaturge Merits listed for other traditions, only those listed for his own path.

Strengths: The thaumaturges of a tradition are particularly proficient in an aspect of their practice, and gain certain bonuses to rolls related to their training.

Weaknesses: The dedication required to practice in a tradition instills certain behaviors in a mystic. The character suffers penalties to rolls that defy her training.

Character Creation: Recommendations for additional Attributes, Skills and Merits that are particularly appropriate. These are not requirements; they are advice to get you started when creating a character of that tradition.

Apostle of the Dark One

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.

In the beginning, the universe came into being. While it may be important to discover whether the cosmos was created by a divine act or it formed spontaneously (via the Big Bang or some other method), certain magicians believe it is more important that something else existed before. Before there was light, there was darkness, and thus the darkness is the source of all that came after it. Some thaumaturges believe that the darkness is sentient, a primordial force that must necessarily have witnessed the origin of everything. For these sorcerers, the “Dark One” represents the ultimate source of knowledge.

The human mind conceives darkness as a void or non-entity. Thus, darkness has come to symbolize negation to those who are unwilling to accept it as a mystery. A mystery is confusing and frightening, so darkness is given a persona with negative traits, because it must be opposite to that which we believe we know and hold dear. But even if they might prove true, these labels are insufficient to explain the nature of things. Does the universe encompass darkness, or does darkness encompass the universe?

Good and Evil

There have always been people who have rebelled against the path chosen by the majority. Sometimes this resistance is for the better. Without the sacrifices of those who stood against slavery, for example, that horrid practice might still be an accepted way of life. But revolution may also cause great harm when taken to extremes, such as murder in the name of the cause. So, when rebellion involves contacting and understanding a force beyond existence, the general reaction is likely to be negative, regardless of whether the effort is harmful or not.

Whether communion with the primordial darkness is inherently bad depends on what the Dark One is. If it's a malevolent entity that directly contests a benevolent Creator, then communication is a dangerous prospect at best. Should the primordial darkness transcend the totality of existence, there is no basis for us to understand or judge its morals. But if the nature of the universe is not morally predetermined, any good or evil that arises from exploring the darkness is a product of the supplicant rather than the inscrutable mystery of the cosmos.

Satanism

Technically speaking, a magical or religious practice about communing with a sentient force of

darkness outside the mortal ken isn't necessarily Satanism. Nonetheless, it bears a lot of similarities to the practices of self-labeled Satanists. That similarity can be very upsetting to people who follow a monotheistic faith such as Christianity, Judaism or Islam. Exploration of Satanic principles in a roleplaying game could be very upsetting to anyone involved in the game. If your group has even one member who is bothered by this sort of stuff, or who might get in trouble for it later, you should probably just leave it out of your game.

Even if the Storyteller decides to use the apostles of the Dark One, there remains the question of what the Dark One might be. If you decide it's a primordial figure of evil or the oft-named Prince of Darkness, then apostles are likely to be pawns of that malfeasance. If the Dark One is an inscrutable force with a personality projected on it by those who seek communion, apostles might vary considerably, ranging from power-hungry sorcerers to enlightened left-hand magicians. Following these powers can therefore be what one makes it in terms of goals and the identity of the force behind the faith.

Throughout history, certain individuals seeking knowledge outside the confines of society claim to have received emanations from the Dark One. Thaumaturges who seek this communion cannot demonstrate whether it comes from outside the universe or from some power within. In either case, they believe the difficulty of attuning to the fundamental sentience suggests some kind of interference. Of course, “interference” could be anything, from the inability of the human mind to comprehend the exchange to an antagonistic force that seeks to discourage the interaction. Some magicians have interpreted the Dark One's messages as commands, and have responded according to what they believe was asked of them. Others have carefully recorded their hard-won discoveries and pondered their full meaning. Whatever the intent, there is little doubt that those who claim to have received such contact have been objects of controversy.

In the medieval era, the Catholic Church engaged in an Inquisition against reputed Satanists. While many targets were really just sects (sometimes even of Christianity) that Catholics found offensive, some groups may have been guilty as charged. Modern apostles of the Dark One disavow



any wrongdoing by their antecedents, but it's hard to imagine that they were universally blameless. Unfortunately, religious fanatics have obscured the truth of matters by ruthlessly pursuing politically dangerous groups rather than limiting the investigation to those with true criminal intent. Catholics weren't the only group to carry out these sorts of violent purges. Of particular fame were the Salem witch trials of 1692. Faced by wholesale persecution and a lack of any strong organization, it is unlikely that any apostles of the Dark One existed in significant numbers.

In 1966, Anton LaVey founded the Church of Satan in California and arguably brought Satanism into the modern age. LaVey claimed magic power derived from rituals dedicated to Satan, although Satan was portrayed as a pre-Christian force of nature rather than as an evil deity. LaVey received (some say encouraged) a lot of negative media attention, and he was a controversial figure even with believers. In 1975, portions of the Church of Satan broke away and formed a "new" faith called the Temple of Set. Setians put forth the idea of a transcendental being that might ultimately help them gain ascendance.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, widespread stories of Satanic ritual abuse frightened an enraptured public. A 1994 survey by *Redbook* magazine claimed that 70% of Americans believed in Satanic cults that engaged in ritual abuse. Almost one-third of respondents felt that law enforcement figures had evidence of abuse but didn't want to admit to the existence of cults. FBI reports, including an exhaustive one authored by Kenneth Lanning in 1992, disputed the reports and demonstrated that widespread claims were factually inconsistent.

Apostle Rituals

Central to practices of apostles, whether they're ignorant dabblers or skilled students of the occult, is the effort to achieve communion with the Dark One. For magicians of the left-hand path, this is an attempt to improve the self so that the magician may express her inner divinity. Less ethical thaumaturges crave power so they might gain whatever else they want. In either case, personal desire is upheld over society, and the importance of self is emphasized. There is no single organization of apostles of the Dark One. Rather, there are handfuls of practitioners who diverge widely in their ideas of what the Dark One is and how they should employ the knowledge they gain.

Rituals to establish communion usually involve a symbol important to a thaumaturge on a personal level, or one that's made important by its popularization and empowerment. The Satanic Bible presents an inverted pentagram as a dominant symbol in its teachings, although many apostles of the Dark One question the validity of such texts. Some sorcerers intentionally pervert the rituals of other traditions or religions to gain power from the breach or to draw upon sympathetic connections. In particular, apostles seem to draw heavily on the practices of ceremonial magicians and hedge witches. Other apostles find use in the rituals of ancient religious faiths they feel reflect the Dark One, whether as an adversarial being such as Satan or a once-accepted divinity such as the Egyptian god Set.

Bad Internet Connection

This story idea works best for characters with interest in the occult and computers. One evening, one of the characters accidentally types the wrong address into her browser and ends up on a strange website. Startlingly, the site

states, "Hello, (insert character name)!" Clicking on anything on the site downloads a file that overwrites part of her hard drive. If the character possesses the Library Merit in computerized format, the files specifically overwrite her file collection. Included in the download is information about a "Dark One," and the material exhorts the character to escape the prison of ignorance. If she seems happy with this turn of events, the Storyteller might treat the invasion as an attempt by an apostle of the Dark One to recruit a new practitioner. Alternatively, an apostle sees the character as a threat and causes the download. Personal files (pictures, passwords, tax software records) are leaked to the Internet. The horror of identity theft begins. How much of the bad luck the character suffers is from a malicious hacker, and how much of it is from a ruthless magician?

Apostle Training

Defining Merit: Communion (••••)

Path Merits: Countermagic, Curse of Ill Fortune, Divination, Dream, Enchantment, Evocation (Spirits only) (•• or ••••), Familiar, Library, Luck Magic, Magical Nexus, Sacrifice (Spirits only), Scrying, Second Sight, Visionary Trances, Warding

Strengths: An apostle learns to use his arts to fulfill personal desires. Whenever use of magic in a scene would play out in a manner appropriate to his Vice, the apostle receives a +1 bonus to roll for the Merit or ritual used. Note that the character may also regain one Willpower point if the scene reflects his Vice (see "Virtues and Vices" in the

World of Darkness Rulebook, pp. 100–105). The apostle may benefit from only one +1 bonus per scene.

Weaknesses: An apostle can conclude that society's rules are little more than shackles to be cast off should they be a hindrance to his advancement in knowledge and self-awareness. Without the safety net of shared morality, a thaumaturge can easily spiral out of control or sink into personal damnation. Regaining lost Morality is challenging for apostles. Experience points required to raise Morality equal new dots x 4 rather than the usual three multiplier.

Character Creation: New or lowly apostles are often deficient personalities whose attraction to service is a desperate attempt to find some power over the world. Those apostles who actually have that power are usually possessed of greater Social Attributes than most people. Intellectual practitioners may focus on Mental Attributes, but Manipulation is likely to be important to any long-term success.

Apostles benefit from a good mix of Mental and Social Skills. Considerable Occult knowledge is important for impressing lesser cultists and achieving one's own magical goals. Depending on an apostle's personal slant, the Social Skills Persuasion, Socialize, Intimidation and Subterfuge may be useful.

Social Merits are appropriate, because apostles seek to gain wealth or some sort of control over others. The Retainer and Allies Merits in particular might represent loyal underlings awed by a practitioner's apparent power.

Apostles seek to indulge in their Vices; these Traits run the gamut, with any of the seven being appropriate. Many such characters have Flaws that encourage them to seek group membership so they might achieve some sort of standing or authority they feel has otherwise been denied them.

Concepts: Cult leader, magician, dilettante intellectual, Satanist dabbler, rebellious teenager, jealous neighbor

Ceremonial Magician

Magic transfers celestial forces to the medium in which such forces can operate. The medium is the center, and the center is human.

Ceremonial magic is old, but not truly ancient — it's a type of magic suited to civilization and practiced almost exclusively by well-educated members of the middle or wealthy classes. In Western Europe and the United States, the vast majority of ceremonial magicians use knowledge derived from Western occult tradition, but there have been ceremonial magicians in almost every culture that has possessed a class of well-off, highly educated people. The magi of ancient Persia formed one such group, as did the syncretist magicians of Hellenist Alexandria. There were also ceremonial magicians in India, China and Japan.

Although the exact details of magical practice vary from one culture to another, the general way that magicians perform rituals is relatively similar. In the modern day, these similarities are reinforced by the fact that most ceremonial magicians are highly educated scholars of the occult, and they eagerly study the magic and ritual practices of other cultures. In addition, mystics of various cultures with generally similar goals or belief systems tend to use the same styles of magic.

All ceremonial magicians are serious scholars of one sort or another. The very nature of this tradition means that only scholarly individuals persevere long enough to master it. Most are amateur students of various esoterica ranging

from cryptids to ghosts, while others are college professors or other sorts of professional scholars of history, classics, archeology or comparative religion. The promise of esoteric learning or rare books is often a remarkably good way to attract the attention of a ceremonial magician.

Western ceremonial magic is the most common variety in Europe and North America. This type of magic was originally codified in the early Renaissance, when scholars and churchmen gained access to Islamic occult knowledge and Jewish mysticism gained from the European conquest of Spain and from ancient Greek occult texts acquired during the Crusades. European scholars and mystics transformed this disparate lore into a new and powerful sort of magic known as hermetic magic or hermeticism. This style of magic derives its name from the *Hermetic Corpus*, a collection of second- and third-century occult texts that were translated in 1463 and published in 1471 by Marsilio Ficino, who was ordered to do the work by the powerful noble Cosimo de' Medici.

Renaissance scholars and nobles were interested in hermetic magic because they believed it contained secrets that could help them to attain greater wealth and power, as well as subtly hinder their enemies. The practice of this knowledge was exceedingly difficult, however, and few of those interested in learning the complex secrets actually did so. Since that time, various secret occult organizations, including the semi-mythic Rosicrucians and even a small branch of Freemasonry is suspected of keeping this knowledge alive.

Although mastering any form of ceremonial magic takes several years of dedicated and exacting practice, gaining access to the know-how to perform rituals is relatively straightforward. This is one of the few types of magic that can be learned solely from books. The problem is that there are far more useless or deliberately obscure grimoires than there are accurate and easy-to-read ones. Most ceremonial magicians guard their knowledge jealously, and some go to the trouble of writing fake or useless books on magic to discourage others who attempt to learn.

Modern Ceremonial Magic

Ceremonial magic's subtle intricacies attract those who find it a fascinating exercise and a useful path to power. The vast majority lack either the capability or (most often) the perseverance necessary to actually learn how to perform magic. Nevertheless, a few succeed in mastering the secrets of this complex discipline.

Ceremonial Magical Groups

Many ceremonial magicians belong to small and secretive groups that are often arranged in highly formal and hierarchical fashions. The magic is difficult to learn without access to either books or teachers. Skilled magicians with large occult libraries therefore hold considerable power over novices. This fact is most of the reasoning for the hierarchical structure of the society. In return for doling out small amounts of teaching or limited access to libraries, senior members order lower-ranking ones to pay money, perform various legal and illegal services or simply pander to leaders' egos.

Some ceremonial magicians have no interest in complex politics or petty displays of power, and work alone or with a few trusted colleagues. Others find gaining and holding power in magical groups to be a consuming passion. Perceived threats to their power, such as a rival group attempting to recruit members, can result in magical "battles" wherein each side attempts to curse the other. Such conflicts can lead to attempts to destroy a rival's library or even murder. Occasionally, supernatural beings such as spirits, mages or vampires find such mortal conflicts amusing or useful and offer to help one of the combatants — or both — in return for a promise of service or some other price. In this way, a ceremonial magician can become the pawn of a powerful being without ever knowing the true nature of his new master.

Magical Hubris

Because ceremonial magic involves the manipulation of chance and luck, many magicians come to believe they are invincible, that their magic can solve any problem. Despite the fact that even the most powerful ceremonial magician can be killed by a speeding car or an assassin's bullet, some learn of the existence of other secret societies lurking in various cities and towns. These self-obsessed practitioners attempt to use their magic against what turns out to be a group of magically trained vampires or Atlantean mages. Such intruders usually die or end up mind-blasted hulks without ever learning just what their opponents are.

This same hubris is responsible for the cavalier manner in which many ceremonial magicians deal with entities called from the Shadow Realm. Protected by warding circles and powerful blessings, some magicians assume they can treat such beings as slaves without any risk of retribution. This belief comes from a mixture of overconfidence common among practitioners, and from the fact that most know little about the hidden truths of the World of Darkness.

Despite the vast amounts of occult lore most ceremonial magicians amass, few know more than hints or rumors about the various supernatural beings with which they share their cities. They can openly scoff at the idea of vampires, or deny that any magician could perform the miraculous feats of which willworkers are capable. The few ceremonial magicians who have learned some of the truth possess only scraps of knowledge mixed with legends and falsehood. Few learn anything resembling the truth of these beings, unless they become ghouls or agents bound to willworkers. Because they usually live in cities and are just as subject to Delirium as any other mortal, almost no ceremonial magicians know anything about werewolves.

Mysterious Rivals

A character hears of an extremely secretive group of magicians paying top dollar for useful occult tomes, and that offers even more money for magical artifacts. No one the character knows has learned much about this group. It's composed of greedy and amoral Atlantean mages who have

heard rumors of valuable occult books and magical artifacts in the area, and who are determined to acquire everything they can. They approach the character with a generous offer for any relics or rare tomes he has. If he sells, they pay well. If he refuses or has nothing to offer, they break into his home using powerful and inexplicable (to non-mages at least) magic. If the character makes an effort to learn more about them, he may gain knowledge privy to few ordinary mortals. If he is caught, he may end up dead, or with a void in his memory.

Rumors of Power

Although the vast majority of stories are nothing more than rumors mixed with outright lies, magicians occasionally hear that some of their number become involved with large corporations or governments. These rumors range from potentially reasonable tales of corporate CEOs gaining power through use of magic, to wild rantings about how the CIA employs practitioners to inflict curses on enemy leaders. Learning the truth of any such rumors can be nearly impossible and occasionally fraught with risk, but sometimes such tales are accurate (or at least partially so).

Unfortunately, any ceremonial magician who works with important politicians, CEOs or covert operatives risks such people turning on him when they fear what he might do to them. In turn, anyone who attempts to uncover the truth of a magician's efforts risks incurring the full wrath of important and powerful individuals. Because so many people regard magic as foolish superstition, authorities rarely want to reveal that they employ magicians.

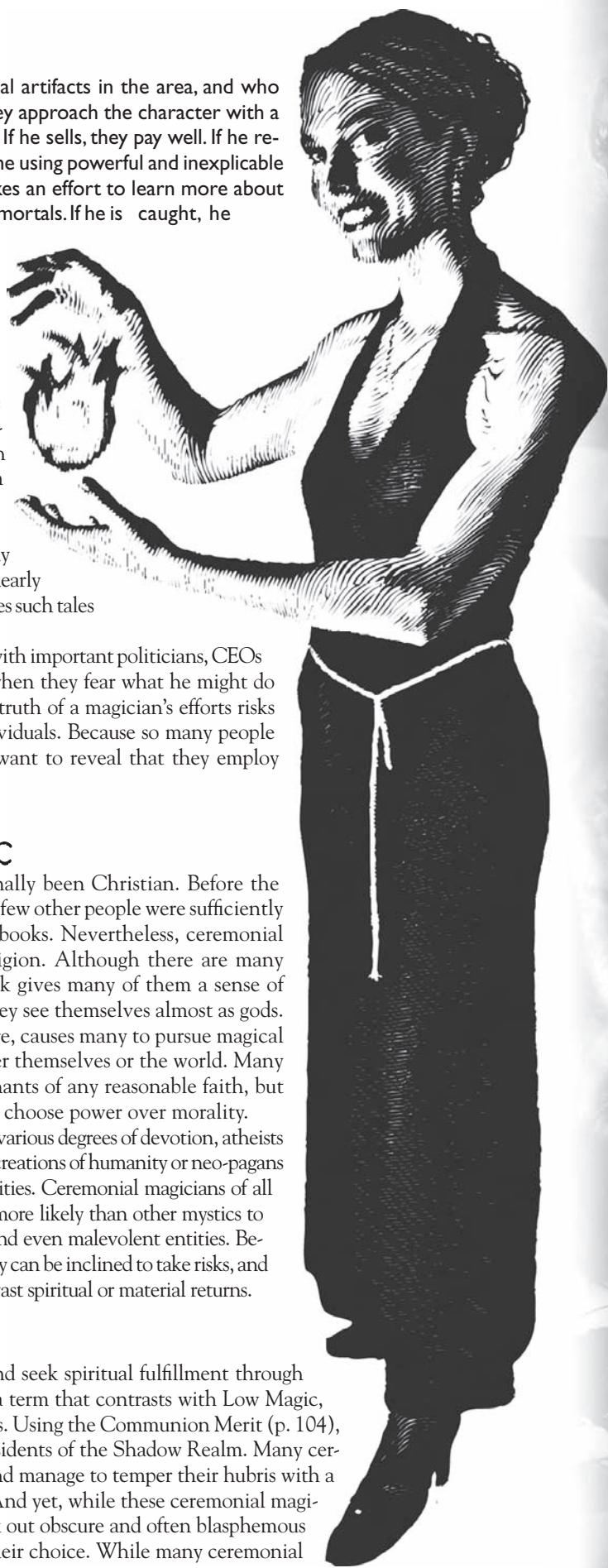
Religion and Ceremonial Magic

In the West, ceremonial magicians have traditionally been Christian. Before the 17th century, many of them were priests, largely because few other people were sufficiently literate to understand the obscure Latin text of most books. Nevertheless, ceremonial magicians often have a dubious relationship with religion. Although there are many devout magicians, the ability to control their own luck gives many of them a sense of superiority. A few are so absorbed by their pride that they see themselves almost as gods. This hubris, combined with their natural affinity for lore, causes many to pursue magical tomes in search of rituals that allow them to craft either themselves or the world. Many such tomes require vile acts completely against the tenants of any reasonable faith, but the power that can be gained tempts many devotees to choose power over morality.

Most Western ceremonial magicians are Christians of various degrees of devotion, atheists who believe that all gods and spirits are nothing more than creations of humanity or neo-pagans who seek to emulate or even become one with various deities. Ceremonial magicians of all spiritual paths often seek exotic sources of power and are more likely than other mystics to willingly become possessed or to make deals with potent and even malevolent entities. Because ceremonial magicians can make themselves lucky, they can be inclined to take risks, and sometimes they endanger their lives and souls in hopes of vast spiritual or material returns.

High Magic

Some ceremonial practitioners resist temptation and seek spiritual fulfillment through magic. This pursuit is often referred to as High Magic, a term that contrasts with Low Magic, which is defined as magic used to aid mundane endeavors. Using the Communion Merit (p. 104), a thaumaturge attempts to learn divine wisdom from residents of the Shadow Realm. Many ceremonial magicians discover important spiritual truths and manage to temper their hubris with a deep understanding of the mystical unity of all beings. And yet, while these ceremonial magicians work toward spiritual progress, others actively seek out obscure and often blasphemous rituals in an attempt become one with the divinity of their choice. While many ceremonial



magicians use the Communion Merit to contact powerful and benevolent forces, other ceremonial magicians contact malevolent or base spirits that sooth their conscience and lead magicians into servitude, and from there into inhuman depths of depravity.

The Practice of Ceremonial Magic

Ceremonial magic is by its very nature complex and exceedingly orderly. Although different cultures have different types of ceremonial magic, it all involves drawing complex diagrams, reciting lengthy formulas, calling upon the many names of various deities, divine servants or spirits and summoning the power of various magical elements. Western ceremonial magic is closely tied to astrology and numerology. Although a ritual can be performed at any time, details of the ritual must often be adjusted for the particular astrological significant of the hour or day on which it is performed. Almost all long ceremonial rituals involve drawing a large and complex circle in chalk or a similar substance, in which the magician stands to perform the remainder of the rite. The magician typically draws various magical signs in the air while calling upon various powers and stating what he wants the ritual to accomplish. Ceremonial magic is highly formal and exacting, and many rituals involve using colored candles, carefully blended incense and similar props and wearing special colors.

Despite the exacting nature of their magic, ceremonial magicians can also perform short rituals. Such rites almost always involve drawing a series of magical signs or symbols on a surface such as a piece of paper or a napkin while saying or possibly whispering a short magical formula. When performed in public, such rituals typically look like the character doodles or draws while mumbling to himself, as if thinking something over.

The Ascension Tome

The characters learn of a pair of reclusive and secretive lovers who are capable ceremonial magicians. This pair has an impressive reputation in the local occult community, but rarely interacts with other magicians. These two recently obtained a book that supposedly allows anyone to magically ascend and become a powerful, immortal spirit. No one hears from the two magicians for some time, and then there's a news report that one of them has vanished and the other has gone completely insane. If the characters investigate, they find the remaining magician has been institutionalized but can have visitors. This survivor can no longer make sense of either the language or the details of the physical world. Understanding any statement he makes requires an

Intelligence + Investigation roll as he rambles about bizarre and seemingly meaningless topics, and only half understands any questions he is asked.

If the characters manage to get through to him, they learn where the book was hidden. They also learn that the ritual worked halfway — the insane magician's partner seemingly became a powerful spirit, while he was left halfway between human and spirit, his mind and perceptions trapped between the mortal world and the Shadow Realm. By using the book, the characters might be able to help him return to normal or to join his partner. Alternatively, they might try the ritual themselves. Anyone using it risks becoming stuck as he is, and no one knows what really happens to anyone who succeeds in the rite.

Ceremonial Magic Training

Defining Merit: Luck Magic (•••••)

Path Merits: Communion (••), Curse of Ill-Fortune, Enchantment, Evocation (Spirits only) (•• or •••••), External Alchemy (•• or •••••), Favorable Fortune, Healing, Internal Alchemy (••), Scrying, See Auras

Strengths: All ceremonial magicians who possess the Library Merit (see p. 113) or who borrow another character's Library gain an additional +1 bonus in researching rituals.

Weaknesses: All ceremonial magicians suffer an additional -1 penalty for using improvised ritual tools or inadequately prepared ritual spaces.

Character Creation: The highly complex and intellectual nature of ceremonial magic suggests that most ceremonial magicians favor Mental Attributes. Because these people tend to work in magical groups that are both formal and hierarchical, Social Attributes, especially Presence and Manipulation, are also useful.

Mental Skills are likely to be primary, particularly Academics (History), Investigation (Artifacts or Cryptography), Occult and potentially Computers and Politics.

Any intellectually oriented Merits from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** are appropriate to ceremonial magicians. Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge and Language are all common among scholars attracted to this path. Social Merits are also possible, especially Resources and Status, both of which may be the result of luck magic. Some ceremonial magicians learn their magic from a Mentor and most possess the Library Merit (p. 113). If a ceremonial magician does not possess the Library Merit, the player should consider why not. Perhaps the character's library was stolen or destroyed by a rival, or she is a low-ranking member of a magical group who does not yet have her own collection.

The elitist and scholarly nature of ceremonial magic can result in excessive Pride, and Greed is common among practitioners who seek out wealth and status or rare books and artifacts.

Concepts: Stage magician, fortune-teller, professional gambler, stockbroker

Hedge Witch

I do conjure thee and with uplifted voice to thee I call, that thou shalt never have content or peace until thou comest to give me all thy aid.

Hedge witchery is a particularly diverse type of magic, but it is ultimately focused on affecting other people. Witches can affect emotions and learn to curse and heal others as well as invade their dreams. These mystics are found throughout the world, in every society, from the tribal peoples of the Amazon jungle to the vast metropolises of the industrialized world. Some warlocks are born with their magic or develop it spontaneously. Both of these means to gaining this type of magic are relatively rare, however. The most common ways to become a hedge witch are either having one as a close relative and learning from her or recreating the basics of this magic from the multitude of legends, stories and superstitions about witchcraft. Hedge witchcraft is regularly awoken by would-be witches who experiment with rituals. It is by far the easiest of the six traditions of thaumaturgy for people to learn independently.

Traditional Culture

Hedge witches live openly in some cultures, but they hide their knowledge in most for fear of persecution. Their ability to control others' emotions inspires fear and mistrust. Ordinary people who find out what a warlock can do either want to learn his secrets, too, or want a ritual performed for them. It might be a rite to cause someone to fall in love, or to cause enemies to humiliate themselves. Hedge witches who are open about their abilities can gain wealth and acclaim, but can also be the targets of hatred from people who fear their manipulation. Warlocks occasionally end up as targets of organized or spontaneous mob violence.

Most hedge witches keep their abilities secret. Some who uncover the secret attempt to blackmail a mystic, but if these people are not careful, they can end up being enchanted themselves. Because people will pay so much for magically enhanced love or lust, even the most discrete hedge witches sell their services, but doing so is often fraught with risk, especially in societies where people are particularly paranoid about witchcraft. In much of Africa and in parts of Central and South America and South Asia, witches and suspected witches are murdered even today. The vast majority of the people killed are nothing more than eccentrics or are unpopular, but every time someone is killed as a witch, real practitioners grow more careful and paranoid.

Warlocks' ability to remain hidden is enhanced by the fact that they are rarely near the top of their social hierarchies. Witches are typically found among the poor or working class, and among minority groups. Their rituals tend to be earthy and often involve the use of blood, urine and common household implements such as brooms and knitting needles.

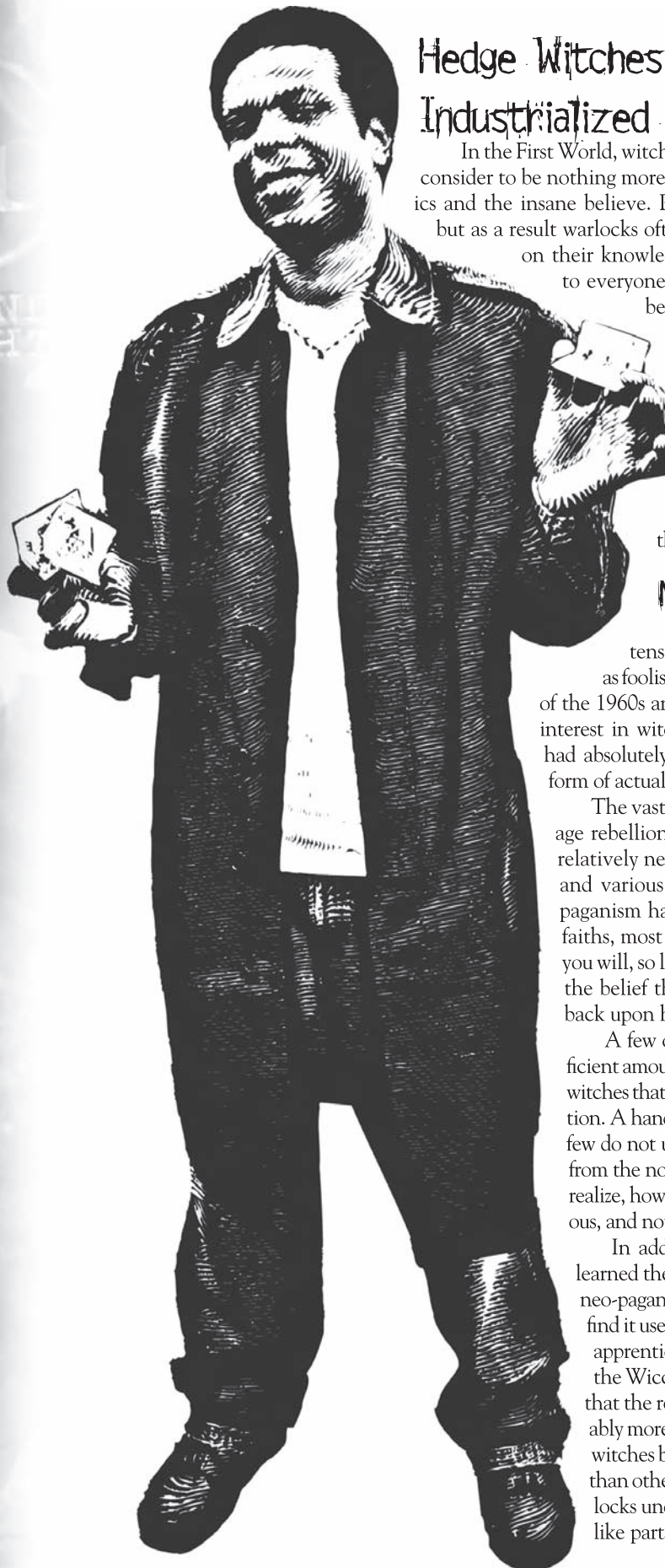
Historically, many hedge witches were illiterate, except in cultures where literacy was extremely widespread. Books on this type of magic are quite rare; most wealthy individuals seeking to study it must find a teacher. Few educated people or members of the upper classes ever learn this type of magic as a result, and those who do are often considered eccentrics who spend too much time among the "dirty masses."

One of the keys to the survival of many hedge witches — especially the poor or members of religious or ethnic minorities — is information. In addition to using their own craft to keep track of people's feelings and actions, many possess familiars that take the form of small animals. Although they are fully intelligent and can communicate with the witches to whom they are bound, these embodied spirits typically assume the roles of treasured pets that are easily overlooked and rarely cause suspicion. Such companions often spy on warlocks' enemies or on people who might pose a danger. A familiar is often a hedge witch's trusted friend, and occasionally even a partner in various criminal schemes such as blackmail.

Hidden Threats

A hedge witch with a familiar learns that her companion has spent considerable time away from her. When she questions the animal, it reveals that it has consorted with an unusual group of local animals. Although they appear to be ordinary creatures such as feral cats, crows, skunks and raccoons, these animals are unnaturally intelligent. The familiar doesn't know whether these beings are possessed, but they pretend to be ordinary, all the while watching humanity.

The familiar thinks the animals are responsible for several seemingly accidental deaths. It first thought the animals were both worthy of study and interesting companions, but admits that they have asked questions about how the familiar feels about its master and her habits. They have also warned the familiar not to reveal its new associates. If the hedge witch can scry, she can use the familiar as a magical connection and observe the creatures while her companion is with them.



Hedge Witches in the Industrialized World

In the First World, witchcraft is one of many practices that the vast majority consider to be nothing more than a superstition in which fools, religious fanatics and the insane believe. Persecution of hedge witches is almost unknown, but as a result warlocks often have trouble finding students to whom to pass on their knowledge. In a few families, hedge witchcraft is taught to everyone, or possibly to one gender. Such families tend to be exceedingly secretive and paranoid, though, and members are usually adept at lying and covering up their knowledge.

Although many hedge witches in industrialized societies live in cities and suburbs, the earthy nature of their magic and the fact that many of them have animal familiars and learn magic related to healing and the weather gives even the most urban practitioners a strong connection to the natural world.

Neo-Pagan Witches

Hedge witches in the modern world have are intensely secretive, largely because their ways are regarded as foolish and outdated. The rise of the neo-pagan movement of the 1960s and 1970s has caused a significant revival of popular interest in witchcraft, though. Initially, this religious movement had absolutely no connection to hedge witchcraft or any other form of actual magic.

The vast majority of neo-pagans are either products of teenage rebellion or are sincere spiritual seekers who are part of a relatively new faith that worships femininity, nature, the earth and various pre-Christian European deities. Although neo-paganism has become a number of diverse but closely related faiths, most are united by a belief in the Wiccan Rede: "Do as you will, so long as you harm none," and by the Three-Fold Law, the belief that all harm that one performs with magic comes back upon her threefold.

A few of the most dedicated neo-pagans have amassed sufficient amounts of information about the practices of actual hedge witches that the most capable have been able to recreate this tradition. A handful of neo-pagans are now actually hedge witches. A few do not understand that the magic they work is any different from the non-magical rituals performed by any neo-pagan. Most realize, however, that their craft is potent and potentially dangerous, and not simply an exercise in alternative spirituality.

In addition, a few traditional hedge witches who have learned their art from families or other sources have joined the neo-pagan community. They may genuinely believe in the faith, find it useful to blend in with non-magical witches or may seek apprentices. Although some neo-pagan hedge witches accept the Wiccan Rede and the Three-Fold Law, many understand that the reality of being a thaumaturge is sometimes considerably more complicated and less morally rigid. Some neo-pagan witches believe themselves to be far wiser and less easily duped than other believers. Unfortunately, almost none of these warlocks understand that portions of the neo-pagan movement, like parts of all religions, are influenced by vampires, mages

and other supernatural beings. The few hedge witches who have uncovered hints of this harsh reality become recluses or reveal their insight with potentially lethal results.

Morality and Magic

The temptation to use magic to solve personal problems is exceedingly strong, even for the most moral of warlocks. Magic can be a shortcut to jobs, romance and various other interpersonal needs or challenges. Many hedge witches come to see others, basically anyone who is not a witch, as someone who can be manipulated. A few practitioners are faced with the problem of never knowing if a spouse truly loves them, or if seeming love is only the result of an especially effective spell.

While immoral hedge witches use people without regard for their feelings, other hedge witches have difficulty resisting use of their magic to “help” people. Sometimes giving someone extra confidence or attempting to smooth over a serious argument between friends can be of genuine aid, but such efforts can also backfire. No matter how often witches use their abilities on others, the nature of magic tends to make warlocks isolate themselves from ordinary people and form most of their close personal ties with other mystics.



Exposure

Someone whose wife has fallen out of love with him discovers that a character is a hedge witch. This person asks for help. If the character refuses, he threatens to expose what he knows about the character’s activities. He has pictures of the witch engaging in various odd-looking rituals. In addition, he threatens to tell everyone he knows that the character can work magic, so the witch faces being hounded by desperate people.

The husband’s first request is relatively reasonable. He wants the witch to cause his wife to love him again. When cautioned that the result will be temporary, he acknowledges, and rationalizes that he will be especially good to nurture his wife’s love so that it will become real and lasting. His tactic fails, so he keeps coming back to the witch asking to make his wife “give their love one more chance.” If the witch agrees multiple times, the wife becomes distressed that her feelings for her husband are in dramatic flux, and she develops a drinking problem. Unless the witch finds some solution, the husband keeps coming to her every few days, and his wife’s mental state deteriorates.



Practice of Hedge Magic

Hedge-magician rituals are some of the most diverse available to thaumaturges. Such rituals most commonly

involve tools and trappings that can be found in any house, including cooking spices, kitchen knives, photographs and brooms. While it’s almost impossible to describe a “typical” hedge-magic rite, most involve simple repetitive actions such as tying strands of hair from two people together to cause them to fall in love, or stabbing a photograph to curse a target.

Regardless of the specifics of a ritual, hedge-witch magic is always relatively straightforward. Most formal rituals involve actions such as tying knots, writing notes on leaves or slips of paper and then burning them, or destroying small objects. Informal rituals are often exceedingly simple — the witch draws a few symbols and possibly ties knots in a bit of string, or gazes into the small flame of a candle or a match while making a wish.

One of the defining characteristics of witchcraft is that it’s visceral. When warlocks inscribe magical symbols, they often draw them in their own blood. A ritual designed to cause someone to love the performer might involve him kissing a magical connection, while a curse could require him to urinate on a connection.

Hedge-Witch Training

Defining Merit: Enchantment (••••)

Path Merits: Curse of Ill-Fortune, Dream Travel, Familiar (Embodied Familiars only), Healing, Invocation (Spirits only) (•• or ••••), Luck Magic (••), Scrying, See Auras, See Spirits, Visionary Trances (••), Weather Control

Strengths: Hedge witches are adept at using mundane tools in their rituals, so reduce all penalties for lacking proper materials or preparations by one.

Weaknesses: Although warlocks excel at improvisation, they are affected strongly by their environment. They suffer a –1 to ritual rolls in any location that is antithetical to the purpose of the rite. For example, they have difficulty casting a ritual to create love in a prison, or a ritual to inspire peace in a violent or crime-ridden slum.

Character Creation: Witches’ ability to influence emotions and the fact that they typically conceal their powers suggests that they favor Social Attributes. Most also find that high Wits and Resolve aids them in social endeavors.

Social Skills are likely to be primary, particularly Animal Ken, Persuasion, Socialize and Subterfuge. Almost all hedge witches know Occult with considerable facility, and those who specialize in healing know Medicine.

Witches tend to be magical generalists, so many of the Merits from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** are appropriate. Down-to-earth characters could possess Common Sense. Witches who focus on healing probably possess the Holistic Awareness Merit. Warlocks who live in rural areas or who are closely attuned to nature may have Direction Sense and also Contacts thanks to their capability in social situations. Many hedge witches possess the Familiar Merit.

Sadly, hedge witches often find the temptation of using magic for personal gain to be overwhelming. Envy, Greed and Lust are all common Vices.

Concepts: Counselor, alternative-medicine healer, therapist, con artist

Shaman

I became a shaman, not knowing myself how it came about. But I was a shaman. I could see and hear in a totally different way.

Shamans act as intermediaries between the physical world in which ordinary humans live and the Shadow Realm, which is inhabited by spirits. A shaman's first and most important step in her training is learning to project her mind and perceptions into the Shadow Realm so that she can interact with beings there. Shamanic exercise changes the life of the devotee forever. Once the exercise is complete, shamans can always see and hear Twilight spirits, so shamans cannot block out the voices of spirits that seek their attention. As a result, shamans literally live double lives. Their relationships with the various spirits they see and communicate with every day are often almost as important as the shamans' interactions with people. Even in communities where shamans are respected members of society, few understand them and they are often considered eccentric or somewhat mad.

Much of a shaman's power comes from making deals with spirits. By means of offerings, sacrifices and occasional threats, shamans obtain a wide variety of favors from ephemeral beings. They learn a multitude of magical secrets from their explorations of the Shadow Realm. Shamans also forge permanent relationships with spirits, and can gain the Familiar Merit and have a Twilight familiar (or "fetch"). The bond between a shaman and her familiar is often one of her closest. Familiars can be wise mentors, passionate lovers, trusted friends, loyal but emotionally distant allies, or some combination of all of these possibilities. While many shamans take apprentices or befriend other practitioners as a way to interact with peers; for some, the only being who truly understands them is a familiar.

Because the spirits of the Shadow Realm are far older than humanity, and spirits occasionally choose people to become intermediaries, the first shamans almost certainly originated long ago. Many claim that theirs is the oldest form of magic in the world. While there is no way to learn the truth of this statement, most occultists and magicians agree that shamanism is at least several thousand years old and possibly far more ancient.

Shamans are sometimes simply born with their powers. While most thaumaturges must spend months or years training to use their abilities, some people are born as shamans or spontaneously develop shamanic powers after a serious illness, an episode of insanity or after a near-death experience. Occasionally, spirits grant humans shamanic abilities, and don't always ask a person whether he wants these gifts. Some shamans are ordinary people who go insane at a young age and who find their way out after years or decades of madness only by becoming spirit communicators. No one knows if these are people born with a connection to the Shadow Realm that drives them mad, or if powerful spirits

cease twisting their minds and eroding their sanity once a subject begins training as an intermediary.

Life as a Shaman

In many societies — the nomadic peoples of Siberian and the northern-most portions of Europe, Native American peoples and in urban communities in various East Asian nations — shamans have an important social function. They either work for pay or are supported by a local village. Shamans are regarded as holy people. They are not priests, because priests imply the existence of gods, and most shamans don't believe in or talk to gods. Shamans deal with a myriad of spirits — driving beings of illness from the sick and making deals with entities of earth and water to ensure good hunting and bountiful harvests. Whether in isolated Amazonian villages, small ethnic enclaves in Los Angeles or Bangkok, or in neighborhoods in Seoul or Jakarta, shamans serve as spiritual leaders. They have a well-defined place in these settings. The people who support shamans believe in spirits and occasionally need the help of someone who can deal with the Shadow Realm and its inhabitants.

Gender Transgression

Shamanism all over the world is strongly associated with breaking or playing with gender boundaries. A great number of shamans are and have always been gays, lesbians, transvestites or transsexuals. There is even some debate that the word shaman may be more accurately translated as an intermediate gender term such as "man-woman" than as a word for someone who works a particular type of magic.

Many shamans of the First World no longer belong to traditional communities, though. Some are members of ethnic groups such as the Lapps who have largely abandoned shamanism for more mainstream faiths. Facilitators from such communities are either taught by the spirits of their ancestors or by one of the group's few remaining shamans. Other intermediaries are simply ordinary residents of First World countries who spontaneously develop shamanic powers or who are chosen by a spirit or a human mentor and taught the mysteries of the spirit world.

Non-Traditional Shamans

When humans began practicing agriculture, most societies worshipped powerful gods rather than spirits that had personal ties to small groups of people. The members of settled agricultural communities had less need to wander in search of food, so they no longer dared to go into areas presided over by unknown spirits. Some shamans believe that the first gods were simply local spirits with which members of a settled community worked out a formalized arrangement of tribute and blessings.

Thanks to this sedentary lifestyle, people relied more on priests who dealt with local gods than on shamans who dealt with all manner of spirits. Shamanism faded in these regions, in part because priests and their followers could persecute anyone who followed other spiritual paths. People with shamanic gifts continued to arise in even the most religiously rigid cultures, though. While some were agents of spirits who attempted to fulfill various esoteric goals, most were simply rebels, tricksters or eccentrics who developed abilities spontaneously or who were taught them by older shamans. Most civilizations recognized the existence of holy hermits, eccentric mystics and similar unconventional visionaries.

The greatest limits imposed on such people were in regions with few shamans, where people could live their entire lives and never encounter an intermediary. Such a solitary existence meant that the few thaumaturges were unusually strong-willed. Many lacked human teachers and spent years learning basic knowledge that traditional shamans were taught at initiation. Others became allies of powerful spirits that often used such isolated shamans as pawns or servants.

Spontaneously developing shamanic powers is a difficult and traumatic process, so many who do are at least mildly insane. Even rigidly monotheistic religions such as medieval Christianity and early Islam recognized the existence of half-mad mystics who received visions of angels and heaven. Some early ascetics, hermits, monks and Sufis were almost certainly people with shamanic powers. Although these eccentrics were often regarded with distrust or disdain, their existence was an accepted part of life and many were allowed to speak the truths they learned, as long as those messages were presented in a form that was not heretical. While some were killed or imprisoned for their beliefs, others managed to amass a considerable following.

The most problematic and troubled shamans were given their gifts and received their training from a powerful spirit that took an interest in them. In most industrialized nations, individuals who are contacted by powerful spirits often consider the initial messages to be nothing more than vivid dreams or signs of insanity. Since spirits can be exceedingly determined, ignoring such messages sometimes results in a being tormenting a potential shaman until he recognizes that all the strange dreams, disembodied voices and bizarre coincidences are evidence of something else at work.

While some spirits genuinely wish to help shamans, spirits are fundamentally inhuman beings that live in an alien realm. Having one as a teacher can stretch the sanity of anyone. Even the most well-meaning entity may lack sufficient understanding of human physical or psychological

limits to avoid causing serious trauma.

Occasionally, malevolent spirits grant shamanic abilities because they wish to have a pawn in the physical world. After being told vast numbers of lies or occasionally simply being driven mad, such shamans are convinced to perform horrific acts. Weak-willed and isolated individuals, especially ones who are mentally unstable, make excellent pawns for conniving spirits.

The Guru

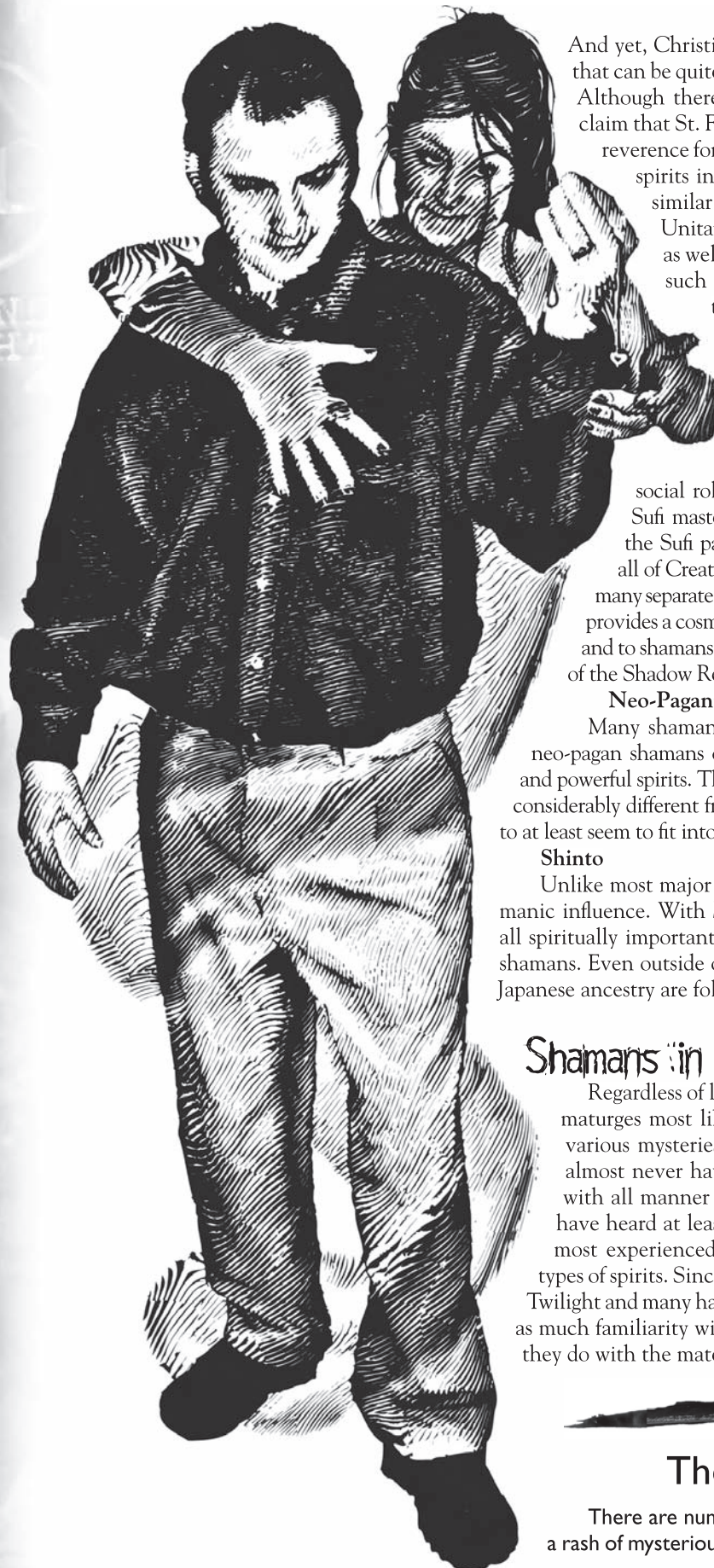
A shaman who is part of the New Age community offers a series of expensive workshops in which she allegedly places people in contact with their spirit guides. In reality, she helps spirits possess clients. These spirits do not immediately take control of their hosts. The spirits provide hosts with advice in the form of subtle mental urgings. The shaman calls upon relatively benevolent spirits that seem like they genuinely wish help the timid become more confident and the violent to calm their tempers. In truth, these spirits gradually infiltrate their way further into their hosts, and eventually twist minds and bodies. None of these victims becomes a ravaging monster, but several have already become radically different people who are now inhuman meldings of spirit and body.

Other shamans can easily see that there is something wrong with these victims, and talking with loved ones reveals that a person became different after going on a weekend retreat. Most of these spirits are relatively weak, and many shamans are able to evict them by using the Warding Merit or by bargaining with or attacking them in the Shadow Realm. The shaman who runs these workshops sincerely believes that she helps people. The characters may have a difficult time convincing her to stop.

For shamans who remain sane and who are not pawns or victims, life in industrialized nations is difficult. Being an intermediary involves having a dual life, part of which is lived some place that most people consider imaginary or mythic. Many shamans seek out people in need of spiritual or magical aid, while other shamans simply remain solitary magicians with no defined social role. Some shamans find both spiritual satisfaction and a sense of community by belonging to various large religions. Shamanism can be made compatible with almost every faith. The following is a short list of how shamans who belong to religions can integrate their calling.

Christianity

Mainstream Christianity has little place for animist spirits inhabiting every blade of grass or individual person.



And yet, Christianity has a long tradition of fringe theology that can be quite accepting of shamanic practices and beliefs. Although there is much debate, a few Christian shamans claim that St. Francis of Assisi was one of them, and that his reverence for all of Creation was in part recognition of the spirits inherent to everything. Shamans who uphold similar forms of pantheism can find a place among Unitarians, Quakers and even the Catholic Church, as well as among many of the small denominations such as the Pentacostals, for which falling into trances and seeing visions is an accepted part of the faith.

Islam

Islam is surprisingly accepting of shamans. While intermediaries often have trouble with traditional Muslim beliefs, the Sufi path provides a perfectly acceptable social role for Muslim shamans. Muslims expect wise Sufi masters to be somewhat eccentric. The essence of the Sufi path is achieving personal unity with God and all of Creation. Conceiving of the entirety of the world as many separate but interconnected pieces that all work together provides a cosmology that is acceptable to both Sufi pantheists and to shamans who have experienced the exotic complexities of the Shadow Realm.

Neo-Paganism

Many shamans belong to various neo-pagan faiths. Most neo-pagan shamans consider gods to be nothing more than large and powerful spirits. These shamans often find their worldviews to be considerably different from most neo-pagans', but can usually manage to at least seem to fit into this diverse community.

Shinto

Unlike most major religions, Shinto retains a great deal of shamanic influence. With *kami* spirits inhabiting every sacred site and all spiritually important objects, Shinto is a natural fit for Japanese shamans. Even outside of Japan, many shamans of Japanese or part-Japanese ancestry are followers of Shinto.

Shamans in the World of Darkness

Regardless of location or spirituality, shamans are the thaumaturges most likely to know at least a few hints about the various mysteries of the World of Darkness. Although they almost never have contact with vampires, shamans interact with all manner of beings from the Shadow Realm and may have heard at least rumors about mages and werewolves. The most experienced shamans know a great deal about various types of spirits. Since all of these mystics continually see spirits in Twilight and many have spirit familiars, some shamans have almost as much familiarity with the Shadow Realm and its inhabitants as they do with the material world.

The Deadly Statue

There are numerous reports in the local media about a rash of mysterious deaths at a local hospital. Patients who

were weak or in serious condition, but who were expected to recover, have simply died during the night. The authorities investigate the possibility of foul play. If a shaman visits the hospital, or possibly even walks by, she notices several small predatory-looking spirits, a twisted mixture of multi-headed rats and human children. Investigation in either the mundane world or the Shadow Realm reveals a place where spirits can easily pass through worlds. The focus of this gateway is a new statue of the hospital's founder, created by a sculptor who was possessed by a powerful spirit. To end this deadly invasion, the shaman must destroy or steal the life-sized bronze statue (located in the hospital's main lobby) or journey into the Shadow Realm and somehow destroy the statue's ephemeral counterpart (which is guarded by hungry spirits that enjoy easy access to so many helpless victims). Warding the area around the statue stops the incursions, but only temporarily.



Familiarity with the inhuman and sometimes deadly landscape of the Shadow Realm is not always a good thing. Many shamans have a reputation for insanity based solely on the fact that they regularly talk and react to beings that no one else can see. Others manage to hold onto their sanity, but have learned such horrible truths that they hide in small huts or small, cluttered apartments that ward against creatures that have been glimpsed. Many shamans consider their proper role to be as intermediaries between the mortal world and the Shadow Realm, and as guardians of the material against intruders from beyond. While the best shamans perform these jobs bravely and well, it exacts a terrible price on their lives and peace of mind.

Practice of Shamanic Magic

Regardless of its purpose, shamanic magic always involves entering some sort of trance. Shamans can enter trances through a wide variety of means, including taking powerful hallucinogens, meditating, self-hypnotism though use of flashing or moving lights, drumming or ecstatic dancing. Informal shamanic rituals require trances that are considerably less deep; most shamans can simply meditate or daydream to enter the trance necessary to perform an informal rite. Regardless of the length of a ritual or the depth of a trance, entering one is only the first step in performing a shamanic act. The mystic journeys deep into his own mind and finds gateways that lead to other minds, to Twilight, to the Shadow Realm or simply to conceptual spaces within his own psyche where he can call upon various powers. All of these rituals are in some sense a spiritual journey wherein the shaman's spirit travels someplace that may be inside or outside of his own mind. He may journey into the body of

a patient and heal her, travel deep into the Shadow Realm to literally drag a spirit into the mortal world or simply send his spirit out of his body to explore the Twilight world that lies so close to the mortal realm.

Shamanic Training

Defining Merit: Visionary Trances (•••••)

Path Merits: Familiar (for Twilight Familiars only), Dream Travel, Evocation (Spirits only) (•• or •••••), Internal Alchemy (••), Invocation (Spirits only) (••), Healing, Psychic Projection, Sacrifice, See Spirits, Weather Control

Strengths: Because of shamans; understanding of the Shadow Realm, shamans are adept at bargaining and negotiating with spirits. They gain +1 to all Social rolls involving communication with spirits.

Weaknesses: Because shamans' magic requires a direct connection to spirits and immaterial realms, all shamans must possess the See Spirits Merit (p. 117). That means a player must purchase the Trait for his character with available Merit dots. This same connection causes spirits in Twilight to be able to automatically tell that shamans can see and hear them. Most spirits find shamans innately interesting as a result.

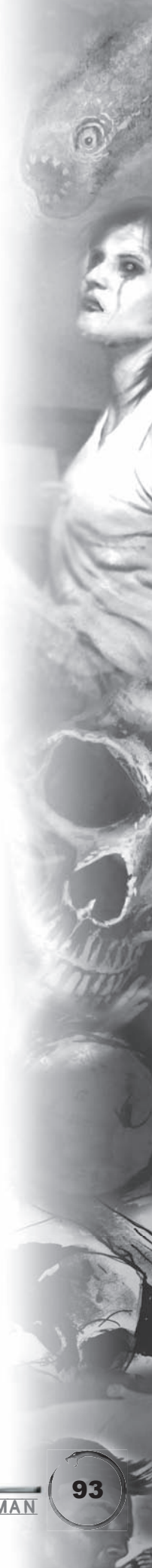
Character Creation: Many shamans are important spiritual figures in their communities. The demand for regular interaction with both people and spirits means Social Attributes are likely to be primary. The rigors of enduring lengthy trances or extensive hallucinogen use make a high Stamina useful, and dealing with the dangers of exploring the Shadow Realm has required many shamans to have a high Wits.

Social Skills are prominent. The necessities of negotiating with various spirits means Persuasion and Socialize are especially useful. Shamans who excel at tricking spirits into doing their bidding find Subterfuge and Intimidation helpful. The Mental Skills of Occult, Investigation (Dreams or Riddles), and occasionally Medicine, are also common.

Shamanic reliance on trances makes the Meditative Mind Merit an excellent choice. Characters who use hallucinogens can possess the Toxin Resistance Merit. The rigors of some trances mean that Iron Stamina is common. Because of a strong connection to the unconsciousness, the Dreams Merit (p. 106) is likely. Most shamans form close ties with a spirit and so possess the Familiar Merit (p. 109). Intermediaries operating as spiritual leaders often have the Status or Allies Merits, and shamans who do not spontaneously develop their abilities often possess the Mentor Merit.

Many shamans are poor and have Envy as a Vice, while successful shamans who feel that their knowledge of the Shadow Realm places them above others can be consumed by Pride. If the Storyteller uses the optional rule for Flaws (p. 217 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), shamans are most likely to have a derangement (pp. 96–100 of the same).

Concepts: Visionary writer, artist or musician; village shaman; new-age guru, spirit medium



Taoist Alchemist

The tao that can be told

is not the eternal Tao.

The name that can be named

is not the eternal Name.

Tao, pronounced “dow” and sometimes written as Dao, roughly translates as *the path* or *the way*. It is a combination of psychology and philosophy that evolved into the state-recognized religion of China by 440 CE. Taoism teaches that the Tao is the origin of all creation and the force behind the functioning of the natural world. Though the Tao is unknowable, its manifestations are observable. Through the path of nonresistance, one becomes so immersed in the flow of the world that he becomes one with it. This does not mean doing nothing, but rather doing things in perfect accordance with the way they should naturally be done. Ultimately, the perfection of the way leads to a return to the original state of the spirit when it was part of the Tao.

Taoism is first based on the text of the *Tao Te Ching*, reputedly written by the author Lao Tzu (also written Lao-Tse or Laozi, “Old Master”) around 550 BCE. The *Tao Te Ching* describes the nature of life, the way of peace and how a ruler should lead his life. Lao Tzu wanted to put an end to the feudal warfare that wracked China during his lifetime.

Following in Lao-Tse’s footsteps, the book *Chuang-Tzu* (*Zhuang Zhou* or *Zhuangzi*), named for its philosopher author, expanded Taoist thinking. A well-known passage relates that one evening Chuang-Tzu dreamed he was a butterfly flying happily. Upon awaking, he wondered how he could determine whether he was Chuang-Tzu who had just finished dreaming he was a butterfly or a butterfly who had just started dreaming he was Chuang-Tzu. The philosophy of Taoism grew to include the ideas of human thought, perception and condition being biased by perspective.

The philosophical movement of Taoism gained prominence, but it wasn’t until some of its adherents espoused a religious set of ideals that Taoism gained ultimate acceptance. Part of this evolution may have come from the idea that life is limited yet there are infinite things to learn. Thus, evolving Taoism considered the possibility of immortality as a means to achieving the way. The idea of Eight Immortals who embodied the conditions of life came into general acceptance.

Around 142 CE, Chiang Ling (Zhang Ling) claimed to have received a revelation from Lao-Tse instructing Chiang Ling in the sole orthodox doctrine of the master. Upon his

death, Chiang Ling was said to have ascended to heaven to assume the title of Heavenly Master. His successive followers founded an organization that taught the wisdom of Lao-Tse to the growing faith. The Heavenly Masters were sometimes able to achieve positions of prominence in the courts of powerful families, particularly in northern China. As more followers of Taoism adopted beliefs that were more religious than philosophical in nature, the Heavenly Masters increasingly warranted elaborate ceremonies. The faith did not achieve a central authority, however, fragmenting into numerous small sects with different interpretations of scriptures and rituals.

For centuries, Taoism’s principle of living according to nature was honored alongside Confucianism’s principles of social responsibility as a dominant Chinese philosophy. The early 20th century saw this era come to an end. The Ch’ing dynasty fell in 1911 and much of Taoist heritage was destroyed by warlords. In 1949, the Communist Party took control of the country, and religious freedom was curtailed severely. A faith that once boasted millions of monks was reduced to around 50,000 by the early 1960s. Nevertheless, Taoism has survived and even gained some acceptance beyond the boundaries of its original cradle. It is estimated that there are 20 million Taoist followers worldwide today, mostly in Taiwan, China and Southeast Asia. Approximately 30,000 reside in North America. Taoism has influenced Western culture in the areas of acupuncture, herbalism, holistic medicine, meditation and the martial arts.

The Missing Man

One of the characters lives around the corner from a Chinese laundry. One day she goes to pick up a jacket, and on the way sees a missing persons poster with a picture of the old man who normally waits on her. She arrives to discover the shop is under new management, but the staff happily delivers her cleaning. At home, when she puts the jacket on, the character discovers rice paper in the pocket with peculiar writing on it. Unsure

what to make of it, she pockets the paper again and heads for the door. Outside, she can hear voices speaking an Asian tongue. Peering through the peephole, she sees two large men wearing black suits. She is startled as the phone rings. Is it one of her friends? What do the strange men want with her? Does it have something to do with the missing man or the odd note?

Taoist Magic

The Taoist movement has never been unified. On one level, it is divided between philosophical and religious ideals. The core of the teachings is a way of thinking that does not necessarily require any religious faith. But even the religious branches of Taoism are fragmented in belief, with different sects owing much to Buddhism or Shintoism. Indeed, the magic practiced by many groups of Taoists could be a form of Shinto shamanism, and Storytellers who want to present Taoists whose magic is based on interactions with spirits should look to the shaman tradition (p. 90). Herein we look at Taoists who practice Eastern alchemy.

The primary purpose of Taoist alchemy is to facilitate the achievement of the state of consciousness described as the Tao. The Tao is the undying essence of the universe from which birth separates us. As we progress through life, we allow the essence of our being to flow out of us, diluted by struggle against the world. This loss leads to death, which is not inherently bad, but it also leads to death without attainment of the way. Taoist alchemists seek to crystallize that which is true according to the way, and to disperse diluted falsehoods.

Wai-Dan

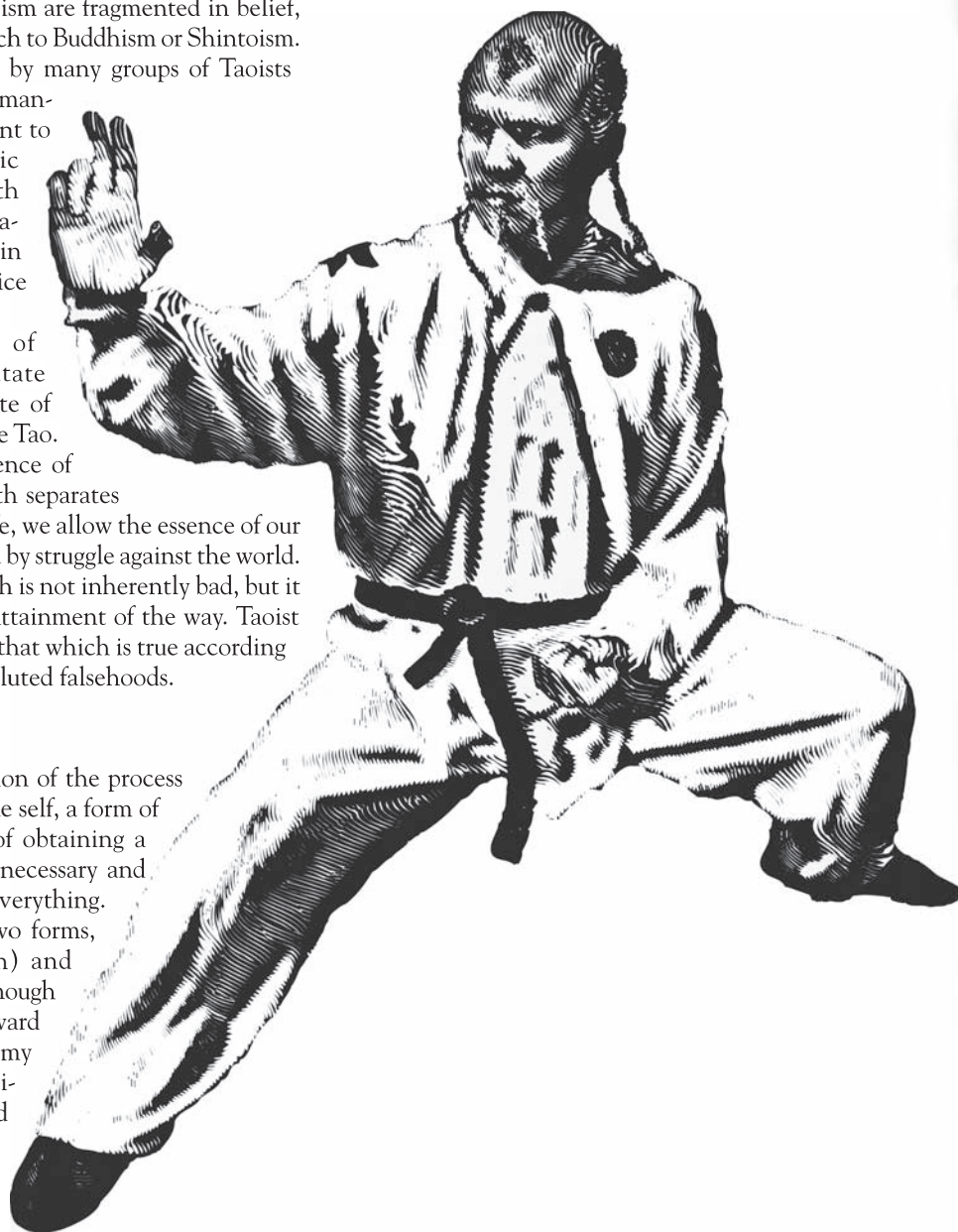
Alchemy is an exploration of the process of changing the world and the self, a form of purification, with the goal of obtaining a state at which struggle is unnecessary and yet the mystic can achieve everything. The study is divided into two forms, external alchemy (wai-dan) and internal alchemy (nei-dan), though each is really just a path toward the same goal. External alchemy focuses on changing the physical. If the material of the world can be mastered, the body of the alchemist can be transformed. The student learns

the cosmological associations of elements that compose the world, and practices compounding magical elixirs from natural substances.

In a mundane sense, the art of wai-dan literally allows an alchemist to transform one material into another. Transmuting lead to mercury or gold may have enchanted greedy nobles. Most practitioners do not seek to gain temporal wealth by such means, however. They desire to discover all of the properties of natural substances, perhaps including those unknown to scientific chemists. The processes of external alchemy produce remarkably powerful medicines with which the Taoist heals the dying or even restores life force surrendered to the world.

Nei-Dan

Internal alchemy does not seek to transform the physical world. Instead, the Taoist masters his spirit and mind through



practice of the way. The idea is to become the immortal embryo, to shed the biases and false concerns of the world. This effort may begin with exercises that precisely control breathing, carefully regulating the flow of energy through the body, or even reabsorbing bodily fluids before they escape. The alchemist transforms himself from within, becoming one with the universe. This result may manifest in strength that comes from the *chi* (energy) of the earth rather than from muscular might, in grace that derives from a perfect sense of the flow of actions rather than from good reflexes or even knowledge that comes from intuitive understanding of the cosmos.

Perhaps the pinnacle of achievement of *nei-dan* is the ability to actually return oneself to the spiritual form of the Tao. Becoming one with the universe, the alchemist is freed from the bonds of his physical form and joins the ephemeral essence of the cosmos as the “immortal embryo.” Unfortunately, the mind is not yet ready to let go of its attachments, and the Taoist inevitably is drawn back to the material realm. In the World of Darkness, the universe is not the perfect whole that it should be. The alchemist discovers that barriers conceal the higher states of being. Some Taoists who encounter these obstructions conceive of them merely as constructs of their own mind, which must be overcome in the process of understanding the way. Perhaps with time they may prove right, but for now the spiritual state of the cosmos is as dangerous to the alchemist as is the physical world.

Becoming Ephemeral

The World of Darkness is a place of mystery, and there are simply places mortals cannot go. If you own **Mage: The Awakening**, you are familiar with the Supernal Realms as examples. If you have not read **Mage: The Awakening**, you’ve still been introduced to the idea of immaterial realms such as the state of being in which ghosts exist. The Taoist alchemist capable of transforming into ephemera effectively becomes a ghost or spirit in a state of Twilight. He is intangible and invisible to those in the physical world who do not have the supernatural ability to see or touch Twilight. Ghosts and spirits in the same state find him quite solid, however, and the reverse is true as well.

Unfortunately, unless a Taoist discovers some sort of mystic gateway to other places, he is trapped in Twilight for the duration of his alchemy and can neither return to the physical world nor pass through the barrier that seals the Shadow Realm. If slain during this time, he almost certainly becomes a ghost.

Barring tragic circumstances, the effect that allows an alchemist to transform eventually ends and he instantly returns to a material state. If he has managed to somehow pass through the barrier to the Shadow Realm, his ephemeral form does not end until he returns to Twilight.

Immortality

In the process of finding the way, a Taoist naturally attunes to the spiritual energy of the world. Rather than expending his life force to pass from day to day, he lives in harmony with the universe. There are many stories of Taoists blessed with immortality, and the wise alchemist may discover that he has joined their ranks. This is the ultimate achievement, although it might be accomplished through external or internal practices.

The Taoist does not simply become immortal and get to live forever. Continued existence in physical form, separate from the Tao, introduces the potential for struggle and the loss of life essence. The immortal must continue his study of alchemy, continually transforming toward a state of perfection that otherwise becomes diluted. Through alchemy, the Taoist forms the Golden Elixir of Immortality and is rendered ageless for a time while the elixir protects his life energy and restores at least as much as the world tries to take. The Golden Elixir might be an actual physical compound formed through the art of external alchemy, or a spiritual essence formed within the crucible of the Taoist’s own body and mind. With great mastery of both *wai-dan* and *nei-dan*, the alchemist may even transfer this energy to another, and continue a tradition of immortals bringing others onto the path through magic and teaching. The process of immortality is a constant one, requiring regular infusions of the Golden Elixir, however it’s acquired.

Additional Practices

Taoists’ primary focus is alchemy, but certain abilities are commonly learned in pursuit of transfigurative wisdom. The effort to perfect one’s body and spirit is a particularly effective method of learning to heal others. The study of the magical energy of natural substances and the internal *chi* of the individual sometimes includes examination of auras. The positive aspects of the alignment of oneself with the proper path of the universe often manifests as an apparent streak of good luck. Manipulating compounds and one’s own internal energy can translate into processes that counter the magic of other thaumaturges, or into wards against hostile spirits. Philosophical traditions also make great use of the ancient *I Ching*, a tool of divination consisting of 64 hexagrams that may be interpreted correctly when one understands the Tao.

The Crooked House

A client contacts a character inquiring about the *feng shui* services he offers. The customer indicates that he is busy today, but that he’d like the character to take a look at the first floor of a property he wants to clean up for commercial rental. The key will be under the doormat. Arriving on the scene, the character notices the faded old sign for “Al’s Butcher Shop.” Once inside, geomancy reveals that the place is strangely attuned

to the Weaponry Skill, and gleaming knives still line a rack near the sink. A crumpled fragment of yellow police tape peeks out from one of the meat lockers. What happened here? Is that the sound of the front door locking? Are those footsteps upstairs? Who lives in the second-floor apartment? None of the lights work, because the power is off. What's in the freezer? Does the client know? Can this crooked house be straightened?

Finally, some Taoist alchemists pursue the Eastern arts of geomancy. The study of transformations and flows of natural energy creates environments perfectly oriented toward work and life. If the energies of the world flow like a river, then fighting against the stream rather than gaining the strength of the current is foolish. Eastern geomancy is known as *feng shui* and is a very serious art. Disney reportedly spent millions to redesign Hong Kong Disneyland at the recommendation of a *feng shui* expert. *Feng shui* practitioners study the physical form of an existing building, or the plans for one, and seek to align form with function on a mystic level. Properly designed and executed, *feng shui* may grant harmony in the home or success in the workplace.

Taoist Training

Defining Merit: Choose Alchemy (External) or Alchemy (Internal); chosen Merit is rated ●●●●

Path Merits: Alchemy (External), Alchemy (Internal), Countermagic, Divination, Dream, Geomancy, Healing, Library, Longevity, Luck Magic, Magical Nexus, Second Sight, See Auras, Warding

Strengths: The contemplative training of the way grants +1 die to Meditation rolls, and a successful session

grants potential bonuses to degeneration rolls (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 51). Successful meditation also confers a +1 bonus to the Taoist's next effort to use a Merit or ritual derived from his thaumaturge path.

Weaknesses: The true practitioner of the way does not act without deliberation. A Taoist alchemist faces a -1 penalty to magic conducted using informal rituals (in addition to any other penalties that apply). Furthermore, if the Taoist enacts magic using rituals with intervals shorter than 30 minutes, he may not benefit from bonuses gained through meditation.

Character Creation: The intellectual nature of Taoism suggests that many alchemists favor Mental Attributes. Stamina represents the health and endurance that Taoist alchemy seeks to achieve, while the study of non-resistant action provides a suitable basis for dots in Composure.

Mental Skills are likely to be primary, particularly Academics (Religion), Medicine, Occult and potentially Science. Taoists who strive to return to nature should possess the Survival Skill, while those who practice martial arts learn Brawl.

Many of the Merits from the *World of Darkness Rulebook* are potentially appropriate to the Taoist. Common Sense, Holistic Awareness and Meditative Mind represent the pragmatic, contemplative and naturalistic practices of the tradition. Physical Merits portraying talent in martial arts or great physical stamina may be appropriate, depending on your character's background. The pursuit of most Social Merits runs contrary to the teachings of Taoism, though many alchemists feel loyalty to a wise Mentor.

Strict attempts to adhere to Taoism can engender excessive Pride, or encouraging nonresistance can turn to Sloth. If your Storyteller uses the optional Flaws rule, Aloof may be appropriate.

Concepts: Taoist monk, acupuncturist, professor of Asian studies, martial-arts teacher

Vodoun

I do what I want with the spirits, and they do what they want with me.

Voodoo. For most of us, the word instantly brings to mind shambling zombies and wax dolls stuck with pins. Hollywood, antithetical groups of Christianity and Western scholars have all perpetuated this image. It is thoroughly ingrained in our imagination. Some apologists would argue that there is no truth whatsoever to these portrayals of the faith. Yet, some things not altogether true in the real world have a place in the World of Darkness, and one could make a case that various practitioners seeking personal gain (particularly the *bocor*) have purposefully fed this stereotype.

The name "voodoo" is a distortion of the original Dahomean people's words: *vodoun* (the tribal Fon word

for "spirit" or "god") and *vodu* (the Ewe equivalent). The origin of this faith can be traced to 18th- and 19th-century inhabitants of the region once known as Dahomey, a prominent West African kingdom that arose during the 15th century and that included parts of what is Togo, Benin and Nigeria today. Vodoun's tribal roots may go back thousands of years before that. Many modern scholars note that vodoun should be capitalized when used in the same context as other religions. Considering that many faithful followers use the word *voodoo*, claiming that the word alone is disrespectful might be difficult. Unfortunately, the past 200 or 300 years have been marked by outright attempts

to wipe out vodoun, and so even accidental insults may be taken to heart by believers.

During the colonial era, Europeans actively suppressed vodoun, destroying many of its shrines, forcing conversion and even shipping slaves from West Africa to use as hard labor in the New World. Slaves were baptized Roman Catholic when they arrived in Haiti or on other West Indian islands. The infrastructure of the church was fragmentary at the time, however, so slaves managed to continue to practice their religion in secret even while they attended Mass.

European efforts to destroy the faith ultimately failed. Ironically, greed-driven exploitation of thousands of people transplanted the seeds of the religion across the world. Attempts to suppress “voodoo” continued for more than two centuries (including very active efforts by Catholics in Haiti during the 1940s), yet the faith persevered and even became widely accepted in some areas. Today, estimates place vodoun practitioners anywhere from 60 million to more than 80 million, with followers in Benin, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Haiti, Togo and in cities in the United States, particularly in the South. Of course, such numbers are often buried under indeterminate CIA Factbook religious terms such as “indigenous” and “practices,” despite the fact that vodoun became the official religion of Benin in 1996, and was a formally accepted religion of Haiti in 2003. Vodoun is also commonly referred to as Voodoo, Vodou, Vodoun, Vudu (or half a dozen other spellings), Sevi Lwa and even as hoodoo. Similar religions include Yoruba, Umbanda, Quimbanda, Lucumi, Macumba, Candomblé, Santeria and Jamaican Pocomania.

Lexicon

Note: *Italicized* words refer to separate entries.

ason: A sacred rattle used by a *houngan* or *mambo*.

bat guerre: The “battle for the spirits.” An initiation ritual for a *houngan* or *mambo*. Other initiation rituals include *kanzo* and “taking of the *ason*.”

bocor: Also bokor. Literally “who works with both hands.” An often feared minister of *vodoun* who practices powers of both creation and destruction, also called *caplata*. Many ascribe “black magic” to the bocor.

cheval: A horse. A person possessed or “mounted” by a *loa*.

govi: A small earthen bottle used to rescue the *gros-bon-ange* of dead ancestors.

gros-bon-ange: “Big guardian angel,” one of the parts of the human soul. Some consider it separate from “the person.”

houfo: The physical region of a *houngan* or *mambo*’s influence.

houngan: A male priest of *vodoun*.

kafou: The crossroads. The place where earth and spirit meet. Most rituals begin with an acknowledgement of this image.

Les Invisibles: All spirits (including ghosts).

Les Mysteries: The *loa*. Sacred knowledge.

loa: (or *Lwa*) *Les Mysteries*, referred to as ancestors by some, gods by others.

mambo: A *vodoun* priestess.

mount: Possess. The *loa* possess or mount a *serviteur* who acts as a *cheval*.

orisha: Spirit or god. Generally considered another word for the same idea as *loa* or *vodoun*.

peristyle: A *vodoun* shrine or temple. Usually very small.

Petro: Also Congo. The aggressive part of *vodoun*, also called hot, bitter or negative by some practitioners. Referred to as “black magic” by some, although others insist that only *bocor* do black magic, and that Petro combine positive and negative aspects.

poto mitan: Also poteau mitan. Center pole in a *peristyle*. Represents the center of the universe. Central to all ritual dances.

Rada: The passive part of *vodoun*, also called cool, sweet or positive by some practitioners. Referred to as “white magic” by some.

ridden: Possessed by a *loa*. Acting as a *cheval*.

serviteurs: Serious practitioners of *vodoun*.

ti-bon-ange: “Little guardian angel,” the part of the human soul that leaves the body during sleep and during possession by the *loa*.

vévé: Also veve, verve. Ceremonial drawings representing the *loa*, usually created in flour or cornmeal.

vodu: The Ewe equivalent of *vodoun*.

vodoun: Literally the Fon word for “spirit” or “god.” Also used to refer to the religion itself.

zombi: Also zombie. A person supposedly resurrected from the dead to serve as a mindless slave to a *bocor*.

Hi, Mom

One or more of the characters attends a funeral for a parent of a friend (possibly that of another character). That evening, an apparition of the parent appears to one of the group, clearly trying to tell him something. Unlike the typical ghost story, those with access to vodoun might interact far more actively. If this is the mother of one of the characters, how does the character react? Why has the mother become a ghost? Was she murdered? Does she want revenge, or does she just have some unfinished task? Might she be trying to prevent the murderer from striking again? Can the characters contact her personally, or might they enlist the services of a *houngan*? What if the characters are Protestant or Catholic? Are they vodoun, too? What if the murdered parent wants to take on the role of an ancestor spirit? Will the characters encourage this or try to encourage her to rest?

Loa

The heart of vodoun is the human relationship with the loa. The word literally means “mystery” in the Yoruban language. In traditional Yoruban belief, there is a chief god,

the Supreme Being known as Olorun or Onyama, who created the universe and is remote and unknowable. Dahoman religion (including the Fon and Ewe) calls the Supreme Being *Seh*, *Mahu*, *Mahou*, *Mawu* or *Mau*. Another title (used in the New World) is *gran met*, or “grand master,” also called *bondye*, from the French *bon dieu*, “good god.” Human beings are so far removed from the Supreme Being that we cannot even conceive of its relationship with us. Instead, we rely upon intermediary forces that help us achieve some sort of comprehensible interaction with the divine. The *loa*, or *vodoun*, are the Supreme Being’s representatives among mortals. Some of the *loa* are said to be the sons of God the Creator, while others are deified ancestors, the revered ghosts of the dead.

The *loa* act as humanity’s gateway to the invisible world. A *serviteur* learns to attract the attention of the *loa*, to offer his body as a vessel for the *loa* to interact with the physical world. The *vodoun* who is possessed is called a *cheval* (horse), and the possession is known as being mounted. Unfortunately, the *loa* grow tired and worn out in their efforts to interact with the physical world. *Houngans* make sacrifices to the *loa* in order to refuel their energy, ensuring that the spirits are able to continue their sacred duties. These sacrifices are often in the form of food, but the energy contained by life is particularly potent and thus the sacrifice of animals during attempts to woo the *loa* is especially favored. Detractors claim that the *bocor* include humans in their sacrifices, although such acts would not only be considered gross examples of black magic, but *bocor* who would consider such acts might prefer to use those they consider expendable as “zombis.”

Some wits say that Haiti is 70% Catholic, 30% Protestant and 100% *vodoun*. The similarity between the idea of a remote creator and the Christian God is unmistakable. Indeed, this is one of the strengths of *vodoun* — its inclusion of an all-powerful Supreme Being and a host of animist intermediaries within the same faith makes it one of the most encompassing religions in the world. *Vodoun* allows for mutual respect for similar *orisha*-based tribal faiths in Africa and the New World, as well as acceptance of Christianity without renouncing *vodoun*. Many practitioners see natural corollaries between their merged beliefs and associate the *loa* with saints, especially *Erzulie* with the Virgin Mary. This is not to say that all *vodoun* are also Christian, but that some practitioners are comfortable followers of both faiths.

The interaction of the *loa* with the physical world is the source of *vodoun* magic. Most often, the power of the *loa* manifests while a *houngan* is being ridden. Other times, the *loa* grant mystic secrets and powers to a *houngan*, allowing him to perform remarkable acts of healing or to help him influence the physical world. The wise *houngan* offers his form as a vessel to a *loa* whose powers align with his desired goal. If one wishes to manipulate the weather, *Shango* is the divinity to call. To inspire or seek love, one invokes *Erzulie*.

There are literally hundreds (debatably thousands) of *loa* that might answer the call of *vodoun*, although some are more popular than others. In some cases, individuals honor the pantheon of beings they have grown up to worship. In others, expertise might be applied to a specific spirit. For African practitioners of *vodoun*, the favored *loa* are likely to be specific to a tribe. In the New World, different countries

and regions have favored figures. Haitians in particular hold many *Petro loa* in high regard due to their part in the revolution against white colonialism. *Vodoun* is a living religion, however, and new *loa* come into favor from time to time.

Most *vodoun* divide the *loa* according to whether they are considered *Rada* or *Petro*. Generally, *Rada* are seen as benevolent figures, sometimes referred to as sweet or cool in reference to their passive natures. The most ancient of the *loa*, whose worship originated in Africa, are almost all considered *Rada*. *Petro loa* are regarded as more dangerous figures, sometimes referred to as bitter or hot to explain their aggressive nature. Many of the *Petro loa* are ancestors of the dead who perished in the New World, and the *loa*’s anger is considered a righteous reaction to the slavery, oppression and violence they endured. These divisions are not simple, however, for certain *Petro* originated in the Congo, and newer *loa* can be benevolent. To further confuse matters, *loa* such as *Ghede* are said to straddle the line between the two, sometimes drifting one way and then the other. This divergence should not be surprising given that *Les Mysteres* are beings whose nature is to stand at the crossroads of the mundane and the unknowable.

Prominent loa

Agwe: Spirit of the sea, including its plants and animals. Also fond of ships, military uniforms and gunfire.

Aida-Wedo: Also *Ayida*. The female counterpart of *Dumballah*. The rainbow spirit.

Baka: An evil spirit that takes the form of an animal.

Baron Samedi: Death. Keeper of the cemetery and primary contact with the dead. Some assert that he is a different face of *Ghede*.

Dambala: *Dumballah*, *Damballah* or *Damballah-wedo*. A serpent spirit associated with primordial creation. A benevolent source of wisdom, though it may be poorly communicated as it is above human level.

Erzulie: Also *Ezili*. The Wealthy Lady. Female spirit of love and beauty. Also associated with dreams and artistic ability. Despite her maternal ways, *Erzulie* is a virgin.

Ghede: *Loa* that embodies death and fertility. Also associated with eroticism. Sometimes a clown figure in black who inspires laughter, singing and dancing (although much of it lewd). Some say that *Baron Samedi* is *Ghede* in another form.

Kalfu: *Petro* counterpart to *Legba*. Spirit of night, origin of darkness. Symbol: the moon. Can be placated but is a dangerous *loa*. Called upon to cause bad luck.

Legba: Or *Papa Legba*. Guardian of the crossroads. Often the first figure honored in a service since some say that as the keeper of the gates to the spirit world, no other *loa* will show itself without his permission.

Loco: Or *Loko*. A spirit of vegetation, associated with herbs, healing and visions that impart wisdom.

Mawu Lisa: Or *Marassa*. The divine twins, a spirit of creation, the first ancestors, man and woman. Archetypal polar opposites.

Ogoun: Also *Ogun* and *Ogu Bodagris*. A warrior figure of wrath and liberation who gives strength through prophecy and magic.

Shango: Also Chango and Sango. Spirit of storms, the elements, weather.

Simbi: Guardian of fountains and marshes. Associated with magical powders and potions, the elements of air and water.

Zaka: Also Oko or Azacca. A spirit of agriculture. Addressed as “cousin” and beloved by poor farmers, because he is a hard worker of their own kind.

against only one or the other. Other types of mystic power are effective with ghosts and spirits alike, due to their shared ephemeral properties. Some mystic rituals apply to only Twilight, while others can reach into the Shadow Realm. The former can affect only ghosts or spirits in Twilight, while the latter affect only spirits in the Shadow Realm.

Ghosts and Spirits

In the World of Darkness, ghosts and spirits are not the same thing. Ghosts are immaterial entities that were once living beings but are now dead, while spirits are immaterial entities that represent the animist expressions of the world.

Ghosts normally inhabit the same space as the material world, yet are untouchable and invisible, in an ephemeral state of existence that magicians often call Twilight. The memories of objects also exist in Twilight, as the “ghosts” of buildings and heirlooms long gone in the material world. Ephemeral objects and beings are invisible and intangible to those without a supernatural power that allows them to see or touch.

Spirits normally inhabit a space separate from the material world known as the Shadow Realm. The Shadow Realm lies on the other side of a mystical barrier that separates it from the ephemeral existence of Twilight. The Shadow Realm is a place whispered about in shamanic and animist beliefs, where the world is not the same as ours, but is perhaps the way our world should be. Some shamans might explain the Shadow Realm as the living soul of the material world. Sometimes spirits pass through the barrier from the Shadow Realm into our world, where they enter the same state of Twilight that ghosts occupy.

Some ghosts and spirits have powers that allow them to affect the physical world, to manifest as apparitions of visible but immaterial essence or to even take solid form as materialized beings. Other ephemeral entities have the ability to enter other states beyond the physical, the Twilight and the Shadow Realm. The dead can sometimes pass beyond to the Underworld, one of the various strange places where ghosts go after death, although they rarely return. Spirits also may sometimes pass into other realms, including the dominion of dreams. Even if mortals may not follow, magicians may learn much from these immaterial beings.

Many forms of magic that might affect ephemeral beings are limited to use on ghosts alone or spirits alone. A magician might learn a ritual to target ghosts, and later learn an alternate version effective against spirits, but each ritual would be of use

The Loa: Ghost or Spirit

The loa of vodoun are beings of polarity, a concept ultimately embodied in the Marassa twins, yet present throughout the faith. Loa stand at the crossroads of spirit and physical, and bridge the unknowably divine to the mundane world of mortals. Loa can be difficult to define in a straightforward discussion of the faith, much less in a game in which rules attempt to provide a solid framework for what a character can and cannot do. Yet, the rules demand a tough decision, “Are the loa ghosts or spirits?”

The simplest answer is to assume that some of Les Mysteries are ghosts and others are spirits. The loa of the ancestors, reverently remembered members of the dead, are likely to be powerful ghosts. Such beings may literally have thousands of followers as anchors, and might benefit from the rituals of more than one powerful *houngan*. Petro are the most likely to be ghosts. The loa who are ancient tribal gods from Africa are probably spirits. These orisha are archetypal powers with a tradition of worship extending back thousands of years. The Rada are the most likely to be spirits.

Realistically, things aren't quite that simple, though. Figures such as Ghede are generally considered to be both Petro and Rada. Despite their association with death, these ancient beings are held to be gods rather than ancestors. Furthermore, many practitioners (and scholars) suppose that even the eldest of the loa were originally ancestor spirits. Storytellers may wish to allow for changes in the nature of ghosts and spirits. The possibility exists that some ghosts become spirits over time, as the ghosts grow less human and more iconic in nature (particularly if they pass into other realms). Perhaps spirits of death may become ghosts when they wish to move among the dead. Maybe spirits who suffer terrible defeats, or who are abandoned so long that they starve for lack of ephemeral energy, fall into a state of death.

For our purposes, we assume that Les Mysteries are ghosts, whether they have always been ancestors or they are spirits that have joined the dead to help the faithful. Thus, vodoun magic is limited to targeting ghosts and entities whose ephemeral natures are indistinguishable from ghosts. Storytellers who don't agree with this tact can increase the scope of vodoun magic, but doing so increases the characters' power and may create issues of game balance.

Vodoun Rituals

The primary purposes of vodoun magic are healing and gaining wisdom. *Houngan* rites invoke the presence of the loa, offer the bodies of the faithful for possession and ask for the

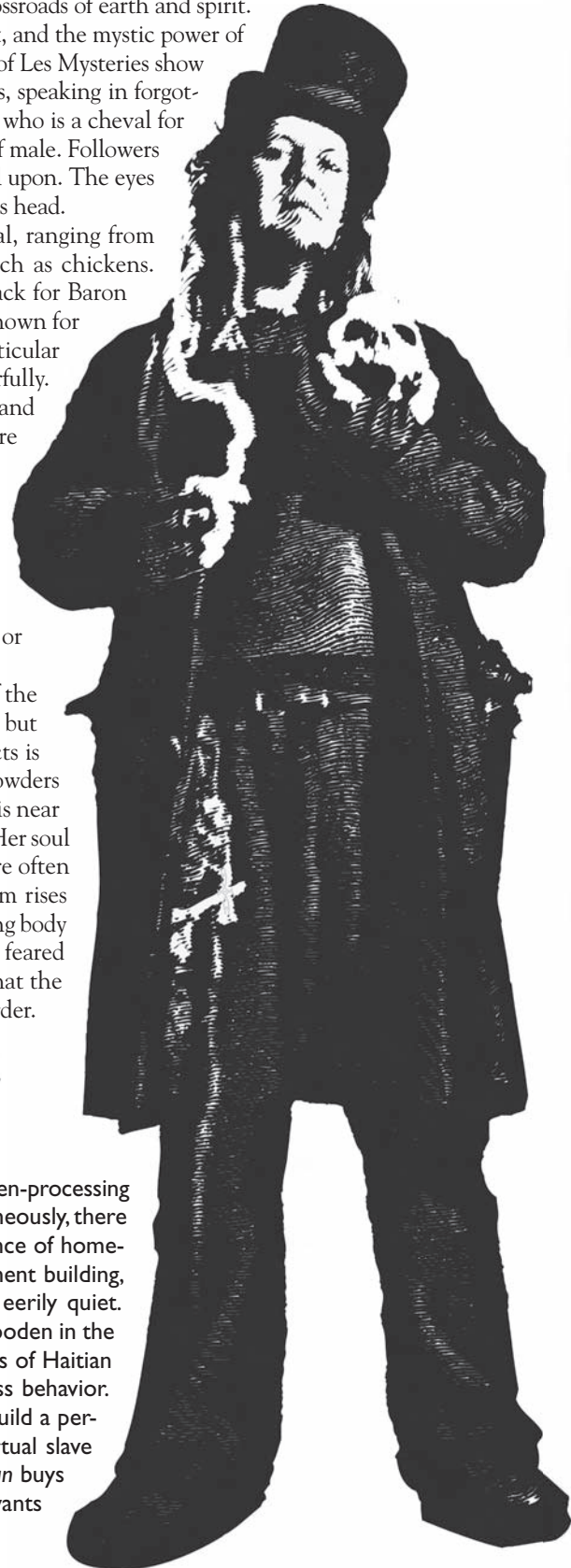
aid from ancestors or beings that answer. The rites of vodoun are not solemn, quiet affairs, and can even prove frightening to the uninitiated. The faithful gather in circles, dance furiously to powerful music and ask for the intervention of beings at the crossroads of earth and spirit. When the loa answer, they mount one or more of those present, and the mystic power of the spirit world is unleashed. Those who are under the control of Les Mysteries show definite signs of possession, twisting limbs in awkward positions, speaking in forgotten tongues or assuming the behavior of possessors. A serviteur who is a cheval for Erzulie flirts and dances erotically in a feminine manner, even if male. Followers of Dambala writhe on the ground like the wise serpent they call upon. The eyes of one possessed by Ghede or Baron Samedi may roll back in his head.

Sacrifices are performed in every important vodoun ritual, ranging from intricate designs left in flour or cornmeal to live animals such as chickens. Petitioners wear clothing of the appropriate color, such as black for Baron Samedi, and sacrifices are chosen accordingly. Some loa are known for their love of tobacco or rum, while others prefer animals of a particular color. Agwe invocations often include small boats painted colorfully. Sacred rattles called *ason* are common in the hands of *houngan* and *mambo* ritual leaders. Other ritual tools, known as *gris-gris*, are blessed implements that enhance a rite. *Gris-gris* varies greatly, and can include such things as balls of black wax, bone tools, hex signs, cards, herbs, potions, dust, candles and animals. Earthen bottles known as *govi* are used in ceremonies designed to recall the dead from beyond so that they may aid families as respected ancestor spirits. Dolls may be used to represent targets of good or bad luck, while mojo bags may help with medicine or to ward off evil spirits.

At the heart of sensationalist presentations is the magic of the *bocor*. These *houngans* may practice benevolent Rada rituals, but they are renowned for black magic. Most famous of their effects is the ability to make zombies. Through the use of poisonous powders or perhaps merely being on hand when an unfortunate person is near death, a *bocor* performs a ritual over a temporarily dead victim. Her soul is captured within an object known as a soul jar. Such items are often a perversion of the *govi*, but may take other forms. The victim rises from her temporary death experience, a shambling, soulless living body whose ghost is held at the mercy of the *bocor*. This practice is feared and hated in the vodoun community, and taken so seriously that the Haiti penal code literally regards the practice as a form of murder.

The Factory

An article in the morning paper notes that an old chicken-processing factory in a rundown area of town has reopened. Simultaneously, there is a story about the mayor decrying the increased presence of homeless in the city. If one of the characters lives in an apartment building, he notices some neighbors have become unkempt and eerily quiet. They shuffle to work in the morning and return just as wooden in the evening. One by one, the building is taken over by families of Haitian immigrants, each of whom demonstrates the same listless behavior. Perhaps a *bocor* abusing his vodoun powers is trying to build a personal fortune by turning down-and-out refugees into virtual slave labor. Do the characters get involved? What if the *houngan* buys the apartment building, having frightened the owner, and wants to convince the character to leave?



Vodoun Training

Defining Merit: Invocation (Ghosts) (•••••)

Path Merits: Countermagic, Curse of Ill Fortune, Divination, Dream, Evocation (Ghosts only) (•• or •••••), Healing, Invocation (Ghosts only) (•• or •••••), Library, Luck Magic, Magical Nexus, Sacrifice (Ghosts only), Second Sight, Soul Jar, Warding, Weather Control

Strengths: A vodoun is an expert in dealing with the loa, and therefore gains a +1 bonus to Social rolls to interact with ghosts. At the Storyteller's discretion, the vodoun may also get a +1 bonus for rolls (typically using Intelligence + Occult) to determine whether she knows specific information about the dead.

Weaknesses: Acting as a serviteur is second nature to a vodoun, so she suffers a -1 penalty to resist when made the target of a spirit or ghost's mind-affecting powers such as Possession or Clairvoyance.

Character Creation: *Houngans* (and *mambos*) are religious figures in their communities, and the demand for regular interaction with people means Social Attributes are likely to be primary. The rigors of enduring possession make a high Stamina useful,

and the dances of vodoun rituals are best performed with a degree of Dexterity.

Social Skills are prominent, particularly Expression (Dance or Music) and Socialize. Petro practitioners may focus on Intimidation and dabble in Streetwise and Subterfuge, while the more beneficent Rada are often known as great listeners due to their Empathy. The Mental Skills of Occult and Medicine are common among vodoun priests, and many followers of the faith practice various Crafts.

The focus vodoun puts on healing makes the Holistic Awareness Merit a good choice. The multicultural nature of regions with concentrations of vodoun makes the Language Merit useful. Being a *houngan* or *mambo* is a very good reason to take Allies, Contacts and Status to represent influence within the vodoun religious community.

If your Storyteller is using the optional rule for Flaws (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 217), vodoun with an unbalanced relationship with the spirit world can suffer Amnesia due to time lost to possession. The Vices of Gluttony and Lust plague some followers of Rada, while the practitioners of Petro can be consumed by Wrath.

Concepts: Village priest, ritual dancer, religious artisan, political refugee, neighborhood wise woman

Thaumaturge Merits

All Merits in this section require a user to possess a thaumaturge template as a prerequisite. Many Traits here are also specified as "defining" or "path" for the various traditions. If your character's tradition doesn't list a Merit from this chapter as available to his calling, you can't choose it. Some Merits are available to all mystics, however, regardless of their traditions. These traits are listed below.

Prerequisites: Any requirements your character must fulfill before he can have the Merit.

Effect: A description of what the Merit does.

Dice Pool: The Attributes and Skills used with the Merit, if any. This dice pool is used for each roll if use of the Merit involves a ritual.

Minimum Successes Required: A Thaumaturge Merit requires a ritual and an extended action. Unless stated otherwise, the performer must accumulate a total number of successes equal to the dots of the Merit. If a Trait has more than one level of ability (Invocation is available at •• and •••••, for example), and your character has the higher version, the number of successes required equals the number of dots for the specified effect.

Ritual Length: The pace of activity for the ritual's extended-action rolls. So, if an entry says one minute, a roll is made for each minute that passes while the character performs the required behavior. If there is no length listed, the Merit does not require a ritual.

Duration: How long the effects of the rite persist if the performance is successful.

Cost: All Thaumaturge Merits cost one Willpower point per use, unless stated otherwise. You must pay this cost when your character begins the ritual.

Suggested Equipment/Possible Penalties: Exceptional factors that may aid or hamper use of a Merit. Don't forget the general modifiers that apply to all rituals (p. 75), and remember that all rituals require some equipment or physical action.

Ritual Details: A description of the ritual, including mandatory equipment.

Drawback: Some Merits cause problems for those who use or possess them.

All thaumaturges may possess any of the following special Merits, regardless of tradition: Countermagic (•• or •••••), Divination (••••), Dream (• to •••••), Library (• to ••••), Magical Nexus (• to ••), The Last Spell (•) and Warding (••••). With Storyteller permission, any thaumaturge can have the Merits: Artifact (•••• or higher, pp. 80–81 of **Mage: The Awakening**), Enhanced Item (• or higher, p. 82 of **Mage: The Awakening**) and Imbued Item (•• or higher, p. 85 of **Mage: The Awakening**).

If the roll results for a Merit lack traditional entries such as "Success" or "Failure," the effects of these are standard for any extended-action ritual defined in this chapter. Those common roll results are detailed on p. 75.

Alchemy (External) (•• or •••••)

Prerequisites: Occult •• or Science ••

Effect: In simplistic terms, external alchemy is the art

of transforming one physical substance into another. Fairy tales and legends speak loudest of the ability to change base metals into gold, because dreams of wealth captured the imaginations of influential sponsors of court magicians. Clever alchemists invent endless other applications for the art, while wise ones avoid demonstrating their capabilities to the greedy or powerful.

Stories and actual practice agree on one important detail: an alchemist requires materials and equipment with which to work. Without a “laboratory” of some kind, an alchemist is unable to perform. A laboratory usually takes the form of a cooking fire, various mixing glassware or crockery and an assortment of reagents, but a well-stocked herbal collection and pure water may suffice for holistic practitioners.

The two-dot version allows a thaumaturge to transform a simple, common, non-precious substance into a different simple, common, non-precious substance.

The four-dot version allows an alchemist to create or transform a complex, rare or precious substance. A simple compound may be refined into a complex one, a rare substance might be turned into a common one or a precious material might become a different precious material.

The player must succeed in a roll of Intelligence + her choice of Occult or Science. The roll is penalized by -1 for each point of Size above 1 that’s transmuted, and the entire body of transformed material must be one mass (a single chunk of metal, a pool of liquid or a sack of powder, for example). The alchemist’s efforts suffer an additional penalty equal to the sum of the highest Durability involved (original or new) and the highest Resources necessary to purchase the materials involved (original or new). So, the penalty equals Durability + Resources. Remember that many objects don’t actually have any Durability or Resources ratings, so the Storyteller may have to make them up.

For example, a thaumaturge uses the four-dot Trait to turn a chunk of iron into a \$500 gold nugget. Looking at the **World of Darkness Rulebook’s** Resources Merit, the gold would require approximately Resources •, the iron is Durability 3 and the chunk is Size 1. The total penalty is -4 (1 for the Resources, 3 for the Durability and 0 for Size).

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult or Science

Ritual Length: One hour

Duration: Indefinite (permanent unless dispelled somehow)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: An accident occurs. It may be anything from transmuting the wrong material to mild acid burns to an explosion. Alternatively, the material may transform, but reverts to its original state at an inopportune time.

Exceptional Success: The final product is also imbued with magical energy. As enchanted material, it can be used to cause bashing or lethal wounds to ghosts or spirits in Twilight. Additional properties may manifest at the Storyteller’s discretion (see **Magick: The Awakening**, p. 82, the Enhanced Item Merit, for ideas).

Possible Penalties: Size of material transmuted (-1 per point over Size 1), Durability of toughest material (-1

per point), Resources cost of most expensive material (-1 per dot), poor laboratory equipment (-1), no sample of the desired material (-1)

Ritual Details: Alchemical rituals resemble archaic chemistry or herbalism. Indeed, frauds pretending to be alchemists utilize those very arts. Fire, acidic and base materials, mortars and pestles, mixing containers, mercury and gold are prevalent alchemical materials. Some degree of laboratory equipment or herbal mixing apparatus is necessary.

Alchemy (Internal) (•• or ••••)

Prerequisites: Occult •• and Medicine •

Effect: Eastern occult scholars have long believed in two different studies of alchemy. Western alchemists are usually focused on the physical realm, and while Eastern have also explored the concepts of internal alchemy. The principle is the refinement of the mind and body in pursuit of purity of spirit from which life springs. Although a mystic may consume medicinal herbs and compounds, the art requires one to go further. Meditation, breath control and purification rituals blend with nonresistance, asceticism and physical training to recapture energies lost in daily life and to direct them toward a return to the spiritual state.

The two-dot version allows the alchemist to hone her body or mind toward a more perfect state. Choose any Attribute and roll Resolve + Occult, with a -1 penalty per dot already possessed in the Trait. A successful roll grants a bonus of one dot to the Attribute, though the trait cannot be raised above the human limit of 5. The alchemist gains all of the benefits of the increased Attribute for the duration of the scene. Raising Resolve or Composure increases the character’s Willpower dots, but doesn’t refuel her current points (thus increasing her capacity, but not her current Status). Health might increase due to Stamina, but the gains disappear at the end of the duration, potentially endangering the thaumaturge. Other advantages such as Speed, Defense and Initiative Modifier are figured from increased Attributes as normal. The character may benefit from only a single increased Attribute at a time. If she uses the Merit again while it is already active, the first effect ends when the second begins.

The four-dot version represents the alchemist’s great strides toward the achievement of spirituality. A successful use causes the character to transform into an ephemeral being, immaterial in the manner of a ghost for the duration of the scene. If the alchemist chooses to return to physical form, it takes her one action spent concentrating to bring the ritual’s effect to an end. Any clothing worn or personal objects carried are transformed as well. Anything held in hand that’s larger than Size 3 cannot be changed. A transformed character cannot affect the material world at all as she passes harmlessly through physical objects. She moves as fast as she normally would travel were she still physical. Being ephemeral allows her to affect other ephemeral beings, with “physical attacks,” social interaction or other powers. The roll to achieve ephemeral state is adjusted according to the alchemist’s surroundings as follows:

Location	Dice Modifier
Dense urban area	-3
City suburb or town	-2
Small town, village, built-up countryside area	-1
Wilderness	0
Magical nexus	+1

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult

Ritual Length: 30 minutes

Duration: One scene

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The jarring experience prevents the mystic from using this Merit again for the remainder of the scene.

Exceptional Success: The two-dot version grants an extra dot to the chosen Attribute (for a total of two). The four-dot version allows the alchemist to end her ephemeral existence reflexively at any time, returning to material form.

Suggested Equipment: A magical locus (+1)

Ritual Details: Meditation and ritual-breathing exercises interact with the physical and mental discipline of the alchemist. Medicinal herbs or compounds are sometimes used as well.

Communion (•• or ••••)

Effect: The thaumaturge is capable of connecting his consciousness to that of another being, generally a figure of godly intellect and incredible power. The experience is usually deeply personal and highly religious — one does not communicate directly with one's divine inspiration without being changed by the experience.

The two-dot version of this Merit allows a character to reach out to the entity he considers his patron and open the way for the divine presence to communicate directly with him. This contact is one-way; the thaumaturge is limited to receiving whatever wisdom his patron desires to send without any ability to communicate in return. Spiritual figures of great power may be omniscient (or nearly so), and thus cognizant of a follower's wishes. If the ritual succeeds, treat the effect as the Common Sense Merit (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 108), but present the "common sense" as emanations from the force with which the thaumaturge connects.

The four-dot version allows the performer to open the same pathway with the advantage of sending as well as receiving. Although the patron figure might choose to focus on matters different from what the character asks, revelations generally consist of warnings against particular courses of action, or of suggestions that will aid the goals of the thaumaturge. In terms of game mechanics, the wisdom transmitted means the thaumaturge may choose to treat an action of your choice as a rote action (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 134), provided the character *begins* that action before the expiration of this ritual's duration (one scene). If the action is extended, the rote-action rule applies to each roll in the process.

The greatest challenge to a Storyteller here is presenting knowledge gained by Communion in a thematic light. Try to keep in mind the goals that the thaumaturge's benefactor

might pursue. More importantly, remember that the patron is a spiritual figure with an intellect far greater than that of humanity, and that the patron's answers are likely to stretch the understanding of a thaumaturge to its limits. The wisdom granted in a single ritual may take years to fully comprehend or for its intended effects to be realized. Perhaps each communion should be recorded so that its full meaning may someday be discovered by future generations.

Dice Pool: Composure + Wits. Storytellers may choose to make these rolls to keep players unsure about the success of contact.

Ritual Length: One hour

Duration: One scene

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The thaumaturge experiences some sort of grand self-delusion that he mistakes for success. He suffers a mild derangement for •• or a severe one for ••••.

Exceptional Success: The communion results in particularly significant information, or is unusually clear. The Storyteller decides what that means in the game.

Suggested Equipment: Thaumaturge lives a lifestyle pleasing to his patron (+1)

Possible Penalties: Questionable or poor symbol in ritual (-1), caster has ignored patron previously (-1 to -3), ritual enacted for trivial reason (-1 to -3), patron currently displeased with caster (-1 to -5), character has posed one or more questions already today (-5), character has posed one or more questions already this week (-3)

Ritual Details: The performer focuses on a symbol of import to his personal concept of his patron. Through intense prayer or meditation, the performer seeks to open his senses to communication from his divine inspiration. Drugs are sometimes used to divorce one's senses from the normal world, though some practitioners feel this approach clouds the message rather than clarifying it. Darkness, incense and other mild ways of altering the senses are useful as well.

Drawback: Receiving communication from divine power is life-changing. The will of the patron is inscrutable and vast. A patron may be displeased with a follower who ignores the wisdom the patron has shared. Displeasure may be expressed by refusal to answer, repetitive demands or "magnanimous" attempts to reform the thaumaturge. An angered patron may cause the Merit to suffer dramatic failure at will.

The Black Mass

One of the characters who is a churchgoer, or a friend of hers, meets the new priest or preacher of the congregation. The priest is charismatic, handsome and witty, and enthusiastic about inviting people to midnight services. Over time, he builds a small subgroup from among the church faithful, who trust him implicitly and receive special teachings and blessings. If the characters manage to crack this inner circle, they discover that his late-night



sessions would likely be considered un-Godly by most parishioners. Hidden behind the icons of the church, he communes with an unknown power. In the eyes of some of his more conservative congregation, he would have gained the immediate powers of Satan rather than the unfulfilled promise of Salvation. How do the characters react? Do they seek to put an end to his meetings? What if local law enforcement protects the new priest because he isn't breaking any laws?

Countermagic (•• or ••••)

Prerequisites: Wits ••

Effect: One of the first questions that a new practitioner of magic is likely to ask is, "How do I defend myself against other people who can do magic?" Most paths provide some training in the arts of protecting oneself against hostile powers.

The two-dot version is based on the idea that first defense is being able to detect an attack. This ritual extends a mystic's senses for a single scene, allowing her to detect the first thaumaturge ritual used against her during that time, whether the magic is intended for good or ill. Rites performed through a sympathetic connection are noticed, though the source may not be. She senses the beginning of the ritual, which may give her time to try to prevent its completion via other means.

The four-dot version weaves the will into a defensive barrier against hostile magic. If the character succeeds, she benefits from the effects of the two-dot version. If the first ritual to target her during the scene is one that she would like to avoid, her Countermagic also applies a -2 penalty to the caster's ritual rolls. This defense works against mental assaults as well as physical ones — the magical energy intrinsic to the attack is what is blocked. Only one Countermagic ward may apply to a character per scene, and the effect cannot be transferred to others.

Countermagic applies against other thaumaturge rites only, not against the spells of mages or the powers of other supernatural creatures.

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult

Ritual Length: One minute

Duration: One scene

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The thaumaturge weaves an ineffective Countermagic field around her, providing no protection but potentially attracting the attention of those who can sense such things.

Suggested Equipment: Possession of a ritual tool used by the attacker (+1)

Ritual Details: Use of this magic commonly includes the hasty erection of protective circles or amulets scrawled on paper and worn. Iron, lead and various gemstones are sometimes included for their reputed defensive properties.

Drawback: The four-dot version creates an invisible aura that may be detected by certain supernatural beings, which could endanger the thaumaturge by drawing unwanted attention. If a being can see the barrier, it may appear as a shield or wall of magical energy.

Curse of Ill-Fortune (●●●●)

Prerequisites: Luck Magic (●● or ●●●●) and Persuasion ●

The character can inflict bad luck upon others. This spell is a basic curse intended to bring about ill-fortune when another person performs a specific type of action such as driving a car or making a speech. The performer chooses both the target and the nature of the activity to be affected before dice are rolled. If the rite is successful, the curse removes a number of dice from the subject's pool equal to the magician's Manipulation for a number of rolls of the designated type equal to the caster's Persuasion. For example, the magician could curse someone to do poorly at a job interview, or simply to drive especially badly whenever going faster than 60 mph. A single target can be subject to no more than one curse at a time. If the player rolls an exceptional success, this curse applies to all rolls of the specified type that the target makes for duration.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion versus Composure + Supernatural Advantage (extended and contested roll)

Ritual Length: 10 minutes

Duration: One day

Suggested Equipment: A photograph or video of the target performing the action to be cursed (+1), a tool or accouterment the target uses to perform the action that becomes the subject of the curse (+1)

Possible Penalties: Subtract the target's dots in Luck Magic (if any) from the roll

Ritual Details: The magician draws sigils, recites chants or impromptu poems or even draws images of the action he wants to curse. The ritual always involves taking a magical connection and using it as part of a symbolic representation of the action. For example, when cursing a target to be an especially bad driver, the mystic might attach the magical connection to a photograph or model of a car and then smash or otherwise destroy the model or photograph and the magical connection.

Divination (●●●●)

Effect: The thaumaturge performs ritual readings to divine the future. The character declares a target — a person, place or thing. He can then attempt to divine the future of that subject. The information revealed is typically vague and difficult to comprehend until the predicted situation is imminent. At that point, things suddenly make sense to the thaumaturge and courses of action may be remarkably clear.

This Merit grants use of the advanced-actions rule (from the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 135), allowing the player to roll twice and choose the most beneficial result for a single action involving the target. This action

must be undertaken within 24 hours of the divination. Such rolls require interaction of some sort with the target, whether that be finding, attacking, persuading or attempting to understand.

The same target can be divined with this rite only once every 24 hours. Any attempts to read the same person, place or thing's future again before 24 hours have passed fails automatically. If the thaumaturge means a target ill, then the divination counts as hostile magic for purposes of defensive measures.

The thaumaturge must have some connection to the target or the ritual fails. The degree of connection provides potential penalties to the roll (see "Magical Connections," p. 76). The thaumaturge cannot choose himself as the target, because the divination allows him to determine the future only as it relates to his own interaction with a subject.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult. The Storyteller may wish to roll secretly to keep the accuracy of the divination in question.

Ritual Length: 10 minutes

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The thaumaturge unwittingly receives a faulty answer, suffering a -2 die penalty to the action attempted.

Exceptional Success: The divination is more clear than normal. The thaumaturge gets use of the advanced-actions rule for two rolls involving the target that day.

Suggested Equipment: Target willingly participates in the ritual (+1)

Ritual Details: Divination rituals always involve some sort of medium with which the thaumaturge may read the future, usually in symbolic form. Tarot decks, rune stones, tea leaves and *I Ching* characters are possibilities.

Dream (● to ●●●●●)

Effect: Your character has a connection to primordial forces, ancient truths that can be seen and comprehended only through dreams. He gains insight into secrets through reverie and visions, finding answers to questions he couldn't normally get by mundane means. Behind the lie of the so-called real world, dreams reveal the world as it really is — from a certain point of view. Through effort of will, your character can even channel this insight into action.

Once per game session, your character can use this Merit to gain a supernatural insight concerning a question or topic. Activating this ability requires at least one hour spent in sleep, a trance or in an activity focused exclusively on accessing an altered state of consciousness. The Storyteller then rolls the character's Wits + Composure in secret. A successful roll results in one clue per dot of Dream.

The meaning of these clues is hidden behind allegory, symbols and archetypes. Dreams rarely answer questions directly, typically relying on symbolism and images to convey information. A thaumaturge seeking a specific person's location wouldn't see his address, but landmarks nearby could lead the way: a river, a tower or even the face of a man walking by at dusk. The answer has the potential to

resolve a problem. This Merit is a tool for the Storyteller to help drive events of a story.

Dream Travel (●●●●)

Prerequisites: Visionary Trances (●● or ●●●●)

Effect: The thaumaturge can psychically enter the dreams of another. This ability operates much like the Visionary Trances Merit (p. 119), except that the mystic enters the dreams of a sleeping individual instead of the Shadow Realm. The roll to enter another's dreams is resisted only if the target is unwilling. If the thaumaturge asks permission and the target agrees before he goes to sleep, the target does not get a roll to resist the ritual.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult versus Composure + Supernatural Advantage (if the target is not willing; extended and contested roll)

Ritual Length: 10 Minutes

Duration: Trance

During the time the thaumaturge's consciousness is in a subject's dream, the thaumaturge's body is alive but comatose and her spirit has actually separated from her body. She has no way of knowing her body's current state of health or any other information about it. Once inside a target's dream, the mystic can simply observe and possibly gain a deeper understanding of the subject's fears and worries. Alternatively, the thaumaturge can choose to form an ethereal dream-body capable of interacting physically with the target's dream-self and the contents of his dream. The thaumaturge normally appears in a form identical to her own body, dressed in clothes in which she is comfortable. She can interact with the target and the contents of the dream as easily and normally as if she were awake and interacting with the target and his surroundings. Although damage done to the sleeper's dream-body cannot harm the his physical body in any way, the mystic is not so lucky. Any damage done to her ethereal dream-body becomes bashing damage on her physical body, as bruises appear on her flesh. If the thaumaturge's physical body loses all Health, her spirit is thrown out of the target's dream automatically and she is likely unconscious from her injuries.

If the target's ethereal dream-body loses all Health, he wakes up automatically, but does not suffer any damage to his physical body. The mystic also wakes automatically.

The thaumaturge may attempt to leave a target's dream at any time with a successful Manipulation + Occult roll as an instant action. If the target wishes to stop her from leaving, this effort becomes a contested action, with Composure + Intimidation rolled for the subject. Holding onto the thaumaturge, imprisoning her or otherwise attempting to keep her from "getting away" counts as an attempt to keep the mystic from leaving a dream. Magicians who are prevented from leaving a dream may suffer damage from being in a trance for a long period, and from being attacked in the target's dream.

Although the thaumaturge cannot use her magic to directly affect the subject's dream, she can use her understanding of dreams to affect her form and location within the dream. Roll Manipulation + Occult in an instant action

to alter your character's clothing or appearance, including looking exactly like someone else whom the target knows. You can also make this roll reflexively to allow your character to move with inhuman speed. The mystic can fly for a scene or teleport instantly from one place to another. If the target attempts to resist these changes, such as by attempting to restrain the thaumaturge, then these rolls are contested by the target's Composure + Intimidation.

Suggested Equipment: Hallucinogenic drugs (+1 or +2, depending on their strength), the target's pillow (+1)

Possible Penalties: The target is drugged (drunkenness and sleeping pills both count) (-1)

Ritual Details: Performing this ritual is very similar to using the Visionary Trances Merit.

Enchantment (●● or ●●●●)

Effects: Enchantment is the magic of controlling and perceiving others' emotions and desires. Thaumaturges trained in this type of magic can affect the feelings of people and animals. These abilities can also be used on living supernatural beings such as ghouls and werewolves. The emotions of spirits, ghosts, vampires and other dead or otherwise inhuman things are sufficiently alien that they are immune to the effects of Enchantment.

The two-dot version allows a magician to cause a target to feel a relatively simple emotion. These feelings are more a suggestion than a mandate, though they are apt to be heeded if they make sense for the individual and situation. (Causing someone to feel sad when walking into a decrepit old house is reasonable and likely to be dismissed as a natural reaction, whereas making someone feel sadistic glee at the funeral of a sibling almost certainly causes the subject to question from whence the emotion came.) In all cases, the emotions produced are very general and are applied by the target to the immediate situation. For example, if a subject is made angry while talking to an employee, the target becomes angry with the employee, but does not suddenly become angry with someone the target had not been thinking about or talking to. A character can be made to feel angry, but not angry at a particular person who is not present. Producing murderous rage in someone who is both naturally aggressive and already quite angry can have dramatic results. If the target speaks with multiple people, the magician has no way to determine whether the target turns angry with everyone or with only a specific individual. This ritual can provide a magician with one or two bonus dice in a Social situation with the subject (depending upon how well the emotion produced fits the situation), or the ritual penalizes the target's Composure by one or two as he is overcome with passion.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Empathy versus Composure + Supernatural Advantage (extended and contested roll)

Ritual Length: One minute

Duration: One scene

Suggested Equipment: Food or drink that the magician touches during the ritual and that the target then consumes (+1), sample of the target's blood (+1), the emotion is the most reasonable reaction to the target's current circumstances (+1)

Possible Penalties: The emotion is completely inappropriate to the setting (-1), the target meditates regularly (-1), the target restrains her emotions regularly (-1)

Ritual Details: The caster must focus on either the target or a magical connection to the target and then perform an action relating to the emotion, such as concentrating on the desired feeling, whispering a description of the emotion while tying a knot in a piece of thread, dripping candle wax on a sigil representing the emotion or burning a piece of paper with the desired emotion written on it.

Characters who have the four-dot version can perform the above ritual, and also gain the ability to exert more precise control over a target's emotions and desires. In addition to being able to fill targets with rage or to make them sad, this ritual can cause a target to become angry with someone he had not seen or spoken to in several weeks, or to be in a crowd of people and suddenly fall in love with a specific person. If this ritual succeeds, the target feels these emotions, but may rapidly dismiss them if they are completely inappropriate or nonsensical. Someone working for a boss she likes and respects is likely to feel no more than annoyance or mild anger, but she still becomes angry at him. Similarly, filling a committed teetotaler with a desire for a drink isn't likely to start him on a lengthy drinking binge.

One of the major limitations of this ritual is that while a thaumaturge can produce emotions and desires in a target, she cannot control or even predict how he will respond. Causing the subject to feel rage at a particular person can result in the target yelling at the person, physically attacking him or attempting to drown his rage in drink or some similar intense or self-destructive activity.

A single target can be subject to only one of these rituals at a time. Causing a subject to feel a second emotion immediately negates the impact of the first.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Persuasion versus subject's Composure + Supernatural Advantage (extended and contested roll)

Ritual Length: 10 minutes

Duration: One day

Suggested Equipment: A sample of the target's blood (+1), a photograph or video of the target feeling the desired emotion (+1), an object the target touched while feeling that emotion (+1)

Possible Penalties: The emotion is completely inappropriate to the setting (-1), the target meditates regularly (-1), the target restrains her emotions regularly (-1)

Ritual Details: The details of this performance are very similar to the lower dot version, except that the ritual is considerably more detailed and extensive. The caster typically uses various props involving colors, shapes, scents and materials representing the desired emotion — say, hearts and roses for love or dark blues and dead flowers for sorrow.

Evocation (•• or ••••)

Effect: Evocation is the art of compelling a spirit or ghost to answer a summons. A thaumaturge with this Merit must choose ghosts or spirits as the Merit's focus, though she may learn both versions separately. Initially, the character

learns to force an entity to answer her call. Eventually, she can impose her will directly over the entity and enslave it temporarily. Obviously, most ghosts and spirits despise such treatment and may seek revenge once their servitude has ended. Some thaumaturges try to circumvent this danger by demanding only minor services, while others silence vengeful servants by treating them as expendable resources. Evocation does not grant a mystic the power to perceive Twilight, and Evocation's power does not reach into the Shadow Realm; the target summoned must already exist in Twilight.

The two-dot version forcefully contacts a specific entity or sends out a general summoning to the nearest entity. In either case, the being must be within visual or audible range to sense the thaumaturge. The character may summon an entity personally known to him (one that falls within any of the sympathy connection categories), or he may specify a type of entity of his choosing (males ghosts or fire spirits, for example). The entity comes to the caster with as much speed as the entity can muster, although it cannot be made to violate any normal limitations (such as exceeding the maximum distance from an anchor or defying a spiritual Ban). The entity must remain near the thaumaturge for the duration of the scene, unless the caster allows the entity to leave. At two dots, the thaumaturge cannot compel an entity to do anything other than attend his presence, though nothing prevents him from convincing or forcing the being to serve him by other means.

The four-dot version allows the performer to summon an entity and present it with a command that the entity must follow for the duration of the scene. The Merit does not grant any special power of communication to the thaumaturge, so the entity must be able to understand his command. A French-speaking Creole ghost may not know English, while a fire spirit might not fully comprehend ideas associated with water or ice. An entity is forced to obey the caster's command as best as it is able, though poorly worded commands may be twisted to suit the entity's desires.

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion versus Resistance (extended and contested roll)

Ritual Length: 10 minutes

Duration: One scene

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The thaumaturge's command is delivered to the entity without any force behind it. The ghost or spirit could feel anger toward the audacious caster.

Success: The thaumaturge summons the nearest entity matching his chosen description, provided that one is within range.

Exceptional Success: The evoker issues his command with great eloquence. The Storyteller should consider working with the player to eliminate potential loopholes in the wording.

Suggested Equipment: The command is actually helpful to the entity (+1), the entity has been successfully summoned by the thaumaturge before (+1)

Possible Penalties: Thaumaturge has negative reputation known to entity (-1), the entity is angry at caster (-2), the entity is currently bound by the caster or someone else (-3)

Ritual Details: The thaumaturge focuses the ritual on some object or creature significant to the ghost or spirit. For ghosts, this might include such things as living relatives, part of the ghost's corpse or grave, handwritten notes or personal photographs from its lifetime. Spirits are usually tied to concepts. An item or offering reflecting this affiliation is necessary — fire or flammables for a fire spirit or a mouse for a cat spirit, for example. Symbols of binding (chains or twine) or authority (coins, wands) may also be useful.

Drawback: Spirits and ghosts do not appreciate being enslaved any more than living beings do. The entity is very likely to bear ill will toward the caster in the future.

Familiar (●●● or ●●●●)

Prerequisites: Visionary Trances (●●●●), Communion (●●●●) or Enchantment (●●●●)

Effect: Your character has a magical bond with a spirit that aids him, one that is either in Twilight (it's immaterial and invisible) or that's embodied. Twilight familiars have no bodies; they are spirits in an ephemeral state of existence called Twilight. Embodied familiars inhabit a physical body in the material world. Only shamans who possess Visionary Trances (●●●●) and apostles of the Dark One who have Communion (●●●●) may possess Twilight familiars, and only hedge witches who know Enchantment (●●●●) may possess embodied familiars. A Twilight familiar is bought for three dots; it is a spirit originating in the Shadow Realm, and is also known as a "fetch." Twilight familiars can temporarily manifest as ghosts can (see "Manifestations," p. 210 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), but the ephemeral bodies of Twilight familiars are otherwise invisible and intangible to the physical world. A Twilight familiar must manifest or use Numina to affect anything in the physical world, except for the Twilight familiar's bound thaumaturge, whom it can touch at will. (The Twilight familiar's thaumaturge can also see and speak with the familiar even when he is not using a ritual that allows him to see Twilight.) Twilight familiars exist in this world, not in the Shadow Realm, although they can accompany their masters into the Shadow Realm or travel there themselves if Numina allow it.

An embodied familiar is bought for four dots. It takes the form of an earthly creature. Many of the legendary stories of sorcerers with cunning animal companions — cats, rats, bats — are actually references to embodied familiars.



Familiar Traits

Whether immaterial or embodied, a familiar is considered to be the lowest rank of spirit (a "squire" or "Lesser Gaffling") with a limit of 5 on all Traits and a maximum Essence of 10. The Storyteller designs the spirit's Traits. Each familiar begins play with at least one dot in each Attribute, with extra dots as listed below. For rules concerning spirits Traits, including additional Spirit Numen, see



pp. 210–212 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, as well as pp. 317–322 of **Mage: The Awakening** and pp. 273–282 of **Werewolf: The Forsaken**.

Twilight Familiar Traits

Attributes: 3/3/2 (allocate dots in any order among Power, Finesse and Resistance)

Willpower: Equal to Power + Resistance

Essence: 10 (10 max)

Initiative: Equal to Finesse + Resistance

Defense: Equal to the highest of Power or Finesse

Speed: Equal to Power + Finesse + “species factor” (same as its earthly counterpart)

Size: 5 or less (same as its earthly counterpart)

Corpus: Equal to Resistance + Size

Influence: 2 dots (choose one)

Numina: Choose one

Ban: The fetch has one Ban, chosen by the Storyteller (see pp. 320–321 of **Mage: The Awakening** and pp. 278–279 of **Werewolf: The Forsaken**).

When a fetch tries to manifest, use the following modifiers for the effort:

Location Modifier

Wilderness +3

Place associated with the spirit’s Influence +2

Minor magical nexus +1

Major magical nexus +2

Handmade structure (wooden bridge, shed) +1

Parking lot –1

Modern commercial building (grocery store, mall) +1

Modern industrial building –2

Modern laboratory –3

Embodied Familiar Traits

Attributes: 5/4/3

Skills: 9/6/3

Willpower: Equal to Resolve + Composure

Essence: 10 (10 max)

Initiative: Equal to Dexterity + Composure

Defense: Equal to highest of Dexterity or Wits

Speed: Strength + Dexterity + “species factor” (based on its animal type)

Size: 5 or less (based on its animal type)

Health: Equal to Stamina + Size

Influence: 2 dots (choose one)

Numina: Innocuous (see below), and choose one more

Ban: The fetch has one Ban chosen by the Storyteller.

Embodied familiars live in the material world in a physical body, although it might be a somewhat unusual body like a snow-white raven or a cat with violet eyes.

All embodied familiars have the Innocuous Numen (pp. 321–322 of **Mage: The Awakening**); they are very good at not being noticed by others. Anyone but the familiar’s bonded thaumaturge

suffers a –2 penalty on Perception rolls to notice the animal, unless it does something to draw attention to itself.

A spirit-familiar’s bound thaumaturge is considered to be its anchor to the material world, although there is no limit to how far a familiar can travel from its mystic. It does *not* lose Essence for every hour it spends in the physical world or Twilight. The familiar must follow all the other rules concerning Essence, however, including spending one point per day. If the familiar is reduced to zero Essence, it falls into Slumber, but it is not transferred back into the Shadow Realm as long as the thaumaturge-familiar bond persists. Similar to other spirits, the being can gain Essence by being in proximity to something that the familiar reflects (see pp. 319–320 of **Mage: The Awakening** and pp. 275–276 of **Werewolf: The Forsaken**).

Master and familiar have an empathic connection; each can feel the emotions of the other automatically. (Supernatural effects that damage or manipulate a familiar through an emotional attack don’t damage or manipulate the master.) All familiars have a sensory magical connection to their bound thaumaturges, meaning that a mystic can use the familiar’s senses as a magical connection without any penalty to ritual rolls. This effect makes familiars superlative spies.

Improvement: To improve a familiar, you must spend some of your character’s experience points on the being.

Favorable Fortune (●●●●)

Prerequisites: Luck Magic (●●●●)

The magician creates a shift of destiny, effectively generating a highly directed turn of personal good luck. These small manipulations of fortune always take the form of totally plausible events, such as a parched magician finding the five dollars she needs on the sidewalk to buy a drink, or finding a moderately attractive person in a bar who wants to spend the night. Big shifts such as finding a \$1,000 at the convenience store’s front door, or meeting the love of her life are simply too implausible for the limited power of this ritual. The magician requests some small jolt in the desired direction and allows destiny to decide how it comes about.

The character should be on her toes, ready for anything in the event that her request comes about in an extremely unexpected manner. A wish for “a ride” along a lonely country road at night yields one, but the results could be anything from being picked up by a truck driver to having a thief abandon a stolen car nearby and then flee into the woods. These manipulations of destiny are small, but they may be undertaken for a wide variety of ends. Indeed, these tweaks can grow into something bigger and more meaningful if tended carefully. Mr. Right *Now could*, in fact, actually be Mr. Right, provided the magician puts in the time and effort to bring such a relationship to fruition. Alternatively, the \$50 a magician wins from a scratch ticket might yield

up many times its own value if invested wisely. This ritual helps destiny along rather than creating it, but does give a character an opportunity to seize her own fortune or to help make one for another.

This ritual cannot provide a thaumaturge with more than \$50 at a time, or produce any item whose value is greater than that unless the item has a significant drawback (such as a stolen car whose theft was reported to the police).

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult

Ritual Length: One minute

Duration: Lasting or one scene (minimum of one hour)

Suggested Equipment: An item strongly associated with luck, such as a winning lottery ticket or some hair from a champion racehorse (+1)

Possible Penalties: The desired item is particularly unlikely (such as finding money while walking through the woods) (-1)

Ritual Details: The magician decides what he wants and then creates some simple representation of it. He performs an action involving what he wants, such as writing his desires on a leaf or a small scrap of paper and burning it, or writing out what he wants to occur and rearranging and compressing the letters until he has turned the phrase into a complex and abstract sigil.

Geomancy (●●●)

Prerequisites: Intelligence ●● and Crafts ●

Effect: The art of geomancy (known as *feng shui* in the East) is the study of harmonizing the physical environment with the flow of energy. The goal of *feng shui* is to create the ideal place to live or work. Through a combination of architectural design and mystic mathematics, a geomancer plans a pattern that must be duplicated within the entire structure (in the case of a building) or the layout of a room or series of connected rooms (in the case of interior design). Implementing this design increases the time required and the cost of the work involved, but practitioners consider it well worth the effort.

When designing a geomancy effect, the thaumaturge chooses a single Attribute or Skill to be the focus. Once assigned, the Trait cannot be changed without completely redesigning the location. Attribute-based designs are more difficult to create than Skill-based ones (-3 dice penalty for Geomancy attempts to plan around an Attribute). The selected Trait must reflect the building or space's function. For example, a library might enhance Academics rolls, while a peaceful cottage might aid with Composure rolls. If the thaumaturge is successful, she creates a unique design that benefits those who use the location in the manner for which it was created, provided that the design is followed perfectly. The architect or interior designer who follows the geomancer's design must succeed in a suitable roll (probably Intelligence + Crafts). Of course, the geomancer may be the architect or interior decorator, and such an arrangement is auspicious for the future of the site — an individual automatically succeeds in efforts to follow her own plans.

This Merit calls for an extended ritual roll, as normal, but requires a greater number of successes, dictated by the size of the space to be designed. If the thaumaturge creates her

geomancy design successfully, and the architect or interior designer successfully integrates the design into the physical location, the flow of energy is modified within the space. Any action that takes place in the space using the designated Attribute or Skill may gain a bonus. Once per scene, the first person to attempt an appropriate action within the space gains the 9 again effect (reroll 9s and 10s) for that single roll. Large spaces have the potential to help more people, one per distinct area of the space. (Note that this effect does not affect a chance die, should a dice pool be reduced to one. Only a result of 10 is a success under those circumstances.)

Once a geomantic design is created and implemented, it remains in effect indefinitely unless something happens to disrupt or change the flow of energy. Natural disasters may change the magical landscape more than they appear to affect it physically, requiring geomantic designs to be realigned. New construction or destruction of buildings or even spaces within a building may require that a thaumaturge reassess the location for potential updates. Poorly designed geomantic locations may disrupt those around them, as well. The only limits on the number of designs a geomancer may create are her time, her capability and the ability of others to come up with the resources to put her designs into place.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Crafts

Minimum Successes Required: 5 (small room), 10 (typical home), 15 (typical office), 20 (multi-story building), 25 or more (skyscraper, Disneyland Hong Kong, Love Canal)

Ritual Length: One hour. Actual construction or redesign certainly takes longer — days or weeks depending on the size of the project.

Duration: Indefinite (until disrupted)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The geomantic design is flawed, but the thaumaturge doesn't notice. When the plan is implemented, the Storyteller might have it disrupt nearby geomantic effects or have some disaster strike during construction or redecorating that is clearly the geomancer's fault.

Exceptional Success: The flow of energy grants the 9 again bonus to the first *two* related rolls per scene.

Suggested Equipment: Religious holy site or magical nexus (+1 to +3 provided the structure is appropriate)

Possible Penalties: Multiple geomantic spaces within the same physical structure (-1 for each), site is haunted (-1), negative history (-1 for a murder or failed business to -5 for a toxic waste dump or death camp), shoddy materials (-1 to -3), dense urban area (-3), modern industrial area (-2), town or suburb (-1), holy site used inappropriately (-1 to -5)

Ritual Details: Thorough examination of the site is required, often using special compasses or the like. Measurements and calculations of mystic mathematical ratios are also common.

Healing (●●●●)

Prerequisites: Composure ●● and Medicine ●

The thaumaturge can use her magic to heal wounds and cure diseases for both humans and animals. Although healing serious injuries or life-threatening diseases is difficult and potentially dangerous, magical healing is

the only hope of recovery for some. Of course, failing to heal or cure someone can easily result in a desperate patient turning on the mystic. Thaumaturges cannot use this ritual to aid any form of undead or inhuman beings such as vampires, spirits or werewolves. This ritual can be used to heal any living human including the magician himself, as well as individuals who are possessed, ghouls or werewolf kin. Only one application of this ritual can affect a subject at one time.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Empathy (or Animal Ken for healing animals) — the patient's wound penalties

Ritual Length: 30 minutes

Duration: One week

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Improperly channeled energies cause the thaumaturge to suffer one Health point of lethal damage. Alternatively, the subject might suffer additional injury or have her disease worsen.

Failure: The thaumaturge fails to heal the subject.

Success: This ritual speeds the healing of all forms of damage by a factor of three. At this speed, one point of lethal damage heals every 16 hours. If the subject possesses the Quick Healing Merit, the speed of healing is increased to four times normal. All damage suffered by the patient during the next week heals at this rate. This ritual can cure a mild or moderate disease such as influenza, tuberculosis, pneumonia or a mild skin cancer, and sends more serious diseases into remission for the duration.

Exceptional Success: The ritual speeds healing of all damage by a factor of five — at this speed, a point of lethal damage heals in 10 hours. If the patient has the Quick Healing Merit, the ritual increases the speed of healing to six times normal. An exceptional success is required to permanently cure otherwise “incurable” or exceptionally life-threatening diseases such as terminal cancer, AIDS or Ebola.

Suggested Equipment: Holistic medicines (+1), the blood of a werewolf (+2), actual clothing or medical instruments used by a highly skilled doctor (+1)

Possible Penalties:

Dice Modifier	Situation
-2	The thaumaturge attempts to cure a moderately severe disease such as pneumonia.
-4	The thaumaturge attempts to cure a normally incurable or exceptionally life-threatening disease.

Ritual Details: The mystic must touch the patient while performing some action appropriate to his tradition, such as going into a trance, drawing a magic circle and invoking the five elements or calling on various deities or other powerful beings. If this ritual is performed using a magical connection to a distant patient, the connection assumes the role of the patient.

Invocation (●● or ●●●●)

Effect: Invocation is the art of requesting a spirit or ghost's presence. This is merely a plea for help at its basic level, while advanced magicians are able to aid the supernatural entity that opts to answer by offering a gateway

through which to interact with the physical world. The mystic chooses ghosts or spirits as the Merit's focus, though the thaumaturge may learn both versions separately. Spirits or ghosts answering an invocation are generally much better disposed toward the caster than those summoned via Evocation (p. 108). The Invocation Merit does not grant a thaumaturge the power to perceive Twilight.

The two-dot version allows the performer to attract the attention of a specific entity, or to send out a general call to the nearest entity. In either case, the respondent must be within range to sense the thaumaturge or the respondent does not perceive the request. The invoker may call an entity personally known to him, or may specify a type of entity of his choosing (any available member among his own ancestors, or any spirit of Erzulie, for example). The entity called may choose to ignore the request or answer it. If the entity responds, it comes to the caster at its own speed, although the entity cannot violate any normal limitations (such as leaving the maximum distance from an anchor or defying a spiritual Ban). Invocation does not grant any control over an entity; the character must strike a deal of some kind in order to accomplish her goals.

The four-dot version acts as the first with the added benefit that the targeted entity gains the Possession Numen (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 212) if the entity does not normally have that power. The entity may possess the thaumaturge automatically without the normal contested roll, as the thaumaturge actively opens the way with magic (although use of the Possession power still costs one Essence). Of course, the entity could decide to possess someone else, although the attempt requires a normal contested roll. The ritual does not grant any control over the being, but the offer of Possession is a valuable bargaining chip.

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion

Ritual Length: 10 minutes

Duration: One scene

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The thaumaturge attracts the attention of the wrong spirit or ghost, probably one with mischievous or malicious intent.

Exceptional Success: The mystic's performance pleases the target. For ghosts or spirits of very negative bent, this may simply mean the thaumaturge's Invocation is ignored. Otherwise, apply a +1 bonus to Social rolls made with the entity for the duration of the scene.

Suggested Equipment: Appropriate sacrifice offered as part of ritual (+1), entity linked by ancestry (+1)

Possible Penalties: Location not appropriate for entity called (-1 to -3), entity dislikes thaumaturge (-1 to -3)

Ritual Details: The thaumaturge seeks to enter a trance. Rituals include objects attractive to the target, with sacrifices of such things being particularly effective.

Drawback: Invocation calls the attention of spirits or ghosts to the thaumaturge, but doesn't exert any control over them. The entity called could make life difficult if it's malevolent or antagonistic.

Library (● to ●●●; special)

Effect: Your character maintains a personal collection of useful information, which can help with both natural and supernatural research. Whether in the form of musty occult tomes, encrypted computer files, sacred scrolls, visual art or stranger media, this library includes reference works that can help him understand both magic and the supernatural world. In both fields of knowledge — mundane research and occult lore — this collection relates to one or more fields of specialization.

Each dot in this Merit represents one field of study or area of knowledge in which your character has a wealth of tomes, computer files or scrolls, and from which he may draw information. If he has Library 3, his dots might be assigned to demons, cryptozoology and one tradition of thaumaturgy, respectively. Topics can include arcane lore that most people don't know about, or that has been forgotten since antiquity.

Ordinary people have libraries as well, of course, dealing with less exotic specialties. The study of the supernatural is different from ordinary research. Many occult tomes refer to magical insights that only thaumaturges trained in a particular tradition understand. Aging magical tomes don't typically use indices, keywords or cross-referenced page numbers — they're as arcane as the mystics who access them.

Gaining information from a library is a research task, as described on pp. 55–56 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, except that a thaumaturge spends only 10 minutes per roll when researching from his library. Success doesn't guarantee exactly the information for which he looks. Libraries aren't all-knowing, and they don't always provide one definitive answer to a question, since multiple authors may have different points of view on the same subject. The Storyteller is perfectly justified in saying that a particular library simply doesn't reveal something.

An extended research task performed to gain a bonus on a ritual requires a total number of successes equal to the number of dots in the Merit used to perform the ritual.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character uncovers flawed or inaccurate information that subtracts one die from the roll to perform the ritual.

Failure: The character can find no useful information to help him perform the ritual.

Success: The character finds useful information sufficient to provide him with +1 to his dice pool to perform this ritual.

Exceptional Success: The character discovers large amounts of useful information about performing a ritual and gains a +2 bonus to his Merit dice pool. This bonus cannot exceed the number of dots in the library he uses, however.

Any thaumaturge may allow another practitioner the privilege of consulting his library. Unless this consultant has put points toward the Merit, 30 minutes are spent per roll researching a topic.

Special: Thaumaturges can share Library dots, with each contributing to the facility's areas of knowledge.

These characters each receive the full benefits of the library, and may invite others to use the resource so long as all parties agree. It may happen that thaumaturges suffer a falling out, in which case one or more might be asked to forfeit her library privileges. Those who are banned lose whatever dots they contributed, unless an agreement is worked out to split the library, allowing outcasts to take their areas of knowledge (and dots) with them.

Longevity (●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Medicine ●●● and Alchemy (Internal) ●●●● and/or Alchemy (External) ●●●●

Effect: Your character possesses alchemical secrets of long life, achieved through a combination of medicinal and magical elixirs. Each application of alchemical Longevity keeps him from aging for the duration of the magic. With continuous use, a thaumaturge can achieve — or grant — virtual immortality, though elixirs do not protect against illnesses unconnected to age and do not prevent death at the hands of violence or accident.

The creation of longevity elixirs requires extended Intelligence + Medicine rolls with a potential dice penalty based on the duration of a potion's effectiveness, and requiring increasing successes based on the age of the recipient. The duration of the mixture is the period of time in which the elixir remains potent, whether it has been consumed or not. Thus, a thaumaturge creating an elixir with one week's duration who waits three days before consuming it gains four days of agelessness.

Duration	Dice Penalty
24 hours	0
One week	-1
One month	-3

The thaumaturge must possess the Alchemy (Internal) ●●●● or Alchemy (External) ●●●● Merit in order to create longevity elixirs for personal use. Should he desire to create elixirs effective for someone else, he must possess both Alchemy (External) and Alchemy (Internal) at ●●●●, and must design each dose for a specific target. A longevity elixir is useful to living things only, although it could theoretically be designed to affect a plant or animal provided the mystic has sufficient understanding of his target (via Science).

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Medicine (or Science for plants or animals)

Minimum Successes Required (target's real age): 10 (25 years or less), 15 (26–50 years), 20 (51–75 years), 25 (76+ years)

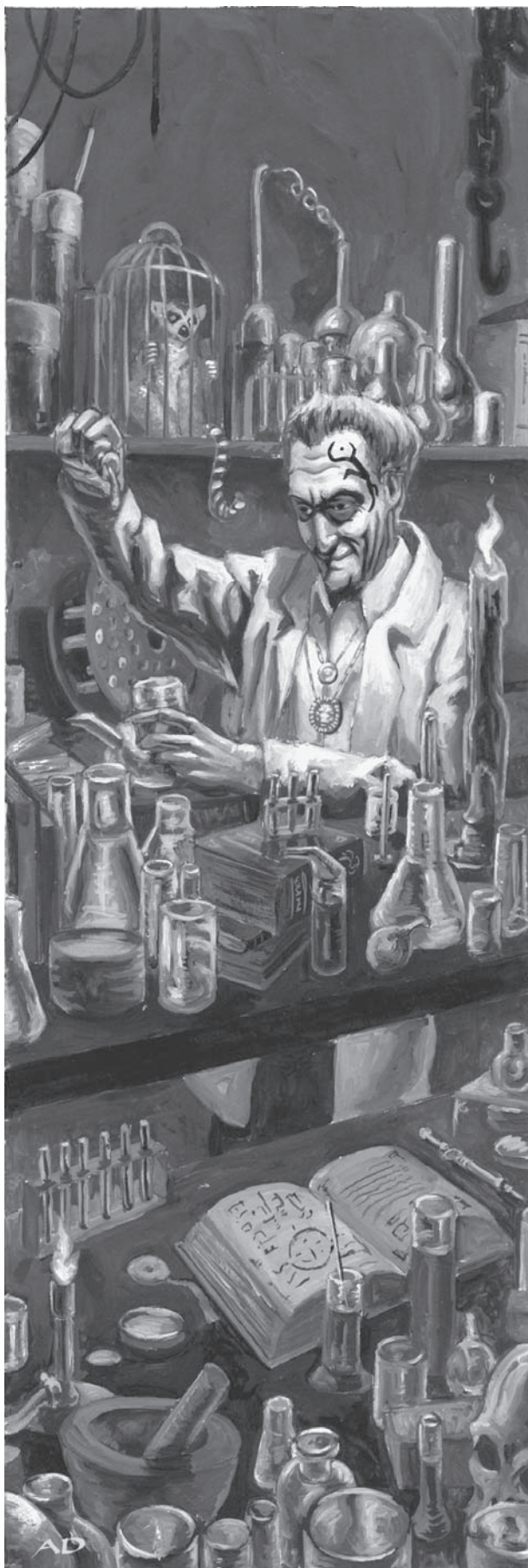
Ritual Length: One hour

Duration: Varies

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The thaumaturge contacts poison with a Toxicity of 3, taking damage once per hour until a contested Stamina + Resolve roll is won (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 181). Or the process results in a seemingly normal elixir that's actually a poison.

Exceptional Success: The elixir is of twice the normal potency, effectively preventing aging for twice the intended



duration. Or the process results in an elixir of normal potency, but it may affect any living target.

Suggested Equipment: Mercury (+1), gold (+1), vampire blood (+3, although there may be unfortunate side effects)

Possible Penalties: Target has less than Stamina 3 (-1 per missing dot), animal target (-1), target is plant (-1), target has exceeded normal life span for species (-3), target has unhealthy or stressful lifestyle (-1 to -3), one-week duration (-1), one-month duration (-3)

Ritual Details: The caster must focus on symbols of the eternal, generally assumed to represent the soul in most traditions. Medicinal herbs and substances with power to preserve flesh are common ingredients, even if science sometimes considers them poisonous. Mercury and gold are favored additions.

Luck Magic (•• or ••••)

The thaumaturge gains the ability to control chance and bend luck in his favor, improving his success at specific tasks. No character can be affected by more than one luck ritual (of any type) at a time, and the magician can successfully perform this ritual only once per day. This Merit cannot be used to improve rolls for any supernatural efforts, including ritual rolls.

At two dots, the thaumaturge can grant himself the 9 again effect (reroll results of 9 and 10) on a number of his future dice rolls equal to his Manipulation, as long as all of these rolls are of a specified type and they all take place during the duration of this ritual. The player must choose the exact nature of the situation benefited before rolling dice for the ritual. Bonuses gained can only be used to affect rolls made for the performer, not rolls made for any other characters. Appropriate choices include attack rolls, drive rolls, any rolls involved in public speaking or even rolls where failure would result in injury to the character.

Note that this spell does not affect a chance die, should a dice pool be reduced to one. Only a result of 10 is a success under those circumstances.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult

Ritual Length: 10 minutes

Duration: One day

At four dots, the thaumaturge can grant himself the 8 again effect (reroll results of 8, 9 and 10) on a number of rolls equal to his Manipulation. Alternatively, the magician can grant another subject a 9 again effect on a number of rolls equal to his Manipulation. The player must choose both the recipient of this luck and the exact nature of the situation to which the ritual applies. The effects are otherwise identical to the two-dot version of the Merit. No target can benefit from more than one Luck Magic ritual at a time. A magician can successfully perform this ritual only once per day. If the mystic gives someone else a bonus with the rite, the thaumaturge cannot use it on himself until the next day.

Exceptional success on either of the two-dot or four-dot rituals adds one die to pools receiving the 8 again or 9 again effects.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Occult

Ritual Length: 30 minutes

Duration: One day

Suggested Equipment: A piece of hair or clothing or a sample of blood from someone who excels at the type of action designated (for example, a bit of hair from a winning race-car driver for Drive rolls) (+1), a picture or video of the target performing the chosen activity especially well (+1)

Ritual Details: The magician draws sigils, recites chants or impromptu poems or even draws images of the action he wants to improve. No matter how the ritual is done, Luck Magic always involves some symbolic representation of the action to be affected. Or the mystic can invoke the blessing or aid of a deity, spirit or supernatural power.

Magical Nexus (● to ●●)

Effect: A magical nexus is a place of magical power where the currents of magic run especially strong or close to the mundane world. See “Magical Nexus Points,” p. 77.

At one dot, a thaumaturge gains access to a minor magical nexus point. This location adds +1 to the dice pool of all magical rituals performed there. Minor nexes are rarely larger than a small house and are often smaller. Because they are relatively common, a mystic can even have a nexus in her house, workshop or other personal, private location that she can access at any time.

At two dots, the magician gains access to a major magical nexus point. This location adds +2 to the dice pools of all rituals performed there. Such places can be as large as an entire hilltop, an aging office building or a large grove of trees.

Drawback: Other thaumaturges may wish to borrow or even take possession of any magical nexus points. Also, most major points are of interest to one or more types of supernatural beings such as werewolves, spirits and ghosts, and these beings often object to thaumaturges intruding.

Psychic Projection (●●●●)

Prerequisites: Visionary Trances (●●●●)

Effect: A thaumaturge can project her mind into the state of Twilight. This mental form has no corpus or ephemeral body; the projection is just an intangible, semi-transparent image. The projecting magician cannot affect creatures or things physically. Interacting with the physical world or spirit world while using the Merit is impossible. The character’s form has no substance at all, not even spiritual substance — she is merely a projected consciousness. This state can be both a benefit and a drawback, in that the character is unimpeded by obstacles, but is also unable to affect any threats she encounters. If two thaumaturges’ ghost bodies or a projected thaumaturge and a genuine ghost encounter one another, they can communicate as if they were in the real world, but no sorts of physical or mystical exchanges can occur between them. A projected thaumaturge’s psyche is invisible to most physical beings. A child or animal might intuitively sense the mystic’s presence, or even

see him. Both shamans and supernatural beings almost certainly notice the projected character. A projector’s other abilities cannot be used while projecting. She can observe and even talk to ghosts and spirits that are in Twilight, but cannot use any other magic.

While projected, a magician’s body is alive but comatose. She has no way of knowing her body’s current state of health or any other information about it. Her soul continues to reside within her body; she projects only her senses and an intangible image of her body into Twilight. As a result, the mystic cannot be prevented from returning to her body. When in this state, a thaumaturge can move rapidly in any direction, including up and down. She can pass through solid objects and moves at a Speed up to twice Wits + Willpower +10 per turn in any direction.

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult

Ritual Length: 30 minutes

Duration: Trance

Suggested Equipment: Hallucinogenic drugs (+1 or +2, depending on their strength), a fragment of a spirit’s materialized body (+2)

Possible Penalties: The place where the ritual is performed is inside a general magical warding (see p. 119) (–2)

Ritual Details: The details of this ritual are typically very similar to those involved in the Visionary Trances ritual. The exact chants, dances and body postures are different, but the general type of activities performed are similar.

Sacrifice (●)

Effect: Your character is trained in performing ritual sacrifices to aid spiritual entities. When she first learns this Merit, she must decide whether it applies to ghosts or spirits. An appropriate sacrifice channels the energy released by the death of an appropriate creature or the destruction of a suitable object to the spirit or ghost to whom it is dedicated. If the ritual is successful, the spirit or ghost receives its choice of one point of Essence or Willpower.

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult

Ritual Length: 10 minutes

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: In addition to failing, the sacrificial ritual displeases the ghost or spirit.

Exceptional Success: The ritual is particularly effective and the recipient receives an additional point of Willpower or Essence (for a total of two).

Suggested Equipment: Valuable or potent sacrifice (+1 per dot of Resources or Size of creature). The sacrifice of a really expensive bottle of rum might grant +1 die for summoning Ghede, while a human sacrifice might grant a twisted apostle of the Dark One a +5 bonus.

Possible Penalties: Poor quality sacrifice (–1 to –3), sacrifice not treated with respect (–1)

Ritual Details: The caster must destroy some object (often by burning it) or kill some creature (usually a small animal) as part of the ritual. Formally dedicating the sacrifice to the ghost or spirit in question is required.

Drawback: Although appropriate sacrifices please the recipient, they sometimes anger other spiritual entities.

Sacrificing a chicken to the loa may aid them, but could offend an animal spirit in the process.

Scrying (●●●)

Prerequisites: Wits ●● and Occult ●

Effect: The magician can view a location remotely. She can both see and hear the location normally, allowing her to overhear conversations or read text on a distant computer screen, all as if she were physically present.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Investigation

Ritual Length: One minute

Duration: Trance

Ritual rolls are modified by the thaumaturge's magical connection to the location (see p.76). Because the mystic is in a light trance, she can talk softly, write or type while continuing to view a distant location. She must use a magical connection to perform this ritual and can see the location only from the point of view of the subject to which her magical connection is linked. For example, if a mystic is holding a piece of someone's hair, she can observe events occurring around that person. If she holds a chip of brick from a wall, she can observe the surroundings from the exact location where the chip was taken. The thaumaturge can turn her point of view as if she were turning her head, but she cannot move the location from which she observes without obtaining another magical connection to a different subject and performing this ritual again. If, however, a thaumaturge scrys a moving vehicle, a person who is walking or an object that someone picks up and carries, the thaumaturge's point of view moves accordingly. Because the mystic merely observes a distant location, she is aware of events occurring around her body and her trance ends automatically if she is harmed, shaken roughly or otherwise disturbed significantly.

Suggested Equipment: Hallucinogenic drugs (+1), a large and unusually sphere of clear, transparent quartz (+1), a mirror from the location to be scryed (+1)

Possible Penalties: The magical connection to the location was obtained more than a month ago (-1), the magical connection to the location was obtained more than one year ago (-4), the target being scryed is located inside a general magical warding (-2)

Ritual Details: There are two common alternatives for performing this ritual — going into a trance using techniques similar to those involved in the Visionary Trances ritual (see p. 119), or staring into a viewing device such as a mirror, a candle flame, a pool of water or ink, a crystal ball or even a TV screen displaying static. Chants, hallucinogen use, drawings of complex sigils and diagrams or prayer may accompany these practices. The magician may first perform various preparatory actions such as drawing a magic circle, but the essence of the ritual is either going into a trance or gazing into a mirror or similar object.

Second Sight (●●●)

Prerequisites: Wits ●●

Effect: Occult stories speak of "second sight" as the ability to perceive the spiritual realm via sight and sound. By at-

tuning her senses, a thaumaturge temporarily gains the ability to see and hear Twilight. Second Sight allows a performer to see and hear ghosts, provided they exist within Twilight and lie in normal visual and audible ranges for the caster.

Of course, the ability to perceive the immaterial doesn't guarantee that there is something to see. If a ghost hides behind a desk, the caster must try to spot him with a Perception roll, as normal. Spiritual fog or ephemeral darkness hampers second sight as much as the physical versions of such things hamper mundane sight. Likewise, the mad screams of a tormented ghost can make it hard to hear cries for help from his eternal, ghostly victim.

While using Second Sight, a thaumaturge can still see and hear the physical world around her, but with less focus and a great degree of distraction. All rolls for actions affecting the physical world suffer a -2 penalty, including Perception-based rolls. The caster's Initiative rolls also suffer this penalty.

Second Sight does not allow a mystic to perceive spirits in Twilight, only ghosts. The See Spirits Merit is required for that awareness.

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult

Ritual Length: One minute

Duration: One scene

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The thaumaturge fails to gain a clear sense of Twilight, but still loses focus and is distracted by odd perceptions. She suffers the normal penalties for the rest of the scene, but cannot perceive ghosts. Alternatively, the Storyteller may choose to have the thaumaturge imagine ghostly phenomena even though they aren't really there. In any case, she cannot try to use the Merit again during the same scene.

Exceptional Success: The thaumaturge succeeds at activating her special senses and does not suffer the normal -2 penalty to actions involving the physical world.

Suggested Equipment: The character can see some physical evidence that something ghostly currently happens (+1), a physical link to one of the ghostly entities currently present, such as a photograph of a being while he was still alive (+1)

Ritual Details: Rituals for Second Sight are usually very simple. The caster may close her eyes and focus her will, stare at the patterns of tea leaves or swirls of smoke, or mumble a short mantra.

Drawback: Once one has seen beyond the physical realm, it is hard to forget that there are invisible forces at work all the time, and that some of them don't have humanity's best interests at heart.

See Auras (●●)

Prerequisites: Empathy ●●

Effect: A thaumaturge can open his perceptions to the psychic auras that surround all sentient creatures, witnessing numerous and often-shifting hues and patterns. Although the strongest emotions predominate, almost every individual has more than one color to his aura at any given time, and an observer can see any number of streaks or flashes. "Psy-

chic colors” change with the subject’s mental or emotional state, creating an ever-moving pattern that is as unique to each person as a fingerprint. As a rule, the more powerful the emotions, the more intense the colors, but even this guideline is betrayed by any number of mitigating factors, depending on circumstance. Practice makes perfect; a true master aura-perceiver learns to understand the significance of each whorl and eddy. Because mystics’ powers are limited and rather dim, thaumaturges cannot see auras clearly enough to tell the difference between the radiance of ordinary humans and those of mages, vampires or werewolves.

If performed correctly, this ritual allows a thaumaturge to observe a single subject’s aura. The magician must recast this ritual to observe the aura of another subject. After the magician completes the ritual to allow her to perceive auras, she must concentrate on observing a subject. She can continue to perceive his auras for the next scene, and can talk, walk slowly or perform other non-distracting activities while doing so. However, she cannot run, walk rapidly, perform any complex or difficult physical tasks (including combat) or even look closely at anything other than her target. Also, because of the concentration involved, the magician suffers a –2 penalty to any dice pool involving looking at anything except her target’s aura. The magician can end this ritual at any time and can see normally after that.

Thaumaturges who use this ability to observe someone in the act of lying may recognize that the subject speaks falsely. Intelligence + Empathy is rolled versus the subject’s Wits + Subterfuge in a contested action. The mystic recognizes the lie if the most successes are rolled for him.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Empathy versus subject’s Composure + Supernatural Advantage (extended and contested roll)

Ritual Length: One minute

Duration: Scene

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character gleans utterly misleading and wholly inaccurate information. The Storyteller may want to make performance rolls on a player’s behalf for this reason.

Failure: The character can distinguish no information at all.

Success: The character perceives the brightest color in the subject’s aura and gains a +1 bonus to all Social rolls in regard to the subject.

Exceptional Success: The magician gains a +2 bonus to Social rolls in regard to the subject.

Suggested Equipment: A bit of hair, blood or clothing from the person being observed (+1); a mirror more than a century old (+1)

Possible Penalties: The subject is a habitual or pathological liar (–1)

Ritual Details: The caster must perform some action with her eyes to allow her to see auras. Such actions include unfocusing while staring at the target, looking at the target’s reflection in a small mirror or looking through a special lens, kaleidoscope or transparent stone. The magician must continue to perform this action for the duration of the ritual, and the ritual ends as soon as she moves her eyes away.

Aura Signifiers

Condition	Color
Afraid	Orange
Aggressive	Purple
Angry	Bright Red
Bitter	Brown
Calm	Light Blue
Compassionate	Pink
Conservative	Lavender
Depressed	Gray
Desirous/Lustful	Deep Red
Distrustful	Light Green
Envious	Dark Green
Excited	Violet
Generous	Rose
Happy	Vermilion
Hateful	Black
Idealistic	Yellow
Innocent	White
Lovestruck	Bright Blue
Obsessed	Bright Green
Sad	Silver
Spiritual	Gold
Suspicious	Dark Blue
Confused	Mottled, shifting colors
Daydreaming	Sharp, flickering colors
Psychotic	Hypnotic, swirling colors

See Spirits (•••)

Prerequisites: Visionary Trances (either version)

Your character automatically notices the presence of spirits from the Shadow Realm when they intrude into the Twilight Realm. Your character can automatically see, hear and speak to any nearby immaterial spirits in Twilight without needing to make any special rolls. Although magicians with this Merit cannot see or hear the ghosts of the recently deceased, at the Storyteller’s discretion the magicians can see and hear immaterial ghosts that are old or twisted enough to have become significantly inhuman in their appearance or motivations. A magician also notices the existence of any openings or thin points between the Twilight Realm and the Shadow Realm (see “Locis,” pp. 260–265 of *Werewolf: The Forsaken*, or “Locis” and “Verges,” pp. 60 and 282 of *Mage: The Awakening*) with a successful Wits + Occult roll (reflexive).

See Spirits does not allow a mystic to perceive ghosts in Twilight, only spirits. Second Sight is required for awareness of the restless dead.

Drawback: Characters with this Merit *must* perceive such beings. If a spirit speaks to a magician, he can no more block out its words than he can block out those of a

living person. If a spirit wishes to hide from the magician, a contested Perception check is made versus the spirit's Wits + Stealth or against any supernatural ability that the spirit can use to hide.

Soul Jar (●● or ●●●●)

Prerequisites: Second Sight

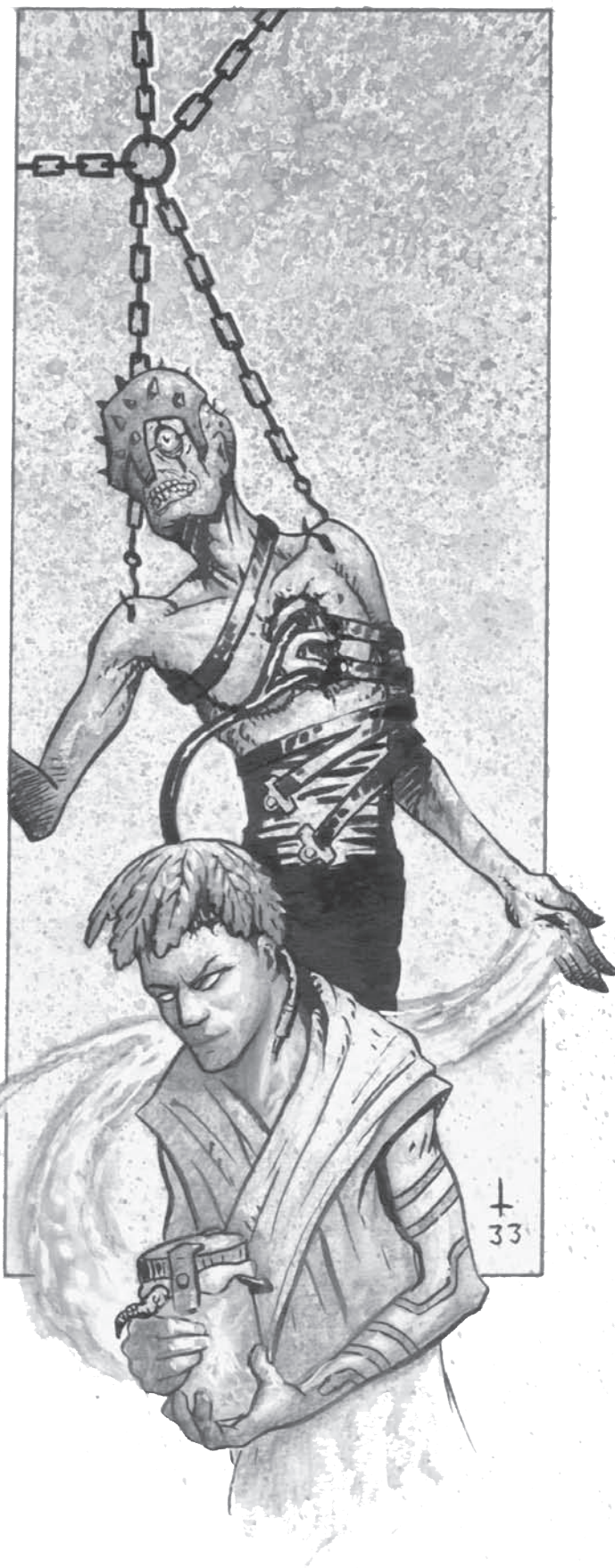
Effect: Creation of a Soul Jar allows a thaumaturge to trap the soul of a dying person, usually in preparation for nefarious purposes. The ritual may be performed upon an individual who is actually dying or who is merely trapped in a deathlike state (a vodoun *bocor* uses poisonous powders to achieve this state). The mystic must touch the subject throughout the ritual and must have a physical object ready to receive the soul.

The performer must overcome the victim's will to successfully complete the ritual. Roll Presence + Intimidation in a contested, extended action against the target's Resolve + Supernatural Advantage. Each party seeks to accumulate a number of successes equal to the other's Willpower dots. If the performer achieves that total first, the victim's soul leaves his body and becomes a ghost with a single anchor (see "Anchors," **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 209): the physical object chosen by the caster. If the subject achieves the total successes first, his soul goes wherever it normally would. If the victim is truly dying, the soul passes on or it might become a ghost over which the mystic has no hold. If the victim's deathlike state is temporary, his soul hovers over his body until signs of life resume. If the ritual fails, it cannot be recast on the same target until at least 24 hours have passed. Of course, a dying subject may have escaped his fate by then.

This ritual allows a thaumaturge to gain a certain degree of power over the dead, and over the living as well. The caster knows the single anchor of the ghost involved, and probably has physical possession of it. This standing allows the performer to control the ghost's behavior to an extent, without further magic, but powerful thaumaturges may also use Evocation (ghosts only) to gain more direct control.

A person who returns to life from a deathlike state without a soul suffers from the loss. A living body that's lost its soul is easier to possess, and spirits or ghosts using the Possession Numen gain a +2 bonus. So long as the thaumaturge is careful to not let the original soul ever possess its own body (which ends the power of Soul Jar and frees the soul to live in its original body), the living soulless body remains subject to manipulation. Each week that a character's soul is absent, he loses a dot of Morality. Once his Morality is reduced to one dot, this process of erosion applies to his Willpower dots. Once his Willpower dots drop to zero, the soulless one becomes practically catatonic, shuffling through life by force of habit, if at all. A character with zero Willpower is also treated as having zero Resolve and zero Composure. If a person ever regains his soul, the dots he lost from Morality and Willpower return at a rate of one per day, beginning with Willpower.

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation versus Resolve + Supernatural Advantage (extended and contested roll)



Minimum Successes Required: Opponent's Willpower

Ritual Length: One hour

Duration: Indefinite (permanent unless somehow reversed)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Something goes wrong. If the thaumaturge has created other Soul Jars, perhaps one of those ghosts is set free. A ghost might suddenly discover that the caster himself has become one its anchors. The dying person might become a free ghost set upon revenge, having the caster and its own body as anchors (plus perhaps its gravesite and the site of its murder).

Success: The ritual works as normal. A Soul Jar is considered a supernaturally Enhanced Item for purposes of its Durability, which means it can resist aggravated damage.

Exceptional Success: The ritual works correctly, and the Soul Jar gains an increase of +1 Durability.

Suggested Equipment: Thaumaturge personally crafted Soul Jar object (+1), victim believes in Soul Jars and ghosts (+1)

Possible Penalties: Victim has a Morality higher than 7 (-1 per dot over 7), victim was ready to die (-1), Soul Jar object inappropriate (-1 to -3), dense urban area or modern laboratory (-3), city suburb or modern industrial building (-2), small town or village or empty shopping mall (-1)

Ritual Details: The caster places the Soul Jar in close proximity to the dying individual. Victims may be painted with white makeup to resemble the dead, and may even be ritually buried. Literal rites for the dead are often given as part of the ceremony.

Drawback: A ghost created by Soul Jar is likely to seek revenge on the caster.

Visionary Trance (•• or ••••)

Prerequisites: Resolve ••

Effect: At two dots, the thaumaturge can see and communicate with beings in the Shadow Realm. She goes into a trance and essentially opens a mental window into the Shadow Realm to observe the landscape and inhabitants of that dimension from the position her body occupies. Although she cannot physically interact with any being or object in the Shadow Realm, the magician can communicate with spirits within earshot.

When in this type of visionary trance, the character use any of her other magical abilities. Spirits in the Shadow Realm cannot target her with their powers. The performer has no way of knowing her body's current state of health or any other information about it. Should her body die while psychically projecting, her soul passes on.

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult

Ritual Length: 10 minutes

Duration: Trance

At four dots, the thaumaturge can perform the two-dot ritual and perform a more powerful one that allows her to create an ephemeral body in the Shadow Realm so that she can physically interact with the dimension and its inhabitants. While the thaumaturge is in the Shadow Realm in this form, she can use all of her other magical abilities. Also, spirits and

other beings in the Shadow Realm can target the mystic's mind and mystical physical body with their powers. Any bashing or lethal damage done to the character's ephemeral body is recorded as bashing damage on the shaman's physical body, as bruises appear on her flesh. Aggravated damage inflicted on the shaman's ephemeral body appears on her physical body as lethal harm. If an ephemeral character is knocked unconscious by this damage, she automatically returns to her body as long as her silver cord (see below) is intact.

The magician's ephemeral body can move around normally in the Shadow Realm, walking and running at normal Speed. During the time she is mentally projected, the thaumaturge's body is alive but comatose and her soul has actually separated from the body. She has no way of knowing her body's current state of health or any other information about it. Should the magician's body die while psychically projected, she most likely becomes a ghost and moves to an appropriate anchor. (See "Ghosts," pp. 208-216 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.)

The thaumaturge's ephemeral form appears in clothes and other portable gear that the character wears or uses regularly. A character with four dots can also bring along ephemeral versions of any artifacts or other magically powerful items she owns. In addition, her body in the Shadow Realm manifests an ephemeral silver cord connecting back to her physical body. This cord has Armor equal to one-half the thaumaturge's Resolve (round up), and a Health Trait equal to her Willpower dots. The cord can be harmed only by aggravated damage. If this cord is severed, the magician must try to find her way back to her body by some other means (a daunting proposition).

The instant a thaumaturge's silver cord is broken, her physical body lapses into a coma from which she cannot awaken unless her spirit is reattached to her body. Another mystic in a visionary trance can look for the lost spirit and guide it back to its body. Alternatively, the lost thaumaturge can ask a powerful spirit for help. Any spirit that can breach the barrier between worlds, materialize or steal souls might restore the thaumaturge's spirit to her body, but such spirits may ask a high price. All damage to a silver cord is erased once the ritual ends. Each time this ritual is performed anew, the silver cord starts at full Health.

The following applies to both the two- and four-dot versions of this Merit.

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult

Ritual Length: 30 minutes

Duration: Trance

Suggested Equipment: Hallucinogenic drugs (+1 or +2, depending on their strength), performing this ritual at an opening between Twilight and the Shadow Realm (+2)

Possible Penalties: The place where the ritual is performed is inside a general magical warding (see below) (-2)

Ritual Details: Performing this ritual can be as simple as sitting down and meditating quietly, or as complex as engaging in ecstatic dancing until the thaumaturge collapses into a deep trance. Drumming, hallucinogens, chanting, unusual body postures and various meditation aids can all be used.

Warding (●●●●)

Prerequisites: Resolve ●● and Occult ●

Effect: Your magician can create a magical barrier around an area to keep out ghosts and spirits. This barrier can be created as a general ward that keeps out all low-level entities, or as a powerful barrier designed to protect against a single supernatural being. Both types of wards can be used to protect an area only against ghosts and spirits. The only way to move a ward is to move the entire structure it protects. While thaumaturges can ward the exterior of a house or even the interior of a car or van, they cannot create a portable or wearable ward. An area can be protected by only a single ward at a time — putting up a new one automatically eliminates any existing one.

Each ward must be tied to some sort of physical marker, such as a fence with symbols painted on it or a line of chalk drawn on a floor. If anyone disturbs or makes an opening in this physical marker, or if a drawing is washed away by rainfall or blown away by the wind, the ward instantly ceases to function. Magicians cannot create wards that are more than 21 yards on a side; they can protect a small house and most of its yard, a large house or most of a warehouse but not an entire office building or city block.

When creating a ward against a specific ghost or spirit, a mystic does not need to know the name of the entity — an obvious designation, such as “the ghost of the young man who was murdered here” or “the spider-like spirit that has been attempting to possess the inhabitants of this house” is a sufficiently accurate description. Specific wards protect against only that particular being, though. They have no affect on any other spirits or ghosts.

All wards have a Strength rating. This score is subtracted from the Power of any affected ghost or spirit that seeks to enter the area. If the entity's Power would be reduced to zero, the entity cannot enter the area. Otherwise, the entity can enter, but its Power is reduced by the Strength of the ward for the entire time the entity remains in the area. Spirits or ghosts outside the warded area that attempt to use Numina to affect anyone or anything inside the place are still subject to the ward's Strength.

Although spirits or ghosts may convince a mortal to remove or damage the physical markers that keep a ward in place, such entities are completely incapable of affecting these physical markers directly, even if they could normally move or destroy them. A spirit affected by a ward cannot make the area into an anchor while the protection is in place. This Merit does not undo the connection between an entity and its anchor if the rite is performed on such an object, however. The spirit or ghost's Power is still reduced by the ritual, but the spirit remains in proximity to its anchor. Such a being whose Power is reduced to zero is forced into a sort of hibernation while the ward is active, becoming dormant and inaccessible.

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult

Ritual Length: 10 minutes

Duration: One day (against all spirits and ghosts) or one week (against a specific spirit or ghost)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Improperly channeled magical energies either draw spirits and ghosts to the location or grant such beings a temporary +1 to their Power when they are in the area.

Failure: The thaumaturge fails to produce a functional ward.

Success: The thaumaturge creates a ward with a Strength equal to his Resolve. Alternatively, a mystic can create a ward against a specific spirit or ghost with a Strength equal to his Resolve +1.

Exceptional Success: The thaumaturge creates a ward against all spirits with a Strength equal to his Resolve +1. General wards last for three full days. Alternatively, the thaumaturge can create a ward against a specific spirit or ghost with a Strength equal to his Resolve +2. Specific wards last for two weeks.

Suggested Equipment: A fragment of a spirit or a bottle of ghostly ectoplasm (+1). Raise this bonus to (+2) if the fragment or ectoplasm is from the ghost or spirit that's targeted for a specific ward.

Possible Penalties: The magician attempts to place a ward on a major magical nexus point (–2), the location being warded is already the anchor of a ghost or spirit (–2)

Ritual Details: Drawing a line of chalk or salt around the walls of an apartment, hammering a series of iron nails into a perimeter, painting or drawing small symbols every few feet on the inside or outside walls of a house or marking walls with small splotches of the magician's blood at regular intervals

Weather Control (●●●●●)

Effect: The thaumaturge can control local weather in a relatively minor way. He can call up weather conditions that are reasonable for the season and location, so making snow in Death Valley in the summer is impossible. The character cannot create catastrophic weather such as hurricanes or tornadoes. All weather produced appears to be perfectly natural and takes between a few minutes and an hour to appear, depending upon how long such conditions would normally take to form. After six hours (or longer in the case of an exceptional success), the weather fades at the same speed. The effects are purely local, covering anything from one square mile to an entire large town or small city (not counting the suburbs). The thaumaturge can make moderate changes, say, creating light rain on a sunny day, calling a light snowstorm on a cool, early winter day or transforming a thunderstorm into a violent and windy hailstorm or into a cloudy day with occasional rain. Exceptional success normally increases the duration to one day and allows a mystic to call up almost any sort of normal (non-disastrous) weather.

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult

Ritual Length: 10 minutes

Duration: Six hours

Suggested Equipment: A photograph of the desired type of weather in the target area (+1)

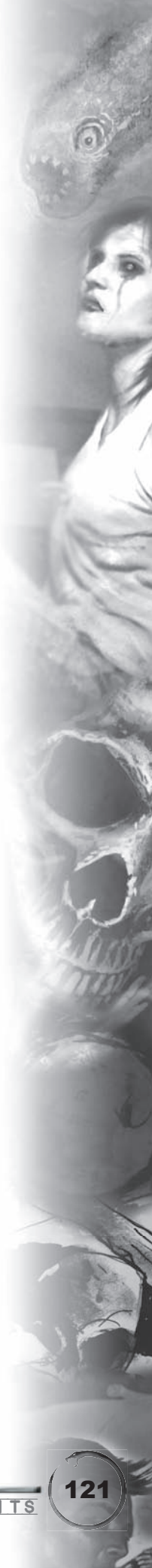
Possible Penalties:

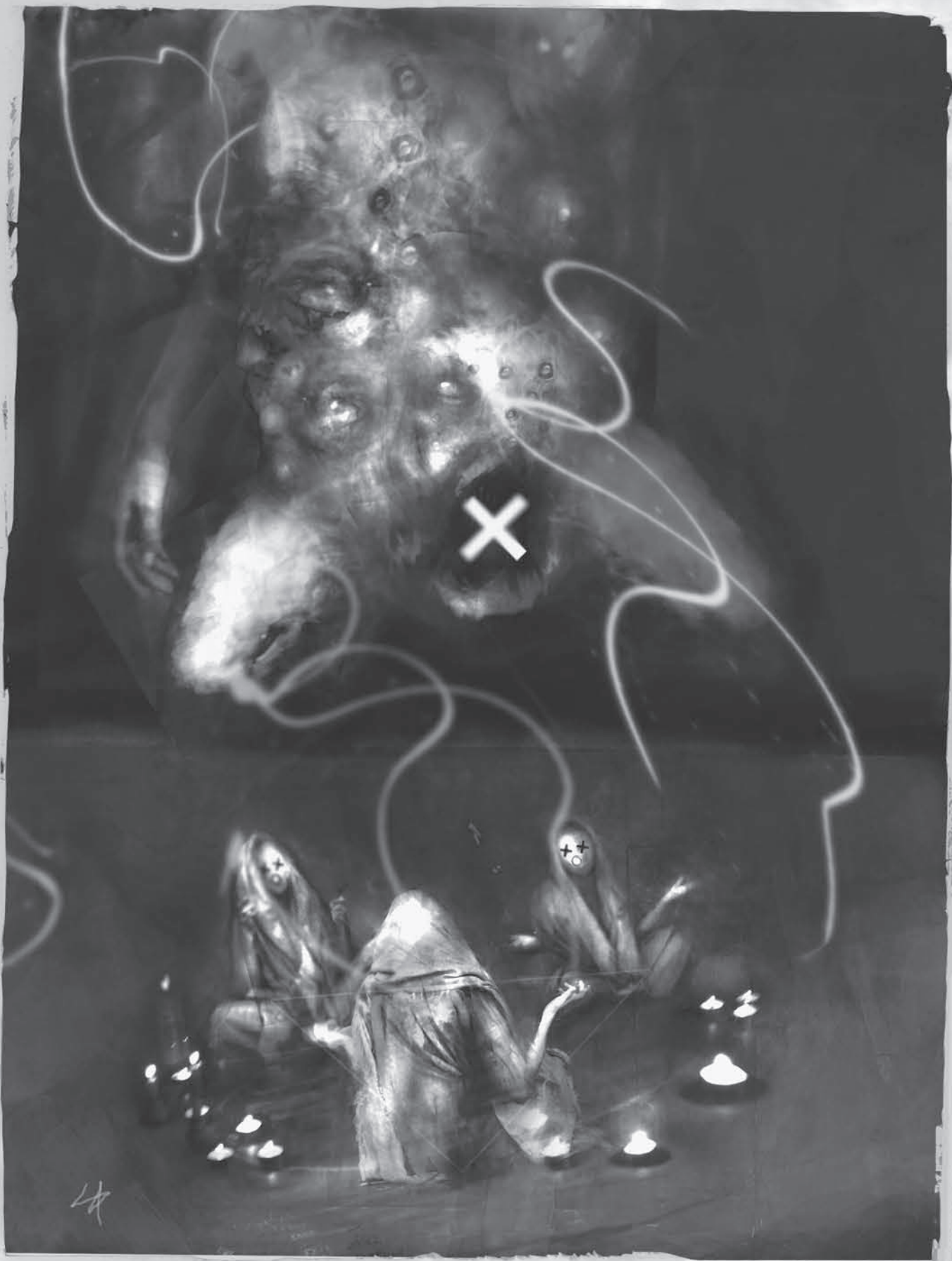
Dice Modifier	Situation
—	Attempting to produce weather in line with current conditions (rain on a cool, cloudy day) or attempting to change a single aspect of the current weather.
-2	Attempting to produce weather somewhat different from current conditions or attempting to change multiple weather conditions at once. Examples include turning a cool, cloudy day into a warm, rainy one, or calling up a thunderstorm on a

cloudy day or summoning light rain on a sunny day.

-4 Attempting to produce dramatic changes: transforming a sunny day into a hard rain or calling up a thunderstorm and moderate winds on a cloudy day.

Ritual Details: The magician must create some symbolic representation of the type of weather desired, whether playing loud music and making large clouds of steam, calling rain by dripping blood on the ground, tossing a handful of glitter or confetti into the air, saying chants or rhymes about weather or calling upon various deities or mythological beings associated with particular types of weather.





Chapter Four: Reality-Bending Horror

**"While the olden
voices calling,
One by one behind
are falling;
Into silence dread,
appalling,
Drift we to the dark...
Hopeless, helpless,
weird, outdriven,
Fateless, friendless,
dread, unshriven,
For some race-doom
unforgiven,
Drive we to the dark."
—"The Dread
Voyage," William
Wilfred Campbell**

There are things that lurk in the darkness. Beyond the endless Stygian ink between the stars, in the warm and clinging dank of steam-filled haunts, and in the tenebrous impulses of corrupt flesh. Some of these things have always been, as old as time and as alien as the totality of undifferentiated experience. They have no purpose save entropy, no pursuit other than to drag life down into the endless crushing maw of a virulent universe. Others are young and hungry, eyeing the cracks of reality with a burning lust in their bellies, aching to devour and destroy all that crawls and lives and dreams. There are even those things that do not wish to destroy, but to possess, to control, to smother and own, to enfold in sodden, clinging membranes that slowly replace clean air with perverted fluids gushing down throats to fill bodies and minds with dreams of obedience and degeneracy.

All of these various entities have one trait in common, however. They are not devils of Hell or angels of Heaven. They are not remnants of the world of humans or ancient experiments. These entities are flaws in reality itself, violations against the very nature of the universe. Or, at least, they are violations against the very nature that humans hope and pray the universe cherishes, for these entities represent everything wrong, every creeping fear of isolation and madness and the inevitable howling, gibbering heat-death of all living things. They are fear, bleeding obscene and primordially atavistic.

Yet, terrible as they are, the beings that lurk beyond are not the most horrific forces at work. That dubious honor goes to the most depraved and craven beast of them all, the only being that turns traitor to not only its own kind, but to its very existence and the sacral nature of being. These defilers betray everything real, knowing that what they do is a transgression against all that allows them to be, against everything that gives them life and breath and existence. They do it knowing, at the deepest pit of their essence, that what they do is vile beyond demonology, damning beyond blood-guilt — and they revel in the fact. These things, men and women who once loved and were loved, are the most horrific of all. They renounce everything that allows humankind to survive, plunging themselves and the sum total of creation headlong into damnation. In so doing, they commit the one sin the things in the dark cannot. They choose to be as they are.

This chapter covers those depraved and defiled people who worship the outer things, the elder forces, the flaws in reality. While some attention must be paid to the un-nature of outsiders themselves, they are not the primary focus here. They are background, the rotting ebon silk upon which the crimson tapestry of human damnation is woven. The process of that human devolution, the violating transgressions of cultist, madman and nihilist, receives primary attention here. A thing beyond time may rise someday, but a player's character has little time to worry about it while dealing with a lover who tries to seed her with entropy and make her world come undone. Darkness inspires apprehension and fear, but the human face lends it soul-shuddering horror.

The Apprehensive God

Building a story on things of madness and eldritch ages, and on the depraved beings that worship them is no easy task. Between esoteric incomprehensibility and the trap of comic-book monsters, there are many ways in which the horror of the shadow can turn into a parody. A hack-and-slash bug hunt. A meandering tale full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. This chapter is designed to help Storytellers create stories that avoid these problems by establishing focus, coherence and a sense of other.

The creation of a story about horrors from beyond reality usually begins, oddly enough, with an individual human being. This personality is the impetus who spurs the dark forces and transforms the impulses of things that cannot be understood into a story that we can tell, comprehend and dread. Based on something human and mundane, the story is rooted in things that all players can grasp and empathize with. That basis allows later violations to have context, to be shown as shocking transgressions against the world, rather than as aberrations or simply as alien threats that can be dealt with fearlessly because they have no emotional relevance to characters.

Your Choices Shall Haunt You

Storytellers looking for an extra dose of pain and angst in their games might consider that a player's character is the cause of the corruption in one of the thematic categories presented here. Though the character is not the villain, his actions trigger events. A spurned lover, hateful killer or lusting cenobite could focus on one of the protagonists, tying him into the story from the start. The character could have isolated the prisoner who madly draws runes in his own blood on a cell wall, or the character didn't speak to the girl who loved him madly, driving her to the brink. Tying the cause of an otherworldly problem to a player's character gives the troupe a stake in the issue that is more than just stopping or discovering the evil cult or banishing a dark god. It means personal, spiritual survival.

The Villain

So, the first question that the Storyteller must answer is, whom shall I make my villain? What mad, epic human force is behind the breach in the world that lets the horror seep into reality? In many ways, this is both your easiest and hardest question, because it is so wide open and has so many possibili-

ties that it can be liberating or paralyzing. Start by deciding whether the antagonist, this villain who may bring about the most depraved of fates, is a fallen hero or a malefactor. It takes a certain kind of person to step outside the very nature of reality to contact or worship a Thing That Should Not Be.

Fallen heroes set out on quests with what they feel are noble intentions, only to go wrong along the way. Their goals are typically flawed to begin with, objectives perceived as noble but that are really tarnished at the core. Other times, fallen heroes start out with truly bright intentions, only to be drowned by the corruption they challenge. These characters try to save the world by summoning devils. These characters weep for the world's pain until they decide to play the final song that will silence it all. They want to undo the laws of reality to bring back that which they loved and lost. Or they drive humanity to greatness by giving it something great to strive against. Any story with a fallen hero at its heart probably ends ambivalently and bitterly. The protagonists confront one who had such potential and who fell so very far. Even in her fallen and wicked state, she is a great woman whose massive potential and magnificence must be acknowledged — but now stopped. In system terms, a fallen hero can still regain Willpower from her Virtue. There is still something human and worthy in her, even if she has fallen from grace.

The malefactor is simpler, more straightforward. He sets out to do evil, and finds more evil than he expected. This character is mad, bad and dangerous to know at the outset. Dealing with forces from beyond the dark between the stars unhinges his mind, however. This doesn't mean he can't appear sane; we all know stories of people who are completely mad, yet who manage to appear civil and genteel to maintain a presence in society. This malefactor most exemplifies the horror stated earlier: that something once human could deliberately and knowingly choose to become the agent of a mad and gibbering deity.

Where the fallen hero is usually a character whose story speaks of the pain of life and the tragedy of a fall, the malefactor's story speaks of the capacity for human hate and cruelty, vanity and greed. In system terms, a malefactor can no longer gain Willpower from his Virtue. He has fallen too far to interact with the world positively. He can, however, gain all spent Willpower from his Vice if he engages in behavior related to it that's beyond the normal scope of his failing, allowing him to use the trait as a Virtue by pushing it to epic levels. For example, a malefactor with Wrath regains one point of Willpower for attacking a dangerous foe who laughs at the malefactor's brilliant discovery, but he regains *all* spent Willpower if he kills the foe and her whole family for the same offense.

A fallen hero is ideal as an antagonist when the Storyteller wants to make players' characters worry that they might someday become the same, or when you want to make them despair that they had to fight one who was once tameless, swift and proud. A malefactor should be chosen when you want to make the players' characters shudder that any human being could become debased, to know that humanity's horror is more wicked than even the things from beyond.

Thematic Background

Once you've decided on your type of villain, consider themes and focus your villain with those goals in mind. Some of the most common themes in reality-bending horror stories — and the types of villains who manifest them — are explored below. It's worth noting that many of these themes overlap, focusing on places where people's relationships to each other and reality break down. Feel free to extrapolate and build your own categories, or mix them to gain more potent brews. Take the tormented scion of a family of horror-worshiping cannibals (torment and family secret) who decides to call upon the power of a god in order to crush his relatives and their whole tainted town. Now *that's* cross-pollination.

Listed with each theme are common derangements for antagonists immersed in that kind of story. These ailments project the flaws of the villain in hard, demonstrable terms. The ranting of the megalomaniac industrialist, the avoidance of the alienated and abused child, the depression of the jaded philosopher looking for a new calling. All are traits that Storytellers can leap on and play with to make the thematic background of a game visible and painful. Madness is central to a story of reality-bending horrors, so the traits of insanity should be driven to the hilt.

Alienation: One of the most common themes of reality-bending horror stories is fear of the unknown and abandonment. For villains, this motif is less about the inhumanity and oddity of the terror summoned, and more about a creeping sense of separation from the rest

of humankind. Villains who move toward darkness are alone, fundamentally cut off from the rest of society. They cannot connect, so they seek union with something foul as a way to feel any link to something, anything else. Their twitching madness can start before they even discover the beyond, as their separation from society has already led to odd behavior and instability.

Sometimes, alienation manifests in physical isolation, occurring among prisoners, members of distant communities or followers of a condemned philosophy. Prisoners in an attic, exiles, anchorites and explorers lost in hostile territory can assume these roles. Cut off from human contact, these people lose sense of themselves as social creatures. Alienation can also manifest in social or mental isolation, however. Imagine the philosopher who wanders too far into esoteric realms, the lonely boy in the middle of a crowd, the shy woman who cannot overcome her fear enough to speak and who takes refuge in dreams. This role is most often played by polygamists, the incestuous, prophets of strange or alien philosophies or religions and by the common person who is overwhelmed by an anonymous world. These antagonists manifest through their disconnection, through their inability to speak to others, through the loneliness that dominates their past (“He had no friends, no family, no life outside of his cell-like apartment, which he filled with dreams of a world in which he was a beloved king-priest”). Sometimes, these villains emerge from a pathetic need to communicate with anyone, even an enemy, in order for some part of their souls to feel again.



The alienated fallen hero is the isolated yet grand master of his own life, but who simply cannot find a way to connect with others. He's the emotionally blocked thinker, the proud and noble outcast who speaks in only absolutes of blood and thunder, or the stoic aunt whose illness has isolated her too long. These fallen ones are broken, but they do not rant or gibber. Instead, they enter monologues or speak as though to children, trying to explain that which cannot be explained, at the same time lacking the ability to communicate as ordinary people.


Alienated villains often have a strong touch of tragedy to their stories. While some deliberately choose their isolation, for others weakness causes them to be crushed under the vast wheels of the modern world. Consider whether your villain is an example of hubris or an indictment of human's inhumanity to human and the way in which society creates monsters by overlooking people in need. Did your isolated antagonist cut herself off or was she marginalized with only something else as her companion?

Common Derangements: Depression, Suspicion, Inferiority Complex, Avoidance, Obsessive Compulsion and Paranoia. Alienated villains have problems dealing with the world as normal people do, as the alienated don't know how ordinary people behave. The alienated's madness focuses on fear of others, avoidance and aberrations that allow them to deal with things they believe they understand.



Example: Part I

Gary is creating a new story about mad things from beyond time, and starts by thinking about the human being at the root of the madness. His last chronicle involved a horrific vampire lord, complete with a bed of skulls and baths of blood, so he decides that he wants a fallen hero rather than a malefactor this time around. He wants the players' characters to confront their own failings as they confront the antagonist. So, Gary decides on a villain who is flawed and dangerous beyond any conventional meaning of the word — but who is still grand, even magnificent, in presence and vision.



Corruption of Power: One of the most often-cited aphorisms in the modern world is that power corrupts. Villains who emerge from this theme exemplify the saying in all of its potential horror. Antagonists who move toward damnation from power come at damnation from two basic directions: those who have power and who let it drive a wedge between them and that which is fundamentally real, and those who lack power and will do anything to acquire it. Essentially, this theme and its children exemplify the ways in which imbalances of liberty and power destroy a sense of cohesion and responsibility, eliminating any knowledge that we're all "in this together."

Those who have power and who are corrupted by it are the easiest types to think up. Mad old dukes, scions of bourgeoisie wealth who lose the work ethic of their ancestors to idle away their days in frivolous pastimes. Wealthy industrialists who see the world as nothing more than one huge resource to be exploited and polluted. The demagogue who comes to despise the very people who grant him authority. Having power, these people slip from humanity and toward self-worship. They are malefactors when seen as nothing more than parasites who suck the life from people in order to feed their depraved lusts. Such villains should be visibly corrupt, indulging in grotesque and rarified delights, and using money and clout to subjugate and dehumanize. Orgies of torture, cannibal feasts on silver plates and cringing servants who have obviously tasted their master's anger all fill the penumbra of such villains. These malefactors destroy that which they should love, fail to see themselves as ordinary and become callous toward decency, respect and the bonds of emotion. In order to expose the true wickedness of this villain, his victims should be portrayed as frail and vulnerable, beings that do not deserve the treatment they suffer.

But for every antagonist who has power and who abuses it, there is another who is driven toward darkness by being abused by power, or simply from wanting that power in order that she may abuse others. The victim who takes and uses power so that she will never again be a victim. The child who wishes to end the world so that her father will never again come to her in the middle of the night. The angry rebel who lost her job and home because of injustice. Having known the lack of power, these figures do whatever they must to gain it themselves, and in so doing step toward damnation. These outcasts who become tyrants make very good fallen heroes. The rebel who destroys whole offices to end the corruption of a few industrialists. The philosopher who kills priests to end the domination of religion. The lord who brings down a kingdom in order to exact his personal vengeance. All fill the role of the fallen hero corrupted by power. In order to keep these characters sympathetic, the objects of their anger should be shown as nearly — but never quite — as bad as the fallen heroes themselves. Stories of these heroes are essentially about fighting a human horror with an inhuman one, so the corruption of enemies should be on display. Play on the human wickedness of the powerful, on their wickedness and bigotry, and then put it all in contrast to the overwhelming madness and evil of a reality-bending horror, and make protagonists consider which is worst.

Common Derangements: Narcissism, Fixation, Irrationality, Vocalization and Megalomania. The madness of this type of villain focuses on having, controlling and dominating. She must be in charge and is obsessed with the things she wants, and even more obsessed with the things she cannot have.

Ennui: Between the existential conundrum of the modern individual and the jaded palate of the modern world, characters who come to darkness out of ennui do so because they are bored, depressed or empty. If Camus' stranger had decided to kill a town rather than shoot a man, the stranger would have walked out of existentialism and

into this sort of horror. The hollow man, the sad person living to die, the emotionally dead crafter who loves his mannequins more than people and the bored researcher who chases forbidden lore are all examples of this type of antagonist. They have lost the ability to care or feel, to be excited by the joys or sorrows of normal life, so they search for something more — something beyond sanity.

While most people find ways to escape emptiness that do not involve summoning or worshipping being in the cracks of reality, those who fall into darkness do so because they cannot find other ways to distract themselves. They must overcome the emptiness with some greater and more extreme deed. Malefactors tend to distract themselves and their jaded wives with ever more debauchery. Fallen heroes feel the need to rail against the emptiness by proving to themselves that there is something to feel, that there's something worth caring about. Either way, those who strive to escape ennui are driven to extremes to find something "real." In so doing, they step beyond the bounds of common reality. This leap can be shown in-game by having a villain participate in the foulest of rites with a sense of excitement, and then experience futility and disappointment afterward. Everything always disappoints him. Nothing is ever good enough. Nothing can ever fill the hole in his soul. And yet, he must make every effort to placate that hunger.

The other side of those driven to darkness by ennui are those who accept the emptiness. They seek to prove that nothing can hurt them, or they believe that only in boredom and emptiness can they find truth. They deliberately close themselves off from emotions and experiences as a form of meditation. The act is designed not to make contact with themselves or the world, but to do the opposite — to take them out of contact with all that is perceived to be real so they can confront the stark, naked face of the universe. In so doing, they start from ennui, drive themselves through alienation and end up at madness. Both fallen heroes and malefactors work well in this situation, depending on their motivations. These villains force themselves into situations where they should feel, all in order to prove to themselves that they do not. In this, they are almost the opposite of ennui as they approach their rites with dread. Afterward, when they have proven yet again that they are not human and do not feel, they have a sense of exultation in their wickedness.

Common Derangements: Depression, Inferiority Complex, Avoidance, Melancholia, Anxiety and Fugue. The madness of the ennui-inspired villain focuses on lack of feeling, existential withdrawal and the unbearable lightness of being. He should be shown as hollow, empty and drifting through life. He latches onto reality-bending horror in order to either feel something or to prove that he is incapable of such.

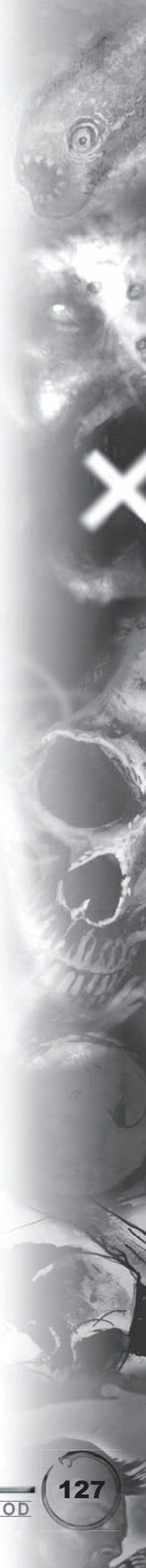
Hatred: In the hearts of those who give into hatred comes the cry, "Perish the world, so long as I have my revenge." In red rage or white-hot fury, these people are driven to madness and evil by a loathing so powerful that nothing can quell it save oblivion. Killing alone is rarely enough for those driven by repulsion. They wish for the

thing they revile to be undone, unsung and unremembered, or universally remembered with shuddering horror over the severity of its final fate. To get that vengeance, these people turn from the bounds of logic and reality, giving in to the delusions of their own rage until they find the Thing That Must Not Be that can give them relief. All of these villains exemplify the truism that vengeance destroys oneself more surely than one's enemies, while often adding "and everything else" for the sake of mad tragedy.

In the realm of hatred, the divide between fallen hero and malefactor is very narrow, differentiated by immoderate hatred over a real wrong and immoderate hatred over a perceived wrong. The fallen hero seeks power he needs to fuel his rage against the men who murdered his wife, to destroy those who destroyed his nation or to do harm to those who tortured him. In the end, however, there is no justice because both the hero's methods and his ends are immoderate. He does not just want to kill those who harmed him, he wants to kill everyone they know, burn down their houses, send their souls screaming to hell and then really get even. The hero's inability to see balance or to quell his rage drives him mad. Such characters should be played between honest sorrow and brutal retribution for those they hold responsible. Letters they never got to send to dead loved ones are thrown in the trash. Tattered old pictures of happy days are tucked into tomes of forbidden knowledge. Gray graveyards are visited in the moments leading up to final vengeance. Such seeming remorse contrasts the blood, horror and pain that their revenge delivers — as new orphans are created, more blood is spilled and madness threatens to take the world.

The hateful malefactor wants to break those who broke her pride, killing their souls before their bodies. Because she believes she was mocked or harmed, she seeks to make nations drown in their own blood, lost in raging fantasies of slaughter. She wants revenge just as brutal and total as does the fallen hero, but, unlike him, she wants it for the shallowest and most transitory of reasons. Her inability to put aside her own pride and deal with life as a human being drives her to madness, lashing out like a spoiled, crazed child. Of all the mad, bad and dangerous villains, these raging lunatics may be the most visceral. They shatter skulls with glee, rip out hearts and drink blood, howl at the moon and rip the skin from their own faces with crooked, diseased, black nails. They do this for the shallowest of reasons: not because of what they actually lost — which should be shown to be small compared to the pain being prepared — but because of their own pride and vanity. This is the woman who, because she was publicly spurned, butchers her offenders' parents and friends, and grants their souls to dance in chains in the foul and burning court of an otherworldly master.

Common Derangements: Fixation, Suspicion, Vocalization, Irrationality, Obsessive Compulsion and Schizophrenia. The madness of these villains is focused on violence, destruction and disintegration. As they destroy the world, they destroy themselves, leaving animals and demons in the place of people. They hate and mistrust, and having seen the rage in their own hearts, believe others to wrestle with the same.



Blowing up the World Is Fun Only Once

There are several places in this chapter where we talk about Things manifesting in the world, rising from the deeps or bringing about the end of reality. Such threats are part of the source literature, and universal fear spices up a game nicely. And yet, blowing up the world becomes an overdone trope and is problematic in games.

Despite the threat of cosmic endings inherent in many stories of outer horrors, the real meat is rarely in blowing up the world. The true threats are smaller, more human and focused on the interactions of protagonists and antagonists. The true threat is the moral degeneration and growing madness that strikes both those who work with the Things and those who try to stop them. Players' characters probably care more about threats to their sanity, family, humanity and sense of self than about those posed to the world at large. So hit them where it hurts, and put the focus on things that matter most. Don't worry so much about the Old Ones rising as about the evils that their mad cults do, the madness of their cult leaders and the degeneration of your antagonists. Outsider beings may actually have little-to-no interest in destroying or ruling the world, so they have no desire to destroy reality. Focus on the humanity, corruption and the inevitability of personal demise, instead.

If you do want to make the end of the world nigh, however, be ready to back it up. Don't put something on the table that you aren't willing to follow through on. If the players' characters are the only ones who stand between the world and the rise of Sampsigeram, the Bleeder of Wills, and the heroes muff it, then let the dice fall where they may. Otherwise, the horror of the tale, all sense of doom, terror and helplessness, is crushed. The threat isn't a threat unless it's real.

Of course, that doesn't mean the rise of the Thing has to be the end of the game if the characters stop the Thing. This could just be the start of an exciting new phase of the chronicle in which antagonists become the leaders of a resistance trying to force a living god back into its eternal and undying prison. The entity could destroy itself and a large area with it, letting the characters off the hook, but leaving them emotionally devastated. No matter how things end, it has to hurt. The characters' failure has to be worthy of the fear and horror that went into a world-ending plot.

Lust: Desire out of control, taken to obsessive heights, is a classic source for corruption and devolution of antagonists drawn to elder things. While that level of desire can be for anything from baths of blood to screams of pain tuned until they make a hellishly beautiful chorus, there is most often a sexual element to lust. The desire itself may not be focused on sex. The slimy, oozing, overpowering grotesquery can turn around a fusion of perverse sexual drives and the sublimation of other drives to sexual ones. There are very few things in human life more powerful or dangerous than lust and sexuality, and even fewer with more taboos imposed upon them. So, repression and dark, fearful obsession with sex makes excellent material to drive characters to madness and foul worship. This lust is not just a powerful need for the villain. It's a craving that has been twisted and bent, perverted by the pressures and taboos placed upon it and forced to manifest in mad and often obscene ways. Insects that suck the pleasure from unwilling bodies. Shuddering rites that reduce the mind to a state of slavery to the body in order to free it from the nagging voice of morality. Pulsing splatters of slime that impregnate anything they touch. All manifest the lust and horror of such villains.

A fallen hero is often a character overwhelmed by his passions, forced to follow them despite the (often fading) dictates of his higher consciousness. He fools himself into believing that what he does is not simply a debasement of himself and everything around them, but that a greater good is fulfilled, and then he breaks when he realizes the truth. These are the people who believe their victims want punishment, that they free the libido from the constraints of artificial morality or that they undo the damage of modern pollution on the bodies of those being "saved."

By contrast, malefactors revel in their perversions, dragging themselves on hands and knees through the filth, screaming for more — more pain, more debasement and more horror for themselves and everyone else.

Lust-inspired madness is everywhere: orgiastic cult rituals, inbreeding families, chthonically fecund impregnators, rapists and tormentors, cannibals who eat flesh in order to possess it, self-castrating dervishes, insatiable stalkers. Any of these antagonists can drag players' characters in, find protagonists' loved ones and use them as bait or surround characters with alien, repulsive and horrifyingly tempting forbidden fruit. Go to the wrong club, and one could be chained to a wall and impregnated by a voluting vine creeping into every orifice. Or sleep with the wrong person and one is devoured by a mouth between her legs.

Sometimes, the focus of lust is human and understandable, such as possessing and rutting with attractive sexual partners. Other times, the lust is so tainted that it is nothing other than perverse, hidden under layers of consumption, tentacles and slime. But at the root of it all is the mixed desire to breed, to control, to possess and to consume. To be blunt: to feed, fuck and fester.

The depravity of lusts, and how far they could go is an important point for Storytellers to consider. There are times at which a beaker labeled "mother's milk" may be natural, and others at which it may be horrific enough



that players are uncomfortable. When dealing with stories about lusty characters, Storytellers are encouraged to keep open and honest out-of-character communications going around the table.

Common Derangements: Narcissism, Fixation, Vocalization, Hysteria, Megalomania and Obsessive Compulsion. The madness of these villains is centered on sex, desire and stimulation. They want, need and take, and cannot stop or control their urges. They have been or are being devoured by their Id, so act in ways that full human egos find revolting and compelling at the same time.

Torment: Everyone knows that life is painful. For some antagonists, it's so painful that life breaks those who live it. These people are stalked by a pain so deep and terrible that it tears their souls apart, robs them of humanity and drives them to the all-devouring darkness in hopes of putting their misery to an end. Whether they were molested by a loved one, tortured until their ability to resist snapped or simply given an emotional wound from which they could not recover, these villains are haunted by anguish that they cannot escape. Those who simply destroy themselves rarely make for interesting characters. Those who cling to life and consciousness, who wish to end their pain through means other than self-destruction drag the world with them toward madness. As with hatred and lust, those in torment are obsessives who cannot deal with their emotions or needs in a human way, so search for an inhuman way to end it all. When their pain catches the eye, when their plans drag others into spirals of undoing, when their machinations involve that which bystanders hold dear, this type of villain draws characters into a web of pain and loss that breeds more.

Tormented fallen heroes are often driven by loss. Dead lovers, collapsed nations and destroyed families must be brought back to the world — undoing the very cycle of life and death in a way that violates the tenants of religion and the movement of the soul. These flawed redeemers cannot stand to live without what they have lost, but are not ready to die, so they try to break the world to conform it to their needs. Tormented fallen heroes also emerge from being personally tortured, broken on the wheel of life to a point at which they can no longer see joy or promise. These shattered people are survivors of violation and abuse who still have the inherent nobility of humanity deep inside, but for whom hope is buried under despair.

Another fallen-hero archetype is the herald of apocalypse, an agent who has decided that the world is too horrific to go on, and so it must end. The “it” here can be the world, literally, or could be a much smaller chunk of reality. Many people believe that Los Angeles needs to go away, for example, but still value the rest of the world. These crusaders seek to bring an end to lives full of misery and to realities full of pain.

The malefactor born from torment is often the most sympathetic of her kind, because her degeneracy comes from honest suffering. But unlike the fallen hero, the malefactor has lost her inner spark of humanity. At some

point, faced with the pain of existence, she decided to give up and be consumed. She came to revel in her torment, revisiting it endlessly on those around her as well as on herself. The torturer who loses her own tongue to torture, the beaten woman who beats other women, the sadist who seeks to alleviate her own pain in the pain of others: they're all malefactors born of torment. The herald of apocalypse also has a malefactor manifestation. Unlike the fallen hero, this destroyer does not seek to end the world out of horrible compassion or to end suffering, but out of selfish needs and a desire to make everyone else suffer as she has.

Common Derangements: Depression, Suspicion, Avoidance, Melancholia, Paranoia, Anxiety and Multiple Personality. The madness of these villains is focused on pain, on being unable to deal with the world as it is and on having flashbacks and trauma from some past misery. These antagonists withdraw. They maintain shields atop shields to keep their true personalities hidden, and never allow themselves to be vulnerable, all the while being achingly raw.

Example: Part 2

Gary, having recently read a quotation that stuck in his head, decides to focus his fallen hero on Ennui and Torment. He writes the quote down to focus him: "I sometimes feel a great ennui, profound emptiness, doubts that sneer in my face in the midst of the most spontaneous satisfactions. Well, I would not exchange all that for anything, because it seems to me, in my conscience, that I am doing my duty, that I am obeying a superior fatality, that I am following the Good and that I am in the Right." He decides that his antagonist, caught between a feeling of emptiness and endless regret over the loss of his wife, is hurtled toward madness and darkness as a herald of apocalypse.

The Source

Once the villain's type and theme has been decided, the next questions are, why this person and why now? How is this coming about? Did the person make contact with Beyond, or was she contacted? Did she fabricate her outer thing, or find it in the dark place to which her heart had fallen? Some ideas for just such origins are addressed below.

Consider, however, whether your creation was complicit in his course. Did a horrific fate befall the would-be villain, possibly at the instigation of another agent (a cult, evil mentor or demonic servant from beyond), or did the figure seek out contact? Many fallen heroes are

subject to horrible fates, while malefactors go looking, but this is hardly a hard-and-fast rule. The type of villain being created, and his story, probably suggests how he came into power.

Book of Ancient and Forbidden Lore: Probably the best-known origin trope is for the villain to discover a book of sanity-destroying rites and truths that reveals to her the nature of things. These books are usually in ancient languages, dusty tomes covered in human skin or written in blood, penned by people whose fingers did not move as fingers should. Feel free to get creative here. Perhaps in this day and age, a mad prophet has released his book on the Internet, where the book can be found only by those who already know the name of it from their dreams? Or maybe the book is burned into the mind of an old homeless man, and the only way to access the book is to pry open his eyes with a mirrored pen and read it directly from his brain?

If a villain's power and contact comes from a book, then much of her ability to use her entity's might is bound up in the pages. She can learn some rites, but most of her capabilities are trapped between the covers. This limitation gives characters a critical way to stop the antagonist and disrupt her powers. Without the book, the opponent has access to two lower levels of rites than normal, and all ritual rolls suffer a -3 penalty. When the book is in her possession, the book applies as a tool that confers +3 to +5 dice to rite rolls. The villain also suffers a severe derangement that manifests only while she is in possession or close proximity to the tome.

Cataclysmic Event/Epiphany: In the midst of horror and suffering, a villain may either witness something beyond the nature of reality or his mind may receive a dark epiphany. How this prophecy comes about is influenced by the theme of your intended story. A malefactor inspired by alienation may hear the chanting of inhuman tongues from out of the murky ooze beyond time. A fallen hero born from torment could recognize unspeakable truth in the spasms of his dying lover's face, realizing the futility of existence in the augury of her death. A powerful, lusty tyrant could emerge from lording over lessers, opening his mind to vistas he could not have dreamed of before.

If a villain's contact with his god comes from such events and epiphanies, he suffers no special penalties to any of his rites or powers. He is a prophet, and needs no tools to work his will. He might, however, benefit from emulating the circumstances in which he gained his first vision. If he can make a passable recreation of the events that destroyed his sanity, such as killing a woman who looks like his dead lover, or meditating alone for a month in a dark well, he gains a +1 to +3 bonus to a single rite roll. This antagonist suffers from a mild derangement inspired by his insight.

Discovery of Horror: Archeologists stumbling upon temples to gods long condemned. Curious students digging an ancient artifact from a dead professor's locked cabinet. A mathematician arriving upon an equation that can be solved only by using numbers that cannot — that must not — exist. These are discoveries of horror. These are the

places and things, besides books, that plant the seeds of the Things That Must Not Be and allow their owners to tap into and be corrupted by the power of new masters. These perversions differ from the magic of other types of artifacts in that they do not utilize the powers of the universe or the human heart, soul or will. Instead, these findings break down reality by their very existence, cracking open the walls of Creation and sanity to make links between what is and what should not be. Their forms are legion, but none of them look or feel innocent. Anyone with a Morality higher than 1 can sense that there is something wrong with these objects or lessons, something twisted.

As with books, discovered areas and implements boost and limit a villain's power. A ritual implement can be taken, and, without possession, it is normally impossible for an antagonist to use her most powerful rites. Places of power are obviously hard to steal, but they do impose limitations upon a villain's movement. If she can be barred from or lured out of her place of power, she can be made vulnerable. Rites cast without the discovered objects or foci suffer a -3 penalty, and the villain has access to two fewer levels of rites than normal. Using the source, the ritualist gains a +3 to +5 bonus on rite rolls. In addition, the villain suffers a severe derangement that manifests only while she's in possession of or in close proximity to the item or location.

Family Secret: Ancient bloodlines that have been corrupted by evil and malice. Inherited weaknesses created by association with the madness and horror that lurks beyond the edges of reality. These kinds of familial phenomena give villains a predisposition toward the madness and evil of archaic entities. An antagonist who comes to his power by birth and blood doesn't so much choose to become evil, but chooses to stop resisting the evil that was already there. In fact, he has the capacity to gain more power by further debasing his own family. Blood not only calls to blood, it feeds upon it, and the forces of entropy drag everyone toward damnation.

A villain whose power comes from his family's taint is somewhat limited in powers, but can gain focus by further violating his family or calling upon its ancient evil. Any rite cast outside the confines of ancestral lands is at a -2 penalty, and the character can access one level of rites less than normal. If the villain conducts a rite on or with a member of his bloodline (doing it to or alongside them), he gains a +1 bonus for each participant/victim who is an extended relative (uncle, cousin, aunt), and a +2 bonus for each who is a direct blood relation (sibling, parent, child) to a maximum of +5. If the rite involves victimizing another member of the family in a manner related to the villain's theme (molestation for lust, locking family in a dungeon for alienation, torture for torment), he gains access to an extra level of rites (though even then rite levels cannot exceed five). This antagonist starts with a mild derangement. The ailment is the same for all members of the family, an inherited trait that manifests immediately upon first participation (conscious or not) in a rite.

Ritual of Deliberation: There are those who find evil, those whom evil finds and then there are those who cre-

ate their own evil, breaking down the doors of reality and hurling themselves into the abyss. Those who enact a ritual of deliberation do not contact one of the Things. Those who enact a ritual of deliberation do not learn of a being that has already touched the Earth. Instead, they reach out through the cosmic void and brand their own soul with the mark of something that either had not existed before. These villains attract the attention and power of a new force, a new threat to reality and destroyer of sanity.

Villains who gain such power are subject to no bonuses or penalties on their rites. They do, however, gain one potent benefit — no one may use any kind of lore, history or occult capability to research the nature of their lord. There is no record of it, no information on it and no hint as to what kinds of powers it bestows. Villains who attract such attention have certainly driven themselves to madness. They start a game with a severe derangement.

Example: Part 3

Gary considers the ways in which his burgeoning fallen hero could have gone wrong, and decides that the character went looking for it. He was a scholar who possessed various scraps of forbidden lore, so Gary decides a book showed the way. He changes his mind, however, as he decides the tome makes the character scholarly and hamstrung by a single source of power. Instead, Gary has the character perform a deliberate ritual that puts him directly in contact with one of the elder ones, and he receives an instrument that allows him to conduct powerful rites to focus the Thing's energies on earth. The villain is now determined to bring about the end of the world so that all the living can be reunited with the dead, so the pain and separation that mortality causes can be ended in one fell swoop. The villain has a ritual tool — a cursed violin, as Gary likes the image of the fiddler playing at the end of the world, a +5 tool. What the villain does not realize, though, is that he himself is the instrument of destruction. The violin is merely a prop to allow the fallen hero to convince himself of nobility, that he hasn't fallen too far. If the violin were taken away, the villain's plot can proceed.

In addition, Gary assigns the Fugue derangement. Whenever the fallen hero sees a woman bleeding, he goes into a fugue state and begins to fiddle. Gary decides that each time the character does so, there's a one in 10 chance that the fiddling will invoke a rite, randomly determined from a list of the otherworldly entity's available rituals.

The Thing That Should Not Be

It's time to put the villain aside for a moment. The focus of your theme and the humanity of your tale should be taking shape. Now we can look toward the element that gives this kind of story its particularly pungent spice: the Thing That Should Not Be. The antagonist has come into contact with the entity, so we need to know what it is, what its powers and horrors are and how potent it makes those who worship and appease it. The identity of your villain determines the Thing with which she works. The being then influences the way in which the character's identity can affect the world. The person is the internal horror, the Thing is the external one.

What will your force beyond comprehension be? All such entities are terrors by definition; reality-bending nightmares outside the scope of the mortal mind. But within that great and terrible void is a lot of room for differentiation, with a great deal of fluctuation in power level. Some Things may be ancient, eternal intelligences capable of eradicating planets with a single thought (which they think of only once per eon). Other Things are gibbering forces of madness and entropy that pulse and writhe in the cracks of reality, easily able to rend and devour the faculties of a single human, but unable to effect the cosmos on a grand scale.

The following are possible creatures and their potential power levels and rites granted (p.139). This is just a set of basic guidelines, as the best and most foul forces await in the collective imagination at your table.

Alien Gods: These beings are deities in scope and power, but, unlike whatever gods may exist in the worlds that mortals inherit, these entities are alien. Monstrous in the most primitive sense of the word. These Things are not dead, and may lie waiting, stretching out their influence to bring about a time when they will rise again, or to bring about the alignment of events and fates that will allow them to enter the world and as tyrants. The requirements for such invasions range from the horrific to the simply inexplicable, as the bizarre needs that compel the beings are abhorrent and diametrically at odds with sanity. Alien gods are perhaps of the most common patrons of antagonists who try to bring about the end of the world, or to set themselves up as high priests. Alien gods are also quite applicable for any villain working from an alienation standpoint. As your character deviates so far from humanity, she is able to commune with the foreign more so than with the commonplace.

Alien gods often exist bodily, in either this or some other reality, and have the ability to reach across time and space with their foul minds and rotting intellects. And yet, something keeps them from being active in this reality with their full might and power. It could be that they are dead and yet undying, locked away by the shields of ancient rites, or that the very nature of this universe is hostile to their intrusion. As a result, they are rarely able to effect the world directly or physically, but are able to grant followers potent rites and powers. When these beings do manifest

physically, they usually have bodies that are bizarre hybrids of beast and human, male and female, or plant and animal. Creatures with the heads of squids, the wings of bats, the trunks of elephants that grow from torsos of rotting mold and with intelligent insect eyes. In these forms, most alien gods are beyond the scale of game mechanics, capable of crushing armies. The servants of these alien gods look much like smaller versions of their masters, but these pawns are often no more powerful than animals or supernatural beasts, and can be killed by resourceful mortals.

Chaos and Bubbling Creation: These beings are not so alien to the nature of the world as others proposed here, because chaotic beings were part of the foundation of the universe. They are, however, foreign and dangerous to the current form of the universe as they represent Creation at its wildest and most uncontained, the chaotic and spurting impulse of fecundity unchecked. They are beings that would devour the world even as they copulate with it, endlessly and mindlessly consuming and creating in blasting cycles that have no rhyme, logic or reason. These entities are bubbling yeast, endlessly procreating bacterial forces that overwhelm everything with their sexual, generative, mindless energies. Obviously, they are attractive to antagonists inspired by lust, as chaotic beings represent an orgasmic, orgiastic and endless stream of belching, unthinking pleasure and penetration. They also hold a certain draw for those coming from ennui as they offer an alternative to thought and boredom, a constant dying and becoming, a spurting bliss that destroys any chance for the mundane as it destroys any chance for having a sense of self or a thought that lasts longer than a moment.

Things of this type have no definite physical form. They, or part of their energy, can manifest either whole or as one of their spawn or servants. When these agents do so, they are usually bubbling energies of ooze and yeast-like fermentation, unable or unwilling to hold a form for very long. Despite this horrid appearance, heralds are often capable of causing lust and the need to breed in onlookers, and of giving their human disciples the same ability. This compulsion is not about physical attraction, but about a base need to fertilize and be fertilized, and knows no limitations of human morality or decency. A creature of this nature is as likely to impregnate a man as a woman. It makes no matter, for their nature is other. Their physical bodies can be destroyed, containing them long enough to do so is difficult. Fire or ice may be necessary to undo them on a fundamental level. Destroying the body just destroys the manifestation, though. Most such creatures can never truly be destroyed, at least not without killing all life. Their projected servants are usually as powerful as potent animals, and indeed combine the traits of animals to attain most of their capabilities and attacks, and can be put down by those with the guts and ingenuity.

Demons of the Outer Darkness: Unlike demons of the Hells, these creatures are not predicated on any human mythology. In fact, they're usually alien to it, creatures so beyond the human mind that knowing their true nature is all but impossible. They're creatures from beyond the stars, out of other

realms of existence, whose nature is alien and dangerous to humans as well as actively malicious toward life. Unlike other classes, however, these Things of have one weakness — they can be killed, and killed by mortals. That's not to say it's easy to do so. Few mortals could hope to kill even the weakest of these entities, and the most powerful can decimate an army. But outer things are subject to the laws of death and destruction, despite all the wrongness of their existence.

Creatures of the outer dark are particularly attractive to antagonists with backgrounds in corruption and hatred — mortals may foolishly assume they can control such “vulnerable” forces. Outer demons are also very potent at bringing about direct destruction. Their powers and services can be used with more accuracy than those of most beings. Each of these outer things has its own goals and motivations, though few of them are comprehensible. Those that are understandable seem to be based on feeding (often on life energy, though sometimes on flesh), procreating and expanding their knowledge and influence.

Outer things normally exist half-in and half-out of phase with the world of mortals. When out of phase, they are treated as ghosts (they have Power and Resistance traits of 8+, Finesse scores of around 5 and Sizes from 5 to 15), and may be exorcised and harmed per the standard rules for the ephemeral dead. When summoned fully into existence, they acquire bodies and can effect and be affected by the physical world as any other creature is. In either form, they retain access to all of their powers and make terrifying combatants. They come in many different shapes, though each one normally looks the same each time it's encountered. Mutated bats, fanged beasts with ape-like bodies and the heads of crocodiles, flying fungal blooms and amoeboid masses with filament wings are all possible.

Example: Part 4

Looking back on his fallen hero's background, Gary decides that the Thing contacted was a flaw in reality that had never been known until the antagonist broke through to the other side. Gary is therefore largely exonerated from making up the entity's history. He decides to give it some background, though, along with a description — to avoid the creature being dull and flat.

Deciding that the reality flaw is linked to music and sound, to go with the fiddle artifact that the fallen hero possesses, Gary likes the idea of the Thing being a dissonance, a dirge that echoes against the vibrating chord of creation on which both super-string theorists and theologians speculate. The being has no personality or name, it simply is, but Gary decides that the fallen hero calls it “Elar'hdi the Dirge Unsinging” to give it the kind of gothic, grand eloquence such a force demands. The Storyteller thinks philosophers have speculated that if the universe is formed by



vibrations or song, it's possible there's an anti-song, but that there is no information available about Elar'hdi, because no one else has actually heard the creature's tune.

Gary decides that Elar'hdi manifests as sound, a shuddering dissonance that cuts across all other noises like nails on a chalkboard. In dreams, visions and rites, this sound — horrid and creeping and seeming to dissolve reality into a hiss of static — represents the ascendance of the Dirge Unsinging.

Flaws in Reality: These beings are not personages or intelligences, but forces given personality only by the delusions and madness of those who worship them. These Things are not phantasms, for they are a source of power among supplicants who unhinge and debase their minds and souls sufficiently to interact. This category of Thing encompasses fractures in reality, the flaws that are inherent to any structure. These flaws may be known as “the errors of God” and are feared with a more intimate dread than many other threats, for they are not apart from reality, but are the part of reality that destroys the rest. Flaws do not try, plan or desire to cause ruin — they simply do by definition. Reality flaws are worshiped by those who are tormented and given to hatred, as these Things are easy objects of pain and rage, as well as a means for turning such emotions into corrupt and wicked power.

Flaws have no physical form, no consciousness. Sometimes, they are described by their follows as “blind, idiot gods,” but this is just because humanity has a hard time interacting intimately with things that have no consciousness, no volition or process, and yet cause change and reaction by simple and undeniable presence. Some flaws do, however, “give birth” to children that have consciousness, or at least mobility and sensibility. These offspring can be like outer things in form and power, but without intentional maliciousness or directed purpose. The children of reality flaws exist only to tear down and destroy, and are often bound and forced into service by those who worship the parent.

Forces of Entropy: Between reality flaws and chaos things are those that destroy and tear down, beings whose sole purpose is to bring Creation to nothing. Unlike reality flaws, these beings are conscious, though in inscrutable ways that often prohibit any true communication between them and any sane human. In many ways, they are both companions and opposites of chaos things. While wild things create and generate and rebirth and consume, entropics destroy utterly so that there can be no renewal. Where chaotics are hot, wet, roiling life, entropics are cold, dead entities that draw everything into their black-hole hearts. Some of them have no appreciable personalities beyond that nature, or have a personality too alien to grasp. And yet, a few have aspects that are all too understandable, filled with sly wickedness and hatred, taking delight in degrading and diminishing the universe. These beings can be subtle, wishing to corrupt one individual at a time, or as overwhelming as vast gods wishing to destroy everything at once.

In either case, entropics are the ultimate expression of hate and torment, Things that want everything else to end, to burn it all so that nothing can ever grow where reality once stood. Human antagonists with selfish motives seek out entropics, just as these beings actively court and seek worshippers. Supplicants will be damned before all the rest, but they come forth because they are deluded into believing they can get what they want before the end.

Few entropic Things have physical forms, though they have a pervasive presence that gives them near omniscient knowledge of death, corruption, endings and horror. Many of them are capable of forming a physical shell to house their will for a short time, and these can look like anything a being wishes. Because they are so foreign to humanity, and humanity is foreign to them, they usually manifest in forms bizarre and frightening — cold, dead and rotting reflections of shapes given unnatural life. Human worshipers can guide them to form more easily overlooked shells, from large pets to mannequin-like humans, allowing the beings to blend in. These shells, however, are just motes of a Thing's might in the world, and are only about as powerful as a very potent outer thing. In order for an entropic to manifest fully in the world, a level six rite (see below) or world-ending catastrophe is required.

Describing the Thing

Once your entity's general type has been decided, the entity needs to be fleshed out, described and brought to wrongful life. What is it about this being that makes it so alien, so monstrous? The genre tradition of tentacles and slime, of writhing, pulsing, spurting creations is long and noble and very much open to being exploited. There are other ways to go as well, with foreign beings that exist in only two dimensions (or only in two dimensions that they share with humanity), and so can be perceived from only one angle (width wise) and not another (no depth). Corrupted and defiled images of humanity are also open to use and abuse, from rotting emperors in saffron robes to beings whose nipples are replaced with eyes and navels with gaping mouths that reveal the consuming hunger of not-mortal flesh.

Even if your creation will never manifest fully on Earth, it's important to have some idea of what the being looks like, because its aura and rites will call upon images of the Thing. Those who fight against or serve it have nightmares of its coming and of its vast intellect. Though the whole being may never be apprehended clearly, its presence and the wrongness of its existence will be apparent in many aspects of the story. Having an inventory of visual cues to trigger horror, shock and revolt is helpful.

The Thing's history should also be considered. If the entity emerged from a ritual of deliberation, the being doesn't have a history that's known or comprehensible to humanity. Most other entities have had some history with humanity, even if it's now shrouded in superstition, fear or the veils of secrecy. Alien gods, chaos creatures and entropics may have been worshiped in degenerate rites that

mocked those of holy religions, and the traces of their evil might be found in forgotten volumes of quaint and curious lore, or by reading between the lines of conventional history. Outer things may have left traces of their activities in the fevered writings of demonologists or exorcists, or been photographed by UFO hunters hot on the trail of a recent abduction. Reality flaws have long histories of driving philosophers and mathematicians mad, who in turn created works both forbidden and simply overlooked because no one could understand them — until now.

Deciding on a thumbnail of your Thing's history of interaction with humanity is important for several reasons. It creates a sense of conspiracy and creeping, insidious evil. If kings and patriarchs have fallen into debased worship of the thing, and partly managed to cover the nature of their crime, who knows how deep and old the taint runs? And what hope do the characters have?

Past intrusion in history also gives your Thing grounding in the human world that keeps the story from being so bizarrely existential that it cannot be played. It can be hard for players to know why they should care about Hez'eptoth Who Is the Flaw of Imperfection in Replication in an abstract sense. But if they know that his cult has previously caused a whole generation to be born defective, has turned whole towns to cannibalism and has destroyed dozens of outposts on the Northwest Frontier, then there's a definitive reason to care. This Thing destroys lives and communities in a measurable, tangible way.

Finally, research and knowledge is often an important key to defeating a Thing and its cults. Creating a history for your being allows players' characters to figure out what to expect of its followers, what its rites and powers might be, and investigation allows them to discover any weaknesses or vulnerabilities the entity may have. The cults of Things That Must Not Be can be quite influential. Without some information about their goals, motives and weaknesses, a group of mortal opponents is likely to be overwhelmed.

Quantifying the Unquantifiable

Once your being from Beyond has a description and history, it's time to apply numbers to dimensions where numbers are irrational. This work is not actually aimed at statting out the Thing itself. Most such entities are well beyond the range of power where game traits are meaningful. Other than outer things, most horrors are not actual foes to be physically confronted. They are special effects, threats that cannot be defeated fully. In the times of madness when they do rise, they can be put down only with special rites or knowledge. Thus, most Things are stattd only in terms of what they can do for their followers, in how hard it is to resist their power or to drive it from the world, and what kinds of weaknesses they have.

Influence: This trait represents the ability of a Thing to affect the world directly with its corruption and power, without actually being physically or spiritually present. Such manifestations typically occur through endowments granted to followers (see below). Some beings, however, turn an eye

toward the world and occasionally reach out to touch it. So long as they do not have full access to material reality, their Influence scores are used.

Note that Influence does not always relate to the total power of a Thing. An alien god of unimaginable might that exists in a reality a hundred dimensions removed, and that cares little for its supplicants, may have few Influence dots. The Thing does not bother (or cannot) send much of its power across the void. Alternatively, a relatively minor outer Thing that sleeps beneath the ocean and that actively strives to be awakened into the world could have a high Influence, because the Thing's full will is present and directly bent on ruining Creation.

Mechanically, Influence is used whenever a Thing itself tries to force its will upon the world. Any direct use of powers by the distant creature are rolled using its Influence as the pool. Influence normally ranges from 3 (for entities that have little power and little interest in reality) to 20 (for alien gods that wake from slumber and whose return is imminent). A Thing rarely has an Influence over 10 unless you want to threaten existence itself.

Note that if a being ever does manifest, its Influence is replaced with its Power and Finesse. This switch should only matter if you use the false god rules (see p. 138). Otherwise, opponents of the creature probably focus on driving it out of reality rather than fighting it directly.

Virulence: Virulence represents how hard it is to banish the powers of a distant Thing from the world. Such efforts can comprise driving away the creature's spiritual taint, ending its Influence-based powers or cutting the link between a cult and its lord in order to render members' powers and rites useless.

Mechanically, Virulence is used as a pool in contested actions when a character tries to abjure or exorcise the power of the being. Virulence is normally between 5 and 10, though truly terrifying things may have more dots. Dramatic failure poses a horrifying danger to these tests. A character who utterly fails to banish the Virulence of a Thing exposes herself to it, allowing the force a free use of a power such as Corruption or Possession on the target, against which no Willpower can be spent.

Virulence is also used when enemies of a cult try to rob the society of its endowments by severing ties to the Thing. This roll is made as other banishing actions are, except the highest Resolve among cultists is added to the Thing's Virulence to resist. Also, any bonuses and penalties from books, artifacts or locations apply their rating to this Virulence + Resolve pool. Thus, cutting the link between a Thing and its cult is possible — but it's not easy, and is best dared when the cult is away from its source of strength.

Note that if a Thing ever does manifest in the world, the Thing's Virulence is replaced by its Resistance. At that point, the bonus characters receive for manipulating the Thing's vulnerability also doubles, and the creature spends one turn in which it can resist with only the lower of its pools (Virulence or Resistance + Power). The creature is not fully in the world in that turn, so the being is at its weakest, giving opponents one last chance to drive it back into the outer dark before its rampage.

Vulnerability: Many Things have weaknesses that can be discovered through Investigation and Occult rolls, or by interacting personally with the power of a being. Researching a vulnerability is relatively safer, but sometimes characters have no choice in the matter, whether because the entity forces itself upon them or they cannot find any records of its previous existence.

Discovering a vulnerability that humanity has encountered before usually involves an extended action needing 5 to 15 successes (based on Investigation or Occult), depending on the obscurity of the information. (Use the “Rules for Solving Enigmas” on p. 60 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for guidelines.) Discovering the weakness of a “new” Thing is harder, and requires that characters come in contact in a way that challenges their very identity, such as being the target of a corruption rite, witnessing a high-level rite being performed or allowing a Thing to penetrate a character’s dreams. A degeneration roll is required to bear the exposure. A player then makes a Resolve + Composure roll for her character to come to an epiphany about the Thing’s weakness. If the character lost a point of Morality from exposure, her player gets a +3 bonus on the Resolve + Composure roll. If the character incurred a derangement from exposure, the player gains a total of a +5 bonus in the Attribute task. The unfortunate victim’s madness gives her profound insight.

Characters who know and use the vulnerability of a Thing against it gain a +5 on all contested rolls against the being, and +2 on all contested rolls against its cult. What constitutes “use” here depends on the weakness and the situation, and is up to the Storyteller to adjudicate. For example, if the vulnerability is a particular sign that must be inscribed, then painting the sign or carrying it boldly emblazoned across a character’s chest would certainly apply. Sketching the sign in the air with a finger may or may not. Simply saying the sound or name of the symbol may be ineffective.

Sample Vulnerabilities: Alien gods can be susceptible to the ancient signs and symbols from the secret rites of other gods, alien or not. They can have a history of conflict with humanity and its faiths, and clues about methods and modes used against the alien gods can be deduced from that struggle. Searching for alien gods’ weaknesses usually involves delving into forgotten tomes of lore, digging through anthropologist and archeologist accounts of ancient peoples or seeking out symbols and signs in exhumed works of art. Examples might be the true form of Isis’ name, drawn with henna upon the skin of the one seeking protection. Or the sign of the Elder of Hyberbad engraved in precious stones upon sacred ground to be defended. Or the prayer of the Virgins of the Wood in Sanskrit (which can be used as a talisman, the actual prayer need not be said). Or the secret mixture of clay, salt and human tears used to make a terra-cotta warrior whose presence is a ban to the power of an undying god.

Chaotics’ vulnerabilities either block spewing gestational powers or cause the beings to lose control. Taking advantage can mean clearing the mind of thoughts of

sex or death, focusing on continual stability or involving Möbius strips of activity or ritual that bind the undimming power of the Thing into a useful form, forcing its own energy against itself. Susceptibilities could be found in the fertility rites of ancient peoples, or in the celebrations of ascetic orders that denied the power of the flesh. There may be a modern interpretation of an ancient chaotic’s failing, such as a specific strain of penicillin that must be harvested from moldering cheese with a silver knife, or the symbolic representation of a genetic code that acts as a block to the phage of the being’s power. The weaknesses of chaotics are usually practices rather than symbols, things that must be done or said in order to quell the undulant horror. Chants, prayers, meditative practices or Vedic mudras that must be demonstrated constantly, or injections that must be administered frequently.

Outer things’ vulnerabilities are usually more “down to earth” than those of other entities. Being creatures from the far fringes of space and time, their banes are often tied to the foundational reality of the universe and therefore the world. Special kinds of rare and pure mud or water, menstrual blood, the caul of a newborn, the heart of an oak tree splintered by the “finger of God” (lightning), silver from a vein of ore that comes from the “center of the world” and similar natural but rare and difficult-to-acquire substances are the banes of such beings. Some outer forces are even vulnerable to such common phenomena as sunlight, moonlight or the tears of the mourning. Many outer things have had their weaknesses exploited in the past, and research can reveal them in occult tomes or books of demonology. These weaknesses tend to show up less in religious and cultural texts and more in those dedicated to violations of orthodoxy, in the works of heretics, madmen or deranged poets.

Reality flaws are typically hardest to investigate. Those that have been chronicled in the past are spoken of only indirectly, in shrouded and uncertain terms by those who tried to study the reality flaws without being drawn into insanity. The easiest way to learn about them is from forbidden tomes or from contact with the Things themselves, but that way lies madness. Astute and patient characters might also tease out weaknesses by collating and collecting the speculations of philosophers, priests and scientists across generations and continents. Here, legalist sages may mention discordant harmony. There, Pythagorists address the harmony of soothing. Those discoveries in combination with Greek and Chinese musical theory show the way to a creature’s failings. The form of such a vulnerability is very fluid, and less typical than those of other entities. The commonality is that it is always something opposed but linked to the damage caused by the reality flaw. So, an entity of musical undoing might have a vulnerability to songs of unity, while a reality flaw motivated by imperfect creation may be vulnerable to works of art that capture the spirit (if not the substance) of ideals.

Entropics are susceptible to specific prescribed remedies that are common in most religions, superstitions and sciences. Yantras and magic circles, symbols against the evil

eye, viral vaccinations, prayers upon the rosary and skipping over cracks for a 24-hour period can all be antithetical to an entropic. The problem is that each such being is prone to only one procedure. In order to find the correct one, characters have to deal with the entropic itself and hope to gain insight, or research the being's cult to learn how it may have been defeated in the past. At least there is often clear information about entropics more so than other Things, as they may have been dealt with often and successfully in the past by all types from priests to doctors. Unfortunately, many entropics and their cults look alike, so figuring out the specific name and qualities of the one in question can take precious time.

Endowments: The most important mechanical element of your creation is the endowments it bestows upon its cults and the antagonist who summons it forth. While some Things may effect the world directly upon occasion, human agents of the Thing's malice and evil are the creature's foremost means of affecting Creation, as well as being the most appreciable and horrifying opponents for players' characters.

Endowments come in two types, rites and powers. Rites are specific formulaic spells, prayers and rituals that cultists learn by worshipping, appeasing or attempting to dominate the Thing. Each rite has a specific casting, effect and choice of targets, as well as material and spiritual requirements. Powers are followers' direct manifestation of corruption, warping and granting them capabilities beyond those of ordinary mortals. Powers are available to only cult members, and rites are usually kept enclosed within their ranks. Some individuals learn rites outside a cult through the Reality Blasphemy Merit, but acquisition of supernatural abilities by that means is rare and dangerous. Either way, both types of endowment inexorably take a toll on the Morality and sanity of those they "benefit."

Abominable Merits

The following two Merits grant cultists and supplicants of otherworldly entities the capacity to wield inhuman, inexplicable powers. These Traits should be available primarily to Storyteller-controlled characters, being available to players' characters only with Storyteller approval.

Cult of Things

That Must Not Be (● to ●●●●●)

Effect: This Trait is limited to members of a cult dedicated to an otherworldly force, and represents standing in the circle. A single dot indicates an initiate who has little trust or standing, while five dots indicate the chief celebrant of the group, a position usually reserved for a fallen hero or malefactor. Sometimes the chief celebrant has fewer than five dots, especially if the Storyteller wants to introduce a less

powerful antagonist. All other members of the cult must have a lower number of dots than the foremost celebrant, or they recognize his fallibility and tolerate his authority as a token to their god or with the intent to sacrifice him one night.

This Merit serves several purposes. First, a character's dots equal the highest level of Cult Resource Pool (see p. 147) to which the member has access. Someone with two dots can use two dots worth of the cult's Resources. People with this Merit therefore have access to contacts and resources beyond their own.

Dots in this Trait also determine the highest level rites a character may request or perform. No matter what rites the cult's deity grants, a member can know only those that are equal to or lower than her dots in this Merit. Characters may not learn the rites of Things other than those offered by their masters. In order to learn the rites of other Things, the character must possess the Reality Blasphemy Merit.

A character is bestowed a single rite for free for each dot in Cult of Things That Must Not Be. He can also beg for other rites rated the same or fewer lower with an extended Resolve + Occult action requiring five successes. (Each roll requires one hour of time, followed by an experience-point expenditure equal to double the level of the rite.)

Many Things grant powers only to followers with a certain number of dots in this Merit, often three dots or more. See "Endowments by Type," p. 138, for how different entities apportion powers. Characters who acquire powers through this Merit suffer derangements as well. Gaining a first power subjects a character to a mild derangement, while attaining a third power turns that ailment into a severe one. However, whenever a cultist does the work of her god, directly following its orders or the orders of the head of her cult, one Willpower point may be spent to suppress the visible manifestation of a power-induced derangement for the duration of a scene. Thus, she has the capacity to pass as a normal, rational person in public for short periods of time. Due to the stress of using blasphemous magic, a cultist may not exert such control while preparing for or performing rites, nor immediately afterward.

Note that the limitations of a Thing itself may impose a cap on the levels of rites and/or powers that it may grant to followers.

Reality Blasphemy (● to ●●●●●)

Effect: This Merit is available to characters who seek to learn the horrid and gibbering rites of reality-bending horrors, without being part of a cult. The Trait represents knowledge of the wicked rites of a Thing, gained independently through study and understanding of the being's perverted logic.

Unlike Cult of Things That Must Not Be, this Merit does not grant powers. It also restricts a character to learning the rites of only one Thing. If a character seeks more or different capabilities, he must dare dedicate himself to multiple lords (and this Trait must be acquired separately for each).

A character gets a single rite for each dot in this Merit free, and can learn other rites rated the same or fewer dots

with an extended Resolve + Occult action requiring five successes. (Each roll requires one hour of time, followed by an experience-point expenditure equal to double the level of the rite.) Successfully learning a new rite is a sin against Morality with a threshold of 7 minus the level of the rite. (So, learning a level three rite is the same as committing an impassioned crime, and requires a degeneration roll with three dice as long as the character's Morality is 4 or higher.)

If players' characters acquire this Merit, they probably want to fight fire with fire against their cultist enemies, and are limited to only low levels (one or two dots; more lures a character into genuine service to a deity). Those who pursue such knowledge too far tend to damn themselves and become the very thing they fight.

Endowments by Type: Alien gods typically grant all five levels of rites. Five or more first- and second-level rites is not uncommon, and followers may have two or more fifth-level rites if their Cult of Things That Must Not Be Merits bear it. Some followers know summoning rites, which invoke servants of an alien god to work with the cultist in accordance with the deity's will. Actually summoning an alien god to manifest physically is either impossible or is a level six rite. Such a being's living, active, physical presence would require massive amounts of energy and would result in almost certain destruction of large chunks of the world. In addition to these rites, alien gods are capable of bestowing up to five powers to their most powerful celebrants (those with five dots in Cult of Things That Must Not Be), and one or two powers to cult members with three or more dots in the Merit.

Chaos creatures often share a short list of rites limited to around third or fourth level at best. Their sway in those areas is usually limited to lust, impregnation, growth, mutation and healing, offering two or three first-level rites and no more than one fourth-level rite. The powers they grant can be extremely potent. Chaos creatures can give up to five powers to their chief celebrants (those with five dots in Cult of Things That Must Not Be), up to three powers to any cult member with two or more dots in the Merit, and one power to even those with only one dot of standing in the trait. As with their rites, these powers are usually physically oriented.

Outer things tend to offer less in the way of power than do other deities. Few outer things have anything more than second- or third-level rites to teach followers, and even then they have only one or two rites per level. They can usually grant only one or two powers to the master of a cult (those with five dots in Cult of Things That Must Not Be), and one power to those with three or more dots in the Merit. Outer things can, however, be coerced to either send their servants on tasks or to go on tasks themselves through application of the Compel the God rite (see p. 144), which must be learned and purchased separately from the rites granted by the cult. Thus, while outer things don't grant a lot of mystical power, they can be summoned to perform more direct and practical actions, and can be used as a force of overt terror far more easily than other distant and vanishing entities.

Flaws in reality offer worshippers no powers, though many followers learn ways of acquiring powers from other

sources. Flaws do grant significant rites, though. Reality flaws' cultists have access to rites of up to level five (and occasionally up to level six, when the Storyteller wants them to be able to threaten to destroy the universe), and can have up to five or six rites at each level. Supplicants can also compel the children of a reality flaw to do their bidding with the "Compel the God" rite, which they can learn from their cult rites.

Entropics grant all five levels of rites, usually with one or two available at each level. Almost all entropics offer summoning rites, which usually manifest aspects of an entropic on the power level of an outer thing. These aspects work with a summoner so long as the manifestations are directed in accordance with their parent's will. Summoning an entropic itself to manifest is either impossible or a level six rite. In addition to these rituals, entropics are capable of giving up to six powers to their most loyal celebrants (those with five dots in Cult of Things That Must Not Be), and three or four powers to cultists with three or more dots in the Merit.

Outer Things and False Gods

The exception to "dotless entities" — those beings whose vastness simply cannot be defined by Traits — are some outer things and any other creatures that you decide are weak enough for characters to face directly. Some alien gods may be potent horrors, but do not actually have the powers of the divine, or are mortal and can be killed. The World of Darkness is filled with mystery and ignorance, even for those who think they are in control. Cults worship forces they think are godly in power and majesty, but that turn out to simply be potent beasts. Outer things can fall into this category, as may others at your discretion. Cultists may think they've contacted an alien god, but it's really a weaker creature. After all, it isn't like one can get a list of references from a mad, gibbering force from beyond reality.

For creatures that have no physical form, or that manifest only under specific conditions, the rules for ghosts work well to represent their spiritual and corruptive threat. Children of greater Things and the least of outer things usually start off with a Power and Resistance of 5 or more and a Finesse of 3 or more, making them potent foes. Outer things and false gods can have a Power in the range of 8 to 10 and usually have a Resistance of 5 to 10, with a lot of variation in their Finesse. Things that are subtle, controlled and focused in their madness can have a Finesse to rival their Power. Those that are wilder and more destructive, especially the minions of chaos or entropy, often have a low Finesse — in the range of 3 to 5. Size is usually between 5 and 8, though some monstrous Things may go as high as 15.

A cult, fallen hero and/or malefactor is the worldly tie for such a being. So long as worship is practiced, the creature is anchored. If the worship can be stopped and the cult destroyed or disbanded, connections to this world are considered severed and a creature is expelled back to its original source.

Abjurations and exorcisms can be turned on manifest entities a little differently than described in the main rule-

book. Storytellers may still grant that Academics (Religion) and Morality dots are effective, allowing a strong soul to banish a Thing. But in these types of stories, it's not always religion or faith that's effective, but strength of will and knowledge of the blasphemous. You have the option of changing the requirements of an abjuration or exorcism to capture a different tone. Instead of having a Morality minimum, characters banishing Things may have two or more Occult dots and a Willpower of at least 7. Alternately, if the characters have researched information about a Thing and its weaknesses, an Investigation of 3+ can replace Occult.

In either case, you may allow tomes of lost knowledge or discovered weaknesses to serve as tools with bonuses of +1 to +5. The bonuses of multiple tools of the same kind (such as books) are cumulative, but one type of tool cannot grant more than a +5 bonus, total. Multiple types of tools may be the only way to banish a Thing with a high Power and Resistance. Dramatic failure on such efforts allows an entity a free use of a power such as Corruption or Possession against a banishing character, against which Willpower cannot be spent. Characters who seek to banish materialized Things beware.

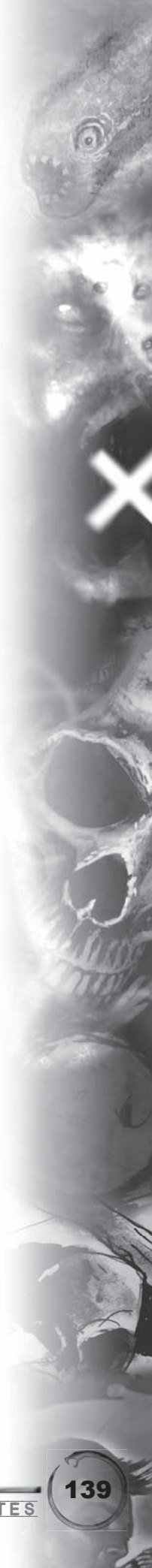
For creatures that have physical form, follow the guidelines above and assign dots for Intelligence, Strength and Presence that average out to suggested Power scores; Wits, Dexterity and Manipulation that average out to the suggested Finesse and Stamina, Resolve and Composure that average out to the suggested Resistance. Total dots in Skills should be somewhere around 10 times Finesse, focused largely on Physical and on alien and threatening applications of Mental Skills. Social Skills are generally limited to Animal Ken and Intimidate, but some subtle beings may have others. Size remains the same as in unmanifest form, and species factor for Speed should be taken from a comparable animal (usually 5 to 10). Manifest beings retain all powers in physical form, and may have access to new ones such as fungal regeneration or gaping maw.

If you have access to **World of Darkness: Antagonists**, some of the beasts and monsters there make good forms for outer things that manifest — especially if the oddity factor of their appearance is played up.

Rites

Based on what's been discussed so far, it's up to the Storyteller to decide what rites a Thing can grant to its followers. A number of different rituals are provided here from which you can choose, or you can use these as a basis for your own. The actual level of rites a character has access to depends on his dots in the Reality Blasphemy or Cult of Things That Must Not Be Merits.

Whereas Chapter 3 of this book addresses the rituals that different kinds of mystics can perform — apostles of the Dark One included — those systems stand apart from what's addressed here. Those rituals and character types are dedicated to players' independent-minded, self-motivated characters. The people who acquire the rites addressed in this chapter are usually the slaves and



servants of otherworldly entities. That is, they're cultists reserved for Storyteller-controlled characters. If players' characters know any of these practices, it's only dabbling knowledge limited to one or two levels, and allowed only by Storyteller permission.

Cost: Uses of a rite always cost one Willpower point. Willpower invokes the soul of the cultist and opens him to dread corruption by his master. A point spent does not add three dice to rite activation rolls. Indeed, because one may spend only one Willpower per turn, a point may never be spent to augment rite rolls unless specified otherwise. Willpower merely makes the vile sorcery possible.

All rites of the elder things also require disturbing rituals and implements: chanting in alien and eldritch tongues, human blood and organs (freshly obtained), bizarre and deranged sexual couplings, ancient tools, distorted dancing and orgiastic drinking, as well as expensive and rare materials or goods. These components are known as offerings, and rites cannot be completed without them — even when performed by those who do not wish to worship a Thing in order to gain its power. Attempts to invoke a rite without suitable offerings fail outright. Material ingredients are consumed upon the invocation of a ritual, leaving behind nothing but a handful of ash, foul slime or some mark of the Thing. These offerings give no bonus dice to a rite; they are simply necessary for it to work at all. Exceptional tools that may provide bonuses to performance rolls are typically magical on their own, or required vast expense or effort to acquire in the first place, such as a rare book or cursed murder weapon.

Most rites require a target to be present and visible to a performer. Some rites can be performed out of sight of the target, though, and these are noted as requiring an “arcane connection” to the target. An arcane connection is either a part of the target's body (such as hair, fingernails or an eyeball), or an important and symbolic possession of the target (such as the glove with which he used to play baseball with his now-dead father, or a wedding ring). With these items, a rite may be cast at a distant target.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + exceptional tools (relics, unholy sites or blasphemous tomes)

Action: Extended. The number of successes required to activate a rite is equal to the level of the rite (so a level three rite requires three successes to enact). Each roll represents one turn of casting. Note that each point of damage incurred in a turn is a penalty to the next casting roll made for the character, in addition to any wound penalties suffered. If a character fails to complete a rite in time or decides to cancel a rite before gamering enough successes to activate it, the effect simply fails. Willpower expenditures are not recovered and offerings are still destroyed.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The rite fails spectacularly, inflicting some aspect of itself as a detrimental effect upon the caster. A rite intended to damage a subject inflicts its damage upon the performer, for example. The caster's mind is also overwhelmed by the Thing, calling for a Resolve + Composure roll as a reflexive action. If the roll fails, the entity uses the conduit that the character has opened to bring about a rite

of its own choosing on the caster or his vicinity.

Failure: In a single roll, no successes are accumulated at this time but further rolls may be allowed. In the case of an overall failure, the rite can't be performed or has no effect, but not dangerously so. Willpower and offerings are lost.

Success: In a single roll, successes are achieved and accumulated. Overall, the total number of successes required is gathered. The rite takes place as described.

Exceptional Success: Five or more successes are accumulated in excess of the total needed for the rite. The effect takes place as described. In many cases, extra successes are their own reward, causing additional damage or conferring extra duration or capacity. Otherwise, the Storyteller is free to invent an extraordinary result.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
—	The character unaffected by threats or distractions.
–variable	Each point of damage suffered last turn is a penalty this turn.
–1 to –3	The character is rushed or distracted, such as by invoking a rite in combat or while trapped in a burning building. This penalty is cumulative with multiple distractions (such as by casting a rite in combat during a hurricane). Successes gained on a meditation roll for the night (see p. 51 of the <i>World of Darkness Rulebook</i>) offset interruption penalties on a one-for-one basis.

Note that for all the rites below, “the God” should be replaced with the name of the Thing that grants access to the performance. Thus, “Unblinking Eye of the God” becomes “Unblinking Eye of Elar'hdi” when learned from that entity.

Apprehend the Ephemera (Level One Rite)

This rite allows the performer to see and communicate with spirits, ghosts and unmanifest Things in her physical vicinity for a scene. These beings must exist in Twilight — as incorporeal beings in the material world. If a ghost or spirit seeks to hide from the performer, a Perception roll is required (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 45), with successes achieved compared to those rolled for the being's effect or for its Power + Finesse as a contested action. Many spirits find the use of this rite angering or terrifying, as they know the source of the power to be a crime against nature. As a result, most spirits contacted with this rite are hostile.

Offerings: The cultist must blindfold himself with a strap made from the caul of a fetal mammal that was aborted from its mother's womb. Once the rite is complete, the blindfold may be removed and put back on freely for the scene in which the rite is active, but while the blindfold is off the performer may not see or communicate with ephemeral beings.

Dread Voyage (Level One Rite)

A cultist takes advantage of the sanity-violating nature of his master, opening bizarre and twisting paths that move in and out of the cracks of reality to reduce the amount of time it takes to travel to a destination. The cultist must

specify the place to which he wishes to travel. He may bring others along for the journey. All must be present and touching when the rite is performed, and all must walk the whole distance with the cultist. Each additional traveler imposes a -1 penalty to the activation roll.

At the end of the rite's performance, a harrowing channel opens in thin air, taking performers half in and half out of reality as they walk through bizarre and warped versions of the world to arrive at their destination. Normal time required to get to a destination is reduced by 25% (40% on an exceptional success). Note that the twisting path does not allow the cultist to bypass any blocks or wards between him and his destination. He and any companions still travel the distance from here to there, they just do so in unnatural ways. Observers who do not partake of the rite cannot enter the portal. While en route, travelers are immune to attacks from the physical or spirit world, although magical efforts could still affect them. There is no room for dawdling once on a journey. Each additional hour spent on the path than is necessary to make the journey imposes one point of lethal damage on each traveler.

Offerings: A Möbius strip made of human flesh, with the name of the destination written on it with the black bile of a fish sacrificed to the performer's deity.

Elder Tongue (Level One Rite)

Use of this rite allows a cultist to read, speak and comprehend the alien and gibbering tongue of his master. This capability lasts 24 hours. No sane, mortal being may understand the language without use of this rite, making it a useful tool for communications that cannot be deciphered by outsiders. The language is obviously wrong and disturbing to the uninitiated. Any hearing or seeing it know that something about it is terrifying and horrific, though those with no knowledge of the hidden world simply put it out of mind. This rite makes it possible to read ancient texts dedicated to a Thing, and lends a +2 bonus to any roll that occurs in the next 24 hours to learn a rite from such a tome. Note that this rite affects only the cultist who casts it, and cannot be used to give knowledge of a language to others. (Although a third-level rite called Gift of the Tongue can do so, granting knowledge of the language to all present and active in the rite at the time of casting. Otherwise, that rite is identical to this one.)

Offerings: The cultist must ritually mark the bottom of her own tongue with a concoction of hemlock ashes and urine that leaves a stain for the 24 hours that the effect applies.

Gem in the Garden (Level One Rite)

This rite allows a cultist to peer into the mind and heart of a person to see what she desires most. Not what she most loves, or what she wants most purely, but that which she hopes to control, dominate or turn to her will. Casting this rite requires an extended and contested roll against the victim's Composure + Supernatural Advantage, which is a reflexive and subconscious effort on the part of the target. Success grants the cultist knowledge of the target's Vice, as well as a likely trigger that makes her indulge in her failing. Gem in the Garden can be cast against a victim only once

per month, and imparts new information only if a new temptation comes into a subject's life.

Offerings: Opiate incense must be inhaled during the course of this rite.

Mark of the God (Level One Rite)

This rite allows a cultist to inscribe the symbol of her lord upon a location or item, making it a ward against any other servant or child of the deity that would do her harm. This rite does not protect against the servants of other entities, much less against alien beings themselves, only against other spawn or followers of the Thing that the cultist worships. Even cultists recognize that their brethren within the ranks bear a threat to one another. Successfully performing this rite means that any such spawn or agent that comes within 10 yards of the marked place or item suffers a -2 penalty to all attacks and actions intended to harm the performer. Once inscribed, the mark lasts for one lunar month. Only one mark may exist in a space at a time. If a new one is drawn, any old one is made invalid. Living people and animals can be drawn upon, even the performer herself. No one but the performer of the rite benefits from its protection, even if the mark is drawn upon someone else.

Note that a mark can give clues as to the nature of the Thing venerated, giving inspectors a +2 bonus to Investigation and Occult rolls.

Offerings: The cultist must use 13 drops of her own blood, drawn with a ritual knife, as ink to scribe the mark.

Babble of Horrid Voices (Level Two Rite)

This rite forces the language and voice of a Thing into a victim's mind, subjecting him to babbling, alien thoughts. The victim is left speaking in tongues, unable to communicate. Even his written word is rendered nonsensical; handwritten and typed messages come out as gibberish. This effect lasts until the next sunrise. During that time the victim suffers the Vocalization derangement and is at a -3 penalty to all Social rolls that require communication. Activation of this rite is an extended and contested roll against the victim's Composure + Supernatural Advantage, in which resistance is reflexive.

Offerings: An animal or person's tongue.

Eye of the God (Level Two Rite)

This rite causes the miasmatic forces of an entity to be turned against the luck, fate or karma of a subject. A victim is plagued by minor bad luck for the next 24 hours, much of it with a malicious bent. Drivers deliberately steer into puddles to splash the subject. Vindictive bureaucrats destroy his applications. Muggers choose him rather than a rich-looking mark further down the block. The bad luck is not usually anything life altering, but it is enough to ruin someone's day and fill him with paranoia that the world conspires against him. As a result, the subject suffers a -1 penalty to all Social rolls while under the effects of the rite.

Offerings: A large crystal carved into the symbolic form of the eye of a deity, sprinkled with tears.

Harbinger (Level Two Rite)

This rite gives the cultist a view of the future as it's perceived by the inhuman intelligence of her otherworldly master. Essentially, Harbinger gives her a crazed and distorted — but often eerily accurate — vision of things soon to come. Such insight offers many clues as to what the future may hold, but they're so obscure that even the cultist must interpret them correctly with an Intelligence + Occult roll (made by the Storyteller), with each success giving a bit of information about what foes, opportunities or failures await the performer. When each foreseen situation comes to pass, the cultist gains a +2 bonus on a single roll, if any. A performer may benefit from only one enactment of this rite at a time. The future revealed is never more than a few days ahead.

Offerings: The entrails of a mammal that dies while the rite is conducted.

Perverted Desire (Level Two Rite)

This rite allows the performer to tap into the most perverse and destructive desires of the dark and haunted corners of the human mind, bringing them to the forefront of a subject's consciousness while instilling a compelling urge to act on them. Activation involves an extended and contested roll against the subject's Composure + Supernatural Advantage, in which resistance is reflexive.

If the cultist succeeds, the victim is subject to a horrible, grotesque urge from her own subconscious. This urge can be anything from eating bloody, raw meat to rolling in feces to copulating with a dead body. This doesn't mean the victim falls reveling into a full-bore perversion, but she does take an action she would normally consider unacceptable — sniffing at the meat or groping the corpse. Because these are forced actions, such minor sins do not trigger degeneration rolls. If, however, an instilled perversion coincides with a character's Vice, and the act falls below her moral threshold, a degeneration roll is called for. Once the rite is completed, it afflicts the victim in the next 24 hours, whenever she comes in contact with a suitable temptation — as determined by the nature of the offering. No more than one application of this effect can bear on a victim at one time.

Offerings: The cultist must ritually indulge in a perverted act similar to the one on which the victim will dwell. Perverse ritual sex and castration are common offerings, as are eating grotesque and possibly harmful substances while chanting the name of the performer's patron.

Primal Shudder (Level Two Rite)

This rite injects the fearful taint of a Thing into a cultist, imbuing him with a creeping air of primal evil. When the rite is enacted, the cultist chooses one of two effects: fear or lust. Those who chose fear gain a +2 bonus on all Presence and Manipulation rolls to intimidate, distract, confuse or disrupt people they confront. Those who chose lust gain a +2 bonus to all Presence and Manipulation rolls to persuade, seduce, distract or deceive others. Either effect lasts for one day. Only one performance may apply

to a subject at a time. The effects of the rite cannot be bestowed upon others.

Offerings: The spine of a monkey, rabbit or human being.

All Eyes Serve the God (Level Three Rite)

This rite allows a cultist to see through the eyes of a victim. This effect requires the victim to be physically present or for the cultist to have an arcane connection to him when the rite is enacted, but the victim may move any distance from the caster after completion. The performer may see through the victim's eyes at any time for the next day. No other sense can be substituted; only sight is available. While seeing through another's eyes, the cultist is only dimly aware of his own body, which falls into on a trance-like state. Minor environmental stimuli have no effect on his own body (such as an insect crawling across his skin or drops of water falling on his head), but aggressive actions perpetrated against him draw his consciousness back. The cultist can indulge in a subject's senses and return to his own body as often as he likes throughout the rite's duration. Activation involves an extended and contested roll against the victim's Resolve + Supernatural Advantage, in which resistance is reflexive.

Offerings: An eye taken from an innocent child.

Baleful Tribulation of the God (Level Three Rite)

This rite brings the foul attention of a Thing upon the fate and hope of an unfortunate victim, inflicting lamentation and sorrow. The subject suffers a -3 penalty on the next three actions performed (i.e., the next three actions for which dice are rolled). An exceptional success during casting makes the penalty apply to the victim's next five actions. A victim may be subjected to only one application of this rite at a time.

Offerings: The sacrifice of something the cultist loves (or at least lusts after), along with a wailing prayer to his master.

Betrayal of Memory (Level Three Rite)

This rite allows a cultist to occlude a victim's memory of a specific event, blocking it from her conscious mind. The performance doesn't actually erase or change the memory, it simply surrounds it with such shame and horror that the victim's mind refuses to consciously remember it. Many victims of this rite still revisit the event in their minds, as occluded thoughts take on the shape of nightmares tainted by the touch of Things. But so long as the rite's power is unbroken, the subject is unable to willingly remember anything about the event in question. Activation of this rite is an extended and contested roll against the victim's Resolve + Supernatural Advantage, in which resistance is reflexive. Success alters up to one night's worth of memories. The conditioning of this rite is permanent unless broken by psychotherapy or supernatural abilities that access or restore memories. In the case of psychotherapy, the therapist must get more successes than the total rolled for the cultist who enacted the rite. In the case of supernatural abilities, a

single success snaps the compulsion of this effect. This rite requires a victim to be physically present when performed — arcane connections are not acceptable.

Offerings: The victim must be forced to look at himself in a shattered mirror while words of horror in ancient languages are spoken in his ear.

Dreams of Lust and Terror (Level Three Rite)

The cultist is able to construct a dream in which to plunge a sleeping victim. This dream can portray anything the cultist wishes, but he doesn't control the event once it is projected. Essentially, the cultist sets the stage, puts the dream into the mind of the sleeping victim and then lets the event run its course through the victim's subconscious. Common uses of this rite involve dreams of sex, terror and/or perversion sent to either intimidate or inspire degeneracy in a victim.

In the case of intimidation, successful use of the rite gives the cultist and anyone aware of the details of the dream a +4 bonus to Intimidation rolls against the victim for a week following the dream. Such manipulators can drop phrases to the subject to set her off, or prepare haunting scenes for her reminiscent of her nightmare.

In the case of dreams of lust, the danger is in the dream itself. The victim is put into a situation in which she is free to act as she wishes. The Storyteller rolls Resolve + Composure on the victim's behalf in a reflexive action. If the roll succeeds, the character is an observer of events rather than a participant. If the roll fails, she climbs in and is subject to a degeneration roll if her Morality is 4 or higher (victims with lower Morality are not especially tormented). Such is the trap of dreams of lust and power sent by Things; their temptations scar the soul as deeply as real sins do.

This rite can be imposed upon a single victim only once a month.

Offerings: Perverted sexual acts mingled with torture and combined with opiates partaken by everyone involved in the performance.

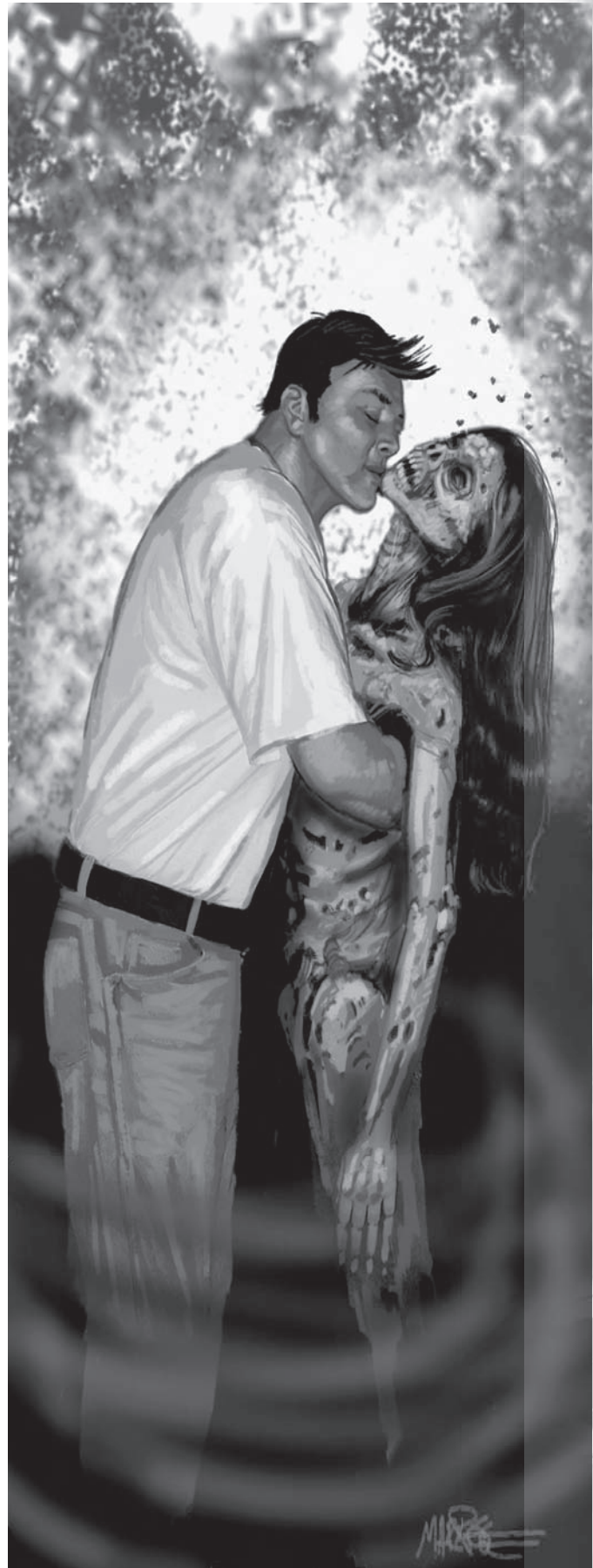
Minor Form of the God (Level Three Rite)

The cultist transforms a portion of his body into a wicked instrument of destruction. The performer creates a pair of lashing tentacles. An attack with these appendages has a dice pool equal to the character's Strength + Brawl +2, and does bashing damage while gaining a 9 again effect on grapple attacks. If the character already has the tentacles power (see below), his attack pool is increased by a total of two dice, and he inflicts lethal damage. The tentacles last for three turns (five on an exceptional success). At the end of that time, they rot, disintegrate or pull back into the cultist's body.

Offerings: A cup full of human blood mixed with the blood of a tentacled beast such as an octopus or squid.

Compel the God (Level Four Rite)

This rite allows a cultist to compel outer things, and



the servants and spawn of greater Things to obey commands for the period of one lunar month. There are actually many versions of this rite, as each version only works on a specific creature or type of creature (such as the Spawn of As'thlot or the Outer Demon Mezmenaron). Each such rite must be learned separately.

This performance is divided into two rolls, both adhering to the normal extended-action rules. The first roll is to summon the Thing or spawn. If the roll fails, the Thing does not come and cannot be bound. Dramatic failure results in the entity arriving and attacking. It cannot be bound and is set free in this reality. Success results in the Thing arriving in anticipation of being bound. Exceptional success grants a +2 bonus to the subsequent binding effort.

Once a Thing has been summoned, it must be bound when the entity is disoriented from its trip to this plane. If binding is not done in the first few minutes of the being's arrival, the entity goes free and may do whatever it wishes. Binding calls for a second extended roll, which is contested by the Thing's Resistance; resistance is reflexive. If the creature wins, it goes free and may do as it wishes. If the cultist wins, the being must serve him for the next lunar month, after which time the entity is banished back to its original resting place.

Offerings: This rite requires a different sacrifice for each Thing or spawn summoned. Self-mutilation, blood sacrifice, soul pacts and large amounts of rare and precious gems, incense and wood are common.

Inexorable Pull of Entropy (Level Four Rite)

A more powerful version of Baleful Tribulation of the God, this rite brings forth the power of a being to actively warp the patterns of luck and fate around a victim, turning the very nature of the world against her. The performer must name a specific action when the rite is enacted. The next time the subject engages in that action, her normal dice pool is not rolled. A chance roll is made, instead. The curse can be as general ("When she next attacks me!") or as specific ("When she next faces the Winged One under the light of the blood moon") as the cultist chooses. The curse remains until its conditions are met. Performing the rite is an extended and contested action, with Resolve + Supernatural Advantage rolled reflexively for the intended target. Only one such curse can apply to a subject at a time.

Offerings: Two ounces of the cultist's own flesh. Which two ounces are at the whim of his master.

Sacral Invocation of the Demarcated Line (Level Four Rite)

This rite brings the horrid power of a Thing to focus on an area, sealing it against intrusion by those who do not serve the being. A reflexive Resolve + Composure roll must be made for all intruders and infidels wishing to enter the warded area, with successes needing to exceed four. Failure means those seeking entrance are so overcome by horror that they cannot intrude upon the warded place. Those unable to cross the line once are unable to try again until a bonus

to their dice pool is gained somehow (such as learning the weakness of the Thing invoked). Until then, the results of an original failure stand. The rite is performed on an object, which is the center of the affected area, and the item must be prominently placed. The radius of effect is five yards for every dot in the character's Reality Blasphemy or Cult of Things That Must Not Be Merit, whichever is higher.

As with Mark of the God, the tools of this rite offer clues as to the identity of the Thing at work, giving inspectors a +2 bonus to Investigation and Occult rolls.

Offerings: The heart-blood of a human being taken within 24 hours of the rite's performance.

Touch of Doom (Level Four Rite)

This rite empowers the performer's body with the horrid and unnatural corruption of her master. If the extended roll is successful, the user's mere touch is deadly. For the next hour, the cultist's body (including tentacles and any maws) inflicts lethal damage, and gains a +4 bonus to Brawl attacks and the benefit of a 9 again effect. This damage manifests in different ways, depending on the Thing from which the rite takes power. Rotting flesh, bursting blood vessels and sudden sores that eat soft tissue are all possible.

Offerings: A gold and lapis knife inscribed with the symbol of the Thing, with which the cultist must cut her hand.

As One with Those Who Walk In Between (Level Five Rite)

This rite gives the performer the ability to become incorporeal at will until the next sunup or sundown, whichever comes first. While incorporeal, the cultist no longer has a physical body and is treated as a ghost with a Power equal to his Presence, a Finesse equal to his Wits and a Resistance equal to the lower of his Resolve or Composure. The cultist also gains any two ghostly Numina that he desires. He is limited to his normal Speed and cannot fly or otherwise travel in unusual ways, except to step between anchors (see below), unless he has a Numen that allows him to do so. None of his non-Numina-specific powers work, such as other rites. Finally, no gear or Artifacts (not even blasphemous tomes and the like) turn incorporeal, meaning they can be used only if the cultist has a Numen that specifically allows him to manipulate physical tools.

The offerings of this rite and any Marks of the God the cultist has created are anchors for his ghostly body, and follow the normal rules for anchors — including the cultist being destroyed if all anchors are severed while he remains incorporeal. The cultist can end the effect with an extended action using the same pool used to enact the rite, and requiring the same number of successes. Once he becomes corporeal again, the rite ends and must be performed yet again to return to an incorporeal state. While ephemeral, the cultist must remain in Twilight — as a ghost in the realm of the material world. He cannot enter the Shadow or other realms. An incorporeal cultist cannot affect the physical world without Numina, but other ghosts and beings like him can be interacted with physically as if they were material.

Offerings: The funerary wrap of a person whom the cultist killed or to whose death he contributed.

Devouring Jaws of the God (Level Five Rite)

When the cultist calls upon the power of her lord, her mouth transforms into a maw of wicked, gnashing teeth or into a puncturing needle-like feeding tube. She does not need to grapple in order to bite a victim and her mouth acts as a +5 tool doing aggravated damage in Brawl attacks. If the character already has the Horrid Maw power (see below), then a second horrid mouth is formed, each of which can attack independently each turn, both at the cultist's full dice pool. The maw from this rite persists for the remainder of the scene.

Offerings: The cultist must bite off a chunk of her own flesh, doing at least one point of bashing damage to herself.

Powers

While rites unleash the unbearable knowledge of a Thing upon the earth, powers are the abilities of a deity manifested bodily upon worshippers. Powers do not require lengthy rituals to enact, though many do require the expenditure of Willpower. They are inhuman capabilities that some followers gain, further widening the gulf between cultists and the rest of humanity. Powers are normally accessible to only those with the Cult of Things That Must Not Be Merit (see p. 137).

As with rites, the Storyteller creates the list of powers that a Thing offers to people who debase themselves sufficiently. Some beings such as reality flaws rarely grant powers directly, though adherents may find ways to develop such capabilities on their own. Other forces such as chaotics can bestow a number of powers to even their lowliest devotees.

The following are some common powers that cultists may manifest. The only way to gain these powers is to pledge one's body and soul to an otherworldly entity, so players' characters are assumed to be unqualified.

Claws, Fangs and Tentacles

Each time this power is acquired it grants the ability to manifest an unnatural bodily weapon such as rending claws, ripping fangs or grappling tentacles that burst from the supplicant's body, making him a twisted parody of humanity. These weapons can be permanent mutations, in which case they have no cost to activate but cannot be hidden without extraordinary means. Or they can be taken as manifestations that are not normally active, requiring one Willpower point to invoke for a scene. While manifested, claws and fangs act as +2 weapons that make Brawl attacks and do lethal damage. Tentacles act as +1 weapons doing bashing damage, but a 9 again effect applies for grappling. Things manifest on Earth can have these powers, which are always considered on, and their tentacles do lethal damage.

Crushing Will

This power works as the Compulsion Numen (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 211) except that Willpower must be spent instead of Essence, and Presence + Manipulation is used in the contested roll. Influence rather than Power + Finesse is rolled for Things. Cultists may control only one will at a time. Things may control a number equal to their Influence.

Delusions

This power works as the Phantasm Numen (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 212) with the following changes. First, it can only be used to make visions that are horrific, nauseating or grotesque and that suit the motif of the Thing in question. Cultists can use this power to make delusions of slaughtering one's family, but not of greeting a character with open arms and apple pie. Willpower must be spent instead of Essence, and Intelligence + Wits is rolled instead of Power + Finesse. Things use their Influence. Finally, while cultists may impose only one delusion at a time, Things may create a number equal to half their Influence, rounded up.

Foul Regeneration

Cultists with this power heal at unnatural rates, be it by growing fungal blooms that knit organs together or slime that sluices into open wounds. Regenerative healing occurs during a cultist's action in a turn, recovering damage from right to left on the Health chart. Every turn, a cultist may heal one point of bashing damage reflexively, or one Willpower point may be spent as an instant action to heal two points of lethal damage or all bashing damage. This power does not allow a cultist to recover quickly from aggravated damage.

Things with this power automatically heal all bashing damage or two points of lethal damage per turn, reflexively.

Horrid Maw

A cultist has a huge slavering maw that can manifest in one location on his body. It can be anywhere, but is fixed once designated. The navel, genitals and neck are all possible, maximizing the horror of gnashing teeth and a slavering tongue. The maw can be taken as a permanent mutation, in which case it has no cost to activate, but the maw cannot be hidden without extraordinary effort. Or the maw can be taken as a manifesting power that is not normally active, requiring one Willpower point to be spent to trigger it for a scene. Once manifested, the maw acts as +3 weapon doing lethal damage in Brawl attacks. Cultists with this power may bite without grappling, but if they do perform a grapple they gain the 9 again effect for damage by biting.

Invulnerability

The inhuman and undying essence of a Thing infuses a cultist gifted with this power. Such taint may manifest as a carapace or shell, armored skin, or as a simple unnatural ability to withstand harm. Each time this power is taken it grants the recipient two points of armor that are always on and active unless the Thing's Influence is banished from



the world. A cultist may have this power a number of times equal to his Stamina. In addition, one point of Willpower may be spent reflexively for the cultist to change incoming aggravated damage into lethal damage. This can be done only when a wound is suffered, not afterward. Willpower must also be spent for Things to downgrade aggravated damage.

Master of Beasts

This power works as the Animal Control Numen (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 210), except that Willpower is spent instead of Essence, and Presence + Wits is used for the cultist's contested roll. A Thing's Influence is rolled rather than Power + Finesse. Cultists may control a number of beasts at one time equal to Wits, while Things may control a number equal to Influence.

Sign of Madness

This power works much like the Ghost Sign Numen (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 211), save that this power can be used at any distance. The cultist does not have to be present where the sign manifests; she simply needs to know exactly where she wants the sign to occur. Manifesting the sign requires a point of Willpower to be expended reflexively, followed by an Intelligence + Manipulation roll. (Things use straight Influence). A successful sign of madness also acts as a +5 tool for any Intimidation roll based on using the message to horrify those who witness it.

Terrify

This power works as the Terrify Numen (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 212), except that Willpower is spent instead of Essence, and Presence + Manipulation is rolled for the cultist. A Thing's Influence is used rather than Power + Finesse. Cultists and Things alike do not have to make any obvious manifestations to inspire fear with this power — it can simply be activated by touching mortal hearts and minds with the unnatural horror of the existence of the otherworldly.

Word of Power

Cultists with this power can utter elder-tongue blasphemes that sear and scar the minds and souls of any living being who hears them. Anyone with even a single dot of the Reality Blasphemy or Cult of Things That Must Not Be Merit is not subject to this effect. Speaking a word of power and spending a point of Willpower gives the cultist an attack against every living thing that can hear the words, rolling the cultist's Presence + Occult minus the Composure of each listener. Successes deal bashing damage, causing bodies and minds to revolt and twist, and bleeding from the ears and mouth. A cultist must be able to speak to use this power, and a Thing must either invade a dream or be physically present to use the word. This power cannot be broadcast, recorded or amplified by any means and be effective. Furthermore, it does not harm the living dead, be they vampires, ghosts or walking dead. Anyone who is able to block all sound from his ears — or who is deaf — is immune to this power.

Example: Part 5

Looking over what he's got so far, Gary starts to stat out the Dirge Unsinging. He feels the Dirge is not itself active; he wants the focus of his stories to be on his antagonist rather than on the Thing, so Gary decides that the being has an Influence of only 3 (so that it can still send disturbing dreams to characters while they sleep). And yet, it is a massively Virulent creature. Its powers are a perverted part of natural reality, as inescapable as death. Gary gives the entity a Virulence of 10, meaning it is very challenging to uproot its powers or to strip its followers of abilities through banishment. Gary then thinks long and hard about giving his creation a fitting vulnerability. His first instinct is to not do so, but then he considers that in order to learn about the being, characters will need to confront it and will deserve a reward for their suffering. Gary decides that the Thing is weak in the presence of the hymns of a faithful person — anyone who has a Morality of 8 or higher and who truly wants to help others.

Gary then considers endowments. He decides that his fallen hero's Flaw is to gain no powers from the Dirge Unsinging, but he has access to rites of all levels thanks to five dots in Cult of Things That Must Not Be. Gary decides Elar'ndi has no children or manifestations, so there are no summoning rites. There is, however, a mythical level six rite, The Sunset Strain of Sin and Sorrow, that the fallen hero strives to uncover so that he might bring about the end of the world. To compensate for the antagonist's Flaw, Gary assigns him four rites at levels one through three, three rites at level four and two rites at level five.

The Blasphemous Cult

With your villain and Thing created, it's time to develop the conspiracy and madness that surrounds the two in the form of a cult. It's probably the cult that triggers interaction between the villain, the Thing and the rest of the world (the players' characters included). The cult's violation and degradation opens a dialogue of evil between the protagonists and the antagonist. Cults give characters layers of mystery and conflict to uncover, letting investigators win occasional victories over foes they can understand and deal with, slowly revealing the true scope and terror of the situation. While the villain waits at the center of the web, and the Thing lurks

beyond the bounds of mortal thought, the cult threatens characters in their homes and jobs, infiltrating social circles, sacrificing pets and letting protagonists engage in the story without having to face unimaginable cosmic evil in the first act. Members of a cult are the last link in completing the chain from humanity to horror and back to humanity.

What theme and image defines your cult? That is, what does the group look and feel like? The band is the herald of your villain and entity. By interacting with circle members, players' characters get a sense of who and what looms on the horizon. Villains with origins in hatred and nihilism have cults focused on anger and revulsion, while those with origins in lust and incest have cults based on family and its corruption. The rites and identity of your cult should also be colored by the Thing that presides over it. Followers of an alien god worshiped in ancient Egypt may mummify their fallen and venerate jackal imagery. It's no surprise, then, that the cult's leader is a headdress-bearing high priest. The cult therefore brings the worlds of the antagonist and protagonists into conflict, prepares characters for the villain and gives them a chance to research and grasp the threat posed by your deity.

The cult also acts as an important tool for the villain, be she fallen hero or malefactor, giving her the ability to reach beyond her personal limitations. Cult members may have access to abilities that the villain does not possess, and extend her sway in the outside world, perhaps through technology, muscle or wealth.

To what tools does your cult have access? This includes money, manpower, status and the rites and powers of the group's god. There are two steps to measuring influence: deciding how much the cult as a whole has and how much each individual member can access. The first part is done by creating a Cult Resources Pool, the second by assigning each cultist dots in the Cult of Things That Must Not Be Merit (see p. 137).

The Cult Resources Pool is collective standing and affluence. The Pool is represented by assigning the group a number of shared dots in Social Merits. A minor cult with little power beyond its own willingness to do evil and ability to do harm may have only a few dots. A mid-sized group might have up to a half-dozen dots of Merits to share. A large circle may have a dozen dots. These dots usually go into Resources, Allies, Contacts, Retainers and Status. The Cult Resources Pool also includes all of the rites and powers that a Thing makes available to cult members, as determined when creating the entity. However, cultists can access only levels of rites equal to their dots in Cult of Things That Must Not Be, and get powers only if they have sufficient standing based on the manner in which their lord bestows powers (see "Endowments by Type," p. 138).

Most cults also have a certain number of enemies; those who have reason to hate or mistrust them. These opponents can be ancient orders sworn to stop such infernalists, rival groups or just individuals who have been harmed by cult activity. The primary purpose of these enemies is to give the characters allies and leads into the group and its activities. It's therefore important that each cult has at least a single individual who knows something of its existence, and who has reason to hate or fear the group, so that protagonists

can be hooked into providing help.

Once you know what your cult as a whole is capable of, each member can be rated by her dots in the Cult of Things That Must Not Be Merit.

Outsiders and Cult Merits

It's possible for an outsider to infiltrate a cult and gain access to the group's Cult Resources Pool. The intruder must successfully gain access to — and the trust of — the cult, and be introduced to the facilities the circle has available. At that point, a player is free to purchase dots of the Cult of Things That Must Not Be Merit as normal, but no higher than ••. The Storyteller may also want to assign the character the Social Flaw: Double Agent. Characters who go this route should be aware that they tread on very dangerous ground, as the madmen whom they dupe will destroy them — or worse — without hesitation. Not to mention that spending too much time in the cult may drive a character mad

Double Agent Social Flaw: Your character is an infiltrator in a dangerous organization, seeming to work for it while spying for someone else. If the organization finds him out, the best your character can hope for is losing his position and all the value gained from holding it. More likely, exposure means the organization tries to kill your character or set him up to take a fall, whether bodily or spiritually. An experience point is gained whenever your character endangers his cover or compromises his true beliefs or goals in order to maintain his cover. Extra experience points can be awarded if the secret gets out, at which time this Flaw is void and your character is hunted by his former allies.

The Solo Cultist

Sometimes, Storytellers may want to tell a very focused, short-run story that focuses heavily on a villain — putting her in direct confrontation with players' characters from the start. Such a story is probably personal, as there is no cult to mitigate or slowly reveal the evil; everything addresses the antagonist. Such a story derives much of its horror from shock and direct confrontation rather than from a slow unraveling of mystery and subversion. You can make your antagonist a cult of one. The levels of rites and powers to which she has access are based on the Reality Blasphemy Merit. In this case, the antagonist *may* gain powers from the trait due to her special and direct connection to her lord.

Example: Part 6

Gary turns his attention to the cult that follows his fallen hero. He decides that members are the remains of the support group to which his antagonist turned after his wife died. In time, the villain's pain became theirs, and they were dragged into the darkness by his force of charisma and in search of their own release. Unlike the villain, however, not all cultists have remained noble in the face of their blasphemy and transgression. Many have become

abusive and self-indulgent, using their rites to spread harm even as they serve the antagonist and search for the ritual that will end the world.

Gary decides that many cult members are businessmen, with a few blue-collar professionals. Some maintain their jobs and real lives, using them as fronts to do their wicked work. Gary makes the cult middle to large in size, with nine Merit dots to share. He allocates the Cult Resource Pool in this way:

Resources ••••: The cult has several wealthy members who have contributed homes, cars and cash, giving the group a large amount of money on which to draw.

Contacts ••: The cult has relationships among software designers and dock workers, the two largest circles from which members originate.

Status •••: Some members are licensed professionals and can invoke attorney-client privilege or legally acquire demolition gear.

Rites and Powers: Gary adds the list of rites that the Dirge Unsinging offers.

Gary decides the cult has a few enemies in the computer industry — people who were burned by white-collar members of the group, and who have growing reason to believe that something underhanded was involved in their misfortune. He also decides that the old psychologist who mediated the help group keeps an eye on members, watching with horror at what they have become. He is now afraid for his life and seeks a way to stop the cult before it's too late.

Finally, Gary decides that his fallen hero is the only member of the cult who has walked far down the path of blasphemous rites. He has five dots in the Cult of Things That Must Not Be Merit while the others have no more than two or three to represent their focus on more prosaic matters such as business and acquisition. Going this route, Gary hopes to make the cult akin to his fallen hero — still bound to goals from previous life, but tarnished nonetheless by a new, wayward calling.

The End of Causality

By now, you've probably created a villain as a fully fleshed-out character. Her experience depends on how much of a threat she, her supporters and her patron god are meant to be to the players' characters. If she'll face off against five trained characters, for example, she may be made with heroic experience points. If, however, your antagonist is meant to be primarily a background element and/or a semi-sympathetic

character who will rarely threaten the protagonists directly, you may start her with only a seasoned degree of experience. Also remember that the villain has access to her cult's materials and services, so you can save on dots by having her cult provide a broad base of capabilities.

Individual cultists can also be rounded out as full Storyteller characters if they'll serve an important story function. Any named and unique character is probably worth taking time on. Many other cultists will be much the same as each other — recruited from various backgrounds and driven toward mad unity by the unnatural worship of a perverted deity. They can be represented by stock character profiles, either made by you or taken from books such as *Antagonists* or the *World of Darkness Rulebook*.

After all that, the hard work is done and it's time to let your imagination run free. Chronicles about reality-bending horrors are both visceral and psychological, getting at the deepest roots of human fears and desires. Now is your chance to kick over a proverbial log to see what squirming, writhing creatures lurk underneath. Generate ideas, horrible concepts full of violation, victimization and terror. Think of scenes based on uncertainty, on things lurking just beyond the corner of the eye that can kill when not seen, and that can drive mortals mad when witnessed straight on. Everything in this type of story should be horrid and portentous. Not knowing leaves one alone in the dark: stalked, raped, devoured, helpless. But finding out the truth can be even worse, driving one mad with visions of eons of hatred and defilement, knowledge that nothing in the universe is safe or sane, or ever can be.

Dream up horrid ways of putting the players' characters between the hammer of the villain and the anvil of their need to stop her alien god. There needs to be good reason for them to tangle with such terrifying forces. Entangle their families and loved ones in the tendrils of a cult. Search out their greatest fears and Vices and use them as a goad to launch the characters into action. Give them reason to fear the night, and more reason to fear staying inside where it seems safe. Invoke reasons to drive the protagonists to paranoia and fearful huddling, or to confront the stark face of reality's brutal, callus nature.

Above all else, stories of reality-bending horrors are about violation. Everything that we consider sacred or certain is stripped away and shown to be a lie. We learn that all the worst, most debased and vile instincts and impulses the human mind can conceive are truer than the delusions of nobility and honor that we try to uphold. People lose their minds in these stories. They're driven to pull away their own skin with eager, plucking fingers so that others may feast upon the maggots that crawl through their subcutaneous muscles. This is the hammer.

For all of that story potential, however, reality-bending tales do not have to be exclusively about the unredeemable and unregenerate. Sure, those fates can be reserved for villains, but the players' characters have a chance to rise above, to look upon the mucous of evil that is as much a part of their world as the sun or the moon and still find something noble in themselves, something worth fighting for. This hope, this nobility, this chance for heroism is the anvil.





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Appendix: What You Wilt

It is remarkable by how much a pinch of malice enhances the penetrating power of an idea or an opinion. Our ears, it seems, are wonderfully attuned to sneers and evil reports about our fellow men.

— Eric Hoffer

This is a story about supernatural power and earthly consequences. Because this story is set in the World of Darkness, the power is mysterious and dangerous, and the consequences are morally ambiguous and potentially horrific. Because the protagonists of this story are your players' characters, the power — and its consequences — are theirs.

The Short of It

That gray-haired, panhandling weirdo in the ratty tweed suit and fingerless gloves has real power. He just doesn't know it, not anymore. He rarely leaves the subway system, so he doesn't see that passengers do the horrible things they think about. He doesn't know his visions for the future come to pass. He hasn't seen the way his power warps the minds, bodies and lives of others.

Like the lice in his hair and the bitter body odor of his tattered coat, the old man's power lingers and spreads. It's contagious. Tonight, the characters catch it.

The Power — intentionally capitalized, because it has no other name — can't be controlled, but can be influenced. As the characters struggle to make sense of the visions and voices they experience, they must choose whether to resist or assist the Power, to fight or succumb. They soon gain new insight into the terrible things their friends and neighbors are capable of, and how the characters are not so different themselves. What do they do with the Power? What gives them the right to use it?

Over time, the ebbing force of this strange effect puts the characters into difficult and dangerous situations. How does the Power change them and the way they see each other? Do they end up deranged and alone, like the old man, or do they struggle to stay together — and sane? That depends on the choices they make, what they do with the Power and what they do to affect its influence.

Reading This Story

There is no story. Not yet, anyway. What you have here is a collection of situations and settings that describe the general plot that a story could follow, but the story itself doesn't exist until you and your players tell it.

While you're reading this chapter, you'll infer a story — or several stories — from the possible scenes. Your imagined story serves as a guide when you get your players together. The story you actually tell collectively is another, with no obligation to imitate the one you imagined.

Though this chapter is broken down into acts, which have an important and intuitive order, the scenes within do not have to occur in the order presented. The acts occur in order almost naturally (at least they should), but the order and outcome of each scene depends on the choices players make.

Using This Story

"What You Wilt" is designed for any Storyteller, whether you're running a fledgling chronicle based on nothing but mortal characters, or a series already infused with the supernatural, such as for **Mage**. As written, this story assumes completely mundane protagonists with a bare immersion in bizarre psychic or mystic powers.

The phenomenon at the heart of events is not a psychic gift or a magical spell unless you want it to interact closely with such abilities. The Power might be seen as a reality-bending MacGuffin, on par with the dangerous phenomena of Chapter 4. This story introduces another supernatural effect beyond those the characters wield, showing them there are yet other secrets to the world. More than anything else, this story raises the questions at the heart of this book, challenging players to decide whether they really want their characters to have access to unnatural abilities and guiding you in the telling of stories that give characters newfound talents.

Breaking It Up

You can play “What You Wilt” straight through as a single story, with one act leading directly into the next, or you can break the story up and use it as a larger story arc or ongoing plot, a backdrop subplot for a whole chronicle. Simply include one scene related to the Power in any other story you’re telling, drawing from each of the three acts in order. Each act can be separated by weeks or even months of game time without difficulty. In fact, this story may feel more powerful if the final, fatal choice it demands marks the end of a subplot the characters have been following for a while.

Telling the Story

This story about a conflict between two wills: that of the Power and that of its host. Sometimes the wants and motives of the two coincide. Other times they’re directly opposed. It’s the struggle, the ongoing series of temporary victories and losses that makes up the story. As the characters react to the Power, it reacts to them. As long as the Power and the characters vie, whether in the foreground or in the background, the story continues.

In place of a set number of specific scenes, play a number of variations on the core scene (described below) as necessary, drawing from the possibilities sketched out and creating new ones as necessary. It’s easy: create a subject on which the Power focuses, make the host decide what to do with the Power and then decide the consequences of the Power’s use (both for host and target). As long as variations on the core scene continue to challenge and interest the characters (and players!), the story can continue.

The key is preparation. Prepare to improvise. Prepare to react to the characters’ choices. Your job is to challenge the characters’ moral position again and again, ramping up dramatic tension and raising the stakes each time the Power shows itself. Don’t drive events from one act to the next. This story will progress naturally. Once the characters have the Power,

the first act is over. The second act lasts as long as dramatic questions continue to arise — it might be three scenes or it might be 10. The second act ends when the characters decide to get the Power out of their lives, or when they finally accept it. The third act explores the consequences of their choice.

Take the energy you would otherwise expend on tending to the plot and put the energy into building and maintaining dramatic tension. Focus on making each scene emotional and captivating. Focus on the enraged face of a would-be murderer as he is ferreted out by the Power and its host. Focus on the dizzying nausea the characters feel when they read in the paper how that stranger on the train went on to kill his family just as the Power foretold. Put your efforts into the moment when the characters give in, surrendering their will to the Power, consciously choosing to ignore the misery it inspires or to do its bidding.

The Power

It has no name. It has no history. It simply is.

Born in the psychic crucible of a deranged man’s mind, the Power is a unique force capable of causing great anguish, and being sensitive to trauma caused to the human psyche by sin. The Power is almost a creature itself, almost alive, as fire is alive. The Power wants, consumes, reacts and burns. Give it fuel and it flares up. The Power’s oxygen is sin. Its wick is the will of its host.

The deranged man, Mulcahey, used to be able to contain the Power, at least to a certain extent. As he has aged, however, his grip on the Power has weakened. Now the Power doesn’t just affect others, it spreads to other minds. As it spreads, it burns itself out. The exception, of course, lies with Mulcahey himself. Even though he’s weak, the Power is strong. Even though it spreads, its presence within Mulcahey’s mind doesn’t diminish.

The Power senses sin before it happens, in hearts and minds nearby. This sense is precognitive, not telepathic. The Power hears the rumbling of a future sin or crime as it draws near, like thunder. But those ridden by the Power don’t have any way of knowing that for certain. A host may believe the Power eavesdrops on minds, overhearing murderous intentions and desires to which future killers are deaf. All a host knows is something horrible is going to happen soon, and someone nearby will be the perpetrator.

The Power reacts to this anticipation of sin as a forest fire responds to wind. The Power grows hot, leaps and burns. Unless the one who possesses it can contain it, the Power does terrible damage to those nearby, withering a person’s mind, body or spirit.

How It Works

The Power cannot be controlled, only enabled or resisted. It draws its strength from a host, but is capable of hurting its bearer and target alike if it slips out of control. A host doesn’t sic the Power on enemies. She only decides to let the Power slip its leash or risk having it turn on her.

The psychic telemetry of the Power relays base, shameful feelings that reek of sin from people nearby to the host, but the Power isn't a bloodhound. It can't follow a scent and track the sinful. It knows that someone nearby is going to do something terrible, but not exactly who. It's like the reek of body odor on a train — the smell is undeniable but the source is unclear.

That waft of sin comes to the host in a vision rife with details, but short on perspective. The pall of a future murder might come to a host as a jolt of pleading screams, as a dizzying feeling as one scrambles on blood-slick hands and knees, or as the sickening pressure of a wrist forcing a knife through wool and into flesh. The metallic stink of a gunshot might come to the host on a crowded elevator. He might feel the warm ache in his knuckles that comes from drunken vengeance, or be blinded by the bursting glare of a lamp as it jams into bone.

The Power knows that someone nearby is about to turn murderer, even though the murderer himself might not know it. What the host isn't likely to see is who or why. Even the glimpse of a wild-eyed victim, mouth dripping blood, pleading isn't much help unless the host recognizes the victim. To understand which future sinner is the source of the vision, a host needs to investigate.

But the Power doesn't always allow time for that. The Power reacts to the scent of sin with a supernatural attack. All the host can hope to do is aim it. If the Power reacts before the host can determine who it *should* attack, then all the host can do is decide who it *does* attack.

The Power grants no special ability to select morally acceptable targets, because the Power has no morality. How a character makes his choice, who he chooses to hurt and how he feels it about it are his problems.

Can a person even be morally accountable for an action he has not yet performed? What if the Power is wrong? These questions plague hosts, not the Power. Once the Power has decided to attack, it can't be stopped.

Game Mechanics

A character who's host to the Power cannot invoke it. It isn't *his* power; the Power is its own. The Power hits the host with visions of sin, and he reacts with an emotional judgment. The Power uses that emotional surge to lash out.

When the Power surges, the host must choose whether to oppose it or assist it. Either way, the host reflexively loses a point of Willpower, consumed by the supernatural effort. This point of Willpower affects the Power in one of two ways:

- If spent to assist the phenomenon, the point adds three dice to the Power's dice pool to affect a subject. This assistance doesn't necessarily reflect the host's active, passionate contribution, just the absence of resistance. If the host doesn't specifically use his Willpower as a net to hinder the Power — by consciously stopping himself from thinking vengeful or judgmental thoughts — the Power uses his Willpower as a springboard. See "The Power's Effect," below.

- If the point is spent to oppose the Power, the point effectively adds two to the value of the subject's relevant

Resistance Trait. The host must intentionally seek to turn from ill thoughts or to talk himself down from a sudden judgment or anger. The subject of a vision doesn't feel "a rush of health" or any other effect of the bonus to her Resistance trait. It's more as if the host increases the "drag" on the Power as it leaves his psyche.

The Power has only one Trait — a dice pool that begins with nine dice. For hosts (not Mulcahey), this pool decreases by one every time the Power activates. Thus, the first time the Power manifests it's unmodified dice pool is 9. The second time it manifests the unmodified dice pool is 8, and so on.

Power Visions

The visions received by a host come solely at your discretion. A character cannot "reach out" with the Power's sense or scan the minds of those nearby. A character might goad the Power into allowing him to use it on a particular subject, but no game mechanics exist to regulate this effort. The Power chooses to respond or not according to its own will (as determined by you). A *player* may encourage the Storyteller to include the Power in a particular scene for the sake of drama, but characters cannot go digging into nearby hearts for a prize-winning sin to judge.

Not every vision is followed by an immediate surge. The Power may show a character a vision without attempting a follow-up assault, though this is rare. More often, the Power relays a vision and then waits to surge until the character has selected a target. Other times, the Power delivers a vision followed immediately by a vengeful surge, which the host must direct without preparation or consideration.

As a rule of thumb, the more immoral the act anticipated, the more horrifically vivid the vision. At the Storyteller's discretion, a host may attempt to glean extra details from a vision when it's experienced, to help him choose the right target. Doing so requires a reflexive Wits + Composure roll. Each success on the roll reveals a memorable detail, up to a maximum of five. The nature of the sin grants a bonus to this roll.

Morality Equivalent of the Sin	Bonus Dice
5	+1
4	+1
3	+2
2	+2
1	+3

The Power's Effect

Dice Pool: 9 (or less) – the subject's Resolve, Stamina or Composure. (This dice pool is always affected by Willpower expenditure, either favoring the Power or the subject.)

Action: Reflexive

Unimpeded by a host's will, the Power makes a supernatural attack on its supposedly sinful subject. Depending on the nature of the sin that stirs the Power and the host's reaction, the Power targets the subject's Resolve, Stamina or Composure. If, for example, the host wishes the subject would give up on his evil course, the Power targets Resolve.



If the host thinks the subject should be ashamed of himself, the Power targets Composure. If the host hopes “that bastard gets the chair,” the Power probably targets Stamina.

The Power’s attack consists of overwhelming feelings of guilt, self-loathing and desperation imported from the future, as if the subject had just performed his crime, and occurs even if he isn’t usually the type to feel shame. The subject has only the vaguest sense of the sort of event from which these feelings derive — “It felt like my son was dead,” not “I felt like I beat my son to death,” for example. Hopefully, the subject recalls these feelings when he later encounters the impulse to commit the crime.

Dramatic Failure: The Power’s psychic pressure doesn’t manage to escape the host’s mind. His sanity is shaken by horrible thoughts he felt from (and for) the subject. A degeneration roll is made based on a sin of impassioned crime (three dice) or planned crime (two dice), depending on your assessment of the sinner’s motives. If the roll fails, the host suffers either the Melancholia or Schizophrenia derangement for a number of days equal to 10 minus his Resolve. Morality is not lost by the host from this effect.

Failure: The Power’s psychic pressure fails to affect the subject. A degeneration roll may be required for the host as with a dramatic failure. The Storyteller decides, maybe for the roll because the host knows an intended subject and is aware of his past sins, or against the roll because the host has no idea who a subject is and is less inclined to judge her.

Success: Each success on the Power’s roll reduces the subject’s targeted Attribute — Resolve, Stamina or Compo-

sure — by one dot, to a minimum of zero. Excess successes reduce the subject’s Willpower points (for Composure and Resolve attacks) or cause lethal damage (for Stamina attacks) on a one-for-one basis. See p. 43 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for information on Attributes reduced to zero. The effects of a completely negated Attribute are also exaggerated by the Power’s supernatural potency.

A subject with no Resolve becomes dangerously depressed and potentially suicidal. If the subject consciously considered or outright planned to commit a crime ranked two or more steps below his own Morality, he is likely to take his own life if the means are immediately available. A victim with no Resolve doesn’t think through the ramifications of such a choice, and moves with cold detachment toward his end unless stopped.

A subject with no Stamina is wracked by fits of coughing and is unable to catch his breath. The victim must commit an instant action to speak and cannot breathe without first-aid assistance. The subject immediately suffers any damage from diseases, drugs, toxins or other effects he may have been fighting (whether knowingly or unknowingly). With the subject’s Health reduced by his loss of Stamina, even common afflictions could prove fatal.

A subject with no Composure suffers an abrupt emotional breakdown. Just as with the target of a Resolve attack, the victim may become suicidal. Whereas a character with no Resolve turns cold and potentially difficult to recognize as suicidal, a character with no Composure is panicky, hysterical and difficult to restrain.

Attribute damage caused by the Power heals as if the damage were bashing damage, at the rate of one dot every 15 minutes. Once a subject has healed at least one dot, the exaggerated effects of negated traits pass.

Exceptional Success: Per a normal success, but the Attribute damage caused heals as if it were lethal damage, at the rate of one dot every two days.

Power Migration

After any surge, successful or not, the Power may attempt to migrate from one host to another. The Power might move because the current host is incapacitated or because he no longer supplies a desired rush of emotion. Or maybe he fights the power too often. Migrating requires the Power to escape from a host's psychic gravity. Roll the Power's current dice pool (before it's reduced by one for a subsequent use). The roll is contested by a host's Resolve + Composure. If the Power wins, it flees. If the host wins, he decides whether the Power must stay or may depart.

The fleeing Power doesn't just disappear. It always migrates to a new host, never further than a number of yards equal to 10 + its remaining dice pool. The Power's destination may be another player's character or even the Power's latest victim. The Power's potency remains what it was when the Power migrated — at the same depleted dice pool, rather than being restored to nine with a new host.

A potential new host has no chance to repel the Power — such a roll would effectively be a test to avoid participating in the story. Use the Power's migration ability to keep players interested and involved in events, being careful not to frustrate or antagonize them.

What It Feels Like

The Power has no voice, but after the first vision it's easy to sense its presence. The Power feels like the chemical haze of cold medicine, the hot aura before the pain of sunburn or the warm buzz of potent Scotch. Not everyone feels it the same way, but every host feels it. What all sensations of the Power have in common is an intuitive gauge of intensity. It's like knowing a buzz is fading. As the dice pool of the Power diminishes through use, the host feels less of its presence. After the Power's first use, and its slight cooling, a host begins to make sense of the feeling. When the Power is finally gone, a host understands just how much of what he was feeling came from outside. Most pine for it afterward, like lost euphoria.

The feeling of an imminent attack is an undeniable but imprecise awfulness, like the skull-bending weight of a headache on the eyes, the breathless chill of a panic attack or the churning pump of a stomach in panic. The feeling often comes with a hot wash of nausea just before the gruesome experience of a Power vision. A host may feel as if her head is full of helium, pulling against gravity. Some experience a sharp pressure beneath the breastbone. Others feel sore or stretched all over. When the Power's surge

reaches its peak, it's like holding back a mouthful of vomit. All the host can do is decide where it splatters.

Player versus Character Choice

Strictly speaking, players — not characters — choose who the Power affects. The pressure of continuing the story should be enough to persuade most players to make quick selections. If not, *players* may choose subjects randomly when the Power rears, but *characters* don't have such a luxury. What's random in the real world might be construed as a character's subconscious in the game world. Randomization doesn't free a character of moral ramifications, since he could spare a subconsciously chosen victim by selecting someone else. A character can choose to spare himself a conscious decision, but that's cold in its own way.

The Power Is a Character

The Power is the true antagonist of this story. It is partial and unfair. It has no need to cooperate, only occasional reason to do so. It is selfish and gluttonous, without regret and without doubt. Such wavering feelings are the purview of a host. The Power wants only to affect people. It has no allegiance and no loyalty.

Part of the mystery of this story is unraveling just how the Power works, and how responsible hosts are for the things it does. The mystical and moral questions don't ultimately matter to characters, though, unless something is at stake for them. The Power must target subjects whom characters care about, whether strangers or family. A character's direction of the Power must be given real consequence on the Morality chart. He is an accomplice to every harmful deed that the Power commits, from breaking the heart of an innocent man to weakening the heart of a would-be murderer and causing his death.

As Storyteller, remember that the Power works for you. Use it to put characters in tough positions where they must make difficult choices. The Power may offer its host a few easy uses — shaking the Resolve of a genuine killer — but that's just a trick to get a host back on its side, to make him feel righteous in his use of it, and to be complicit the next time.

Mulcahey, the Old Man

Quote: (To himself) *"You haven't been to California, but you was in Los Angeles once. When that doctor gets on, change cars."*

You don't speak Russian. Remember, you don't speak Russian."

Background: It's like schizophrenia, part of it may even be schizophrenia, but he has no way to tell anymore what he did and what somebody else did. Maybe he was in Thailand for a while, and he's pretty sure he's been to India, but all that stuff in California and Europe belongs to other people. His father was from Goa, maybe, but his mother was American, he thinks. He's pretty sure he didn't do what he remembers doing the last few years, but he can't be sure when he got on the train, or remember when he last left it. How long's it been?

Description: Vaguely foreign features and the faint edge of a worn-down accent suggest the influence of big-city India or British ex-patriotism. A beleaguered face and sharp, gray stubble puts him between 60 and 70. Though he's bundled in a tweed sport coat and layers of disintegrating sweat jackets, he's often barefoot. His casual, meditative posture makes him look like a mendicant ascetic or post-modern fakir. When he smiles, he shows off straight American teeth going yellow from vending-machine coffee.

Storytelling Hints: Mulcahey is crazy, but he's not a screaming lunatic. There's enough of his rational mind left to know that he's ill, but his withered judgment puts all his energy into staying civil and avoiding pity rather than seeking help. With little concept of time and a terrible fear that he should feel guilty for some of the things he half-remembers, his life has become a routine of train

rides, underground vending machines and mumbled mantras to keep unwanted memories away. On one hand, he's polite and gentle, and waits for something to happen but doesn't know what. On the other hand, he's defensive, proud and afraid that something is about to happen but doesn't know what.

Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Skills: Academics (Anthropology) 3, Animal Ken 1, Athletics 1, Crafts (Sewing) 2, Drive 1, Empathy 4, Expression 1, Investigation 3, Larceny 2, Medicine 1, Persuasion 2, Politics 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2, Survival 2

Merits: Danger Sense, Language (French, Korean) 2, Iron Stomach, The Power

Willpower: 5

Morality: 3 (Schizophrenia at 5)

Virtue: Fortitude. Mulcahey was brought up to endure without complaint. The ability to carry on is a sign of maturity. It's what men do.

Vice: Pride. To seek help would mean that not only can he not take care of himself, but he can't even contain his own problems like an adult. He accepts his fate like a man.

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 7 (Flaw: Lame)

Health: 8

Mulcahey's Power: Mulcahey's particular version of the



Power doesn't operate exactly according to the mechanics described above. His Power's dice pool doesn't decrease. Its dice pool is always nine. Also, the Power does not "jump" from Mulcahey. Instead, it replicates itself, creating a new instance of itself at full strength in a nearby host, as described in the scene of act one called "Bestowed."

Act One

The first act opens with the players' characters undergoing some regular part of their day: a train ride to work, a wait at an expressway off-ramp, a walk to a regular lunch spot. All that's essential is that they're exposed to Mulcahey in a way that's not plainly intrusive. Maybe he's riding the train to stay warm, he's rattling a cup at the off-ramp or he's sitting on the sidewalk outside the restaurant.

Before jumping directly into the scene below, think about foreshadowing events by putting Mulcahey into the background of a story or two beforehand. Establish him as a mumbling old man on the edge of a character's routine, just another suffering soul making up the scenery of the World of Darkness, without drawing too much attention to him. This makes his presence in the current scene less of an obvious clue to trouble.

Storyteller Characters

The supporting cast of this story is left blank. Except for the players' characters, Mulcahey and the Power itself, every other cast member is important only to the main characters. You know your players and their characters, so it's your job to cast supporting roles — the Victim, the Suspect, the Other Man — with details to which *your* players will respond.

Scene: Bystanders

The scene that begins it all puts the characters near Mulcahey when the Power surges from him and breaks the Composure of a third party ("the Victim"). From the characters' perspective, the Victim suddenly pops out of the background when she collapses on the train (or in line for coffee, or whatever fits). She goes into shrieking fits of hysteria like a mother who's just lost her child. She's nonsensical and trembles with shame, punching herself in the stomach or scratching at her face. She has no idea why as little as an hour later — she thought her son had died, but doesn't know where she got that idea. Her son is fine.

The Power knew she was going to throw her 14-year-old son out on the street that night for stealing a bike, and Mulcahey helped the Power along.

To create a longer build-up before the characters

receive the Power for themselves, hide Mulcahey's connection to the Victim's hysteria, describing him as a part of the scene but not drawing attention to him. This lets you reveal Mulcahey's connection to the Power gradually over the rest of the story, holding off players' suspicion until you more fully reveal him.

If you're less concerned about maintaining the mystery of the Power's source, make Mulcahey a clear part of the scene. Maybe he stares crazily at the Victim before her emotional collapse, or he asks her for money and is rudely turned away ("Don't talk to me, asshole!"). However you choose to do it, describe some clear interaction between Mulcahey and the Victim just before her breakdown if you want to throw suspicion on the old man now.

This scene can be played as an isolated, strange encounter or as the precipitating event of a larger investigation, depending on how meddlesome the characters are. The Victim's life turns out to be a non-story, though — her early grief tempers her rage when she finds the stolen bike that night.

The real purpose of this scene is to expose the characters to the Power. When the Power lashes out at the Victim, it also recreates itself in one of the players' characters.

Scene: Bestowed

One character now has the Power, but doesn't know it. Show her. In this scene, she gets her first Power vision and either enables or opposes it.

To preserve some mystery, set this scene away from the first. If the first scene took place in line for coffee that morning, this one takes place that night, maybe in line at the ATM. Consider putting an innocuous, mundane scene or the events of another story between these two, to dilute suspicion and reinforce the feeling that all happens in an ordinary day.

For this scene, keep the number of Storyteller characters to one — the person ("the Suspect") whom the new host affects. All the players' characters may be present, but bystanders are a complication you don't need.

In an isolated area with a lone Suspect, the host gets her first Power vision: A pleading, weeping person is curled on a floor, protecting herself with her hands. Her face is bloody, her mouth webbed with teary snot. The host can hear the dull whack of a belt on flesh, and smell the leather. One end of the belt is curled around bruised knuckles — the same knuckles on the hands of the Suspect, which now holds a transit or ATM card, or pushes an elevator button.

Don't ask a player if she'd like to oppose or assist the Power. Describe to her the sickening vision and the sudden, irrational disgust her character has for the scumbag before her — whose whole demeanor says "spouse-beater" — and then ask what the character does with those feelings. Gauge the character's opposition or support for the Power's intentions. If the character's position seems borderline, talk it out with the player, but get an honest, in-character emotional reaction.

It's important that the first use of the Power involve only a single Suspect. Clue the character into the existence and operation of the Power, requiring her to only under-

stand that she has it. The moral challenge of selecting victims for the Power comes in the second act.

To draw a parallel to earlier events for the characters, have the Power assault the Suspect's Composure. It's probably best to avoid a roll — just describe how the Suspect's hands shake as he wipes tears from his face. In a moment, he's on his knees with his face in his hands, a wreck, apologizing.

Pursue this scene as far as it goes. If the characters choose to get involved in the Suspect's life, go along with it. The time they spend with their first subject makes for an interesting contrast for the time they spend later on, when they've used the Power several more times, grown callous and perhaps relish it.

Act Two: Complications

The second act is where your knowledge of the players is most important. You have to riff on the core theme of the story, choosing whom to hit with the Power in ways that uniquely affect the characters and players. This is when the characters gradually learn how the Power works, and when they confront the dramatic questions inspired by it.

Is it morally acceptable to hurt this person whom you think is a criminal — or who will be a criminal? What about *that* person? Is this crime any worse than that one? Why do you need the Power to confront him — couldn't you treat him as an equal instead? Would you step up without the Power on your side? If you know something terrible is about to happen and you do nothing to stop it, are you morally accountable? Are you exempt from moral consequences for an intervention that's as cruel and brutal as the crime? If it's acceptable to use the Power to punish the wicked, then why do you feel so horrible afterward?

The Core Scene

The essential scene of this story is implicit in the mechanics of the Power. A character must choose who the Power assaults and then live with the consequences of that decision. You'll use this scene time and again throughout the second act, as the Power gradually depletes its dice pool over multiple applications. Here are several variations to get you started:

- A Power vision comes while the host is on a crowded train, surrounded by strangers. It's unclear who the subject of the vision is, but the Power is going to go off soon. The character must choose the Power's target. Is it the Hispanic tough guy with the snake tattoos, the old lady with the four-footed cane, the yuppie executive loud-mouthing on her cell phone, the miserable retail clerk picking his teeth or the hipster-bohemian in the giant headphones? In one variation on this scene, the character has just seconds to decide. In another, she has maybe an hour to investigate

these strangers and make (or rationalize) her decision. On what does she really judge these people?

- The first time a host causes the suicide of someone is a special event all its own. How does the relationship between the characters and the Power change when they discover it's lethal?

- The host is assaulted in the street, either by thieves or drunkards, but the Power never responds. How does the character feel when the rage and moral judgment are all his own? How does he feel when he recognizes he actually relied on the Power? Does he feel betrayed when it doesn't come to his "rescue"?

- The host aids the Power in its assault on a lone stranger, but later discovers that the subject went on to commit his terrible crime anyway. Does the character abandon the Power if it's fallible?

- The only way to test the accuracy of the Power is to refrain from using it on a suspected sinner. To do that, the character must intentionally target an innocent person with an assault and see if a true suspect does indeed commit a foretold crime. What does the character do when his suspect still hasn't committed a predicted crime after a day? Two days? A week? How does the character feel when the innocent subject of a surge is left devastated?

Scene: Blowback

Just as vital as a core scene is its follow-up scene, in which you explore the consequences of using the Power. While at a bar, a host sees on a muted television that someone has been arrested for the crime the host foresaw, and that isn't the person he punished. The person assaulted by the Power is on the train with the host every day, a wheezing reminder of what happened. The characters attend the funeral of a person induced to commit suicide.

By separating the consequences to the characters' Morality into a scene separate from the act of punishment itself, you create suspense and a sense of retrospective detachment. As they say, it's not whether you can pull the trigger, it's whether you can sleep at night afterward.

Remember that the game's Morality scale is intentionally generalized. In the opinion of you and your players, what is the magnitude of the sin of breaking someone's heart or driving them to suicide? Of accidentally enabling a supernatural power to kill? Is it the same as being an accomplice to murder? Is it murder? How do the circumstances of individual scenes change your answers to these questions? Remember, it doesn't matter who "had it coming" in the Hierarchy of Sin. All that matters is how you live with it.

Getting the Power Back

Ultimately, the characters are going to lose the Power, whether through its migration or by depleting its dice pool to zero. For the story to continue, the Power must find them again. For the story to end now, the characters must consciously choose to not continue any interaction with or

investigation of the Power (see “Denial of Power,” below).

If the characters already suspect Mulcahey has some link to it, they might go in search of him. If not, it's during this act that you should reveal his relationship with the Power so characters know he's a vital piece of the puzzle. Play a variation on the “Bystander” scene, this time with serious emphasis on the old man. The characters might see Mulcahey shuffling up the aisle between subway passengers, scrutinizing each one. When he finally takes his seat at the end of the car, one of the passengers collapses, gasping for air in the aisle. The homeless man's contribution to the characters' own experiences becomes implicit.

If the characters avoid Mulcahey, the Power can find its way back to them through a host and a dramatic coincidence, as in the following scene.

Scene: Powermerger

Even if the characters choose to avoid the Power early in the story, they're not necessarily free of it. While riding a different train or getting lunch far from Mulcahey, they bear witness to a variation of the “Bystander” scene, except this time Mulcahey's nowhere to be found. Someone else is using the Power — the Other Man, someone off the street who's received the Power accidentally. When the Other Man uses the Power, it migrates back to one of the characters with five or six dice left in its pool.

To make the Other Man impossible to ignore, make one of the players' characters his target. Force the players to decide how they feel being traumatized and humiliated for something they haven't yet done. How do they like being on the receiving end of the Power?

Act Three: Resolution

The end of this story may or may not involve the end of the Power. If the characters choose to keep dealing with the phenomenon, this story bleeds into the rest of your chronicle rather than coming to a conclusion. That's fine.

You can give the story satisfactory closure by playing out an epilogue scene that shows how the Power has irrevocably changed the characters' lives, even if their relationship with it isn't over. For your troupe, “What You Wilt” may end up being the story of how the characters came to live with the Power, or how they killed the Power or how one character's marriage fell apart. Whatever the consequences of the characters' actions are, they are revealed in this act.

Denial of Power

The characters flee the Power, denying themselves any further exposure to it. Unwilling to face Mulcahey or the Power again, they change their daily lifestyles to avoid it all. They adopt new routines that keep them away

from Mulcahey's train line (or circumvent his exit on the highway or avoid the coffeehouse where he panhandles). They surrender whole blocks of their city to the Power and change the way they live to escape it.

Put another way, they find the discipline to avoid the temptations of the Power. Though they no longer meddle with it, the characters find that they are more compassionate toward (or wary of, or disgusted with) their neighbors and coworkers than they were before, after glimpsing others' lives, futures and crimes.

If the Power enters their lives again, it's a sequel story, not a continuation of this one.

Destroying the Power

The characters choose to put a stop to the Power. They do something about Mulcahey to ensure that it's never used again. What they choose to do — and however they rationalize it — is up to them. Do they put the old man away? Do they use Contacts or Allies to have Mulcahey institutionalized? Even a pharmaceutical catatonia might not suppress the Power (if you don't want to let the characters off the hook).

Do they rescue Mulcahey? Is it possible that drugs or psychotherapy can return him to normalcy and neuter the Power? If one of the characters is a doctor, this is a great dramatic solution that also makes use of the Medicine Skill. Treating Mulcahey is an extended action that never ends. Twenty successes are needed each month to keep him powerless and stable; each Intelligence or Manipulation + Medicine roll represents a four-hour therapy session. Prescription drugs grant as much as a +3 bonus.

Do the characters put a permanent end to the Power by killing Mulcahey? How do they make peace with such a choice? Can they? The scenes in which they find Mulcahey, take him somewhere discreet and murder him can be gut wrenching. The scene in which one of them turns the Power on Mulcahey could be terrifyingly liberating. The scene in which they conspire to stage an “accidental death” could be tense to the extreme.

Whatever the characters do, these are not easy choices. They must take the Power head-on and either commit themselves to a long fight or to a long life of dealing with their decision.

Destroyed by the Power

The characters come to accept the Power as a part of their lives, possibly even becoming sickly dependent on it. They grow distant from their neighbors and the outside world. They spend days following a homeless man around in hopes that they'll catch a dose of his magic power. They no longer see strangers as anything other than “punishable” or “not yet punishable.” Their Morality erodes. They become ghastly vigilantes, riding the bus in search of hearts they can justify breaking or lives with which to gamble. The chronicle is never the same. This ending is a legacy you pass on to new, grim stories.

"Ordinary people don't know it,
but the world is shrouded in lies.
Immerse yourself in them, and you discover
that there are lies within lies.

There are things in our world, monsters hiding among us,
lurking in the shadows, preying upon us.
But there also beings who are us and who are not us
people born or "blessed" to move objects with their
minds, to read our innermost thoughts,
to combine innocuous items to bring about results
nothing short of miraculous.

Are these people our friends for looking like us,
for being like us?

Yes.

Are they our most dread threat, for looking like us,
for being like us?

Yes.

While some things are monsters without,
others are monsters within."

— Further excerpt from the notes of the
unpublished "Sasquatch,"
by deceased author David Hicks

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