

MASTERS™ of Art



The Archmages Handbook for Mage: The Ascension®

MASTERS™ *the Art*



By Deird're Brooks and Adam McCandliss

Credits

Writing: Deird're Brooks and Adam McCandliss
Development: Jess Heinig
Editor: James Stewart
Art Direction: Aileen E. Miles
Art: Richard Clark, Jeff Holt, Leif Jones, Alex Sheikman
Cover Art: Jason Felix
Cover Design, Layout and Typesetting: Aileen E. Miles

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Best of luck in your new ventures, friends.



735 PARK NORTH BLVD.
SUITE 128
CLARKSTON, GA 30021
USA

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Prelude: A Narrow World



Chandra hovered in the void of the Steading, her silvery globe intermittently reflecting the sigils on her Hermetic robes. Deep within the sphere, colors swirled and exploded. Stars spat outward from the center, and the mercurial surface of the basketball-sized orb drifted like clouds, first offering a glimpse inside, then concealing the world within.

Kyle huddled uncomfortably next to the Archmistress. The aged woman with her stark white hair and sixteenth-century mannerisms was just a little too disturbing for her to be dealt with equitably. By keeping him off guard, she claimed, she'd force him to think for himself in every moment he spent in her presence. Kyle didn't much care for the idea, but he couldn't argue. He'd learned more watching her than he had in the last six months of digging through arcane formulae or chewing the fat with Lee Ann.

Dizzy in the blackness, Kyle leaned forward to regard the globe more closely. Chandra passed her wand across the reflective sphere. Certainly, the Archmistress no longer required such accoutrements, but they were a familiar link to a world long ago surpassed. The thought of such power, plus the Steading's lack of apparent dimension or direction, made Kyle slightly nauseous.

"This is the Prime essence," Chandra said. "Many within the Order would have you see it as a force that you pull to your will, an outside flow. The Prime flows through your Pattern, of course, but they teach you that there are other flows of Prime, ones that you tap to create or change."

Kyle nodded, not sure what Chandra was getting at. This was only his second year among the Hermetics. If he concentrated intently, spent the better part of an hour wrestling with those damned Enochian phrases

and had someone help him along, he could see and sometimes even direct the flow of Quintessence.

"The idea of external flows or pieces of Prime is misleading. All Prime is connected, as this exercise shows. The universe is one Prime. Prime flows into all things. Even the Prime that is not part of your Pattern is part of you, just as you are part of the universe."

Kyle nodded, still not completely understanding. It was all philosophical anyway; what was she getting at, and why was the globe important?

Indicating the sphere as if reading his mind — which she might have been doing, for all Kyle knew — Chandra continued her lesson. "This universe — yes, it is an entire pocket universe — was built several thousand of our years ago. As you watch it, sense its Prime nature. See that the energy inside of it is all the same. Every star, every being that comes to exist within, flows from the same source. That is the nature of Prime. It is eternal."

Chandra was one of the best-regarded experts of Prime study, Kyle had no idea why she'd even agreed to tutor him. As far as he could tell, he was so far below her level of skill that she was wasting her time. Squinting at the ball, he focused on the flow of energy, the Patterns collapsing and forming. Inside, entire galaxies whirled, spinning out Quintessence in luminescent strands. Whole civilizations rose and fell. At the edges, the ball itself was a folded mass of energy, a universe closed off from its parent. There the energy seethed, throwing off currents and feelings as it fed on the reality of the larger universe. Kyle leaned back a bit, struggling to see deeper into the surface of the globe.

Kyle smiled as he noticed the connections of Prime. "I can see the lines," he said. "It's a universe like ours. I mean, there's nothing special about it, except that it's so complex I don't know how anyone could make something like that."

Chandra pressed her lips tightly together. She expelled a sudden breath into the blackness of the Steading and continued her explanation. "Even I could not create something of this delicacy. The point is not to see the Quintessence within. The point is to understand its singularity. Did you note the border between that universe and our own?"

"Yes," Kyle mused, thinking again about the ebb of energy. "It's like a wall, but it's tied somehow. Like it's really just a folded-up piece of paper, or the

universe is a long thread or something and that wall is just a pile of the thread."

Chandra nodded with approval. "Good. You see, once you recognize this singularity, you come to realize that all things are the same as you. And by the Law of Congruity —"

"— if they're all the same as me," Kyle finished, "then I can affect them as I affect myself."

"That is the nature of our craft. Not spells. Not altering reality. But the change of the universe and the self all at once." Chandra ran a hand over the sphere for emphasis, then uttered a low, sibilant noise. Light tore through the darkness of the Steading as she opened a door to the spirit realms, floating easily through. Kyle waved his arms ineffectually and moved to follow. Chandra grabbed him and pulled him along, though Kyle knew that she could have simply snared him with magical force.

Once through the gash, Kyle's body reoriented itself. He sprawled with a heavy "Oof!" upon a cobbled road. He was now in Chandra's Realm, not the Steading. The road was nothing more than an illusion, a construct of Chandra's choosing, but as far as his ribs were concerned, it was rock.

Chandra removed a seal from a chain about her neck and spoke the gash closed. As Kyle dusted the stubborn dirt off his legs, she walked along the quaint road to a large wooden manor, another construct of her private Realm. Kyle followed obediently, wondering when he'd see home again.

"You would do well to ask more questions. We do not have forever to continue these studies, and you must return to your normal life from time to time," Chandra said.

Kyle shrugged. "I dunno. On the one hand, Prime theory is pretty easy. But I wouldn't know how to start manipulating it like that. I mean, it's like theoretical physics. If you don't have to actually *do* anything with it, you can just sort of go with the flow."

Chandra blinked and paused, then tilted her head slightly. She stopped, absorbing Kyle's modern idiom. "Go with the flow. I like that. I suppose, then, that you will need practice. But you should find something worth doing and a goal to achieve."

"What about that universe you showed me? How does it work? I mean, I know what you said about it being Prime woven into a new creation and all, but the actual ritual and stuff..."

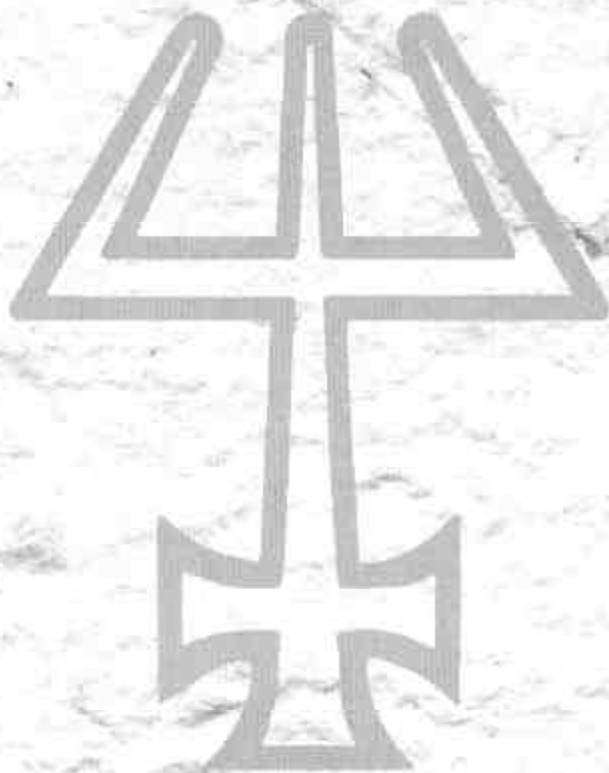
A slight smile touched Chandra's weathered face. "I don't know how it's done, but it is a worthy goal. I suspect it's one you might achieve."

Kyle blinked, taken aback. "If you don't know how to make it, then who did?"

Chandra abruptly resumed her trek to the manor. "You did. Fifteen hundred years ago. And you must do it again. But first, you will learn from me. Then you

can leave the universe for my mentor, in the past. Come along. You've got a lot of work to do if you're going to teach me."

Kyle stopped in his tracks, then rushed to catch up. Magic was rarely easy, and it looked like it wasn't going to get any easier. In his mind, a new universe was already beginning to form.





Introduction



Sheltered in the far back corner of the coffee shop, Mark and Sir Lawrence didn't look terribly out of place — the former in military garb, the latter in dapper formalwear. Surrounded by students, subcultures and caffeine, they were just another couple of patrons in the trendy shop, partially concealed by indoor plants as they lounged in mismatched chairs at a banged-up table.

Mark kept his face carefully neutral as he surrendered the book. Sir Lawrence kept a guarded expression, working hard to conceal his excitement over the find. The book itself was not terribly remarkable, with a simple cloth binding and heavy pages like an old store-bought journal. Perhaps that was even how it had started.

Sir Lawrence flipped open the book, passing a blank first page to look at the assembled diagrams, writings and pictures on the following pages. Patched together from disparate sources, the individual pieces told stories and painted pictures. Most would find the book a collection of unusual tales or unfathomable wisdom. Sir Lawrence nodded once to Mark, then deftly closed the book and carefully placed it in his cloth bag.

"Our lot is difficult enough without having to make it all up as we go along," Mark said. "There's no sense in people making the same mistakes over again. It seemed time to discuss the larger mysteries that nobody ever really addressed before."

Turning in his chair to get a bit more comfortable, Mark shook his head a bit, then took a sip of coffee. His voice was low and firm when he continued. "I'm still uncomfortable with the idea of just handing out all the theories about Archmastery to any magician with a pulse. We've both seen what happens when some mages' reach exceeds their collective grasp, or when a few get it into their heads to take shortcuts on the road to glory."

Sir Lawrence tapped the table for emphasis, replying, "That is exactly what this tome should prevent. Those who learn from the missteps of others can avoid them. Mentors can refer to these lessons, preparing their students for the long road — better than we were prepared, one hopes."

"I hope you're right. I don't want to have to clean up the mess when some kid gets it into his head that he can bring down the pillars of Heaven in six easy steps."

Sir Lawrence shot Mark a brittle smile. "My earlier book gave them the means to survive the difficult first months. Those who really understand the new one," he said, patting the cloth sack, "will already have progressed beyond the need or desire to shake Heaven, as you put it. And the others... would not be helped in any case. This isn't for the thousands who don't understand. It's for the few who do."

Mark nodded, casting his eyes across the crowd at the coffee shop. Amid the confusion and babble, patterns emerged: thoughts, shared hopes, fears and failings. Any one of these

people could be a mage someday, or an Archmaster, perhaps the herald of Ascension. But today, the work was done — the words and pictures of the book that might someday lead these same people to enlightenment.

How to Use this Book

Perhaps you've seen some of those other magical help texts floating around. I've been mentioned in some and I've penned bits of others. I'm Mark Gillan, rogue, adept and general pain in the rear. In this book, I'm going to explode your notions about the POWER of magic, and ask questions like:

What does it mean to be one of the most powerful entities in the cosmos?

Vampires have their ancient elders, werewolves their legends and reincarnated heroes, but even the humblest mage can twist the fabric of the world to her desires. The rising luminaries of Mastery rearrange the Patterns of the universe itself, their thoughts resonating across cosmic boundaries and the spirit of Creation. Certainly, those so in tune with the universe, and so potent in directing its flow, can achieve feats of near-godhood.

But not without consequences. Even as you turn the world inside-out, the power of magic changes you. External control mirrors internal evolution. Magic is not a quick and easy path to power; it is a demanding study that, unchecked, consumes your life. And the more you draw upon and study the transformation of the universe, the more it changes you in return. What humanity remains in a mage who can alter the fundamentals of Heaven and Earth? Forces unleashed turn inward and transform you into something beyond the fragile mortal who was once born to a slumbering world.

The Archmage — the magician so powerful and learned that her outward power mirrors an inward focus — understands the primal essence of the universe to such a degree that her knowledge is limited only by the forms she uses to describe it. The Archmage walks the path to control the universe, but in the process may lose sight of the transformation of the self.

With this book, you have a chance to avoid the pitfalls that trap so many other great mages. I assembled this volume so that you could learn the wisdom that Archmages discover too late. The Archmage's powers may seem attractive, but they're hollow when they come at the cost of Ascension. Read carefully. Learn. To use the colloquialism of a rather romantically minded friend, embrace the journey, not its end.

Oh, and a word of warning: Take everything in here with a grain of salt. Little enough is known about the Archmasters and their ilk that you can just as easily take anything in here as supposition instead of fact. You might learn the hard way that it doesn't work the way that we said it did. So watch out.

Words from the Real Writers

Part narrative and part exposition, *Masters of the Art* carries wisdom from various great wizards and provides powerful new material for your games. See through the eyes of the wizards themselves; understand the flaws that even they possess. Then let this new perspective come full circle into your chronicle. As you've noticed, parts of this book can be found in the *World of Darkness*, distributed as fair warning to the power-hungry. Other elements are best kept as secrets for later discovery. Either way, let the narrative carry you into your own story.

Mood: With Greatness, Loss

An Archmaster has achieved the greatest heights of magical knowledge, yet in the process has bypassed the steps to true enlightenment. The mood of this book is one of loss: the mage's loss of innocence, of sanity, of potential. An Archmage can never recover his missed opportunities. No amount of great power can overcome the flaws in the self. Look into the heart of the Archmage and you see a person who has squandered a great gift for understanding for the power to control. Even those who realize this know that it's too late to go back and repair it — and such realization drives many (like Porthos) to madness.

Theme

Hubris often drives the mage to greater feats of Mastery. So, too, does insecurity or even simple curiosity. The mage who wants to know *how things work* learns powerful magic indeed, but misses the journey of self-discovery. These mages impose themselves upon the universe instead of learning their place as a part of Creation. The conflict here is internal versus external: the Archmage externalizes himself, becoming a separate piece instead of realizing that all experience is fundamentally internal. Finding a road to personal enlightenment while still using magic to deal with a world that grates upon the cares of living is a tough balancing act. No wonder so few mages Ascend — the task is too demanding. Over and over again, the mage must choose between external manipulation and internal understanding. The Archmage has chosen the external and is now trapped by the same rules he imposes on reality. But can any less-enlightened mage learn the distinction and survive a world outside her control? The cycle continues....

The Fundamentals

This book contains all you ever needed to know about Archmages: their powers, their magical knowledge, their allies and enemies, the places they travel and the ways they interact with their peers. You'll also see the path to

Ascension, the role of the Oracles and the lost chances to escape the human impulse to control. Step wisely, for once the magic transforms you, there's no turning back.

Chapter One: Retrospect examines the formative years and notable steps that lead down the path to Archmastery. Though the reward is great, the potential loss is incredible. Destiny's guiding hand cannot be resisted, but perhaps it can be turned to a more productive end. Learn to see those with the signs of greatness.

Chapter Two: Threshold discusses the elevation of a Master to Archmaster. Each Tradition recognizes its greatest achievers in its own fashion, but all agree: The Archmasters are in a class of their own. Few magicians claim such an exalted title; many would, yet true Archmasters know their own from the pretenders. What makes a Master into a true Archmaster?

Chapter Three: Archmastery describes the everyday concerns of Archmages. You thought that just because you're an Archmage, you didn't

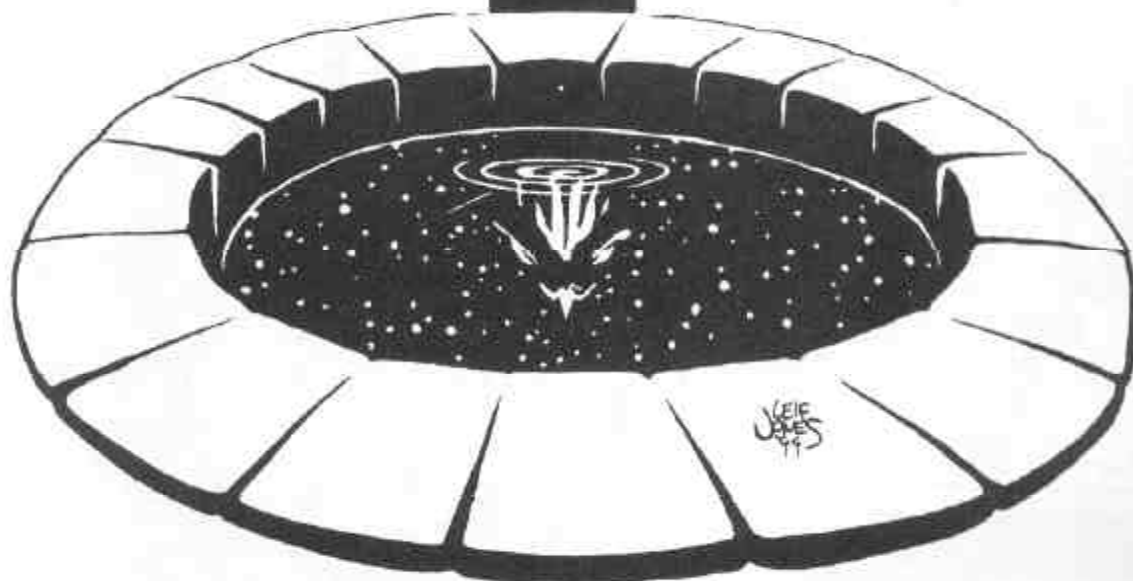


have to worry about friends, family and life in general? Magic is a work of art, not a cure-all. This chapter explores the problems that afflict Archmages when they interact with the material world — and the places beyond.

Chapter Four: Ascension details the mysterious step that even Archmages miss. Ascension is not a Tenth Sphere or a power or a sudden bit of wisdom. Mages aren't sure what, exactly, Ascension really is, or what it means, but it's a true and real goal. Learn about the journey that elevates the Avatar and the role of the Oracles, the greatest and most erudite Archmasters of the ages.

Appendix: The Keys to the Universe examines the Arch-Spheres, the levels of Mastery beyond anything known to most Earthly mages, and the mighty powers that Archmages wield. Here you'll find diverse information about allies and enemies that would challenge even an Archmaster, and guidelines for creating Archmage characters and settings — if you dare.

Use this wisdom in good faith. Remember, the path is inside.





Chapter One: Retrospect



What drives a mage to seek the exalted status of Archmage? What pushes her to climb to the heights of enlightenment and power? The answer to this question varies as much as the mages who choose this path. This isn't the sort of choice a mystic makes casually. Rather, it is a drive that can be traced back to the Awakening, or perhaps even earlier. A mage with such a calling can find satisfaction only in true Mastery of her chosen art.

The hopeful Archmage may see her destiny from the day of her Awakening, even if she does not understand its meaning. Her Seekings, or her approach to magical and philosophical issues, may hint at greater things. The potential Archmage is often easy to spot. She asks questions other apprentices would never consider and often shows great

vision in approaching her art. She never finds satisfaction with her skills and always watches for the next plateau. She has little use for rites, with a preference for her own style. Even if she never comes close to Archmagedom, her performance stands out in vivid relief when compared to her peers.

The mage who walks this road finds her work truly monumental. The obstacles in her path may seem greater than the eventual reward. The sacrifices are costly and the successes are rare. Rivals impede her progress, while inhuman beings try to lure her to their masters with promises of power and knowledge. She must visit rarefied Umbral Realms to seek wisdom not found even in such libraries as those (formerly) of Horizon or Doissetep. Death, madness or servitude to malevolent entities awaits the majority of mages who desire the Archmage's power.

Seekings



Every Seeking is a painful experience. They turn you inside out and force you face up to the parts of yourself you hate. You must know how much you don't measure up to yourself before you know how to improve. Most mages never make it past the first two or three Seekings before they stop trying, die of old age or violence, or simply stagnate, but candidates for Archmagedom don't stop clawing their way upward for anything short of death (and sometimes even that can't stop them).

Seekings are tests administered by the Avatar. They reflect your shortcomings and destiny in larger-than-life symbolism. A Seeking guides a potential Archmage through a demonstration of those aspects of his life that he must develop or resolve before he can move on.

Archmage Seekings are qualitatively different from the Seekings of other mages. Since an Archmage has already passed through many gates of self-discovery, her later Seekings are trials indeed, focusing upon deeply ingrained personality traits or drawing together a mesh of even the tiniest flaws into a formidable obstacle. Naturally, such difficult (and dangerous) dream quests require great effort, but yield equally great insight, sometimes even foretelling the mage's future. A newly Awakened mage might see shadows of a dangerous enemy yet to be encountered (or even born). An experienced mage visits memories of old friends and sees manifold paths to future possibilities. The trials reflect your destiny as well as focus it, while disparate choices challenge your sense of morality and self. This is the forge that tempers the Archmage's determination and will.

As always, an Archmage must pass the earlier tests before moving to the new trials of a Seeking. These early tests, repeated performances of your previous Seekings, ensure that you learned those things that you have already been taught. Often, the challenges expand in depth or duration, pushing you toward a greater commitment to the necessary virtues. An apprentice may face a simple fear during an early Seeking, while an Archmage must not only confront that fear, but also overcome it under the terror's fullest realization. You not only need to overcome flaws in your character or psyche, but understand their nature and fight to turn them into virtues. Few possess the self-mastery to face such a change.

Avatars

The Avatar is every mage's friend, lover, tormenter, parent, sibling, mentor and enemy. This is doubly so for a potential Archmage. His Avatar drives him to the heights

Storytelling an Archmage Seeking

When a mage steps upon the Seeking that will take him across the threshold of Archmagedom (Areté 6+), the profound complexity, symbolism and subtlety can be difficult to comprehend, especially for one who is unprepared. Even more than previous Seekings, this step foreshadows the future, replays the past and melds them into a challenge few mortals could resolve. One fated to seek Archmagedom doesn't have it handed to him, but he is uniquely suited to succeed — provided he tries. His focus on the goal must be absolute, his attention unwavering and his determination unstoppable. Any less means failure.

Storytellers must not hesitate to make Archmage Seekings particularly difficult and erudite. Of course, they should be possible, but never easy. Since the Seeking holds up a mirror to the mage's internal development, the trials faced should challenge the mage's beliefs, worth and character — all facets developed through good roleplaying. A character without depth just doesn't have the hooks for such a Seeking, and in fact should not be allowed to even attempt such a journey until the player takes the effort to better flesh out the foibles of the character.

Remember to draw the line between player and character, though — the Seeking needs to challenge the mage and his perceptions, but it doesn't necessarily have to cause the player to re-evaluate his own real-world behaviors. If both player and Storyteller agree to that sort of education, go for it. Just don't try to force issues on the players as part of a game.

For general information on Seekings, refer to the *Book of Mirrors*, pp. 53-55.

of enlightenment, often with little concern for his physical well-being.

This isn't the drawback it may seem, as an Archmage can take care of his own health. Still, he is advised to watch where he steps when he treads this path. He must keep his Avatar's demands in perspective. Though his Avatar may persist, he won't if he ignores material details.

Many mages learn to adapt to the Avatar's demands or even resist them. This isn't always a bad thing, as it may help a budding Archmage build a sufficient strength of character to successfully achieve his goals. Those who fail often do so spectacularly. The drive to become an Archmage is not



something the Avatar necessarily communicates to the hapless mage, which can be a source of some difficulty over time.

If you're not certain whether your Avatar has this fate in mind for you, it probably doesn't. Destiny's child knows his calling.

On the other hand, Archmagedom isn't solely the purview of the Avatar. Dedicated study and practice are important keys as well. No matter how potent the Avatar, it's worthless if the mage can't find the discipline to study greater secrets. Similarly, the stronger the will, the greater the chance to rise to Archmaster status. The Avatar plays an important role, but not an all-consuming one.

Each Avatar has its own way of communicating and pushing. Most fit into a particular category — you should be familiar by now with the various Essences. Still, the more you pay attention to your Avatar, the more you find that it has a particular personality of its own. Archmages often discover that their Avatars hold shreds of personality, images and impressions from earlier times and past lives — sometimes previous lives as Archmages.

Dynamic

Very few Dynamic Avatars seem likely to lead a mage up the difficult path to Archmagedom. Just because it seems unlikely, though, doesn't mean it never happens. As a force of change and exploration, a mystic with a Dynamic Avatar may very well find his way to this lofty goal. Even so, it's not the journey that's important but the destination. A Dynamic mage on the path often appears driven to what might seem wildly disparate activities that only make sense in hindsight. It may take a Dynamic mage longer to achieve his goal than it would for those with other Essences, but the trip is probably much more eclectic and interesting.

Pattern

A Pattern-oriented Archmage seems like a contradiction in terms. He methodically plots out each step of advancement and tries to anticipate each challenge along the way. Pattern mages tend to be the most practical and grounded of Archmages. They generally don't lose track of what they're doing when distraction interferes. Naturally, Pattern Archmages occupy a strange niche: on the one hand, they are powerful forces of change and have gone through a great deal of personal advancement. On the other hand, they possess the understanding to impose their notion of order on the universe.

As the saying goes, "We are always in the process of becoming more like ourselves." The Pattern mage reinforces her greatest strengths until she is a paragon of her chosen path to Ascension.

Primordial

How can a mage whose Avatar takes the face of a god fail to seek Archmagedom? She tends to be the most enigmatic among the enlightened. Such a mystic may find a roadmap

practically laid out for her if she takes the time to look. Unfortunately, such paths tend to mirror the Avatar's expression. Imagine tracing Odin or Inanna's path to enlightenment, or the strength of will it takes to die and return — all for a bit of wisdom.

Questing

The Questing Avatar is most likely to drive a mage to seek the power and knowledge of an Archmage — not that this is standard for all Questing Avatars. The mage with such an Avatar finds his work cut out for him. He takes a journey of epic proportions, with a clearly defined goal. He won't always make it to the end, but that's not the important part. His Avatar drives him to take the first step. Until he does, he finds little peace.

In some ways, though, a Questing Archmage goes awry. In the search for unlimited power, most Archmages miss the keys to unlimited understanding. As a result, they lose sight of the path, focusing more and more on a particular goal and suffering from a myopia that prevents Ascension. The Questing Archmage may find total comprehension of a Sphere, but that does little good when he fails the larger quest.

Infinite

Thought there were only four Essences! Well, only four ever seem to actually manifest.

The problem is that Avatars are by their nature incomplete. Each Essence follows a particular path and moves in a categorizable direction. This means that the Avatar has a limited understanding — a crippled means to the end of Ascension. Since the Avatar is in many ways the power behind magic, it doesn't make sense for it to have only a single, skewed way of looking at things.

Avatars are nothing more than shards of Prime. They're particularly potent, and they sometimes seem to have their own consciousness, yet they do nothing without attachment to a mage. They don't have a mind in the way that a person does. Since they are fragments of universal energy, they reflect only a piece of that universe — a specific Resonance, if you will. Each Avatar theoretically contains an image of "the big picture," or Ascension would be impossible, but each Avatar shows only a particular façade.

It's thought that a mage who Ascends finally unlocks the other dimensions of the Avatar's universal reflection, encompassing every perspective on the cosmos. That's just a theory, though — there's no real way to test it. The Infinite Essence will probably never be seen in a living, breathing mage, but it's there nonetheless. After all, the universe is reflected in every bit of Prime. Thus, each Avatar contains, in some fashion, a picture of the whole.

"I don't believe in faeries!"

So you don't believe in Avatars?

Get over it.

Some mages never talk to their inner consciousness. Others see visions of angels or dead relatives or phantom lovers or what-have-you. The fact is, the Avatar isn't just a spirit or soul — it's a concept, a concept of enlightenment. You just pick a way to see that enlightenment — your vision of the demon that drives you or the treasure that tantalizes you. "Avatar" is a convenient way to personify this drive. So is "genius" or a host of other terms. Some visions are very active, and indeed, the Avatar sometimes "remembers" experiences from other lives, though this may simply be the Avatar reflecting knowledge from its former incarnations.

An Archmage doesn't have to believe in Avatars. He just has to accept that he's a reflection of reality, and the magic is in changing the image in the mirror. Change yourself, change the reflection, change the universe.

What is the Avatar?

Some see Avatars as angels or incarnate gods. Others, as strange spirits, visions or abstract concepts. Many Avatars show a startling degree of self-awareness and motivation, though they have no true consciousness or mind in human terms.

The Avatar seems to be essentially a shard of Prime energy, tied to the awareness of a human soul. Some mystics theorize that it is a piece of the Pure Ones, one of the ancient entities of early Creation. Certainly, some Avatars show a distinct tendency to certain actions, personalities or manifestations, and occasionally two or more Avatars share specific characteristics that lead mages to believe them related in some way. Still, the Avatar owes its consciousness to the human soul. Archmages philosophize that, just as human intelligence allows the universe to regard and comprehend itself, the Avatar is a piece of Prime that learns the trick of self-awareness from the soul.

Each Avatar picks a soul to follow. When someone dies, the Avatar often disappears for a time, only to resurface sharing a new life. In this fashion, mages remember "past lives" and their Avatars evidence behaviors influenced by ancient personalities. A mage who dies and somehow returns finds himself bereft of his ties to the cosmos; it is thought that powerful magic could draw back an Avatar from wherever they reside "between lives," but the truth of such a prodigious feat remains a mystery. The Avatar learns from life, so death is the natural conclusion of the cycle.

Of course, few mages actually grasp the sublime nature of the Avatar, and arguments about its capacities remain. Is it possible that the Avatar is actually a piece of one God? What if the Avatar really is an angel or spirit tied to a human soul? Perhaps the old gods found new homes when their faiths died out, becoming the patrons and powers of their modern heirs. Understanding of Avatars is as incomplete as the Prime fragments themselves.

Life in the Halls of Power



You simply can't gain the recognition of being a Master or an Archmage if you don't have the respect of your colleagues. You must know who your friends and enemies are and how to cultivate them properly. Unfortunately for the hopeful Archmage, politics are a dangerous reality at the upper echelons. To achieve your lofty goal, you need allies, access to your Tradition's libraries and, at the very least, sufficient clout to keep your enemies at bay. No magical society is ever one big happy family.

The Traditions

The competition is fierce and deadly. Even if you avoid the rivalries between different Traditions, there's plenty to be found within each Tradition's ranks. There are many cases of teachers holding back promising pupils, or deadly rivalries building within a teacher's class. Even so, it's possible to succeed if one knows the fast track.

Keep in mind that respect gets a mage much further with his superiors than does an adversarial attitude.

Akashic Brotherhood

Enlightenment is what the Akashics are all about. Give one a chance and he'll talk about inner peace and exploring the meaning of one's dharma. Akashics who make it to the rank of Master are often humble and wise beyond their apparent age. As a true member of the Brotherhood, you would never find acceptance were you to lord your status over others or show any degree of arrogance. Your deeds and knowledge speak for you; you need not belabor the point.

Celestial Chorus

If each Chorister is a chord in the One's song, the Archmages are entire melodies. To avoid disharmony, you must know your place within the Tradition and exalt it. Working against harmony and life is not the way to advance here. Infighting doesn't get you nearly as far as cooperation does, so it's best for you to work with your fellow Choristers to sing a stronger song.

Despite appearances, dogma is not the way to go. If you get tied up in rules and ignore their meaning, you never understand the steps to becoming an Archmage. You also lose your colleagues' respect.

Cult of Ecstasy

An Ecstatic follows the spirit of the Code of Ananda. She avoids causing unnecessary harm, does not abuse sleepers and does not act as if magic gives her the right to rule. If you need help on the way, you find a teacher you can trust—

and make certain that you can trust him. If you give the teacher what he wants, he gives you what you need.

A time will come when the teacher has nothing further to offer the Ecstatic seeker. This is a critical moment for you as you adapt to self-guidance. Most Ecstatics tend to be very independent, but an unfortunate or unprepared mage might find it difficult to make her own path.

If you want to get tossed out on your ear, it's easy: break the Code of Ananda. Lie to your teacher. Break a promise. You can try to exploit those who could help you most and toss them aside when they are of no further use. You may even show disapproval of fellow Cultists' morals. Needless to say, this is the quick route to ostracism, Branding or worse.

Dreamspeakers

Respect the spirits and their worlds. A shaman does not impose himself upon them. He moves quietly and with wisdom. He honors his teachers and elders, and they honor him in turn. If he harms the spirit lands, shows disrespect for his elders, and forgets who he really is, he can expect nothing from his Tradition.

You can greatly improve your chances as a Dreamspeaker by learning all that you can about the spirits even as you master the ability to interact with them. A shaman who takes the time to learn the ins and outs of Umbral society earns more respect than one who simply tries to use the brute force of magical power to get his way. Remember, the shaman forges a sacred compact to work as the agent of the spirits in the material world. In exchange, they grant favor to their servitor. The Dreamspeaker serves the Dream, not the other way around, no matter how powerful you become.

Euthanatos

Euthanatoi are about karmic balance — cutting away the dead flesh so that the remainder can flourish, equalizing costs and gains with mortal responsibility. Do not become a murderer or allow Jhor to rule you. Of vital importance in this Tradition is a sense of responsibility, especially for a Master or Archmage. You must account for the consequences of your actions. It's too easy to step off the path and lose your way — look at Voornas for an example of a fallen death mage.

To revel in death is to forget what it means. To forget why the good death is important — or to dismiss it altogether — garners little respect. True Euthanatoi Masters are gentle souls who understand the necessity for ruthlessness, but do not abuse it.

Order of Hermes

The Hermetic recognizes the pecking order and knows his status within it. He does not buck the system unless the

result is good for the Order as a whole. He also knows that once he achieves Archmagedom, he can pretty much get away with anything. If he fails to acknowledge his peers, rivals, enemies and superiors, he finds it difficult to acquire the instruction or knowledge necessary to claw his way to the top.

The Order is more status-conscious than any other Tradition. The mage who keeps this in mind and stays in line cannot fail.

The mage who makes the same mistake as Gietulio Vargas and Cristiano — his tacit acceptance of the crimes of Helekar — doesn't survive long enough to become an Archmage, or won't survive long once he's there. Hermetic Archmages are among the greatest teachers in the Traditions, so there's a responsibility to pass along knowledge. If a mage is stingy with his insights, he may find his progress stymied.

Achieving Mastery as a Hermetic is a tedious balancing act between politics and magical duty. Although the Order prizes political acumen, the Archmage serves a greater cause. Porthos Fitz-Empress damned the Order's politics and did as he deemed necessary.

Sons of Ether

The Sons of Ether value patience. The ideal path through the ranks begins with the ability to *listen and learn*. You must develop a broad knowledge from which to develop your own theories. Modern science has lost its way, with research becoming more and more specialized. The Etherite who idealizes the generalist stance can move ahead of more limited scientists. It's not enough to know what has gone before, you must also know what is to come. You must *create* what is to come. What is scientific knowledge without vision? What is learning, without the drive to act upon it?

The cream of the Etherites innovates. You take what was, what is and what shall be and bring the world something unforeseen and unique. You must, above all, develop a unifying theory, a framework within which to perform your experiments. Without a hypothesis, all experimentation lacks context. This is a challenging task, as you must develop a working model of the universe that not only highlights a new perspective, but also incorporates the old. You must turn the dross and spew that the Technocrats produce into something beneficial to Sleeper society.

This takes time. You must await your opportunity to publish in *Paradigma*, present your theories and convince every Etherite of consequence that your theory is not only



unique, but also viable. You must subject yourself to peer review and criticism. An Etherite would be embarrassed to present her grand theory to the *Paradigma* review board only to learn she had overlooked a fatal flaw early in her work. If it cannot withstand the scrutiny of others, your work surely cannot withstand the Technocratic Consensus.

Despite such a clearly laid path, many fall astray. Some steal research notes and prototypes from rivals or students and present it as original research. A few unscrupulous types milk the "golden goose" for years, leading the poor student along with lies and promises. Others simply take what's needed and murder the originators. If an Etherite supports her own work by unjustly tearing apart the work of others, she doesn't get very far. Mavericks are welcome and encouraged within the Sons of Ether, but such behavior has limits. Unethical experiments and careless introduction of dangerous technology can do much to ruin a Scientist's reputation.

Though the name may lead many to believe otherwise, it is possible for women to advance within the Sons of Ether. Any woman with the proper work ethic may advance as far as any man.

Verbena

Verbena aren't too concerned with titles or ranks. Outside of Tradition circles, the witches barely acknowledge such formalities. A Verbena earns respect and standing through the preservation of old ways, the adaptation to new things and the balance between the two. You must respect the scope of the power you seek, and understand your responsibility to use it well, not whenever and however you like. Magic must be treated with reverence.

There isn't a Verbena "party line," as such. It's much more important to maintain your elders' respect than it is to show that you can spout rhetoric as easily as anyone else can. Respect is earned by deeds, not words.

You must not corrupt nature, nor can you forget that you come from the earth and shall return to it. You should understand that blood is a sacred thing and not to be used lightly. Taking another's blood—or life—without consent or need is a twisting of the arts passed down from the Wyck. The Verbena exist to exalt life.

Virtual Adepts

Virtual Adepts who want to join the Elite of the Elite set aside the juvenile "31334!!!" crap. Biff isn't real, and neither are V-As who buy into that shit. If you know what you're doing, you've grown up enough to stop showing off how kewl you are, starting flame wars or trolling discussion groups for arguments just for kicks. You're immersed in information, a witness to the tides of data washing over the seas of global telecommunications.

The best of the V-As aren't kids hanging out in parents' basements waiting for D3m0n533d E114e to come around and strangle them with modem cables. If you want to impress

the Virtual Adept Information Gods, you must make information available and desirable. The Hacker Ethic is only the beginning. Information isn't the only thing that wants to be free; ignorance is still in the race.

Furthermore, the Adepts are not just about computers, stereotypes aside. They're about embracing the bleeding edge. Adepts have a vision of a future that's not yet real, but exists only in the mind—virtual reality is just the way to express such a dream. The truly Elite grasp that future and make it a reality.

Surgical strikes are much more effective than random flaming. An Adept must learn which websingers have the most cred and *pay attention!* An Elite mentor probably won't repeat himself if misunderstood the first time.

The Technocracy

In theory, it should be easy for those with demonstrated competence to rise through the Enlightened meritocracy. In truth, the Technocracy is no more enlightened in such matters than the Traditions. It's best, then, to know your supervisors and CEOs, and play to their weaknesses if you want access to the real super-science.

Technocrats aren't promoted simply for distinguished science. One might receive a promotion because of his organizational competence, another might go up the ladder because she has a favorable relationship with her superiors. The truly competent Enlightened Scientists tend to remain in the field or the laboratory, where their skills can be most effectively put to use.

Iteration X

Innovate! Take the technology to a new level, bring your breakthroughs into the Consensus. Don't fall behind the competition, don't stagnate and most of all, don't lose track of what you're trying to do. While you have to satisfy the Programmers and Comptrollers before proceeding to advanced studies, keep in mind that to really master such techniques, you must understand *why* they are important as much as what they can do. No Iterator ever became a Master Comptroller through complete conformity.

Just remember—don't use your snazzy new ray gun to obliterate humans left and right. You're supposed to protect humanity from the Outside, so behave like a protector, not a cyber-monster in some low-budget horror movie. Look toward developments with real and practical uses in the mundane world. It may take a decade or two to enter the Consensus, but otherwise the Masses may never adopt it. Work within the Convention as well—will you be the one who designs the next generation of neural augmentations? Will you gain general acceptance for your device? If not, you probably won't become a Master Comptroller.

New World Order

Watch your superiors for weakness, your peers for competition and your underlings for ambition. While everyone fits into her own little cubicle in this Convention, you have to remember that everyone wants a leg up — and they don't care if it's over your dead body. The competition is blood-thirsty. Be efficient, be careful and, most of all, never fail — or have a very good excuse when you do.

To advance, you really need to understand information and how it interacts with everything around it. You need to know how to manipulate that interaction on a global scale.

The NWO appreciates cooperation and ambition within the ranks so long as it does not weaken the organization as a whole. As such, it encourages agents to continuously improve themselves. With this in mind, competition is appropriate as long as the side effects are small.

Never waver in your task or you risk your standing. Do not question your superiors without good reason, but be prepared to defend your actions in such a case. Do not give away anything to the other Conventions without approval. Perception shapes reality, so foster the perceptions the Convention needs. A true architect of the New World Order shapes his own mind through education, intuition and self-discipline, then turns those techniques outward to influence humanity.

Progenitors

Forget about grafting lizard tongues onto cats or splicing frog and dinosaur DNA. If you want to advance, you have to keep track of the human element. Break new ground whenever possible — as with any Convention — and direct your subordinates to do the same. Your success is judged not only by your accomplishments, but also those of your students and assistants.

Other Groups

A Word from the Crooked Man, Hollow One

While the Trad and Technoes like to forget about Orphans and Crafts, as a representative of the outsiders of the magical world, I'd like to offer some comments on these invisible people.

I think that certain elements within the aforementioned magical conspiracies hunt us down and kill us if we look like we're getting too good or too visible. I don't have any proof, but it seems strange that we disappear as often as we do.

Hollow Ones

Suuuuure. One's gonna move beyond his self-absorbed world of pain and poetry to become a magical force to contend with.

Damned right. There aren't many of us, but we're out there and we know what we're doing — probably more than the fucking pointy hats. How do we get there? It's like the old joke: practice, practice, practice. There isn't a lot of trust or love among us, but at least we don't sell each other out. Do that, and forget about any help. If you're really together and have a clue, one of us might notice and give you a helping hand. Fuck up, and you're back on the streets, probably three or four all at once. Got it?

Crafts

Not to cast aspersions or anything, but it's unlikely that any of these guys ever get beyond their own self-gratification. Those who pass their Craft limits are an exception, not the rule. In all seriousness, some of them honestly have better things to do — I mean, is it better to make the crops grow or to learn to soar among the stars? Hard to soar on an empty stomach, I think.

Children of Ancient Knowledge

They're always talking about the high road to enlightenment. Maybe a few of them make it to the stratosphere. Or maybe the Euthie death cult comes along and whacks 'em. I heard a story not too long ago... anyway, word has it these guys used to be a Tradition, but were kicked out for not conforming. Right on!

I guess they get to the top through study and experimentation — looking for alkahest or the philosopher's stone or what-not. They don't do it by forgetting how they got there, they are or to help each other out. Otherwise they'd be dead.

Dragon Wizards

Oh Wu Lung, or whatever you want to call them. These guys probably have more Archmages than all the houses in the Order of Fogies combined — maybe that's an exaggeration. I don't know. I do know I don't ever want to cross them. These guys are bad news.

If Wu Lung wants to become an Archmage, all he has to do is study, study, study. Oh yes, and show deference and respect to his teachers. If he disses on his Craft, he won't get anywhere. Rebellion is not tolerated.

Orphans

These kids are lucky if they make it two months after going magic, let alone if they learn any really cool tricks. If you find one of these needs some help and has half a clue, don't be afraid to give a little guidance. We outcasts should stick together.

Remember, I said "a little guidance." It's not quite time to hand him the keys to the candy store just yet. Let him prove himself over a period of years if necessary. Don't lead him to anyone else until you're absolutely certain he's trustworthy. No need to give a guided tour to a Mirrorshade spy, is there?

Many Progenitors have ridden a good distance on the backs of their subordinates, but you'll never get as far as Research Director, let alone past it, if you do so. Someone catches on eventually, and then you're explaining yourself in front of a review board for you. Don't engineer better ways to spread supervirii; it's bad for the population. Don't build goofy monsters—sure, you get a momentary thrill, but in the long run, where's the benefit to the Masses?

The Progenitors exist to improve humanity's lot. Never forget that.

A Progenitor must become an architect of life, not a creator of monsters and killing machines.

Syndicate

The Syndicate is the Union's ubiquitous "invisible branch." No other Convention has more effect on the Masses. The Syndicate influences what they watch, what they buy and what they wear. Sure, it doesn't decide the specifics, but it knows enough people in the right places that a nudge here, a nudge there and *poof!* — hemlines go up next year.

Keep the Masses entertained and distracted. Give them Camel Cash and pro wrestling. You need vision to do it correctly. I'm talking 20/15 Vision with a capital "V." You have to know where and how to guide society. Don't look at the money — it's just a game. Look at the effect.

If you can figure out how to get the other Conventions even further in debt, great. But keep in mind that they are

your allies and can't be squeezed too tightly or there won't be any blood left. Maintaining that balance is the mark of presidential material.

Lose track of the pulse of modern culture and you're finished. Don't ask too many questions — there are a lot of shadows in the Syndicate, and the veeps don't like anyone looking too closely if they're not cleared for it. Syndicate reps don't just do pop culture. They also handle a lot of the dirty work for the other Conventions. When it comes up, don't ask questions, just do your job.

Void Engineers

There are so many possible careers in the Void Engineers, it's hard to say which is best if you're headed for the DSEATC or beyond. You need the proverbial "pioneer spirit" to make it that far — not that it does you much good on the DSEATC, where you spend most of your time behind a desk. If you want to get there, take whatever job you've got and make like Captain Kirk. Explore — interstellar space, the Web, the undersea abyss. Find what's hidden and dig it out. Stretch the limits and map new territory. Discover new places and define them.

Once you're on the DSEATC, it's time to make certain you keep the VE's overall vision in mind. Even if you're not out there, keep the vision alive for those who are.

Learning



The Archmage does not live by magic alone. She must also attend to her mundane life. Yes, I mean that exactly as I say it. How can you comprehend the esoteric mysteries of the universe if you can't hold down a regular job? You are human, after all. Take time to watch the sunset, look for shapes in the clouds or even have a relationship. Have a care that your mundane friends don't suffer when magic invades your life; it can seriously degrade your morale.

Pay close attention to your life in the Sleepers' world. It's vitally important to retain perspective, to understand that despite your ability to crack mountains with the flick of a wrist, you are not a god. You certainly don't have any excuse to act like one.

To excel as a mage, you must learn everything you can. You want to master the secrets of matter? Study it. I don't mean just the magical side. There's much to be learned about magic from a mundane angle. The answer is, of course, to learn something from every moment of living. Attend classes, raid your favorite bookstore and move in to your local library. It is simply impossible to possess too much knowl-

edge. You should spend at least as much time with the mundane as you do the magical.

Friends and Family

Charity, as they say, begins at home. If a mage can't maintain a friendship, how can she master the secrets of the mind? The obvious answer is that she can't. Humans are social creatures, and the person who cuts herself off from meaningful contact loses touch with her own life. This is frighteningly easy to do — consider how many Etherites spend entire years in laboratories, or how many Hermetics get lost in their libraries. Try to balance such magical pursuits with social pursuits — make a friendship, raise a family.

Conversely, a mage understands that her lifestyle can bring harm to those around her if she isn't careful. More than one mage has found a spouse replaced with a clone, taken hostage or even killed in some lethal crossfire. Often, family or friends are caught due to the mage's supernatural activities, but sometimes even mages are subject to mundane vicissitudes.

Even more basic than enemy threats, a mage must also work to keep her friends and family well-disposed to her. It's easy to get caught up in a quest to petition Ragachak, Grand

Slayer of the Seventh Portal, for several weeks or months but what happens when you get home? Explanations are certainly in order.

Do you reveal your nature to your family? If so, what effect does this have on your relationship? What about friends? What if your friends think you're crazy, or worse yet, tell other people? If you keep your nature hidden, how do you explain long absences? What if your significant other decides that you're cheating on him? What if he picks up and moves while you're gone?

It's difficult for an active mage to maintain any kind of relationship, but the reward is worth the effort. Friends can be a safety valve, and conversations can ease the stress that surrounds the life of a mage. A sympathetic friend need not be aware that you're Awakened, but if he is, the above risks apply. Be careful that your friend isn't some kind of plant or spy for the opposition (whoever that may be). The last thing any mage needs is a betrayal from this front.

Most of all, your friends and family are your reminder of what it means to be human. Who'd ever want to be that mundane? Well, you were once. Magic acts according to your desires and your emotions. If you lose sight of your humanity, your magic works in ways that are anathema to human existence — even your own. Your friends are your gauge, a lifeline to the "real" world and to understanding the plight of the Sleepers to whom we wish to bring Ascension.

Holding a Job

This is not as easy as it seems. Many of the same difficulties mentioned for relationships are even more applicable to the workplace. Where a friend might accept your explanation of a "round-the-world tour" after you've been gone for two months questing for the Sacred Orb of Macondo, an employer may not be so understanding. Holding a job of any sort takes effort and dedication that most mages simply cannot manage in concert with magical studies.

Of course, the nearly unemployed mage may decide at this point to apply mind control to avoid his fate. I cannot discourage this course enough. While it may work for a time, inevitably such controls wear off and the result may be much worse. Such *interference* may leave the poor Sleeper unable to attend to other aspects of his life. Even worse, such activity is akin to rape. This may be acceptable to Nephandi and Marauders, but most Traditionalists and Technocrats know better — those who don't have no business interacting with Sleeper society. Their Masters tend to make sure of this, too. If you wreak havoc on the local Sleepers with your enchantments, sooner or later someone will make you pay the piper, be it a member of your Tradition bringing punishment or a Technocrat investigating and eliminating the "problem deviant."

Storytelling the Mundane Side

It may seem strange to focus on the non-magical aspects of a mage's life, but consider what a hopeful Archmage sets out to do. With luck, she succeeds. Odds are good she will find methods to extend her life span. This is a given, as it takes decades or centuries to attain the sixth dot of any Sphere — and that's after the time it takes to attain Mastery (at least nine years, according to Mage: The Ascension).

With that in mind, it's best if she establishes her ability to actually live a healthy life before she tries to live several lifetimes. If she can't keep her interest in events around her, what's Archmastery of any Sphere worth? Admittedly, some mages have survived the centuries without the necessary connections, but they tend to turn out badly — Voormans, the Grand Harvester of Souls and Master of Helekar comes to mind. Even the Jade Dragon maintains contact with the human world. Admittedly, a very unsavory cross-section of the human world, but nevertheless... even Nephandi understand the importance of human contact.

Without a firm foundation in Earthly matters, an Archmage has nothing upon which to build Mastery.

There's also the simple fact that all those world-shaking magical story lines just don't hit as hard without contrast. There's a bit more punch to visiting Horizon if you set your previous scenes in a shopping mall.

This is not an encouragement to bog yourself or your players in minutiae. If you want to run a vignette focusing solely on mundane aspects of life, make it interesting!

Now it must be said that many Technocrats have an advantage here in that their jobs are directly related to their duties as Scientists for the Union. It must not be forgotten that these are *duties*. A Technocrat who finds a sudden need to chase alien invaders had best clear such an excursion with his superiors.

A resourceful mage finds a line of work that makes it easier to maintain a flexible schedule. You'll find many Virtual Adepts who work as independent technical consultants. Other useful occupations include freelance *anything* and just about any form of self-employment. There are still deadlines to meet and schedules to manage, but at least you have more control over your work situation.

So why bother holding down a job? A Master or Archmaster can certainly conjure or acquire just about anything he needs. However, a job provides several tangible benefits. First, it's an avenue to connections and resources without the threat of magic blowing up in your face. Second, it's a cover — if you have a normal job and seem like a regular Joe, people are more likely to overlook your otherworldly



nature. Last, a job often opens opportunities that you can't find elsewhere: travel or access to special materials and information, authority over specialists who may have useful mundane knowledge or even the opportunity to scout for potential apprentices and allies. Don't think of it as work — think of it as an opportunity.

Study

Just because you've Awakened doesn't mean it's time to stop learning. Indeed, the more you learn, the more you need to learn. It's a vicious — but ultimately rewarding — cycle. Like all other aspects of any mage's life, this is even truer for a hopeful Archmage. Mastery of Spheres does not necessarily grant knowledge of the universe and its workings. Even a Master of Spirit may not have a clue how to behave in an Umbral Court. Even a weaponsmith for Iteration X must understand the underpinnings of nuclear physics before he designs the next model fusion rifle.

Some mages choose to return to school. Certainly, there's no shortage of Sleeper universities to pick from and it shouldn't be too difficult for a determined mage to gain entry. Nor should it be a challenge to maintain decent

grades. It's childishly easy for any mage to cheat — but really, how do you learn? Yes, you could use Correspondence magic to locate the instructor's notes, Mind powers to take it from his skull, Spirit allies to find a little "helper" to retrieve the answer key — but this teaches you nothing, except how to use your magic in an unethical fashion.

The rewards of a good education will last you a lifetime — or several lifetimes. Taking the necessary effort to learn lays the invaluable groundwork for the first step into Archmagedom. If you cannot sit through a year of astronomy, you certainly can't spend decades or centuries mastering the techniques to rearrange stars.

Individual study can be useful as well. You aren't limited by the lecturer's bias or scheduling, and you can study at your own pace, exploring subjects that your local universities may not offer. However, without external structure, personal discipline becomes an issue. If you lose interest in your studies of ancient religions after a few weeks, you can't expect to master your chosen field of magic. Problems do occasionally crop up as needed texts may be unavailable. Locating obscure books can be quite a chore.



Chapter Two: Threshold



How does a Master know when he's become an Archmage? When other Archmages acknowledge his skill. Sure, he might be able to drop California into the ocean, or nudge the moon out of its orbit, but does that really mean he's the best of the best? Not at all.

The qualities that make a true Archmage are manifold. The first and most important is a sense of responsibility. All actions have consequences, and the actions Archmages take can change the world — not necessarily in a beneficial manner. A mage who carelessly applies vulgar magic when subtler effects are possible, or is indiscreet around Sleepers or “enemies of Ascension,” would not be a good candidate for Archmagedom. A mage who carefully cultivates the world around him, reshaping it gently, ultimately creates the reality he desires (even if only on a small scale) and is far better Archmage material.

The second quality of Archmastery is ambition. While an Archmage must curb his actions for the health of the cosmos, this doesn't mean that he has no aspirations. An

Archmage's goals may be nearly incomprehensible to normal mortals, but they are very real. It's entirely appropriate for a mage to seek out the true meaning of *violet*, or the cosmological significance of *fire*. An investigation into the profound, metaphysical underpinnings of all reality is not uncommon. Others might try to answer certain questions: “Why is Ascension important?” or “What is it like to experience the life of another being?”

The third prerequisite is a desire to continue learning about the universe. Something new awaits the Archmage at every turn. Stagnation is anathema to mystics of such potency.

Finally, the factor most mages consider when they see an Archmage is raw power. The simple truth is that without the power to back up his claims, no one will take any mage seriously when he tries to assume the mantle of Archmaster.

No Tradition or Convention will accept anyone into the upper ranks if he fails to show these qualities. While the trappings change, the basics remain the same: from group to group.

How to Tell the Difference



Here's a detailed explanation of how to make it from Master to Archmage, and some advice to keep in mind as you walk the arduous road to glory.

Responsibility

This is so important! If you haven't developed responsibility by the time you've been confirmed as a Master, you probably never will. Responsibility is the understanding that your actions have consequences which may resonate across Heaven and Earth. You've probably heard the saying, "power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely"? It's true, but the corollary, "power requires responsibility, absolute power requires absolute responsibility" is also true. Ignore the latter and you fall to the former. We do not need another Voormaas on our hands.

Show that you not only understand that consequences exist, but also that you prepare for them. A good Archmage takes care that no situation gets out of control. We don't want the other side (whichever that may be) to bring out their big guns and start blasting apart the Horizon in some kind of cosmically ineffable magical duel. They don't want this either, so don't make it necessary.

This isn't a simple matter of flexing your magical muscles, either. It also applies to how you act in public, what opinions you express and other similar social concerns. An offhand comment may spark an ideological war within your Tradition that lasts for decades; Read Porthos Fitz-Empress' last work, *The Fragile Path* for a good example.

There's a tendency for people to see Archmages in one of two lights — either as beings so incredibly powerful that they can do whatever they want, or so constrained by tradition and their potential destructiveness that they dare not make a move. Neither is completely accurate. An Archmage has the potential to wreak some serious havoc, but you don't become an Archmage through capricious exercises of power. Archmages of all sorts realize that if any one of them were to get out of hand, two or three others would come down on him pretty quickly. As a result, responsibility is the *judicious* course. Every Archmage pursues some agenda; each knows that he can't fulfill it if he's a smoking corpse. Thus, it's important to figure out exactly when and where to act, and how far to go.

The simple guideline of acting judiciously is known as the "reflexive credo." Young mages sometimes call it the "Cold War effect": An Archmage dare not use his full power lest he initiate a chain of events that obliterates him and everything for which he fights. It applies to all mages, but Archmasters push around such cosmic forces that even their minor actions can have great consequences. The credo is true even of tweaking the cosmos. Archmages push, and push *hard*, and the universe shoves back with equal force.

Sometimes, an Archmage's full power may be needed, but the preferred response is minimum force for maximum gain. When you can turn your enemies to ash with a whisper but they can do the same, you choose your words most carefully.

Ambition

Does it really need to be said that if you don't want the power, you probably never get it? Well, it's true. Even the humblest Akashic Brother still seeks to master himself and the world around him. I speak of healthy ambition here. Don't plot to advance by assassinating your superiors. First of all, they'll see you coming and turn you into a lawn gnome. Second, without their approval you never earn recognition.

Still, you must show a willingness to learn and master your Tradition's (or Convention's) secrets. You must also show respect for these secrets. They're fairly important in the grand scheme of things, so you can't treat them like a tabloid you bought at a convenience store. When I talk about secrets, I don't simply mean mastering the Spheres. The Hermetics have lists of spirit names, the Verbena have backdoors everywhere, the Virtual Adepts have some places in webspace that you simply would not believe unless you see them and the Euthanatos know a few truths about death and the underworld that would turn any mortal's hair white. These are the purview of each individual Tradition, and they don't share — not just out of jealousy, but out of responsibility. Often, the training regimen of a particular Tradition eliminates those apprentices who don't respect the group's secrets and predilections. An outsider with dangerous knowledge may not have the grounding to use it properly or responsibly. You must know that they *are* secrets, and understand why, if you want to unearth the esoterica necessary to Archmagedom.

Thirst for Knowledge

If you have no interest in secrets, why are you still in your Tradition? What's so important that you do not have the time to master the appropriate lore? If you cannot be bothered to learn, you never earn the respect you need for advancement. Sure, being a rogue is a major social handicap, but being a slack-ass bastard is worse. You must be passionate about your knowledge if you are to master its depths.

You need to learn about those aspects of the world that support your magical learning. This ties into ambition and stagnancy. You should always maintain an active "life of the mind," to avoid traps caused by preconceptions and poorly considered prejudice. There is always something new to learn, a new topic to study.

Archmages are expected to have a wide base of knowledge. As a Master, you should already have such a base, but do you have the depth expected of an Archmage as well? A Master may

be expected to know the major figures of every Umbral Court, but an Archmage would know the names of every spirit as well.

Demonstrated ignorance will get you nowhere fast. Worse, it might get you assassinated. Before you take offense, put yourself in an Archmage's place. Would you want some buffoon besmirching your Tradition's name? Sometimes it's necessary to "clean up" a bit.

Avoid mental stasis. Yes, it's easy to become hide-bound — while that won't necessarily bar you from advancement, an active mind gives you a definite advantage. Innovation can get you further than some tried and true methods — but do not ignore those either. They are tried and true for a reason.

Power

The secrets of mystic might are what you've been waiting for, right? What does it mean to have an Archmage's power? Well, first you have to be a Master, which is nothing to sneeze at. Once you're there, you have to break through the normal limitations. You must be responsible enough to use the power wisely, educated enough to know what you need and ambitious enough to actually reach for it.

Just be careful that you don't burn yourself. That's too easy for any of us. Paradox will get you first if you don't slow down. By now, you must have seen a major paradox backlash, right? Some cocky mage calls on forbidden powers and a man in a wrinkled white suit comes and takes him away, or Farandwee locks him in a box or perhaps he just explodes in some psychedelic light show. These types are self-selecting, true, but for Archmages it's even worse.

If backlash is nasty for a Disciple or Adept, imagine what it must be like for an Archmage. The hubris required to change Earth's gravitational or magnetic fields is unbelievable in itself, but the corresponding backlash might be enough to wipe out a small nation (who is to say this has not happened already?).

Archmastery carries enough torque to perform some truly terrifying manipulations of the world. However, Paradox and the combined forces of other Archmages can just as easily prevent or reverse such manipulations. An Archmage must be subtle and careful if he's to effect wide-ranging change over an area or time. There's no point to phenomenal power if someone else is just going to undo everything you've done.

Action

Given that Archmages could spend all of their time countering one another's Effects, and that responsible use of power is a prerequisite to recognition by other Archmages, it would seem that the Archmage-to-be is stuck in a bind. She can't just fire off Effects left and right to impress her peers. Sitting on her haunches, though, won't get her recognized.

The answer is appropriate action, the cumulative result of responsibility and power. A Master often settles

Why can't I just buy a sixth dot and be an Archmage?

Good question. The simple answer is: You can. The more complex answer is that, while you might possess the magical might to be a real Archmage, you also need the Abilities and Backgrounds to match. Porthos did not get by on Forces alone — he was a scholar, a warrior and a politician. He spent a great deal of time studying in his extensive library in Doissetep. It's doubtful that he'd read every volume to his satisfaction before he died. He also explored a great deal of the Earth and, when Paradox prevented his return, the Umbra as well. He had allies throughout the Tellurian (enemies too!) and probably knew at least a few people in every Tradition Horizon Realm. Although Paradox barred him from Earth, it's a safe bet that he worked through many intermediaries and had fingers in many Sleeper pies.

The time it takes to study the advanced Spheres not only includes the time necessary to perfect the magical technique, but also the time required to study the skills and knowledges needed to understand the Sphere itself. Even at lower levels, this still applies. Who's going to believe that a Progenitor with Life 5 and Science 1 is really qualified to be a Research Director? Build up the mundane traits appropriate for your character along with the Spheres. The result is a more satisfactory (and plausible) character.

Also, being an Archmaster requires recognition. If other Archmages believe that the mage in question is unprepared to handle Archmastery, they gang up to take care of the problem. Such Archmages have far more experience than any Johnny-come-lately. Achieving Archmastery is theoretically possible with nothing more than a few decades of study and practice. Surviving as an Archmage is a different matter.

into a routine without taking giant strides, using a little power here and a little magic there, guiding apprentices of his Tradition. The Archmage risks more, but gains more. There's a strong tendency to think that "no matter what I do, someone else can do it better, or just undo it." The Archmage doesn't let this stop her from taking action anyway! Instead, the Archmage chooses what's important to her and acts. Magic comes from will. If you don't have the will to use magic in defense of your own beliefs, then you certainly won't make it as an Archmage.

This isn't to say that the Masters are useless — far from it. However, a Master typically uses powers in established fashions, to achieve predictable results in his field of specialized study. The Archmage doesn't limit herself to such small gains. Instead, she takes chances, expands her repertoire and shifts her interest to new areas where her beliefs carry weight. Instead of just teaching a few apprentices and writing dissertations on the basics of the Spheres, the Archmage gets out

there and finds out what's going on in the cosmos, decides what needs to be done, and then takes action to do it!

The Archmage embodies the dynamism that animates most mages. So what happens? Mages are, by their nature, heralds of change, bringing new ideas and creations to light. But along the way, they become infected with stasis—a belief that they're doing all right, that they

know what they need to know, that they have found a comfortable stopping point.

Archmages get stuck in a different form of stasis: the tendency to look at the universe through one particular lens—and to enforce the set of beliefs that viewpoint implies—instead of exploring new ways of thinking. Yet that very focus on also elevates them to the extremes of power and understanding within their chosen fields.

Degrees of Potential



What's the real difference between a Master and an Archmage? Aren't Masters also powerful, ambitious, responsible and scholarly? Yes, they are. So what really separates the two?

The Master

In any Tradition, the Master is the primary authority. He's carved a place for himself within his Tradition that gives him broad discretion. He has his Tradition's resources behind him, along with potential aid from the others. The Master is probably caught up in Tradition politics and the Ascension War.

He may not be happy where he is, but there's really nowhere else to go. Without the driving need for greater enlightenment, he'll never advance. One Master may choose not to extend her life, while another may simply lack the desire to pursue further study.

This is not a flaw, mind you. There's no shame in stopping at any given point. It's simply that the Archmage isn't satisfied unless he is constantly progressing.

A Master is a public figure among the nine Traditions. Certainly, one might devote himself to his studies, but he is generally available. This is not to say that Adepts and Disciples can always petition the Master, but rather that it is generally possible to at least get a message through. The Master assumes the tacit role of leadership, and his Tradition expects him to act the part.

It is expected but not required that a Master have apprentices. This commitment siphons time from personal improvement, making Archmagedom even less likely. Since Archmages are usually abroad or involved in dangerous projects, and Disciples lack the skill to train apprentices, the position of authority regarding their Sphere or Tradition is thrust upon the Masters.

Perhaps one of the most telling differences between the Master and the Archmage is in Earthly life. While Masters often spend quite a bit of time in Horzoni realms or exploring strange spiritual dimensions, they still tend to return to Earth from time to time—to deal with apprentices, to check up on mortal friends and contacts, or even just for fun. Paradox is a concern, of course, and many Masters find it

difficult to return for too long. Still, they usually maintain some communication with the world.

Finally, a Master may be satisfied with Mastery of two or three Spheres, rarely more than four. Such skill is formidable but comparatively limited. A Master may even learn the Spheres incidentally, simply as a result of experience while trying to accomplish less magically oriented goals. Certainly, the constant use and refinement of magic leads to greater understanding; a mage can become a Master of a Sphere just by exercising its powers constantly for several years. However, Mastery is generally the boundary of such development. For the sake of total understanding, becoming an Archmage requires dedicated study into the underpinnings of the Spheres.

The Archmage

She may not be the primary authority within the Tradition, but that's mainly because she has other things to do. When she offers her viewpoint, you can bet that everyone listens. They might not agree, but they do pay attention. For the Archmage, the difference is a matter of scope. The Master may only wish to name the stars, but the Archmage attempts to grasp them.

For an Archmage, there are no limits, no stop signs and never any turning back. The deepest secrets of magic are hidden simply so that she can experience the challenge of finding them.

An Archmage tends to be somewhat reclusive, or at least prefers to appear so. While she is known within the Traditions, she rarely reveals herself except when absolutely necessary. An Archmage's presence alone is enough to cause ripples. Thus, she takes steps to conceal her identity. Often, an Archmage is so far removed from her Tradition's day-to-day operations that few, if any, individuals even know where she might be or how to contact her.

Since an apprentice is a distraction from her studies and tasks, an Archmage seldom takes a student. However, due to the prospect's destiny or talent, it may be necessary that she accept someone for instruction. Apprentices of Archmages are usually exceptional in some way, slated for greatness and impressive deeds. Even so, an Archmage often leaves an apprentice in the care of a trusted Master or even has him assist

a Disciple. With their proclivities toward dangerous Realms, potent enemies and world-shattering magic, most Archmages are simply too hazardous to an apprentice's health.

Finally, the Archmage often Masters many Spheres. Her road is therefore longer, but may lead to a more satisfying end. The more an Archmage studies, the more it becomes

apparent that the Spheres are arbitrary distinctions of a unified cosmos; to unravel the sublime mysteries of Arch-Spheres, she must have a profound understanding of all forms of magic. It's a rare Archmage who hasn't developed some proficiency with every Sphere.

Cusps and Transitions



After decades of eye-straining arcana and harrowing Seekings, you've finally mastered your chosen magical field.

What now?

You're only halfway there. Now you need the recognition of your future peers — an intimidating prospect. You must convince relative titans that your own competence, though inferior to theirs, has earned you the right to the title "Archmage."

Mastery

Not all Archmages have reached the apogee of magical power. Many simply master Sphere after Sphere until a recitation of their titles could leave even an Adept of Life breathless. Recognition comes from broad understanding.

This is the point of development where the Masters are separated from the true seekers. Keep in mind that simple

Mastery of numerous Spheres doesn't necessarily guarantee acceptance. Power is merely one factor among many.

Metaphysics and Meditations

An Archmage's viewpoint undergoes a profound evolution as he takes the step beyond Mastery. This isn't the simple addition of new powers to his arsenal, but a refinement of his perspective. The change is comparable to what happens when a sleeper Awakens. The Archmage is aware of fundamental levels of reality he's never experienced before. With Pattern magics, he may fully comprehend what they mean and how to manipulate them. For Prime, he may learn how to draw upon the vast stores of potential other mages only theorize about. Mastery of Correspondence may reveal new means to surmount barriers, in ways previously thought impossible.

Judgment



When a Master becomes an Archmage, she isn't summoned before a committee of other Archmages and asked to deliver a dissertation on why she feels worthy to join their august ranks. It just happens one day that she's seen as an Archmage, perhaps because of her Mastery of the Spheres or her extensive knowledge of esoteric fields. The *why* isn't as important as the *when*. The acknowledgement is fairly quiet, although it might be seen as high drama to onlookers.

It's usually as simple as another Archmage greeting her as an equal.

You can be certain that a Master on the threshold of Archmagedom draws the notice of his superiors. If an Archmaster pays special attention to a given Master, it might signify impending recognition (unless, of course, he's just keeping tabs on a loose cannon). On rare occasions, an Archmage announces that a prospect has proven her worth and passed into the exalted ranks. Usually, the new Archmage is left to establish his own reputation. Once you've made it to the top, of course, that shouldn't be much of a problem.

Rejection

For those ambitious souls who strive for acknowledgement, rejection is a real possibility. A mage who seeks out Archmages in an attempt to gain (or force) recognition isn't likely to garner respect. The title of Archmage comes when the aspirant's betters decide that she is ready, and not before. Clamoring for promotion reveals a mage beyond her means; she requires the validation of outside authority for her claims.

Sometimes, a hopeful Archmage never receives acceptance. For whatever reason, she's just not seen as Archmage material.

Even worse, a Master who lacks the requisite qualities finds herself shunned by most mages he meets. Word gets around — it doesn't matter how good she is with the Spheres; if she's a danger or an annoyance to everyone, she can't find backers within her peer group.

Common Reasons for Rejection

Dearth of Responsibility

A mage with the potential to crack the universe, but without the sense to use such power responsibly, is a danger

to everyone. Such mages don't last long. Other Archmages hand together and squash them.

If a mage hasn't learned responsibility by the time he's an Archmage, he never gets the clue. In some cases, these impulsive powerhouses wind up wreaking massive havoc, devastating Horizon Realms or shaking up Sleeper society. Masters of several Traditions gather together to stop such abominable practices, and more potent Archmages are all too glad to lend a hand if necessary. Recently, an entity believed to be an Oracle arrived to whisk away an offender—whether to death, judgement, imprisonment or some other fate, one can only imagine.

And, of course, if other mages don't punish gross irresponsibility, Paradox will.

Lack of Ambition

Those without motivation rarely achieve Archmage standing. A mage who lacks the drive for perfection just doesn't have the necessary devotion to pursue the demanding Arch-Spheres. Furthermore, recognition as an Archmage means showing up in the right places and saying the right things. An unambitious mage doesn't stand out from her peers, doesn't get things done and doesn't strike other Archmages as someone who can advance the cause of Ascension.

Ever wonder why so many Archmages seem strange, erratic or downright loony? Each one has his own personal agenda, driven to the extremes of someone who understands the very underpinnings of the cosmos. There are no fence-sitting Archmages; a candidate who doesn't share their commitment doesn't have a place among these luminaries.

Mages with weak Avatars and little Destiny about them tend to be less ambitious. More motivated individuals find that their Avatar or Destiny pushes them into confrontations, forcing them to take a hand. A mage without such impetus must forge his own future. He must delve into Sleeper society and history to find something that strikes him as *wrong*. Or he can look to the spirit worlds for inspiration. He must search until something yanks his heartstrings and compels him to take action.

No Thirst for Knowledge

Incurious mages rarely even become Masters, much less Archmages. While practice and constant use are sometimes enough to achieve Mastery, the Arch-Spheres require more—a fervent need to know how things work.

There's little that can be done if a mage lacks this drive. He may get things done, but can't puzzle out the Spheres or pass on their secrets. He may be active and helpful, but he just doesn't have the enthusiasm to undertake a few decades of tedious research required to learn the rudiments of the Arch-Spheres.

Is this aimed at me in some fashion? Just because I'm more interested in doing the right thing than in pursuing incredible powers... — Mark



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A few mages suffer some trauma — often related to a failed Seeking or abuse at the hands of Nephandi, Marauders or less-than-compassionate Tradition mages — that convinces them to give up magic entirely. They might still use their powers here and there, but are too hurt or frightened seek further learning. Helping such a recluse takes care, work and a successful Seeking. Find out what drove him to give up and convince him of his ability to reclaim his destiny.

Finally, some mages may understand the Spheres but neglect mundane learning. Why study history or sociology when you can be study arcane magic? The answer, of course, is that a mage must understand the world if he hopes to change it.

Imagine that you want to change some small aspect of Sleeper society, to get a particular idea ingrained in people's heads. If you're an Archmaster of Mind, you could just plant the idea in people's thoughts. However, such a crude manipulation leaves them wondering where this sudden inspiration came from, or forgetting about it entirely since it sprung unbidden to the mind and leaves just as easily. Instead, learn what people already think, how society passes on information, and alter a few thoughts here and there to make the change. Only by understanding the normal world can you hope to make a difference.

Mages who don't understand the natural states of the world in depth tend to get themselves blown up anyway, as they push too hard against the boundaries of plausibility. An ignorant mage can be educated — many Masters take it upon themselves to ensure that their students are educated enough to be able to take responsibility for their actions. A mage who scorns such knowledge is being irresponsible with her powers, and everyone knows where *that* leads.

Insufficient Power

Face it: If a mage doesn't have the Arch-Spheres, the connections and the potent trappings of Mastery, he just can't climb the rungs.

For someone with all the ambition and knowledge, of course, lack of power is a surmountable problem. Along the way, most mages create their own Sanctums, build a few Talismans, recruit some allies and piss off some enemies. The trick is pinpointing weaknesses and covering for them. In some cases, this isn't easy: if a mage has a weak Avatar, for instance, he may never have a great facility with Prime. If he's alienated his own Tradition or cut some bad deals, he may never have political clout. The Archmage candidate finds ways to work around these flaws. Even if he can't fix things himself, there's someone around who can. The cosmos is infinite and power is ubiquitous — with enough ambition, there's always a solution.

Complacency

Some Masters get stuck in a rut. They develop a pattern of behavior, a set of preferred areas of influence and study. To become an Archmage, you've gotta move beyond this. You must get out there and do things!

A mage begins as an agent of change, but the human mind must categorize and form patterns. Naturally, many willworkers end up focusing on certain aspects of their paradigm, on the things that work best. But taking action means taking risks and expanding your capabilities. This means practice, study and the occasional failure. Most mages, especially Masters, are loath to bother with such things. They get others to do it for them.

The true Archmage avoids complacency by looking for new ways to apply old knowledge. The Archmage takes his paradigm as a basis for further understanding of the universe. Anything from dusty old tomes to conversations with Umbral Lords is fair game in the quest for new knowledge. The idea is to shake up a mage and force him out of his habitual ways, to make him look at his weaknesses and overcome them instead of always relying on others.

Closing Thoughts



Each mage studies his magical capabilities in a specific, individual way. A mage learns how to do everything within one or two ways of thinking. Each Tradition teaches a different way of looking at the universe. Through such training, the budding mage learns to describe magic in specific forms, thus learning more about it. The Archmage directs his study and focuses it, becoming highly specialized in some areas.

Eventually, the Archmage's paradigm creates a complete, functional model of reality. Through that language of paradigm, the Archmage can describe any phenomenon of magic.

Some mages don't go this route, deliberately casting aside such jargon. Although a paradigm is useful for discussing magic, it's limiting by nature. When a mage chooses a certain vocabulary, she restricts her discussion to the terms of one or two paradigms. Some mages fight to understand reality from every angle, to cast aside the formative notions of their magical youth in favor of a more complete understanding. They learn to "think outside the box," in popular business-speak. These latter sorts generally don't become Archmages. They have a different destiny.

More about this later.



Chapter Three: Archmastery



Now you've done everything right. You've earned the title of Archmage. You're wondering what the rest of your long, eventful life will be like, right? It's not what you think. Most Archmages live through decades of boredom

punctuated by brief moments of terror and crisis. That's the good part. It forces you to keep your edge. It's far too easy to fall into some epic Quiet, mundane insanity or simple stagnation. To be a successful Archmage is to maintain interest in the world around you.

Mortal Ties



Do you still keep in touch with your family? Your friends? If so, good for you. If not, maybe you should rethink your strategy. Yes, you have the power to light stars and travel Realms closed to lesser mages — but you're still human.

The Importance of Friendship

Consider that you've spent at least a century mastering your Art to the point that you are now an acknowledged Archmage. You've toiled, studied until your eyes nearly bled and then studied a little more.

And what are you left with? The friends and family you knew before Awakening are probably dead. Unless someone's hanging around as one of the restless dead, embraced by a vampire, or even Awakened and followed a path similar to yours, no one you knew is still around.

How do you deal with this? Do you hole up in a Horizon Realm and lose yourself in study? A mistake, in my opinion. Now that you have the power of a god, it's important to remember your feet of clay. It's just plain healthy to maintain relationships. Sure, you have to make new friends as the old ones die off, but who doesn't? Does that sound callous? Too bad — you can't keep them all alive.

Think of it like moving. You travel across the country, start a new life, meet new people. Only for you, it's a matter

Humans in the Horizon

The Technocratic Union has worked for centuries to colonize the far Realms. Some among the Traditions keep their own families in faerie lands and special Sanctums. No wonder so many humans can be found in the Horizon.

Of course, adjusting to life in these strange Realms is no easy task. Most humans just can't handle it. That's why there's an abundance of exceptional types out there. The Union isn't going to stick Joe Average on a Mars colony without training in microgravity and engineering, and the Traditions won't put a human in a castle floating in the ethereal void if she can't handle phasing space and magical creatures.

For Archmages, this is a great thing! They can freely interact with "mundanes" in the Horizon because there's little threat of Paradox. The Sleepers are, by default, able to handle a little weirdness. Such humans are a great bridge between mage life and mortal life, a way for an Archmage to slow down, consider mortal concerns again and keep some perspective.

Naturally, such characters also fit the bill for Wards, Allies, Contacts, Retainers and the like, or even as consors in a spirit world-based chronicle. Not that anyone plays something as outré as a normal human in a game dedicated to the masters of the cosmos.

of time rather than space. The best way to keep yourself grounded in reality is a forcible, daily reminder that most people do not share your lofty perspective. It's important to maintain empathy as you get older. Otherwise, you lose track of that essential vitality that makes you human.

Some farsighted Archmages cultivate their human families as retainers, each generation replacing the last. Others use their powers to extend the lives of friends and family. There are as many means of coping as there are Archmages who need them — probably more.

Moving On

Eventually, Paradox will prevent you from returning to Earth. It might take two or three centuries, but eventually you'll just find it too painful to stay. This happens to everyone who lives long enough, so don't worry about it too much. Striking around is a fatal mistake. A simple rote to control traffic can turn into a disastrous backlash that sends you and everyone within 16 square blocks to your own private hell. That's the optimistic scenario.

Culture thrives in the Horizon Realms. You can find plenty of company there — yes, even normal humans. It's not out of the question to bring friends and family to a Horizon Realm when you relocate. How do you think so much of humanity has already gone to the Horizon? Concordia alone had several thousand humans within its walls, and it was certainly a hospitable home to Archmages. The Tech-

nocracy has equivalent bases, such as the Cop, which provides more living space than anyone knows what to do with.

They Knew the Risks

Or did they? While it's good to keep close ties to others for your emotional health, what happens when some Black Hat decides it'd be a great coup to bring you before the Inner Circle? It's suicidal to hit you straight on. Instead, he works on everyone around you. What do you do when your beloved spouse of many years has been shipped off to some Construct? Do you rush to the rescue? Better hope your execution is flawless. One slip and she dies.

For someone of such power, your greatest weaknesses are those things most important to you, like loved ones. You have to protect them from enemies, hazardous magic and even incidental harm. If Al Aswad sends a nexus crawler to wake you up, odds are good that the surrounding neighborhood doesn't weather the results.

Many Archmages avoid this by setting up their families in elaborately defended Realms. If you have powerful guardians, spirits and magical wards surrounding your home, it tells others that someone potent lives there — but also that you mean business. Sure, there's always some hotshot ready to bust into the Archmage's tower, but the

Lack of Empathy?

A mage who avoids contact with Sleeper society (even the smaller communities found in Horizon Realms) rapidly finds herself disconnected from humanity. In a short time, she finds dealing with normal people next to impossible. Because of Resonance, mages already cause unease and wariness in normal humans. Archmages who neglect human ties exacerbate this problem.

To reflect this tendency, apply a cumulative +1 difficulty (maximum +4) to all rolls involving social interactions or interpretation of human behavior for every 25 years spent isolated from human contact — other mages do not count. From a roleplaying perspective, such mystics are not just socially inept. One can be very charismatic yet utterly unable to understand others.

Another problem that plagues such mages is the possibility she might forget to use coincidental magic when appropriate. Her time spent isolated has inured her to vulgar effects and she is not acclimated to subtlety. To reflect this, add +1 difficulty to coincidental effects for every 50 years spent in isolation.

Finally, this distance can drive a mage mad. For each century away from normal society, treat her Paradox pool as being one higher for the purposes of Quiet.

These effects can be avoided if the willworker interacts with humanity. This doesn't mean she spends an hour every week at the café, but that she actually interacts with humanity on its own terms. The accumulated effects listed above can be reversed over time so long as an effort is made to do so.

more people that explode in the process, the less dumbasses you have to scare off. If your friends and family are safely ensconced in your little world, then you just need to remember to check up on them every now and again. If another Archmage stops in... well, I've mentioned what happens when two Archmages throw down, haven't I?

Alternately, you might try hiding your associations. Oddly enough, the old comic book convention of the secret identity really works. Why do you think so many Archmages are totally mysterious, with big robes or concealing gadgets to hide their features? Why do they craft names and avoid discussing their pasts? If nobody knows anything about you, no one can track down your friends and family. A few powerful deflective spells over an area — or even the people in question — and nobody's even looking for them.

All you have to worry about is getting your ass fried when the inevitable "bigger fish" comes along to mess with your relatives. But every mage has to deal with that!

Leave Me Alone

What happens if you decide to cut off all contact and live alone in a Horizon Realm? From experience, I know this is a bad choice. Archmages need human contact. Otherwise, it becomes difficult to deal with or understand Sleepers — you might

even see them as bugs to be studied or ignored, but never really respected. Voormas cut himself away from the world, dealing with only his assassins and the occasional consort. His perspective became alien and unrealistic. When an Archmage's perception is distorted, what does that do to the world around him? A sociopath with the godlike power is the ugly result.

The worst case scenario for such a disconnected Archmage is the potential for Quiet to run out of control, possibly leading him to become a Marauder. There's also the danger of Nephandic influence. Without a stabilizing connection, it's easy to walk the steps to servitude.

If you think it could never happen to you, remember that the Nephandi consider Archmages to be valuable — if somewhat risky — prizes. Make yourself a tempting target and you might find yourself on the wrong side of the Ascension War.

Speaking of Ascension, what do you think happens to someone who loses sight of her beginnings? Awakening gifts you with wonderful powers and knowledge, sure, but you're always human. Seekings get you past your problems, but you can still lose sight of the human perspective in your rush to become a better mage. By retaining human ties, you keep your mind on the big picture. When there's nothing left but the magic, you're a Marauder — and you can't go back. Ascension is, after all, a human journey.

Supernatural Ties



Despite the potential danger, you might find companionship among others who dwell in the shadows. Yes, a vampire is a bloodsucking fiend, but he's also one of the few entities who might be old enough to understand what you're talking about.

Hunting up other supernatural beings might not be the safest or smartest thing to do. One might try to kill you just because you interrupted his dinner. However, other supernaturals sometimes make useful allies or sources of information.

Vampires

The undead can be thick on the ground, comparatively speaking. They can make new vampires faster than you can count them and some aren't afraid to do so. When that happens, seek companionship elsewhere.

Vampires are divided into lineages sharing characteristics or common interests. These lines often war against each other over resources or to offset the boredom of immortality. Regardless of the reason, never underestimate their viciousness.

With that in mind, some are amenable to approach. Certain ancients are unwilling to maintain true friendships with other vampires and find us a welcome diversion. This

lasts precisely as long as it takes you to become embroiled in a vampiric plot. My advice? Don't. Do not presume upon her friendship, and do not allow her to presume upon yours. Once you're involved you become a liability.

Young vampires (undead less than a century) are the most likely to trust you, but they lack perspective. A vampire who's a bit older (a century or two) is generally too

Warning! Crossover Stuff!

Yeah, we constantly harp on the fact that the various supernatural groups don't know jack or shit about one another, and that there's no real reason to hedge together Vampire and Mage and whatever else happens to be in the game store. Doing so can dilute themes, cause rules problems, yadda yadda yadda.

On the other hand, Archmages know a lot. Even by mage standards. These guys dig up all the dirt on anything potentially useful or harmful. Archmages are likely to know more about vampires than the average mage does.

With that in mind, these stereotypes assume that you're using some details from other games like Vampire and Werewolf. Don't feel bound to them, though, and always remember that if you're running a Mage game, your Mage themes are more important than the fact that Gumby #12 automatically has the Intoxication Trait because he's from Clan Elfpants.



busy struggling for power within her lineage. Only one who has seen the rise and fall of nations will have the time and inclination to chat, as long as you're willing to tolerate his unusual appetites. Vampires are blood drinkers, ravagers and murderers.

I've found a few bloodlines to be amenable to discussion, for a variety of reasons.

Assamites

Many of these vampiric assassins are surprisingly articulate and educated. Their philosophy and religion is fascinating, if a bit bloodthirsty. The Assamites have an interesting take on alchemy and blood magic, even if the execution falls short. Much can be learned from the Assamites, and they make a powerful allies with the proper effort.

Always show deference for an Assamite's ways. Do not make war upon his kind. The Assamites are more interested in wiping out other vampires than in killing humans, and I can't object to that.

Brujah

A Brujah prides herself on both knowledge and martial skill. The primary differences between Brujah and Assamites are their methods of warfare and their focus. Most Brujah are interested in some cause or other, but often have trenchant political insights. On the other hand, a Brujah's temper is terrible to behold. It's a frightening thing to see these

warrior-scholars on a rampage. Stay out of their way when it happens and try not to become the next target.

Followers of Set

Another vampiric religious order, this one focused on the worship of their father, Sutekh. Or so they claim. Divine descent or no, their esoteric knowledge is practically unmatched. Where they dig up their secrets, I do not know. If you have an opportunity to talk with one, by all means do so.

Accept no gifts and be wary of the Setite's motives. He may entangle you in a web of favors that will be difficult to escape, and what he asks in return isn't in your best interests.

Malkavians

The most dangerous I've encountered yet. The Malkavians are intelligent, perceptive and know entirely too much — sometimes about you. My first encounter with one of these was not by my design. He approached me to ask about something I'd done the month before. Of course, I'd been in Horizon, having dinner with Marianna of Balador. He never told me how he learned her name.

In any event, the real danger is their insanity. Every Malkavian I've met is totally around the bend. That wouldn't be so bad, except that their insanity is apparently contagious. After an encounter with one, I recovered in a dumpster chanting nursery rhymes in Enochian.

Treat Malkavians with extreme caution.

Tremere

This line was once a house of Hermes and many of the eldest recall the days before their forced transformation into bloodsuckers. Some are bitter but others welcome the opportunity to catch up on Awakened affairs. One such lives in Vienna — a friendly sort, but I don't visit unannounced.

The Tremere are the most likely of all the lineages to know things of use to us. As companions? The Assamites and Brujah are probably better choices.

Oh, and a little word of warning. The Order is still kinda miffed about the Tremere. They're not mentioned in polite conversation when Hermetics are around.

Tzimisce

Possibly the most alien of the vampires, but the closest to us in outlook. That frightens me. I have spent many a Transylvanian night discussing events of ages past with a Tzimisce lord. It's easy to forget just how bizarre he is until his three-armed servant arrives with dessert.

The Tzimisce have some small proficiency with sorcery somehow tied to their ancient homeland. They also follow a philosophy predicated on moving past their vampiric curse. To a Tzimisce, humanity is an outmoded concept. She might see similarity between her goals and ours, especially Ascension. Be wary — the end sounds similar but the road is very different.

Other Lineages

There are others, but they're mainly concerned with leadership of other vampires, dominion over the mortal world or trafficking with creatures best avoided.

Werewolves

Your typical werewolf doesn't have much in common with us. He's too busy fighting against the forces of "corruption" and may label you as such a force. It's better to let sleeping dogs lie. The most powerful among them are very conservative in dealing with others. By "conservative" I mean "xenophobic." Never approach their Nodes, which are apparently holy to them.

With my warnings in mind, here are the six types you might find most approachable.

Bone Gnawers

Apparently, the typical Bone Gnawer is usually homeless, filthy and ill-mannered. She's also well-informed, pragmatic and willing to work in a mutually beneficial relationship. Unlike vampires, if you're on her good side, she's honest about it. If you get on her bad side, find a way to make up or never return. Bone Gnawers take grudges and betrayal very seriously.

Children of Gaia

The most peaceful of werewolves. Note that in this context, "peaceful" means he apologizes before he rips off your arms

and shoves them down your throat. Establishing a friendship goes a long way toward preventing such mishaps. The Children have some insights into personal fulfillment, ecology and spirits of life. Just don't get drunk at one of their festivities.

Silent Striders

They talk to anyone but you should never mention any associations with the Followers of Set — they kill each other on sight. Beyond that, association with a Silent Strider is quite beneficial. She's usually very good at transporting and locating objects for you, and may even listen to you wax philosophical. Since they hail from Egypt and keep much of the lore from their past, they possess a surprising wealth of information on things magical.

Stargazers

Of all werewolves, a Stargazer elder is most likely to get along with an Archmage. Most Stargazers enjoy exploring higher realms of consciousness, much as we do. In fact, the first Stargazer I ever met was during a brief sojourn through the more rarefied reaches of the Astral Umbra. I was startled at first, but after a long conversation, we established a friendship that has lasted through three of his incarnations. Yes, Stargazers reincarnate. This odd form of longevity makes the time invested in the friendship more valuable.

Theurges

The Theurges are mystically inclined werewolves, who spend a lot of time with spirits and the spirit world. Although all werewolves have some capacity to enter the Middle Umbra (which can be quite disconcerting if you're not used to it), most Theurges can call upon the spirits there for aid. They are wonderful companions for conversation since they delve into mystical philosophy, but they can get pretty esoteric. Since they're coming from such a different paradigm, even an Archmage may not understand their insights. Although usually suspicious of our kind at first, they open up after a few gifts and friendly overtures. They are usually willing to barter information if you introduce them to a few friendly spirits that you know. On the other hand, if you are near one of their holy places, you may find yourself gutted. Step carefully.

Uktena

Possibly the most peculiar of the tribes. The Uktena are mystical to the same extent that the Stargazers are philosophical. Apparently, many spend their lives watching over powerful spirits of corruption, and that affects their outlook. On the other hand, they're often glad for the company we provide — especially if we're respectful and willing to help keep the wards strong.

Magic and those who practice it fascinate the Uktena. I suspect they can smell it on us. This fascination leads to fruitful alliances.

When dealing with an Uktena, never discount his insight.

Some Splats Are Missing

This is deliberate. Not even Archmages hobnob with everybody in the World of Darkness. Some clans, tribes, changing breeds and such don't get along with mages of any stripe. The Mokole would rather restart the Impergium and the Red Talons never finished. While the Harbingers of Skulls might make great companions for Euthanatos, they only just returned and no one outside the Sabbat has had time to notice.

Crossovers Redux

Archmages are prime material for crossovers. Most maintain ties with other supernaturals, if only to chat with someone old enough to comprehend them. Even so, it's best to limit interactions mainly to social venues. It's fine to talk to a vampire elder every now and then because there's plenty in common — a life span of centuries and the perspective it conveys, the separation from humanity that great power brings about. A wise Archmage takes these relationships no further.

Conflict with other supernaturals is definitely discouraged. One reason is that no Archmage is really certain just what other creatures can pull off. Another is that no other supernaturals are subject to Paradox. This is a major disadvantage, as the Archmage relies on his incredible magic — which he cannot safely use on Earth, even if he projects his Effects from within his Horizon Realm. Paradox spirits still notice and are notoriously intolerant of attempts to cheat them of their due.

Conflicts with individuals arise, but any attempt to declare open war on other supernaturals has serious consequences. There are fewer mages than vampires, werewolves and wraiths out there. A suitably determined group can make a lot of trouble for mages everywhere, despite the advantages magic has over the more static powers.

It is uncertain just what the outcome would be if the Technocracy and the Camarilla went to total economic and political war over the world's governments and businesses. It is certain that such a confrontation would not be kind to the Sleeper world.

In short, it's a big World of Darkness out there and most of it isn't friendly. Crossovers can happen, but when they do they should above all make sense.

Other Shapeshifters

Aside from the raging engines of destruction we like to call "werewolves," there are other more approachable shapeshifting breeds. Not all are exactly friendly to us, but some are willing to listen and a few actually seek us out.

Bubasti

These cats love secret lore and find Archmages to be wonderful repositories of such. If you meet one, she probably came looking for you. Even so, Bubasti make interesting companions and inexhaustible sources of arcane mysteries. I've met only one so far, while visiting Egypt. She was looking for some sort of ancestral ferish that, as it turns out, was in the possession of a particular Nephandus I had issues with. We've maintained contact since then, and I'm still amazed at what she knows.

Now if only I could get her to share more of it.

Corax

Indispensible. I've kept track of a particular cabal run by wereravens: the Hermetic Order of Swift Light. Despite the name, they do no magical research. However, they do ferret out information quite readily, so don't deal with one if you have deep secrets you don't want them to have. On the other hand, you might distract one with the skeletons in someone else's closet. Of course, this approach might earn you more enemies than it's worth.

So far, it's been worth it. Once you get a Corax on a roll, he just can't shut up. By the time you get tired of listening you have a ton of information to sift through. Corax have an amazing intelligence network. If a Corax sees it as significant, he remembers it just in case he needs it later.

The Corax have a unique language, composed entirely of cultural references, kennings and riddles. Do not attempt to translate it unless you want to break all ties.

Nuwisha

You can usually find these coyotes in the Deep Umbra. Doing what, I don't know. Be careful — a Nuwisha often appears friendly, but may decide to teach you a little humility. Like her father/totem, the Trickster, she is a prankster. I don't mean water balloons in the face, either. I'm talking about dangerous stuff like you see in Road Runner cartoons — except that her pranks are real.

If a Nuwisha decides you're worth hanging around, be careful. Still, if she likes you, she may decide to trick your enemies. Nuwisha tricks tend to be sudden, painful and often lethal.

Pay attention. The Nuwisha distinguish between a prank (to teach a lesson) from a trick (to preferably inflict grievous harm to body or ego). Hope that you're never the recipient of a trick. If she pranks you, you probably earned it. Laugh with her and move on.

Wraiths

You're not likely to find the restless dead unless you go looking for them. Wraiths tend to stick to their own side of reality, primarily out of necessity. If you want to speak with one, you have to go to his neighborhood — usually.

Magic in the Maelstrom

If you've read *Ends of Empire*, you know that the Sixth Great Maelstrom is going strong, and that Srygia has fallen. The Dark Umbra was a pretty unwholesome place to start with. Still, the land of the dead has its own sort of rules and consistency. Mages have walked there since the time of Orpheus, and with the right knowledge they've been able to pry themselves away from the grip of death.

Not any more. The Maelstrom is a whirling typhoon of chaos that sweeps across the Deadlands with terrible force. This storm wind shreds the fabric of the Shadowlands into Oblivion-tainted shards. In this chaos, magic itself can be bent against the caster's will.

When a mage uses magic in the Maelstrom, the storm itself may decide to play around with the Effect. Maelstroms are rated in intensity on a scale from one to five; one is a rather rainy, windy storm of screaming meat, while a five indicates pieces of ghostly metal and bone breaking the sound barrier in a whirling cadence with Spectres and wraith-buildings. See *Ends of Empire* or *Wraith: The Great War* for a Maelstrom force chart. Most Great Maelstrom winds are force five, though some areas are a little less hostile. Decide on the intensity of the Maelstrom at a given place, and add two to that rating. Then, for an Effect that a mage casts, any die that scores equal to or less than this number generates a warp effect.

When a mage gets a warp effect, the swirling chaos of the Maelstrom infects the magic itself. The player can spend Quintessence to cancel warp effects; each point spent cancels one warp effect. The mage bulwarks his Effect with the raw nature of reality. The Storyteller applies any leftover warp effects to change the magic in strange ways as it's tainted by Oblivion. It's up to the Storyteller to decide whether to split the warp effects into several minor alterations or apply them as one large change.

Like vampires, wraiths stick around for a long time. Also like vampires, this gives them a perspective that you might relate to. Unlike vampires, wraiths aren't likely to lose their emotions as the years go by. You can help out an older wraith by protecting one of his *fetters*, items important to him in life. Perhaps you can simply keep him company.

If traveling the Dark Umbra strikes you as distasteful, you can always find some magical means to bring your dead friend to you. Perhaps you could create a body, thus giving him a second lease on life. Maybe you can bring him into other another region of the Umbra via Spirit magic. Whatever method you choose, wraiths are usually grateful for the experience.

But there are other kinds of restless dead, some you don't want to invite into your Chantry. These dark spirits have fallen prey to their base impulses and only barely manage a semblance of humanity. Avoid them at all costs.

Oh yeah, a final word of warning. Even an Archmage can get stuck in the Dark Umbra. Once you're lost there, it's over. Sooner or later, you mess up and join the ranks of the

Don't even try using Entropy. Although that Sphere seems like the best for dealing with the chaos of the Maelstrom, the storm itself is just too potent. Chaos, once out of the bottle, isn't so easily controlled. When a mage uses Entropy in the Deadlands, even away from the Maelstrom, her player rolls any failures or botches, she gets a single point of Jhor (for the whole Effect, not per failure die). More than five points of Jhor indicates that the mage has been thoroughly infected with Entropic energy, and her physical body is now nothing more than a shell of Oblivion — the mage becomes a Spectre. So play nice.

A mage can use magic without the warp in a haunt or other place where the Maelstrom is hedged out. Since Entropy is so risky, the mage is probably best served by trying to find a natural lull in the storm instead of attempting to create one.

Example: Stuck in the Maelstrom after a nasty stunt with a Spectre and a Tass-filled artillery shell, Sir Lawrence tries to pull off a defensive Forces Effect to shield himself against a Mortwright. The Maelstrom rating is a 3, so any magic die that comes up 5 or less generates a warp effect. The player rolls Avete and scores 7, 5, 4, 4, 2. Since the Effect is fairly low-key (difficulty 5), the 7 and the 5 generate two successes. The 5 also garners a warp effect. The 4, 4 and 2, while not generating successes, do indicate warp effects. Sir Lawrence's spell generates a total of four warp effects. The Storyteller decides that instead of making several little changes, the Effect itself is thoroughly altered: instead of getting a shield of light that deflects the Mortwright's attacks, Sir Lawrence finds himself surrounded by an oozing, swampy morass of liquid darkness that offers protection but also cocoons him away from the outside world with a smothering embrace.

restless dead. Worse still, the Dark

Umbra is home to a raging storm of spiritual energy that screws with magic. I've heard of at least two mages having their Avatars literally torn to shreds by hellish winds of bone and spectral debris.

Changelings

The fae of old have long since departed. Only pale shadows remain. If you make the acquaintance of one, be forewarned that she may only have a few short years left. More than once, I've visited a relatively recent companion only to find that she has forgotten everything about our previous contact. No magic I could draw forth returned her memories.

A tragedy, but one to be aware of. Treasure the time you have with her. The fae may soon be gone.

Faeries use magic unlike our own. They weave dreams and illusions into Glamours that mask and befuddle. Once, it is said, the fey were potent allies of ours. Now, their illusions barely serve to hide them from mortal eyes. Perhaps only in their lost faerie lands can their true measure be known, but such Realms are locked outside of time and space, captured in moments of teardrops. They are simultaneously terrifying, wondrous and sad.

Others

Aside from the relatively numerous supernaturals described above, below are some rare types who have slipped through the cracks.

Sorcerers

Some say that sorcerers practice a lesser magic. This does not mean they lack insight. In fact, given the limitations your typical "hedge magician" must deal with, she's learned more about subtlety with magic than your average Tradition mage. Pay attention and you might learn something. Besides, the hedge mage you befriend today might be your student tomorrow.

On a slightly different note, I've met a few who seem far older than they appear. Perhaps two or three have found a

manner of immortality that isn't subject to Paradox. That in itself is worth more than anything else I can imagine.

Ultimately, if someone can use magic, what does it matter how it works? If a sorcerer speaks incantations and makes gestures and the world bends to his will, then he is a magician. A few Masters who study Avatars and Prime energy make the conceited claim that hedge wizards are inferior to other mages because they do not have Awakened Avatars, yet still they perform feats of magic passed down from the Mythic Ages.

Do not underestimate them.

Mummies

The closest thing to a true immortal I have ever encountered. I saw Sahura die with my own eyes, cut down by vampiric enemies. Imagine my surprise when he returned to renew our acquaintance some two centuries later, apparently none the worse for wear. According to Sahura, it is some powerful spell long lost to time. I'd be tempted to research a similar effect, except that I've seen what Sahura can do with his own version of magic. While it is certainly potent, it is also limited. I prefer my own path to Ascension.

Still, a mummy can be a powerful ally — assuming you can find one. They are almost as rare as the Bubasti.

Quests and Tasks



An Archmage is a living legend — a mortal with the power of a demigod. The simple tasks of Adepts and Disciples are not for her. She's generally got bigger fish to fry. Her powers are matched by the challenges she faces.

The usual reasons motivate an Archmage to sally forth and storm the gates of Hell. Perhaps he needs to study a Bygone or find a particular Umbrood to learn the Fifth Duke of Ice's secret name. Whatever the details, the goal is never commonplace. The typical Archmage's quest is an adventure of mythic proportions.

Unfortunately, these trips are not only epic but also dangerous. With great rewards come great risks. The Fifth Duke of Ice probably doesn't want his name known to every Archmage who comes down the pike; even one is too many. Expect to find traps, wardings, concealments and anything else an Umbrood Lord can bring to bear to stop you from learning his name.

Of course, you could always ask politely.

Bearding the Dragon

An Archmage often has questions that never even cross a Master's mind. Most libraries — most other sources of lore, in fact — probably aren't sufficient for an Archmage's needs:

How can you find the secrets to further your Archmastery of magic? One possibility is to seek an Oracle, if they exist at all. Of course, there's no guarantee you can understand what one has to say. You could pay a visit to an Umbrood Preceptor or Lord, as they often embody truths and enigmas of elaborate profundity. Their narrowly specialized viewpoints probably make them nearly as incomprehensible as Oracles.

Perhaps one of the many Realms might hold the answer — especially a Shard Realm. Where better to improve your Archmastery of Life than the Shard Realm of Life itself? Access to the Shard Realm of Correspondence was lost when the Hermetic College on Mus fell. Rediscovering the entrance to the City of Brass is itself a quest worthy of an Archmage.

On the subject of finding things, Mount Qaf is rumored to be in the Digital Web. Are the rumors true? To find out would be an amazing coup.

Also, the loss of Doissetep was a terrible blow to the Traditions. With the deaths of so many Masters and Archmages along with the loss of the great Chantry's resources, it's questionable whether the Order of Hermes can ever recover. Establishing a Chantry equal to Doissetep is certainly a task equal to any Archmage, even those few who survived the original's destruction.

Methods of Madness

Like coincidental and vulgar Effects, the methods an Archmage uses to achieve her goals can be subtle or overt. Numerous possibilities exist each method. No Archmage limits her responses. She has access to apprentices, allies, followers, vast magical power and a store of knowledge an elder vampire would envy. A clever Archmage (aren't they all!) uses everything at her disposal to solve problems that come her way.

The Subtle Touch

Not every problem requires overt magical firepower. In fact, such a response is rarely necessary. Archmages can exercise less obvious resources to deal with difficult situations.

Most Archmasters gather quite an entourage: students, mages who wish to attach their fortunes to his, consors (some of whom have been with him for decades or centuries — what's good for the master...) and casual acquaintances. Some even sponsor young cabals, especially if they are competent and efficient.

It's simple for the Archmage to have these allies or followers perform favors for him. Whether this involves interfering with enemy activities, finding an important talisman for a ritual or even rumormongering depends on the situation and the individuals involved. Another possibility is the publication or spreading of information that might be advantageous to the Archmage or his cause. Case in point: the aforementioned journal *The Fragile Path*.

An Archmage's influence is best felt through intermediaries and indirect actions. Such moves are more difficult to counter, and their purpose is not always apparent. No Archmage is a stranger to the concept of the "red herring."

The Sledgehammer

Conversely, sometimes you need to pull out the stops and go in with all Spheres blazing. The problem with this approach is that it flushes out enemies willing to use their Spheres just as forcefully. The result is a devastating war, sometimes on the scale of a nuclear conflagration.

This level of conflict is heavily discouraged and preferably avoided. Use it as a last-ditch gambit when everything else has utterly failed. At that point, when total desperation sets in, it really doesn't matter what happens. Personal defense can justify such an extreme response; how else can you repel a massed Nephandi invasion?

When Archmages move from cold war to hot, the landscape suffers. Their associates should leave the area as rapidly as possible.

Despite the warnings above, such unrestrained conflict happens more often than anyone expects, and doesn't always result in an Archmage's death. Of course, the Archmage who lets everything fly at the first sign of trouble doesn't live long enough to maintain that habit.

Exceptions to the Rule

Not every use of the Arch-Spheres necessarily leads to outright, no-holds-barred conflict between Archmages. There are many constructive and subtle applications for these Spheres that make them useful as long as you're not on Earth. The occasional delicate use of such power can be managed with a certain degree of finesse, but be careful the scalpel doesn't slip.

In general, the most common use of Archmagic is in corrective action: preventing serious magical mishaps from becoming any more destructive. When an Archmage derails the time line or drops a flaming mountain toward Earth, other Archmages are quick to rectify the situation. Nobody needs the sort of Paradox backlash that results when such drastic manipulations get out of hand. It's a cold war; everyone has an agenda, but no one pulls out the big guns lest their enemies do the same.

In the far-out Realms of the Umbra, of course, all bets are off. There, you can roll up your sleeves and get crackin' with world-shattering spells. The relative flexibility of the universe in the unformed void mitigates Paradox. Besides, if you're out bioforming barren worlds in some backwater corner of the galaxy, who cares? It's not like you're stepping on anyone's toes. All's fair on the far side of the Gauntlet.

Mistakes

There isn't much room for trial and error in the Archmage's life. In theory, he should have by-passed this stage long before becoming an Archmage. The consequences of mistakes are much greater with this narrow margin of error. These are easily avoided as long as the Archmage watches his step and doesn't take rash action.

Never Start a War You Can't Afford to Lose

Don't apply force at the wrong place or time. While it's certainly possible for a few Archmages to get together and rip Null-B out of the Horizon, it is a colossally stupid action. First, it's murder. Yes, an Archmage can bend the universe, but does that give her the right to judge thousands of humans on a whim? The consequences of such an action are terrible — the Technocracy has its own Archmages (Arch-Scientists?) and they react swiftly. Imagine a war across the Horizon, annihilating centuries-old Realms and Chantries, slaughtering hundreds of Mages — for what gain? The Ascension War cannot be won through violence.

Think Tactically

An Archmage can forget that he is not the only Archmaster around. He may overlook a possible enemy, fail to cultivate a new friend, or neglect to sway a neutral. Everyone an Archmage meets might be a friend, ally, pawn,

enemy, spy or more than one of the above. An Archmaster should pay attention to everyone he meets.

Watch Your Back

Finally — and this one is so stupid it's amazing anyone fails to do it — an Archmage must watch her back. Constantly. Even when she's asleep — especially when she's

asleep. It's impossible to guess when someone might decide that the Archmage has become a liability. An enemy may send a spirit to possess a trusted ally or activate a sleeper agent within the Archmage's entourage. The attack can come from anywhere at any time. This relates to the previous point, but bears stressing. One moment of inattention, and it's all over.

Trials and Tribulations



Here's the bad news. Even a responsible, attentive Archmage can find himself in danger. Trouble doesn't always wait for you to come looking for it. Sometimes, it comes looking for you. I don't mean annoying distractions, I mean threats that could rend entire Realms if given the chance. Generally, it's up to you to fix the problem.

Trouble isn't the only thing that comes looking for Archmasters. An Archmage is a sort of "reality nexus": if something really strange happens, it probably happens around an Archmage. While not always life threatening, this effect can be very disconcerting for everyone involved.

Mages

The most common opposition Archmasters encounter is other mages. Their rank is less important than their presence. They threaten, annoy, offer service, ask for teaching, spy, try to kill, tempt, convert, or otherwise subvert Archmages. Sometimes, they use several approaches at once.

This is only natural, given the nature of Archmages. They serve as lightning rods for fortune as well as fate. While the potential for death or injury is incredible, so is the potential reward. An offhand lecture might lead to a new understanding of the Spheres or perhaps an insight into the politics of Umbral Courts.

Rivals

Not everyone cares to face competitors directly, least of all other Archmages. Petty gambits such as sabotage and theft are only the tip of the iceberg. Inter-Chantry espionage is distressingly common among the Traditions, and the stakes between rival Archmages are very steep.

These struggles can happen within one Chantry just as easily as between two. The potential danger increases geometrically if dire enemies live next door to each other. The real risk isn't the cold war but the danger of open conflict. Each Archmage is generally surrounded by consors, apprentices and other hangers-on who might be willing to face rival forces in direct combat. Escalation leads to the Archmage's involvement. The safest course of action at that point is to find another Realm or planet to be on.

Fortunately, *Doissetep* is the only such confrontation in recent memory. The sudden violence between the rival factions within the ancient Chantry, combined with its presence in the Shade Realm of Forces, made for a spectacular display of destructive energy — and the loss of the most competent mages in the Traditions.

Most Archmages understand the dangers of these confrontations and prefer to work subtly. While even the worst hatted can burn for centuries, the preferred medium for conflict lies in "counting coup." It's better to injure your enemy by depriving him of necessary resources or disrupting delicate experiments. Some Archmages consider this a necessary part of learning, as few

Code Duello

Most conflicts between Archmages are non-lethal, often involving some arcane contest of magic invisible to onlookers — or visibly impressive beyond the special effects budget of any studio. Past challenges include lighting and dousing stars, wearing down planets with erosion and growing the largest possible viable life form. Of course, they've also been debates, chess matches and even certain sports. Naturally, the real conflict is the intense magical struggle to gain an advantage or minorly alter some small part of the environment.

Some current favorites include:

- Each duelist learns the other's True Name. The winner is the first to make the other forget his opponent's True Name without inflicting lethal damage.
- Begin a media saturation campaign to see who can be the first to evoke enough hype to make a household word.
- There's always room for a classic: the shapeshifting duel. The first Archmage assumes a form, then the other assumes a form to defeat the first. This continues until one cannot find a form to defeat the other.

The challenged chooses the form the duel takes. A creative contest earns an Archmage some status even if she loses. The challenger usually selects the time frame in which the goal must be accomplished. It's considered bad form to choose an arena in which you know your opponent is incompetent. That's the risk the challenger takes, though, and it's not precisely against tradition.

Cerramen is always available, but most Archmages find it a rather unsatisfying resolution.

others can challenge them. These rules of engagement are formal and explicit, since any breach of etiquette might lead to a terrible conflagration.

These ground rules don't make for nice conflicts, but do make for mostly bloodless exchanges.

Finally, an Archmage who takes offense at another can challenge him to some kind of magical duel — Certamen, a shapeshifting contest, or some other arcane test of Spheres. While these challenges are seldom violent, they are profoundly disturbing to observe.

These duels are sometimes to the death. Such a rare challenge may be a disguised assassination attempt, but that gambit is pretty risky. Usually, they're fought over some obscure philosophical hypothesis.

Tempters

Despite expectations, a Nephandus won't introduce himself as such, nor is he likely to launch hordes of ravenous tentacled beasts at an Archmage — unless he intends to offer assistance so that he may gain your trust.

This is a subtle and invasive threat. A Nephandus works his way into an Archmage's presence, posing as a consort or student — if not something else. Once he's found a niche, he exerts his influence. Given sufficient time and flawless stealth, he may successfully corrupt even an Archmage.

Nephandic Archmages do exist and are the most likely to set their sights on corrupting a fellow Archmaster. With powers similar to those of his target, the Nephandus is a terrifying threat.

Even more dangerous are those found in the darkest corners of the Deep Umbra, beyond the farthest reaches the Void Engineers and Sons of Ether have explored. They travel in packs with strange beasts composed of Entropy-tainted energies. On occasion, these blasphemous gatherings drive screaming storms the size of worlds ahead of them. These packs sometimes lair in peculiar outcroppings of black stone riddled with tunnels that twist and stretch almost at random, broken by gigantic caverns that span thousands of miles. The outcroppings are immeasurably expansive, stretching upward beyond any distance the eye can see. Those who have tried to find the summit, along with those who have explored the tunnels too deeply have never returned. Even Correspondence perceptions fail here. It seems that the tunnels are the physical reflections of holes in the fabric of the universe itself.

Nephandi of any stripe see Archmages not as enemies but as potential tools. There are few confident enough in their abilities to approach an Archmage and make a direct offer. The wise Archmage turns deaf ears to such a temptress, for she doesn't approach without something to offer. The price for such favors is all too dear. Don't underestimate the Nephandi. They can be as potent as any Archmage and have knowledge of twisted Spheres only glimpsed in the most terrible of nightmares.

Only those who are too far gone to see anything but the mind-blasting glory of their incomprehensible masters attempt direct conflict. Thankfully, they are usually of little consequence and less threat.

Supplicants

Archmages know more about — well, anything — than just about everyone else. That's a requirement for the job — you can't get there on magic alone, after all. Other mages want to learn what Archmages have picked up. They pop in for advice, wisdom, or several decades of training (if they have the patience for it).

Advice is easy: just give the supplicant what he wants and away with him. Of course, it's possible that he shouldn't have certain information, or that he'll pass it along to someone who has even less need for it. In such cases, it's childishly simple to mislead.

Prospective apprentices are more difficult to deal with. No Archmage has the time to train a relative idiot. In fact, the average mystic is probably not suitable for such training. Now, it's rarely obvious whether the candidate has potential, but there are several ways to find out.

The first is to send the poor fool on a quest to find some knick-knack or other. Make certain the prize seems appropriately important to the mage before sending him off. Finagle a little high drama, and watch how he deals with the matter and judge him afterward. Or perhaps after the second or third such errand, if his suitability is not immediately clear.

It's irrelevant whether the supplicant is an Initiate, Disciple, Adept or Master. What's important is her drive to learn the secrets an Archmage can impart, her long-term value to your plans. If she turns out to be a spy planted by a hated rival, don't turn her away immediately. Instead, convert her. If she's valuable enough to use as a spy, she's valuable enough to serve as a student.

Strange Beasts

Mages aren't the Archmaster's only visitors. The Umbrood, the Bygones and other peculiar beasts unknown to lesser mystics also come calling.

Such creatures might seek an Archmage for succor or out of some enmity, maybe toward one of the Archmage's previous incarnations. Some powerful Umbrood value human input. Perhaps the Archmage is the only one who can understand what it's saying.

A Bygone might need another refuge from the advancing waves of disbelief that forced it into the Umbra in the first place. Perhaps its home was invaded by Technocrats and it requires aid in removing them. The threat must be truly grave if a Bygone comes to an Archmage for assistance.

Visits from Bygones can also be hostile. Perhaps in some past excursion, the Archmage slew a dragon's mate, and now the beast is back for revenge. A dragon is no threat to ignore, even

Storytelling Omens

Signs and portents require subtlety and a decent knowledge of symbolism on the Storyteller's part. Fortunately, this isn't as hard as it sounds. Omens can foreshadow events or offer fodder for future stories. A sign you dropped in front of the players six sessions back might actually fit perfectly into the current story line.

One interesting technique involves the tarot deck. Consider what you want to foreshadow, draw a card and base your description of the next scene on the significance of that card. If you have no actual events in mind, use the card alone for inspiration. You need not directly use any element on the card itself, but you may find that the imagery inspires other symbols that may be more effective.

The Mage Tarot Deck (shameless plug) uses imagery appropriate for the World of Darkness. Each suit is aligned with a specific type of Avatar and corresponding faction.

Other divinatory tools are also useful. The I Ching and Nordic runes are both handy for inspirational symbolism. The I Ching comes with associations for elements, colors, compass directions, family relations and more.

Keep in mind that Archmages tend to be a bit more observant than normal mortals. If the players miss the hint, feel free to make secret Perception + Enigmas rolls for them. The idea is to invoke an air of mystical surrealism, not to frustrate everyone involved.

Also note that signs need not provide full explanations of events, but possible outcomes or interpretations (depending on whether the event has already happened). Tailor such omens to the Spheres the characters know best. Resonance sticks to Archmages like nothing else, and it is dramatically appropriate to invoke it for emphasis.

for an Archmage. What if, on his last visit to the Egyptian Court, the Archmage forgot to give proper respects to Tahuti? If the god takes offense, a dangerous struggle for survival or sanity could ensue—who wants to fight a war with the god of knowledge?

Weirdness

It isn't enough for an Archmage that everyone else plots against him; the Nephandi work twice as hard to recruit him and half the Umbral Courts need his assistance with some crisis or other. Aside from that, there's the fact that almost every facet of an Archmage's life is fraught with omens and hidden meanings. Most mages see things no Sleeper can understand. Archmages see things no mage can imagine.

While this may seem fascinating at first, consider what it must be like after a century or two. Every time you turn around, the landscape rearranges itself into secret messages for your viewing pleasure. You can't ignore these signs, as they all have meaning. Unfortunately, you can't be sure they weren't caused by Quiet, either.

Signs and Portents

Not everything that happens around the Archmage is a sign, but many events can be interpreted as omens. Anything from an early spring to the patterns of broken glass can be significant. Seeing an owl catch a mouse may foreshadow an upcoming event in the Archmage's life; perhaps an apprentice must be punished, or worse, someone is hunting him.

Omens are possibly side effects of the Archmage's Resonance, which may shape events around him to provide insight into past, present or future events. It is foolish to spend too much time meditating on them, or Quiet tosses out illusory signs until the reading is too muddled to comprehend.

Resonance

As a mage does, so she is. Resonance is the accumulated inertia of a mage's workings. The more she grows in power and knowledge, the greater effect Resonance has upon her surroundings. The omens described above are one side effect. But Resonance is more profound than vague signs. For an Archmage, her Resonance taints everything around her. It may be visible in the power crackling about her, or the fact that she just seems to know what everyone around her is about to do.

But it's even more than that. Resonance affects the people an Archmage meets, how they react to her, what her personality and movement seem like and even how the weather patterns change around her on particularly disturbing days. The environment often reflect her emotions. If she is an Archmistress of Forces, her wrath may manifest as a thunderstorm with howling winds. If she is competent with Life, others around her experience increased health, rapid healing or recovery from illness. The drying leaves of late autumn turn green again, if only for a short time.

Usually, Resonance is subtle, a nearly invisible undercurrent that colors the events of the Archmage's life. It

slowly draws others to her because it's necessary. It can draw friends just as easily as enemies. Resonance often reflects her desires and fears with equal emphasis. The degree of influence Resonance exerts generally relates to the degree of Mastery the Archmage has achieved.

While all mages are touched to some degree by Resonance—your emotions, drives and motives all inform your magic—Archmages carry such power that Resonance flows around them even without the presence of magic. An Archmage's personality is emblazoned upon her like a printed sign. Anybody who met Porthos Fitz-Empress got the first impression that he was a lunatic; he was. Archmages have worked such powerful magic for so long that they have been irrevocably changed by their own Effects, even if they don't realize it. The Resonance that flavored an Archmage's outward Effects in her youth returns home to redouble her most vibrant or terrifying personality traits. After all, the Archmage has spent so much time changing the universe

that the magic, which reflects inward change at the same time, has only enhanced her unique traits until they blaze with the force of all the cosmic workings she's done.

Paradox

Paradox is the biggest hurdle that every Archmage faces, and very few overcome it. Just living long enough to become an Archmage generates Paradox you never lose. For the first few centuries, this isn't enough to bar you from Earth, but the risks should be sufficient to dissuade you from using vulgar magic. The price for such hubris is swift and painful. The use of Arch-Spheres alone racks up a large amount of Paradox, regardless of the subtlety with which they're wielded.

Eventually, it simply becomes easier to relocate to a Horizon Realm, where Paradox is no longer an issue. Of course, this has its own drawbacks, such as isolation from mainstream human society, but the benefits are great — risk-free experimentation and study, for instance, or the ability to take a walk without suffering minor backlashes. Life in the Horizon leads some to simply forget all subtlety when using magic, though, which can be unfortunate on those few occasions these Archmages return to Earth.

Most Archmasters tend toward a subtle use of magic, as it is usually the safest, regardless of venue. Subtlety isn't possible with the Arch-Spheres, so it's best to be careful

about when and where they are used. The exercise of such exalted forces may summon more than mere Paradox.

The great quest, of course, is to find some way to get rid of Paradox. It's a bane to mages of all sorts, and even the Technocracy suffers from its own peculiar version of Paradox.

Paradox goes hand in hand with the Awakening. Vampires, ghosts, penny-ante sorcerers — none of them have to deal with Paradox. None of them are humans who have Awakened to their full mystic potential, able to reshape reality by sculpting their own souls.

So what's an Archmage to do? Along with the power to mold Quintessences comes the backlash of cosmic forces resisting her efforts. Anyone who accepts the power of magic also accepts the limitations of Paradox and its effects.

This isn't to say that Paradox is insurmountable, though. While Paradox arises when a mage pushes the universe too hard, the universe itself also has ways of compensating. The clever mage is subtle — avoiding Paradox in the first place — but every mage must deal with the backlash sooner or later.

Removing Paradox

The first way to deal with Paradox is through Prime magic. Paradox seems to come when a mage evades the constraints of reality. The universe says *this should not be*, and when the mage shapes his Avatar to shape the cosmos, Paradox responds. However, Quintessence is the very building block of existence.



When You Peel Away the Skin

A few Archmages know a way to remove permanent Paradox through magical castigation, but it's far from agreeable.

When a mage accrues permanent Paradox, his very Pattern is altered by reality-bending forces. It follows, then, that the mage must excise the tainted Pattern and stem the infection that caused the corruption in the first place.

The answer: a modified version of the Gilgal rite. A mage can strip away permanent Paradox by burning off parts of his Avatar. In game terms, each point of Avatar flayed off like this removes a point of permanent Paradox.

Needless to say, Avatars don't enjoy this treatment and most mages regard it as self-mutilation. Still, for the Archmaster of Spirit, the answer is there... it's just that no one said it would be a pleasant answer.

There's no known way to repair an Avatar damaged in this fashion. And nobody's sure what happens to the tainted bits once they're severed. Another mystery of Paradox, it seems.

Oh yeah. And if you're concerned about your players stocking up on a bunch of Avatar dots just so they can do this, remember: this is a storytelling game, not "who's got the dots." It's up to the Storyteller to moderate who has potent Avatars and to make sure that the full impact of this horrible sacrifice comes across if it ever occurs in play.

With Quintessence, Paradox can sometimes be tricked, smoothing out the ripples in reality as if to say "This is the way it's supposed to be." Granted, this only works for small Effects; nobody has enough Quintessence to run around casting Arch-Spheres and racking up Paradox.

Familiars are another way to handle Paradox. Most familiars are actually potent spirits, bound to the mage through special pacts. A few can absorb Paradox energy,

blunting its effects. This isn't true of all familiars, though, and often their capacities are sorely limited.

Now, the real question: how does one manage to deal with permanent manifestations of Paradox? Although younger mages sometimes suffer explosions of strangeness, Archmages tend to draw lasting manifestations of the weird. Alter your own Pattern too thoroughly, live too long, lay down too many uber-Effects and before you know it some things just won't be right for you, ever again.

Resourceful Archmages find ways to deal with even the problems of permanent Paradox. Some places in the Tellurian are natural wellsprings of power and possibility, where it's possible to wash away one's "cosmic sins." Rumor also has it that a mage can strip off Paradox if he cuts away the part of himself to which it's attached—though how anyone would do this is a subject of speculation.

In the end, permanent Paradox is almost inevitable. It's manageable, but learn to live with it.

Cutting a Deal

Unfortunately, there are relatively few options for the Archmage who wants to actively maintain an Earthly presence. The most well-known are the reports of powerful Umbrood who can consume permanent Paradox in the same manner that a familiar can consume the less persistent kind.

These creatures, assuming they exist at all, aren't rumored to be helpful or beneficent. Indeed, they're known for demanding payment for every service rendered. These creatures, the rumors say, like to take mages as familiars.

Perhaps Paradox is to these bizarre Umbrood what Quintessence is to mages. They might accept Paradox in exchange for some kind of service.

Of course, most Archmages prefer to avoid centuries of servitude or handing over their souls for "safekeeping." Dealing with these beings is worse in the long run than simply living with the Paradox.

Places of Power



The dual problems of Paradox and competing mages eventually push Archmages to the Horizon. They aren't usually satisfied to just hang around at the local Horizon Realm, however. They search for places that offer new insights into the structure of the Tellurian.

Once you've become an Archmage, you'll probably be bored with all the same old hang-outs, too. Besides, who wants to live in some crowded corner of the Umbra where you're rubbing shoulders with all the riff-raff that randomly Awakened? It's not like magic selectively draws out the best of humanity, after all.

Locked Out!

One of the most pressing problems among Archmages (and even Masters) today is the recent change to the Gauntlet. In the past, the Gauntlet served as a simple barrier between the material and spiritual worlds. Now, it's a dangerous, shearing force that pushes out mages and even injures unfortunate Avatars.

This development arose from the recent tumult in the Underworld. Some damn fool decided to set off a ghostly nuke in the lands of the dead. The resulting Maelstrom blew apart hundreds of Avatars, and now the shards of soul fragments skitter along the surface of the Gauntlet in a spirit-tending, scything gale.

The Avatar Winds

Fueled by the terrible Maelstrom of the Underworld, shredded chunks of Avatars rip across the Gauntlet. Magic has become noticeably harder to work, and mages who traverse the Gauntlet may find themselves in danger.

For each point of permanent Paradox + Arete, roll one die when a mage crosses the Gauntlet. A powerful mage is more likely to get clobbered by the storm winds because his enlightenment acts as a magnet to the Avatar shards. For each success (difficulty 6), the mage takes one aggravated wound. It's risky to cross the Gauntlet now! Worse, if the mage botches his roll to step sideways, he permanently loses a point from his Avatar rating as his Avatar is scarred and shredded. If the mage runs out of Avatar points and botches again, he loses his Avatar completely — magic is lost to for him, forever.

This does not apply at natural gateways and zones where the Umbra touches the Earth, but these are rare enough that they are hotly contested property. Looks like you may have to delay that trip to the Horizon after all.

If you want mages to continue traveling the Horizon in your chronicle, of course, you can ignore this new wrinkle, or just introduce a special artifact or gateway to take care of the problem. In general, though, Masters and Archmages find themselves stuck in the far realms, and the Disciples and Initiates left on Earth are all that remain of the Traditions. Your starting character may be the Traditions' last hope!

While a few suffered a brief, unexplained illness, most mages weren't even aware that anything happened. Several unlucky mages had their Avatars damaged or torn apart in the storm winds. The most visibly affected, though, were those away from Earth — mostly Masters and Archmages.

This new layer to the Gauntlet impedes the passage of the Avatar. It's like a spiritual blender. Mages away from Earth wind up stuck outside, or — if they risk coming back — suffer severe damage to their Avatars. For mages on Earth, travel to any spirit worlds beyond the Middle or Dark Umbra is now a dicey proposition.

What does this mean to you? Well, once you're an Archmage, you're probably going to spend time away from Earth, due to Paradox. Now, you can't go back.

Looks like the Disciples on Earth are all that's left.

The Null Zone

It seems strange for Archmages to hang out in a place where magic doesn't work, but that simple fact makes the Null Zone an attractive option. Since Archmages typically have decades, if not centuries, of experience upon which to draw, they are often more than a match for any other entity that finds itself unable to use magic or technology. The Null

Zone is also a fascinating place for mages because it looks out onto various times and places of the Tellurian while simultaneously providing an apparently immutable backdrop of nothingness. Where better to challenge your abilities, than the place where everything you know doesn't work?

Epiphanies

Realms of pure thought, Epiphanies are the perfect place for Archmages to contemplate and learn. As Epiphanies coalesce and disperse, they form windows into peculiar ways of thinking, or specialized realms of inspiration. Obviously, such concentrated zones of imagination can hold fresh ideas for eager mages. Archmasters in particular, always seeking new angles on old problems, are likely to find Epiphanies exhilarating. If stumped by a particular obstacle, an Archmage can always visit a Realm of contemplation about that very conundrum. Chances are, some facet of the Epiphany has a new viewpoint that answers the mage's questions.

Epiphanies tend to be short-lived, though, so Archmages must be quick to take advantage of them. If you can access Mind or Spirit magic, this isn't too much trouble, since you can just extend your perceptions to sense these places of inspiration. Sometimes, an Archmage will even dive into an Epiphany and use magic to hold it together, milking all the secrets to be had.

Steadings

Some mages actually have the power to shape their own little pocket realities in the Umbra. Sure, cabals have built or discovered their own Horizon Realms before. The Technocracy even establishes Constructs within the depths of "other dimensions." Archmages, though, have a tendency to build little walled-off Realms of their own, with the particulars of the Realm specifically engineered to suit the mage's needs and desires. From older days, Archmages took the term "Steading" to refer to such homes.

Remember those stories about wizards with towers that float in the sky or can only be found when you're invited? Those are Steadings. A Steading exists in the Umbra but usually has access points where it overlaps with other Realms, sometimes even with Earth. The mage building the Steading taps a Node and uses it to power the Steading. Particularly talented Archmages have even moved a Node's site to the Steading itself instead of leaving the Steading's power source defenseless at a distant site. In any case, the mage uses some of the Node's Quintessence to form a trickle of shaping magic, creating a "bubble" in the Umbra. The mage applies his will to the Node, and the area around him changes as well. It's like coloring the water in a fountain: as the water splashes out, it colors things around it. The Quintessence from the Node is tuned to particular forms by the mage, and the Umbra around it responds.

A Steading may seem remarkably similar to a Horizon Realm, and in many ways it is. However, a Steading takes the form of a "realm-within-a-realm." While a Horizon Realm exists as its

Your Own Private Idaho

Building a Steading isn't an easy undertaking, but it's possible with the right Spheres and a little time. It's actually not all that different from formatting a sector of the Digital Web.

All you need to do is divert a trickle of Quintessence to an area of the Umbra. Then, you shape it into the form you want. The way that you do this varies by Tradition — a Hermetic mage will use chants and warding circles; while a Dreamspeaker will call for spirit aid and engage in dancing and singing — but the result is that the Quintessence gets shuttled into maintaining the Steading itself. If you just wall off an area and make it habitable, it probably only takes the power of a minor Node (one or two points), unless you're in an extremely inhospitable part of the Umbra. Conversely, if you want to take a barren rock and surround it with a spiritual wall of death with a garden of delights inside, you have to channel the entire power of a potent Node — or many. The ultimate power requirement is up to the Storyteller, of course, with the general proviso that greater changes to the environment need more power.

A Steading, properly built, has its own Gauntlet. Typically, the Gauntlet rating is 6, but extra power from the Node can reinforce the barrier. The creator of a Steading can always exit or enter freely as long as they're at one of the "attachment points" where the Steading meets the Umbra or the physical world, but others have to cross the Steading's Gauntlet. A mage can, of course, key certain entrances so that they can be used by anyone; a mage might have a "front door" through which anyone enter or a complex series of puzzles and tests to allow other people unrestricted entry. With just a smidgen of Quintessence, the Gauntlet can be fortified and warded, so that these alternate entries become the only entries that don't injure or kill trespassers.

own sort of dimension, separate and independent from other Realms and worlds, a Steading is a small area closeted off within another Realm. These sorts of demi-Realms may actually have a visible physical or magical barrier which must be crossed for entry, or they might just take some of the matter from a Realm and pocket it away in a folded patch of space. In either case, the Steading comes from within a given Realm, particularly twisted and altered to suit the Archmage's tastes.

Steadings can be extremely secure because they are so closely keyed to their creators. A mage who builds a Steading has an instant Sanctum in the Umbra. There, all magic works at her whim and by her rules. Even the properties of the miniature Realm conform to her desires and patterns at the time of casting. Archmages have created everything from small cottages in faerie groves to elaborate black cathedrals to tiny worlds of techno-fantasy.

Since a Steading is cocooned away from the rest of the Umbra, exterior environments don't affect it. A potent mage can easily build a little paradise in the middle of an Umbral hell, if he is able to shift the underlying reality of that hell enough to accommodate him and willing to put up with constant attacks by demons. The more the Steading differs from the surrounding Umbra, the more energy it takes to maintain it, so most mages just settle for a chunk of rock out in the spirit world and turn it into a little research base and home with a trickle of Prime.

The one major disadvantage of a Steading, though, is that it can be dissolved if its energy source dries up. Should the empowering Node be moved or destroyed, the Umbra around the Steading no longer reflects the altered Quintessence and slowly devolves to its old forms. This may explain legends of secret fortresses that crumble when their masters are slain. The process is slower in older Steadings, but without the Quintessence to twist them to a mage's design, any Steading eventually reverts back to the featureless matter of the Umbra.

You Can't Fool Mother Nature

The risk to Archmages banishing Paradox at the Pulse is very real. Certain magical acts draw a greater degree of Paradox than others. In some cases, this Paradox is permanent. It will not drain away over time, or expel itself from the Archmage's body with each backlash. The most common cause for this affliction is simple longevity. Archmages who live beyond their years tempt fate by remaining on Earth. Most move on before it becomes too dangerous.

The Pulse serves as a great temptation for Archmages who desire continued, unlimited contact with Earth. It's an easy way to siphon off all that nasty Paradox and keep hanging around.

If it's such a great idea, why don't any Archmages do it?

The answer is, of course, that it's not. When any mage with permanent Paradox in his Paradox Pool enters the Pulse, it burns the Paradox away. Each point removed in this fashion inflicts three dice of unsoakable aggravated damage to the mage. This damage can only be healed over time, and leaves scars similar to those caused by a backlash. The experience is excruciating, and all dice penalties for injuries are doubled if the mage survives.

If the experience kills the mage, the Paradox generates an explosion felt and heard throughout the Radiance. Anyone within hearing range of the Pulse will take one Health Level of damage for each point of Paradox in the dead mage's pool.

Unfortunately, Archmages aren't the complete masters of reality. This is one such case.



The Paradox Realm

Many mages have experienced Paradox Realms before, as their Effects go awry and suck them into strange landscapes and twisted puzzles that challenge their knowledge of magic. But Masters of Prime and Archmages theorize that Paradox itself may have its own shadow Realm in the Umbra. After all, everything in the Tellurian has some reflection in the Umbra; every concept and creature has an idealized representation. Why should Paradox be any different? Mages who have visited Paradox Realms wonder if these places may simply be bubbles in a larger Realm of Paradox, a place that twists magic against its wielder's whims.

Though Archmages theorize the existence of such a Realm, nobody's been able to prove it. Yet, Mages who go to Paradox Realms don't do so voluntarily, and they almost never wind up in the same manifestation again if a later backlash shunts them to another Paradox manifestation. Archmages speculate that this is because Paradox itself is as mutable as magic — it changes to accommodate the current Effect — but for now, none has found a true, stable, singular Paradox Realm.

The Pulse of the Radiance

The Radiance is a Realm of pure possibility, magic and power. Within it, all things are possible and even. Technomancers find it hospitable — that is, if they can find a way in. Magic is generally easier to use and harder to control. An Effect intended to grow a flower might instead create a forest. Conversely, Paradox "snaps" tend to be more dangerous — often deadly. Given that Paradox is already a hazard for Archmages, this is a definite drawback.

As with many magical places in the Umbra, the Radiance draws on images familiar to the mage in question. Usually, it seems to be a pastoral Realm filled with peaceful splendor with rolling hills and lush vegetation, but reports also tell of a void with streams of magic or a technotopia of interconnected, pulsing, translucent wires and metal.

The real attraction for Archmages is the *Pulse* at the heart of the Realm. In this place, nine streams of magic converge, creating a reverberation that can be felt on every plane of perception. When any mage comes within earshot, she feels a surge of Quintessence burn through her Pattern. For most mages, this causes excruciating agony, but in the end leaves her whole and sound — and banishes Paradox.

For an Archmage, who often carries Paradox as an inherent part of his Pattern, the situation is slightly different. It's still possible to purge the Paradox, but doing so also directly shreds his Pattern as the embedded taint is ripped away. For an Archmage just barely a century old, this is nearly lethal and the injuries take time to heal — magic cannot aid his recovery. For significantly older mages, the result is usually a violent detonation felt throughout the Radiance that may injure or kill nearby observers. Even Archmages rarely survive such an experience.



Chapter Four: Ascension



I'd spent a good many years as a mage already, taking my chances up and down the West Coast. San Diego had been a mess, Portland was only marginally better and Seattle nearly killed me. I learned a lot but figured I'd never make Master.

Then along comes Mindy. Quaint-mannered girl from a club down by border. She Awakened one particularly nasty Halloween when the ghosts and vampires were out in force. Someone got cut up by the train tracks and the ninjanatics wound up with a cop blowing off his own head down at the docks while we tried to keep a warehouse from exploding in magical chaos, the way these things do when they go bad.

Anyway, Mindy embraced the whole Hollow philosophy. She had the requisite black lace, candles and old gothic romance novels. But she also had a sort of irrepresible spark that made her smile at the weirdest times. I never could figure it out; she just went with what worked and was happy with it even when shit got out of control.

We settled down in a small apartment outside of Portland and took up the occasional environmental cause and the like. Mindy was content to take a night-school class or two, to chat with people and avoid the blow-ups that seemed to follow in my wake.

One night I got a little note from her saying that she'd gone on a trip with this guy she'd been talking to. I let it go; she was a big girl.

Six months passed before she came back. I was way out in the woods, fucking around with a new rite. She walked out of the

woods totally silent with this guy in jeans and a windbreaker. They stopped a respectable distance away, and I knew something was up when the guy spoke first.

"She has something to tell you before she goes."

Mindy looked at me like she was really examining my face for the first — or last — time. I put down my silver knife and dusted off my knees, annoyed at being interrupted. That's when I noticed that her Pattern was fuzzy, almost like it was coming unraveled. I'd never seen anything like it.

Mindy stepped up and took my hands. She felt almost intangible, like gossamer that you've run through some spell to turn into fog or something. She grinned again, and then she just said "We're all the same." Then she was gone.

The guy nodded, and then he was gone, too.

Of course, I freaked. I did a bunch of divinations to find out what happened. Track them down, that sort of thing. The guy left his Resonance — old, powerful, strong Patterns and weavings everywhere. But Mindy hadn't left a thing. It was like she'd been erased from existence.

I was pretty weirded out. Took me a while to figure out what had happened. Now, when I wonder about the whole mess or think that our world is going to shit and I can't do a thing about it, I just remember Mindy's smile.

— Attributed to David Lindstrom, Verbena Disciple

The Final Steps



If you've already stretched your hand across time and space to become a Master, then you've heard about different goals: Immortality. Godhood. Ascension. Everyone needs a hobby.

Ultimately, the goal seems to be Ascension — that's why it's called the Ascension

War, after all — but you wouldn't know it from the number of mages who stray to other paths. Many options await those with the magical torque and the deviant vision. Just remember: when you gain power, at what price? Your sanity? Your humanity? Your salvation? Your soul? For some, it's best just to get out of the running (one of the cases where the Euthanatos make some sense).

Immortality



It's only natural for mages to get a little worried about age. After all, most of us start breaking down after fifty or sixty years. Those who've Mastered Life magic can often extend their lives, sometimes by centuries, but this causes problems with Paradox. The old stories about ancient hermits living in hovels far from human contact probably weren't far off. Mages who want to live forever wind up cloistered away in their Sanctums and Steadings, avoiding the rest of the world. Paradox can easily eat away the last vestiges of life in a centuries-old magician.

Some mages so fear death, though, that they decide to cheat it. The problem is that magic demands as much out of you as a person as it gives in return. A mage who strikes a bargain for functional immortality loses the dynamism of magic. Instead of transforming himself and changing the universe at the same time, the mage becomes a static creature, stuck with eternal life and unable to act as an agent of change. As a result, his magic can no longer transform the universe in such tremendous ways, either.

This isn't all bad, if you're that scared of being dead. There are vampires out there, as you doubtless know, and when they put the bite on you, you too will live forever with a terrifying bloodlust and a severe allergy to sunlight. There are other spells that bring similar fates, transforming the mage from a human into something else.

Vampirism

Strangely, most mages who opt out of the mortal cycle gravitate toward vampirism. It may have something to do with the portrayal of vampires as demigods, or perhaps their image as sexy predators. Whatever the case, vampirism is probably the single most common shortcut to immortality taken by mages — in some cases, unwillingly.

Vampires can make you one of the undead by draining you of blood and returning a little vampire vitae to your system. It's the nature of the vampire's curse: everything's

fueled by the blood. Naturally, the hunger this engenders is a problem. Being a vampire has its upsides; you stop aging, heal rapidly and your body loses the old aches and pains of life. On the other hand, you never take pleasure in anything but abstract intellectualization or blood. Most important, though, is the loss of magic. Becoming a vampire seems to maim or destroy the Avatar. No longer able to reflect upon the Tellurian in the same way, the former mage's Avatar becomes a cursed shade of existence. Although vampires have their own particular magic, it centers around the power inherent in blood, and it's difficult and demanding to adapt. Worse, in the time it takes for you to pick up vampiric magic, you're thrust head-on into the society of the damned, used as a pawn by those centuries older than you who've had plenty of time to master their own special powers.

A slightly less onerous option is ghouldom. With just a little vampire blood (assuming you haven't died yet), you can sustain yourself without aging. Think of it as selling only a little piece of your soul. The curse doesn't affect you as strongly, but you can still gain some of the vampire's strengths. On the other hand, this not only retains the difficulty of developing your magic while trapped in your now-static existence, but also the problem that vampires often control and exploit their ghouls. Vampire blood carries a compulsion, and once you're a ghoul, you're an addict. You await your next fix and watch out for your supplier all the time. Run out, and you could die quickly (seems that Paradox catches up with you).

Obviously, old House Tremere in the Order of Hermes remains the clearest example of a bunch of bloodsucking mages, and they pulled it off just fine. The Hermetics don't talk about it, but I'd say that's all the more reason to bring it up, wouldn't you? The modern Tremere have apparently adapted to unlife with their blood magic and protective Chantries. But they take a keen interest in anyone with magic like theirs, so if you end up undead and it's not under their fangs, you better lie low for a few centuries and develop the savvy to avoid them.

Static Rebirth

A few mages have stumbled across immortality formulae that don't keep you alive forever, but do ensure that when you're reborn, it's as yourself. Confused? Basically, instead of dying and coming back in a new body with a new life and little memory of your past existences, your old body gets repaired and comes back around. Your spirit hangs out until you can re-energize yourself and return to life.

Again, this modification permanently bends your Avatar out of shape. Removing yourself from the cycle of life and death also removes you from the natural progression of the Tellurian. As a result, you lose the ability to change the universe through your Avatar. In other words, no more Spheres. It's possible to use your own internal energy to perform some minor tricks, but you'll never be a Mage again.

Some refer to this recipe for immortality as the "mummy formula," and it appears that a few mummies have been hanging around for several millennia. It's not a bad ride, except that you can't get off. If you tire of unlife eternal as a

vampire, you can always greet the sunrise. As one of the Reborn, you're pretty much stuck unless you can get an Archmaster of Spirit to shred you apart.

Lichdom

I've heard rumors about this ancient Hermetic formula. Apparently, lichdom is a sort of life-in-death where you hover on the cusp of being dead. As a result, your Avatar doesn't pass on or get terribly fucked up, but you have all the nasty side effects you might expect from such a heinous practice. It's like wearing a huge sign saying "Put me out of the universe's misery!" Any tales about this sort of magic are apocryphal, of course (even more so than Ascension itself, at this point), so take it with a grain of salt.

In theory, the Hermetic lich formula lets you keep your magical abilities while you exist forever as a near-dead thing. The ritual itself is supposed to require nastiness such as destroying every Talisman you've ever made and killing your own Familiar — apparently something about severing all ties to your old Pattern. Doesn't sound like a whole lot of fun.

Exemplars



An expert is someone who knows more and more about less and less, until he knows everything about nothing.

— Anonymous, common wisdom

What of those who become so subsumed by their Spheres as to be incomprehensible, even to Masters of that Sphere? Where do they live? How does a mage find them? Do they still put their pants on one leg at a time?

The answer is yes, unless they exist as Masters of Life without legs, or use Correspondence to fold their legs into the pants, or...

As Archmages continue their quest for understanding, most seek Mastery of one Sphere. As the Archmage delves further into one paradigm's view of the universe, his learning centers around one Sphere's powers. The mage uses that Sphere as a metaphor for examining all of reality. Eventually, the mage becomes so entwined in that Sphere that he's unable to relate to other people. The manifold facets of the Tellurian become like the reflected light of a single gemstone. At this point, the mage's understanding is so complete that even Masters of that Sphere sometimes have difficulty comprehending the mage's insights. Such a paragon of study is called an "Exemplar."

So what sets an Exemplar apart from other Archmages? While an Archmage certainly develops capability with a Sphere beyond that of any lesser mage, an Exemplar becomes a living embodiment of one Sphere. Under certain circumstances, the Exemplar can be considered a god. Hand in hand with the Exemplar's phenomenal understanding of the Sphere

comes a connection to the Sphere's manifestations across the Tellurian. In effect, the Exemplar is connected through his Pattern to the Shard Realm of his Sphere, able to sense, manipulate, create and destroy the most fundamental elements of that Sphere.

The process of becoming an Exemplar is one of gradual evolution. An Archmage finds a connection to a particular Sphere, usually the one most important to him during his training or the one in which he first achieved Mastery. Continued research into that Sphere's secrets leads to a comprehensive understanding, yet that knowledge confined to the Archmage's view of the Tellurian. Unable or unwilling to break free of his self-imposed paradigm, the Archmage struggles to further his Sphere Mastery, substituting additional power or expert knowledge at the expense of broad enlightenment. At last, the Archmage becomes so tied to the Sphere, the idea of a single focus of knowledge, that he takes that pursuit to its ultimate end. Instead of finding wisdom along the path, he reaches the journey's conclusion and never turns back to see what he missed.

An Exemplar is incredibly powerful and enlightened, but their power is narrowly focused and their enlightenment strictly controlled. These sages could certainly teach much about their respective Spheres if anyone could understand them. The Exemplar gives up his human ways of looking at the universe, replacing them with concepts and ideas based upon facets of the chosen Sphere. Some mages seek Exemplars (often through the Shard Realms) to consult them on obscure questions about their Spheres. In general, though, Exemplars are best avoided entirely. They're dangerous,

fickle and obsessed with their own vision of enlightenment to be worth the risk of courting.

Stepping Across the Barrier of Humanity

Down to the nitty-gritty. From the various theories and stories passed down about the Exemplars, a simple picture emerges of the process of subsuming a Sphere.

An Exemplar-to-be must have a mighty understanding of the cosmos and a deep intuition about the workings of Patterns. Naturally, they have all the power that could be expected of an Archmage. Most spend their time secluded in the Shard Realms (often in personal Steadings), where they further their studies. Most have potent spirit allies or mentors. From spirits that personify aspects of their chosen studies, these Archmages learn their secrets.

Eventually, the Archmage decides to move beyond his human state. There's a limit to how much a human can understand, even with the expanding capabilities of Mind magic. Just as an Archmage pushes to know more than other mages, the Exemplar decides to put aside the limitations of his former human state. Through a Seeking guided by a spirit in the appropriate Shard Realm, the Exemplar internalizes the nature of his chosen Sphere, becoming its material representative. He casts aside the human weaknesses for which he has no further use, in exchange for ultimate understanding of one tiny thing.

Once the mage becomes an Exemplar, there's no going back. His Pattern's true nature is forever altered. Most take on some new aspect or name, even a different physical form appropriate to the Sphere in question. The primal energy of his Shard Realm fuels his Pattern, but his Resonance prevents him from drawing upon universal Prune. Only his Sphere provides any consolation or capability any more. It's sobering to look at someone and realize that the quest for power caused him to literally cast away his humanity.

Moving the Cosmos

The idea that there are creatures out there capable of, well, just about anything within their area of competence is pretty spooky. What do the Traditions do when an Exemplar of Forces shows up in the Technocracy?

Not much, really. Just as spirits tend to specialize in certain aspects of reality and in turn have all of their motives dictated by that focus, Exemplars are so caught up in their Sphere that they lose sight of the Ascension War, or even the human experience. Some mages even theorize that Exemplars eventually become spirits themselves.

The fact is that Exemplars are so tied to their study that they just don't get involved in everyday matters. While Archmages have a sort of détente based on a fear of escalating reprisals, Exemplars are so far gone that they can't be bothered.



The Exemplar Process

As noted earlier, an Exemplar is an Archmage who undergoes a special Seeking while in a Shard Realm, for the specific purpose of subsuming a single Sphere into her innermost nature.

The Archmage must have at least a Sphere rating of seven in the chosen Sphere to undertake this transformation. Petitioning for the change, the mage works closely with a powerful spirit of the appropriate type — often an Incarna or even more potent entity. When the spirit is satisfied that the mage is ready, it triggers the mage's special Seeking. At its conclusion (if it doesn't kill her), the mage's Pattern and Avatar are infused forever with the nature of the Sphere. The mage casts aside any hope of further advancement in the human journey, forsaking development of her self for increased significance in the maintenance of her Sphere.

Once an Exemplar, the mage can quickly improve in her chosen Sphere (costing 4x new rating in experience for improvements, even beyond Arete), but she never gains further Arete or knowledge of other Spheres. The mage is effectively her Sphere's emissary of influence in the cosmos. As a result, the mage can use Quintessence as

dictated by her Avatar rating, and this pool refreshes every turn if the mage is in the appropriate Shard Realm. However, Tass without the right Resonance, or raw Quintessence from Nodes, is useless to the Exemplar; it is too unfocused to be channeled.

Exemplars, naturally, aren't really suited to play as characters. However, an Exemplar might show up to perform some strange, high-incomprehensible task or investigate a fundamental shift caused by the use of an Arch-Sphere. Typically, an Exemplar doesn't communicate with other mages, but does things appropriate to the Sphere in question. In some rare cases, an Archmage might speak with an Exemplar, hoping for specific knowledge, but an Exemplar is likely to communicate with metaphors and symbolism concerned with her Sphere. This lends itself to all sorts of roleplaying possibilities.

And, of course, the Exemplar process is a perfect example of how not to pursue Ascension, and can be used as a message to mage characters in the course of play, should they lose a friend (or enemy!) to forces too sublime for their comprehension.

Godhood



Perhaps you've heard of Blue Meanie, or maybe Astarte. They like to show up in the Digital Web. There are others like them, too; ones that show up in the Umbra when nobody's expecting them. By some accounts, they were once human. Now they're gods. "So how do I get in on a little of that divine action?" you ask.

A tenet of certain Asiatic religions is that people who serve well in mortal life can be reincarnated to become gods. However, godhood isn't the reward it seems. While it brings incredible powers, it also brings infinite desire. Since desire shackles one to the material world, this prevents the divinity in question from moving beyond the illusory world to the sublime realms of detachment. Sound familiar?

Yeah, the gods have a pretty sweet deal. Their powers are greater even than those of Archmages or Exemplars. But they, too, can't Ascend. They constantly want something and, though their power lets them satisfy these cravings, it's never enough. How does it feel to be empty all the time, to have the universe within your grasp but never surpass it? Control of the universe's forms also locks the so-called "god" into that universe; it's the Archmage's dilemma on a higher level.

I guess the lesson is that physical power isn't enough to create true wisdom.

Some people out there still want to become gods. Part of the whole "And then, when I have completed my master plan, I shall be a god!" shtick. If you're still entertaining the notion, then put the book down and go dunk your head in a bucket of cold water. It might be nice to wield the power attributed to the gods, but it gets to be a pain when there's nowhere to go. Eventually, all the gods get old, die, recycle, whatever. You can't go up from that rung of the ladder. You have to get on a new ladder.

The quest for godhood is a mysterious and personal one. Nobody's really sure how Blue Meanie became what he did. Alan Turing's dissolution into the Digital Web might have rendered him godlike, or it might have just wiped him out. Heck, if you go for mythological symbolism, Icarus had some aspirations to godhead, and it got him burned. It's like that scene in *Logan's Run*, where everybody's floating up to the rebirth marker but they all get vaporized along the way. In theory, it's possible, but nobody sees it happen.

Ultimately, gods are icons. While the Exemplars personify their Spheres of study, gods fill specific roles. People cast gods into certain niches so that they can identify and understand what they otherwise could not. It's like putting a mask over a giant and abstract universe to make it

Storytelling Gods

You've seen godlike entities before in various books, and the Celestines certainly fall into that category. So what do they do in a game, and how do you have your players interact with them? Could a player's character ever become one?

Gods, like Exemplars, tend to be intensely focused on one specialty. While Exemplars look at matters through the lens of a particular Sphere, gods see the world in terms of a specific emotion, drive or concept. In this respect, gods are essentially the same as any other spirit in the World of Darkness.

Naturally, a god may intervene in matters that involve its area of influence. People invented all sorts of rituals, prayers and religions to appease the gods; the deities that still exist could certainly hang around — even if invisible to normal mortals — when they're supplicated. Given mages' predilections for running around pushing certain viewpoints and messing up the cosmos, it's almost certain that a god turns up eventually. Even if gods themselves don't deign to intervene (and Earth is a pretty small place, in comparison to the rest of the cosmos), their servants, aides and confederates may well do so.

Remember that gods aren't infallible. Because they have exaggerated lusts and drives, the same character flaws that often infect humans can blind them if they're dealt with outside their areas of influence. A mage can cut a deal with a god if he has the balls to back it up.

And, of course, your players may search for godhood itself, the quest for transformation into something divine. Not exactly the same as Ascension, but a viable story nonetheless. The Storyteller has to decide what makes a god. Worshippers? A complete understanding of one facet of the Tellurian? A power source? Some combination of factors? Your players should have more than enough to keep them busy for many stories, even if they think that they're on the right track.

recognizable. Gods, then, are the faces of the abstract: the force of Fire, or the wrath of Vengeance, or just total Chaos.

While Exemplars are like spirits in their focus, gods are spirits. How a mage becomes a spirit like this is a matter for speculation among the Archmages who think about that sort of thing. Maybe someone becomes a god through circumstance instead of choice, but it seems unlikely. Some Archmasters talk about releasing the soul completely to become a being of pure thought or spirit energy, or even becoming a spirit like the others that mages deal with all the time. Certainly, there are incorporeal astral spirits out there that aren't gods, so maybe it's not so far-fetched a step.

Becoming a god is, in many ways, assuming a particular role. You don the mask and take up the trappings of office,

and that's not something you do by accident. You must choose to play the part.

Even so, don't dis on the gods. They have their problems, but they can still instantly turn you into ash.

Oracles



Mages who become lost in their Spheres of knowledge become Archmages or Exemplars. Those who pursue a vision of power may turn into spirits. Some just go crazy and join the Marauders. A few take a backdoor, like the Tremere did so long ago. Only a few ever reach Ascension. The lanterns that light that path are the Oracles.

From time to time, potent mages come around to offer cryptic advice, to shepherd someone through a tough Seeking, or to point away from the road of hubris. They're not Archmages or Exemplars because those sorts are too focused on their own advancement. They're not gods, since they share human concerns and insights with normal mages. They have all the power of the Arch-Spheres at their fingertips, yet they don't involve themselves with Traditions or Conventions, and they rarely even get noticed in the intrigues of Earthly mages.

The best theory is that the Oracles are the ones who've made it. They passed the tests and took the final steps of Ascension, but turned away to help lead others to the same path.

The Oracles rarely show up. They have their hands full keeping the universe together and subtly pushing the most

The Oracle Seeking

Eventually, a mage who develops a broad universal view and avoids the traps of power for power's sake may finally approach the end of the road and have the wisdom to take that last step. Although *Arête* is not technically a prerequisite for Ascension, a mage with a greater intuition of the Tellurian often has a better chance.

If the mage has an appropriate appreciation for the process, a mage's Seekings at very high *Arête* ratings (8+) tend to reveal cryptic clues about the last steps toward Ascension. At this point, the mage may have visions of Ascension itself, hidden symbols pointing to the necessary understanding. Oracles might even get involved with the promising student. Eventually, the mage must choose: Ascend, or stay behind and find others who need your guidance.

There are no real hard-and-fast rules; the Oracle's road is an intensely personal one — the mage examines her own nature, casts aside her mortal cares in order to reach Ascension, and then finds the wherewithal to stay and help others instead. The mage doesn't decide to spend a few years studying to become an Oracle. She decides to push past all of her limitations, and in the process, discovers a compassion for others that drives her to sacrifice her own enlightenment to help the rest of the world.

promising students toward Ascension. It's hard to attract their attention; they seem to realize that their mere presence is strongly influential, and that things can go haywire if they take direct action. Instead, Oracles set events in motion. They let a few cryptic pronouncements do the work, and only intervene when it's necessary to shepherd another soul through a tough spot on the way to Ascension.

Becoming an Oracle is apparently a lot like becoming an Archmage. You don't petition for membership or anything so mundane. Instead,

after you turn back from the final step to Ascension, your peers recognize you as a member of the exalted group.

Broadening Your Horizons

Becoming an Oracle is a matter of taking the steps to Ascension. You work through Seekings. You must overcome your frailties. You need to broaden your perspective beyond the blinders established by Tradition or Convention training.

The last step is the most important. Any mage can push through Seekings and search for new knowledge. Archmages certainly do. If you're going to avoid the traps, though, you must keep your mind young — learn to work magic with a particular set of rules and then move beyond them. You must invent your own language for describing new things, instead of relying on all the old methods.

The best way to keep your options open is probably something like a Tradition exchange program. Figure out how other people see the world. Get involved with things outside your specialties. Seek disparate opinions so you can figure out matters from another point of view.

Eventually, a mage who seeks enlightenment instead of power can get the "big picture" of the Tellurian. A more specialized Archmage or Exemplar probably better understands his area of expertise, but the Oracles have a more holistic view.

At the end of it all, the Avatar leads the mage through the most difficult Seekings in this life or the next. An Archmage's

Avatar gets so caught up in his drives that it sometimes fails to lead him back to Ascension's road. In other cases, the Archmage misses the message, focusing instead on his overwhelming desire to Master the Spheres. The broader mage, on the other hand, sees Seekings not as benchmarks of power, but as trials from which to learn. Once the mage finishes the final Seeking, he reaches the threshold of Ascension. The mage takes his final steps and disappears to wherever we go at the end, or refuses, returning to help others reach Ascension.

The Oracle made it all the way to the end and decided to stay to usher others along as well. It's just as well, too, with all the craziness that infests the Tellurian. Where the Ascended go even the Oracles probably don't know, but in the meantime they watch out for those who press on heedless of the warring factions and power plays around them.

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The Goal of Ascension



In theory, we fight an Ascension War—a battle to determine the ultimate, universal truth. In theory, everyone can Ascend through a new world-wide consciousness brought about by some undiscovered means. Actually, we have little proof of Ascension at all, only the constant urgings of our Avatars. Yet Ascension remains a popular subject for many up-and-coming mages, so here are some thoughts, theories and stories collected from across the years. — Mark Gillan

Although there are many legends about Ascension, most are corrupt retellings of the same handful of tales about the few mages who have reached that lofty goal. The most well-known tales come from the Akashic Brotherhood and the Ahl-i-Batin. These stories are dusty with age, handed down for millennia. The few mages who claim to have been there cannot clearly recall what occurred many lifetimes ago. Some Masters of Correspondence tried to look back through time to see the truth of Ascension, but the waves of distortion and the tremendous warping of the Tellurian around such events prevents any clear visions. Even the best recollections do not reveal the individuals who Ascended, but rather their myths. Ascension itself is a parable. Is the destination more important than the journey?

The Traditions aren't the only mages pushing for Ascension, though Tradition efforts are certainly the most public within the mage community. No one really knows if a Marauder has ever Ascended, although none believe that true enlightenment can come to those locked in their own minds. If a Technocrat has made the journey, then it has doubtless been covered up, else some might realize that personal, not just global, effort can bring Ascension. It's thought that no Nephandus has ever reached Descension—indeed, had one succeeded, it would bode ill for the world on such a scale that it could hardly be concealed.

Sadly, most Archmasters seek power, not broad understanding. The strength of these few alters the world itself, such that their personal foci become the sources of power for the next generation of mages. As the world adopts their foci, Archmages become even more tied to the trappings of their magic. Those who are this powerful forget what Marauders most need to learn—that they must accept the world around them, not change its every aspect.

An Archmage's pursuit of power is not a simple drive for authority or control. It stems from the mage's need to fit more and more of the Tellurian under his paradigm. A paradigm is a powerful tool for explaining reality, but no model can be complete. The Archmage becomes focused on increasing his understanding of the Spheres and the cosmos through one lens—the lens that he's used pursue Mastery. This focus ironically narrows the Archmage's breadth of knowledge even

as more comes under his sway. Once the Archmage has categorized something into his own paradigm, it's stuck in a particular way of thinking, shutting out other possibilities.

Even these Archmages who realize this flaw—and break off their endeavor to Ascend instead—find themselves locked into a role defined by their paradigm and most developed Sphere. The Archmage lives in a world completely governed, as he sees it, by one way of thinking. The only escape is to discard that limiting vision. No Master has yet found this insight. Those few who notice the trap see but two alternatives—rebirth or Descension. Archmages who even consider the latter usually Fall, while the remainder usually have very nasty deaths.

The Plan

Two major groups have a plan for Ascension. The Traditions focus on individual understanding of the self and of magic. The Technocracy stresses a unified plan for global Awakening and Ascension. Each plan has its own strengths and flaws.

The nine mystic Traditions understand that life's lessons must be learned individually. Each person must find the courage to face their problems. Each mage is unique, but this can mean one of two things. The first is that Ascension is unique to the individual, and that each mage must attain his own Ascension. The second possible meaning is that Ascension is Ascension, but each mage must get to it a different way, because of a different starting position.

The flaw of the Council of Nine's approach is its emphasis on magical comprehension and power. Rank within the Traditions is based on one's Mastery of specific Spheres, not a broad view of the world. Ascension is not about power but understanding.

The Council's other flaw lies in human frailty. If allowed to go unchecked, the stress on individuality leads to egotism, arrogance and finally contempt for others. The freedom to Ascend on an individual basis leads mages to believe in the superiority of their own practices, and from this hubris comes dissent. Ironically, the mage's individuality locks out the viewpoints of all others.

"United we stand, divided we fall." The failing of the Council of Traditions is the Technocracy's strength. United in thought, word and deed, the Technocracy helps all of its members, ensuring they don't harm themselves or humanity. The Union's mission to protect the human race is the greatest goal of an enlightened ruler.

If only the ruler were enlightened. Conformity keeps members of the Union from the understanding and personal enlightenment necessary for Ascension. Also, the consensus about what is right means that no technocrat needs the courage to face Ascension because the group leads the way. If it weren't for obedience brainwashing, this group mentality would lead to rioting in the Inner Sanctum.

Inner Council Rec 00038344
Summary file
Michael Faraday,
Electrodyne Engineer

A hero and true patriot of the Technocracy, Michael Faraday advanced our goal of developing a universe understandable to the Masses by approximately 73 years. Arguably the most powerful High Scientist of Forces our order has ever known, Mr. Faraday defined the nature of electricity and magnetism, showing them to be aspects of the same force. His experiments and work on electricity altered that force universally into the electromagnetic force, later adding the weak nuclear force — advancing our theoretical model of nuclear decay. His sacrifices in defeating Czar Vargo in 1914 are forgotten due to our work eliminating that event from history. His final achievement may have been the creation of the strong nuclear force, although this is assumed to be beyond the capability of any person. Our best theory still does not account for it, except possibly as a modification of the gravitational or electroweak force. His disappearance after the Czar Vargo debacle was a blow to the Technocracy, but his spirit of loyalty lives on in all of us.

The Technocracy and Traditions also differ in their views of Ascension. Technocrats believe that by creating a Utopia, the whole world can Ascend. They hope to find one system of rules for the universe that can be understood and used by all. The Traditions are opposed to this for one simple reason — it makes it harder for them to work their magic. This doesn't make the Technocracy wrong. Just because a universal Ascension has never been achieved does not make it impossible. Still, it's clear that there are as many perspectives on the universe as there are people in it, and that means that some people never accept the Consensus.

Technocracy

This little bit is Technocratic internal propaganda. Enjoy. — Mark

When all things are understood and the whole is under our control, Ascension will be at hand. Our great order is designed around this unifying thought. The Void Engineers find new things, the Progenitors and Iteration X explain these things, the Syndicate introduces the appropriate new discoveries to society and the New World Order works to defend and reinforce this society and its appropriate components. The great purpose is to bring Ascension to all, not just those few who understand yet have forsaken their duty to humanity.

The Void Engineers work on three fronts of exploration. On Earth, they search the last remnants of the unknown in both uncharted wilderness and the depths of the ocean. In the Digital Web, they explore and claim virgin web for use by Iteration X. In space, they explore the bounds of the universe, watching for beings we expelled centuries ago. They are the vanguard against the greater horrors that seek to harm humanity.

The Progenitors and Iteration X explain what the Void Engineers find, in ways that don't distract or frighten the Masses. The Progenitors delve into the mysteries of the human form. Iteration X technicians work to prevent the Masses from being harmed by the maddening possibilities of the Digital Web, to build new weapons to defend against aliens and deviants, and to make tools consistently useful for all people. Their efforts aid the work of the other three Conventions.

The Syndicate seeks control over financial institutions, which gives us control over the everyday doings of the Masses. Their resources help fund all of our causes. By regulating the exchange — of information, tools, pleasures, hopes — the Syndicate protects the Masses from dangerous or unbalancing ideas, while bringing them a higher standard of living. The Syndicate's efforts free mankind from the shackles of gross subsistence so that new discoveries are possible.

Finally, the New World Order protects the people from those things that are harmful to them. By controlling mass media, the Order suppresses information that people shouldn't have. They shape the perceptions of the Masses to give them drives, goals and dreams according to the Technocratic plan.

Agents remove deviant patterns, bringing everyone closer to a unified Consensus.

Others seek to stop our noble plan and bring ruin upon the human race. Ancient evils in the cities work to enslave the people. Terrible beasts roam the woods, sometimes preying upon the innocent. Beings of evil power twist people's imaginations, and worst of all, others, gifted as we are but calling themselves mages, work against our grand purpose and against the weakest of humanity.

We face many challenges, but one day, by our plan, a perfect society will come to be. It will last beyond the ends of time, in utter perfection.

Marauders

So few see the need for personal growth. Their life, their vision, their quiet is all they really need. Marauders decide to view reality as they wish it to be, and so it becomes.

Typically, a Marauder winds up bent around a particular vision of reality that is so irreconcilable with the Tellurian that she becomes stuck in a sort of cocoon. It seems that the Marauder's skewed beliefs are so damaging that the cosmos itself enshrouds the Marauder away like an irritating grain of sand in a shellfish.

Because a Marauder begins and ends in madness, it's largely impossible for one to have the broad, universal view that leads to Ascension.

Nephandi

"What happens if they get all seven keys?"

"They bring the darkness back."

"Just like that?"

"Just like that."

— Tales From the Crypt: Demon Knight

Descension is the name of their game.

You thought there was more to say?

The Nephandi want to return everything to the primordial ooze that existed before Creation. There are terrible things locked outside the walls of our comfortably fashioned reality, and they hate the light of our inspiration. If a Nephandus ever finds a real communion with the Oblivion that first coughed up the universe, we're in trouble.

The Tradition Council

Each Tradition has its own views on personal Ascension and external Ascension. Since their beliefs are so varied, it's difficult to categorize them, but many have a similar grounding.

All religions teach a moral foundation for our actions. It's not surprising that four Traditions focus on their religious beliefs. Even the other Traditions employ some philosophy for approaching the world, some moral compass and ethical guidance. Even the most technological Traditions retain some spiritual trappings.

Akashic Brotherhood

The only real outlet for external Ascension among the Akashic brotherhood is Do. Martial arts instill fitness and confidence. The Akashics spread a regimen of mental and physical wholeness to the rest of the world. Don't confuse Do with straight-up ass beating, though. To the Brotherhood, Do is a whole-life regimen. Martial arts are forms of fighting, but they also encompass philosophy, art and discipline. Through its teachings, the Brotherhood encourages these qualities in everyone.

Many Akashics espouse a Buddhist philosophy, if not the religion itself. Other faiths exist within the Brotherhood, of course, but many Brothers adopt a mish-mash of Taoist and Buddhist thought on personal advancement. By shedding the ego and acting as an unsullied tool directed by the winds of need and right action, the Brothers try to fit perfectly into some part of the Tellurian. In theory, if a Brother ever achieved this Nirvana, his connection to the universe would be like the finger to the body — a small piece, yet part of a greater whole.

Celestial Chorus

More involved with "the people" than the ascetic Akashics, Choristers show that faith in God/Yahweh/the One and service to Him/Her/It and to humanity are the cornerstones of life and the afterlife. The shepherds lead their flocks to love Creation and help one another. It's sort of a consensus by individuality: everybody sacrificing a little

to bring the whole together. Of course, the Chorus gets caught up in arguments over fine points of dogma, which causes factionalization — but those who keep the vision try to spread compassion.

Internally, each Chorister is, in some small way, an agent of the One universe. By promoting understanding and a profound faith — a belief in the most noble qualities of humanity and in the promise of salvation or Ascension — they hope to lead through example. The Chorister must become a perfect vessel for faith, a servant who shows the way with devotion, love and forgiveness.

Cult of Ecstasy

People mistake the Cult of Ecstasy for a tribe of modern hippies. Once you've lost that misconception, the Cult's motives are clear: Encourage people to find new ways of thinking and new realms of perception. Drugs, sex and music don't help if you can't open your mind to a different experience. This may be why the Cult gets along with other Traditions, or at least cuts across Traditional boundaries in the search for knowledge. Cultists learn to see from multiple perspectives and accept them all as valid, and they encourage others to do likewise. In their Ascended world, everyone would visualize better answers and better living through the Cult's simple practices.

From the inside, Cultists always look for the greatest rush. This isn't pure hedonism; Cultists who get lost in cheap thrills don't progress very far. Rather, Cultists want a buzz to so completely shock their minds that they see the world from a totally different angle. By stacking up sensations and experiences, they expand their points of view. A simple shift in perception is all that's needed to let those parts become a window to a higher existence.

Dreamspeakers

Dreamspeakers seek a physical world in tune with the spiritual one. It's their fervent belief that the spirit world is the emotion to the physical world's rational content. A healthy mind must balance both, and so too must a healthy world. Thus, the Dreamspeakers hope to bring spirit and body closer together. Once everyone lives in tune with both worlds, they believe, Ascension occurs — the world returns to its pure state, as it was before the Gauntlet. Internally, Dreamspeakers have a similar philosophy: achieving a unified spirituality unfettered by base matter. In the Dreamspeakers' account of Ascension, the body is just a proving ground from which the soul becomes an engine of magnificence.

Euthanatos

The Euthanatoi play their cards close to the vest. Their primary agenda remains unknown even to most of the Council. Witness how long it took for the corruption of House Helekar to become known!

This isn't to say that the Euthanatoi are all secrets and death deals. They practice their brand of magic to remove suffering. When a body is diseased, the physician may cut out

the infection; similarly, the Euthanatoi excise the tainted, rotten underbelly of humanity so that the rest may grow. When the pains of life become too great, the Euthanatoi usher in a new chance in the cycle. Ironically, this means that the Euthanatoi view of global Ascension (if they have such a view, really) is a world that doesn't need them. When everybody learns to treat others with compassion and to see life itself as a thing of joy, then the Good Death will no longer be a necessity. The Euthanatoi shoulder a remarkable burden in their care for the world.

Individually, of course, Euthanatoi are often interested in broadening their understanding of the karmic cycle and the wheel of life. Without that understanding, it's difficult to judge the appropriateness of a Good Death. Who says that the Euthanatoi have the right to determine who dies? Each Euthanatoi takes it upon herself to make that hard decision and live or die with the consequences. Ultimately, the Euthanatoi seeks to be released from the wheel of karma, able to move past the duties of a painful world.

Order of Hermes

Hoo-boy! The Order espouses a rigidly defined system of magic, a political hierarchy and a study of mystical elements that conform to their standards. They're pushy, dogmatic and very, very dedicated.

However, the Hermetic outlook on magic ultimately breaks down to some simple points that create powerful results. As their Law of Sympathy states, if you change one thing, you change another thing like it. Magic, for the Order, isn't just a calling. It's a means to change the universe while changing the self. Like the search for the Philosopher's Stone (a search still respected within the Order), the use of magic transforms and perfects the human state. So what does this mean for the Masses? Well, that's one of the problems with the Order. It's elitist. If you're not a magician, you're nobody.

Don't get me wrong — the Order promotes some good stuff. In many ways, the Hermetics pioneered the formation of the Tradition Council and the use of the system of nine Spheres. They brought potent magic to the table and long ago learned to separate the wheat from the chaff. Their Chantries had the most effective defenses and magical resources available.

But, as the saying goes, "What have you done for me lately?" The Order's mages are often too caught up in their politicking to continue their search for real enlightenment. It's power, knowledge and Certamen, without regard to becoming a better human being. Hell, you don't even have a say in Tradition politics until you have a long string of titles after your name.

The Order of Hermes has some fabulous magical learning, a robust system of mysticism and some of the greatest Nodes and Talismans in the world. If the Hermetics would get their heads out of their asses and decide on a path to Ascension instead of a road to power, they might do some good.

Mark, your politics are showing. — Sir Laurence

Yeah. To their credit, the Order produces more Archmages than any other Tradition. So, if you consider raw power desirable, the Order's methods are effective.

Sons of Ether

The wack scientists of the Council have a pretty good deal. They get to take the castoffs of modern technology — a huge amount of stuff — and incorporate them into their own views of reality. What more could you ask for? Each Etherite is a paragon of his own view of Ascension, creating theories about the Tellurian and then sharing them with anyone who can stand to listen.

Naturally, the Etherites' extremely personalized views of reality cause problems in the quest for Ascension. Each has a set of pet theories, an underlying belief in how the universe is supposed to work. When these collide, the Scientists usually don't want to give. They're not always open to new ideas, especially ones that fly in the face of their favorite works.

On the upside, Etherites are full of wonder. They use what others discard to form their new ideas. The old becomes vibrant with possibility once more. From this broad view, they have a perspective of Ascension: a way of looking at every old piece of the world in a new light.

Verbena

The neo-pagan exterior that most people paint over the Verbena hides an intense Tradition. Verbena take their work very seriously — they're the caretakers of life. As such, they see the process of life and growth as the keystone of the universe. Without life, the universe would be an empty, hollow place. Therefore, the Verbena cherish all of life's forms, even those considered unpleasant or taboo by others. Naturally, this can be quite shocking to the uninitiated. The Verbena don't care. Pain is just another part of living. Get over the conceit that your perspectives are more than a biological imperative and get on with life. Ascension for the world comes with the unfettered freedom of joy in all life.

On a more personal level, the Verbena want to release themselves from the preconceptions, worries and frailties of modern life. Inheriting the pagan traditions of old, they can be like the "noble savage," casting aside material concerns to glorify the all-encompassing pulse of life itself. Some see no conflict in the modern world; they argue that life has simply chosen to grow in a curious fashion. Those who believe this still agree on the need to look beneath the skin for the pulse itself.

When the Verbena stop lamenting their past persecutions and actually get into action, they're formidable. Too bad their philosophy is just too frightening for most people to grasp, or they'd have a holistic road straight to Ascension.

Virtual Adepts

The newest additions to the Traditions are looked at askance by their peers. They shouldn't be. They're well on their way to becoming a whole new Order of Hermes.

Overcoming Foci with an Archmage

It's a pain. Once you've settled on a method, it's almost impossible to overcome the inertia by the time you're an Archmage. Some suggestions for the additional costs to remove a focus for an Archmage:

- Deliberately working against your preconceptions to overcome your dependence (at the cost of a permanent point of Willpower).
- A special Seeking within the appropriate Shard Realm.
- Study a Sphere of magic under a different Tradition's paradigm, starting at an effective Sphere rating of 1, raising it as you improve your restarted Sphere over again until you reach Mastery.
- Die and reincarnate with a new perspective on your Avatar.

By the way, you could always create a world under one paradigm. If everyone bought into your perspective, everyone could access magic of tremendous power — effectively a worldwide Awakening. In this scenario, you'd never lose your foci, but you wouldn't need to. Good luck.

The Adepts' technological legerdemain is a far cry from the Order of Hermes, you say? Well, just look at their structure. You have a ladder of accomplishment, with the Elite at the top and everyone else on the outs. Those without the power of magic aren't even rated. Worse still, you can be Elite and still be an utter asshole. All you have to do is pull off some insane stunt that supposedly demonstrates your Mastery of the Spheres. Jockey with the big boys and you could even get killed for your presumption (witness Demonseed Elite).

Sure, the Adepts are pretty loosely bound, and they use computer science instead of mystical tomes. So what? If they don't get back their focus on pioneering new ways of thinking, they'll get just as stratified as the Order of Hermes.

Enough bitching. The Adepts have one thing going for them, and that's innovation. They exist because they latched onto a totally new concept and executed it. They continue to exist only so long as they keep pushing that boundary. They need to take that external search for new toys to an internal plane: a constant push for a new and exciting personal breakthrough. They've already got the Masses hooked on their technology. If they can spread the right message, then information will not only be free, but it'll belong to everyone. Once the world looks for the next step ahead, people everywhere will find ways past their current problems.

Tradition and Focus

"You must unlearn what you have learned."

— Any number of movie Zen masters

So, we've already surmised that strict adherence to one way of thinking is a barrier to true enlightenment. You might be able to make the breakthrough to Archmastery, but how far can that power take you?

If you really want to grasp the cosmos, you need see it from every perspective. That means casting aside all the familiar languages, tools and crutches that you've held for so long. Look for new ways to describe your universe.

Many Archmages broaden their perceptions enough to internalize their power. By doing so, they overcome their dependence on props. This isn't easy, and it isn't always the best idea. You're always best with your native tongue, after all.

Not necessarily true, Mark. One could easily forget all but the rudiments of one's native tongue after spending several years among the people of another land. — Sir Lawrence

I'm working on a metaphor here. Go with it. — Mark

There are several steps to moving past your focus. Most Masters learn to deal without a particular focus or two, but still do better with the assistance. By carefully studying the nature of magic, you can completely eradicate your dependency upon structure for certain areas. It takes work — you have to break down all the preconceptions that you've had for years of study. It's even more difficult if you're already an Archmage, because of the incredible dedication you've already put into a particular form of magic. But it can be done.

Internal Ascension

The real trick of Ascension is that it isn't about magical power. It's really about who you are. Becoming a more holy, enlightened, spiritually pure person is the true goal of Ascension, but Archmages completely miss the point.

So what do you do on the road to Ascension? Identify your flaws and overcome them. Learn from others. Practice rationality — take in what you experience and deal with it. Improving the world is important, but it's more important to see how people react to you and change yourself for the better.

Seekings are important milestones for the mage who wants to develop. The tests encountered in Seekings highlight weaknesses in your character. If you remember your Seekings, pay attention to them. Even when your Avatar seems antagonistic, it's telling you something important. Avoid the conceit that you know everything, including your own limitations. There's always something to learn and room to improve.

Most importantly, keep a broad perspective. The universe fosters infinite viewpoints. The Ascension War is proof enough of varied truth. Everyone finds a different way to look at the Tellurian. Since most views work, there's some validity to just about every paradigm. Learn from others, even those with whom you disagree. These are tough lessons, but also the ones most worth learning. If you avoid the pitfalls, the prize is always there.

Archmages have an additional problem regarding Ascension. Having spent centuries pursuing power, most have lost their way. The rigors of altering universal concepts mean those universal concepts alter you. Archmastery enmeshes the mage in the workings of the universe itself, and she becomes something of a tool for the cosmos.

All is not lost. In fact, Arch-Spheres can provide new and amazing insights into reality and the self, allowing the Archmage to forge a new, and possibly shorter, path to Ascension. There is, however, a drastic price to pay. It is

practically impossible for an Archmage to Ascend in a lifetime already dominated by the quest for power. But with careful effort, he can prepare himself for Ascension in the next life. The problem, however, is that this Effect is always lethal. The Archmage's Avatar carries on a bit of its wisdom, a sort of hidden imperative in the next life, driving the individual down Ascension's path. It doesn't always work; the Archmage must essentially "program" his Avatar with the overpowering need to find a different way.

Ascension in the Context of Salvation

For most supernatural creatures in the World of Darkness, there is a path of understanding and wisdom that allows a character to move beyond the limits of his form. Vampires, wraiths and even changelings have their own enlightened states through which they attain the inner strength to take on the world. For vampires and changelings, it is a balance within the self that allows them to exist in this world without further spiritual decay. Wraiths, on the other hand, strike a balance with their Shadows that gives them the courage to face their own deaths and move on to the great beyond. The Ascension of mages, on the other hand, is the quest for unimaginable heights of understanding, wisdom, and enlightenment, not to balance or accept the dark side of the soul, but to purify it.

For the mage, the first part of the struggle is the realization that he has a dark side. As the saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. Those intending to Ascend can spend many lifetimes seeking magical power, great mysteries, or villains to battle. The trick, of course, is to find the magical power to fight villains, who should be fought because it's the right thing to do. The mage ultimately transforms the base parts of his being into more enlightened, purified essences. Whether this means

achieving a perfect inner discipline, knowledge of the interconnectedness of all things, or the dissolution of personal conceit in the face of raw life itself, the mage casts aside human weaknesses to become something better.

Although esoteric wraith concepts like Transcendence are not known to mages at large, the eight truths of Transcendence are repeated here for brevity's sake. Any mage would do well to make these the cornerstones of his life as he walks Ascension's road.

Patience

Higher Drive

Conquer the evil within

Make peace with yourself

Make peace with the world

Value the mind over the body

Value "Transcendence" over identity

Perfect the positive virtues

The last major difference between mages and other supernaturals is that the mages' struggle is external as well as internal. No one can simply choose to be a better person. The dedicated aspirant must strive daily to chart the best course through a nigh-impassable moral quagmire.



Appendix: The Keys to the Universe



The rules! Here, at last, is the nitty-gritty of running a chronicle with Archmages, Arch-Spheres, Exemplars and everything else, plus

some tips on dealing with the allies and enemies that show up in an Archmage chronicle, and how to form an engaging game with characters who can rearrange the cosmos.

The Arch-Spheres



Only the greatest self-mastery, the strongest will and the deepest enlightenment can penetrate the Arch-Spheres. Some Masters spend their entire lives on the cusp of this awareness, unable to discern the true depths. It's not enough to exercise power over the Spheres, to study with a few Masters and to indulge in a little experience. The right combination of talent, luck and dedication drives the mage to the ultimate limits of comprehension.

Developing an Arch-Sphere, then, is not a simple matter of spending a double handful of experience points. It's a story arc, a microcosm of the quest for enlightenment. Consider more than just the mage's experience when deciding whether

to add Arch-Spheres to the mix. Consider the needs of the story. What motivates a mage to develop Arch-Spheres — or causes him to fail? The mage must have incredible focus. Many mentors and sources of information are necessary. The mage needs to understand all facets of the Sphere. Most importantly, the mage must endure failure again and again, without giving up. How the mage deals with and learns from failure is just as important as how he succeeds.

Finally, these Arts take time to learn. While experience costs are the same (or whatever the Storyteller decides), each dot takes about five years of study and training. This time is not necessarily spent closeted away with another Archmage, but is at least taken up with obscure quests to understand the aspects of the Spheres. Mentor and Library

backgrounds can be used normally, but in the end these powers must spring from internal understanding.

Using Arch-Spheres

In this book, we've discussed power, responsibility and vision. Mages aren't the only ones who need these qualities to use Archmagic. Players and Storytellers need them too.

Arch-Spheres aren't just additional cool powers. They're fundamental changes to the cosmos, in some cases altering constants of reality. When messing around with powers of such magnitude, you can quickly descend into game-wrecking mode. Archmages don't throw around this sort of power casually, for all the many reasons previously discussed. Even players with Archmage characters should exercise restraint. As Storyteller, don't hesitate to use anything up to and including cosmic-scale backlash or a consortium of angry Archmages and Exemplars to ensure that mages with Arch-Spheres use their powers responsibly. Instead of just "casting spells" with Arch-Spheres, look at them as fundamental shifts in the story, or even as new story hooks entirely. Given the time and power necessary to invoke an Arch-Sphere Effect, a mage probably shouldn't even have the opportunity to use such magic more than once or twice in a given story. Skip "powers" for "stories."

With this salutary warning in mind, we present the highest levels beyond Mastery. If you intend to use these in your chronicle, be sure that you know what you're getting into! A Storyteller is under no obligation to ever let a player use these powers. Even if you're running an Archmage chronicle, there's more than enough for mages to do with their lower-level Spheres and Abilities. Reserve the Arch-Spheres for real problems so that their rare use becomes all the more magical.

Note that the descriptions of the Spheres don't include simple powers, for the aforementioned reasons. There's no such thing as a "rote" for powers this grand!

Casting Difficulties

Most casting difficulties are based on the Effect's Sphere level plus some modifier. With the Arch-Spheres, casting difficulties can quickly become stratospheric. That's not a big problem; any time the difficulty is pushed to 9, additional difficulty increases simply require additional successes from the die roll. Thus, if you have a difficulty of 9 and receive one additional push, you now require at least two successes to achieve a base Effect. This removes successes from the total roll, so the final Effect is not as potent.

Because of the extreme difficulty in casting Arch-Spheres and in achieving the necessary successes to affect cosmic changes, most Archmagic is done through extended ritual, with Quintessence. This is perfectly all right; mages should have to work to pull off this much torque.

Crossing the Boundaries

Since Archmasters have incredible power at their fingertips, it seems natural to throw them up against enemies of

similar scale — legendary werewolves, ancient vampires and so on. Though too many crossovers mitigate the impact of an otherwise formidable opponent, a little spice can unhinge the plans of even an Archmage.

When comparing powers, the easiest method is to cross-reference the mage's Sphere rating against the rating of his opponent's Discipline/Gift/whatever. A vampire with six dots of a Discipline can effectively counter a sixth-level Sphere, for instance. A werewolf of elder rank can contest any Archmage power. Simply roll the appropriate dice pools against one another; unless the other creature's Traits are (dare we say it!) twinkled out to fiber-dice status, chances are that an Archmage's *Arête* is equivalent to most other powers.

However, mage powers are abstract enough that, again, story considerations come first. In some cases, an Archmage's Sphere Mastery may blow away the competition. In others, it may seem appropriate for a specialized power of another creature to defend against or subvert the mage's Effect. Use your best judgement. An Archmaster of Mind may be skilled at all sorts of invasive mental tricks, but a vampire elder with six dots of *Dominare* and a few centuries of practice may be able to slip in unnoticed. If a mage's paradigm doesn't account for a specific attack, defense or divination, then there's no way for even an Archmaster to counter it.

Correspondence

Masters of Correspondence generally use two major theories in their work. The first is the mystic doctrine of contagion. The second, more recent theory is that of the Correspondence Point.

For all Arch-Spheres, there is a step the mage takes to move beyond Mastery. For Correspondence, the mage must figure out how to be in the same space as himself; the Correspondence Point lets Masters exist in many places simultaneously. Next, the mage must resolve the paradox of coexisting in space with himself as more than one simultaneous awareness of singular space. Confused! Nobody said it was easy.

••••• • Fold Space/Create Space

Rarely used inside the Horizon, this power allows the Archmage to reduce or increase the distance between any two objects. If the Archmage is not working in empty space, then he must use other Spheres to manipulate the intervening Patterns (or Spirit, in the Umbra). Successes can be used to remove or add to the space in an area. The mage could create a strip or bubble of additional distance in an area, pulling Patterns like taffy with conjunctive magic in order to make them occupy the new distance. Conversely, the mage could collapse an area of space to a pinpoint, easily letting anyone cross it.

At this level of Archmastery, the mage can effectively create space, generating a zone of emptiness that pushes existing space outward around it. With the right Pattern magics, this space can be filled with other matter or made to look like part of the preexisting landscape. Note that space is not a Pattern per se; it is just, as one Archmage jokingly put

it, "the place where the Tellurian keeps all its stuff." Thus, creating space does not require the use of Quintessence.

A mage can folding a preexisting Pattern to warp its interaction with space. The mage can take a person and twist him into the shape of a pretzel; subjectively, the person still seems to exist according to his normal proportions, but the world around him is horribly bent. Naturally, this can lead to all sorts of complications, though it does not actually cause direct harm.

[Folding or creating space is almost always a very complex (10+ successes) action. Folding a Pattern is a conjunctural Effect, and is also a complex action.]

***** No Warding

As the name of this power implies, the mage realizes that wards are something to be practically brushed aside, as the region inside the ward is space that can be reached.

Normally, a mage can use Correspondence to bypass warded areas, teleporting directly into or out of an area with Correspondence gates or folding. Wards, however, are tied to the Patterns of the Tellurian itself, so that even a mage who doesn't necessarily cross intervening space can be hindered, harmed or hedged out. With this understanding, the mage no longer relies on Tellurian Patterns for guidance. Instead of using the Correspondence Point as an external gateway to all space, then, the mage becomes a sort of Correspondence Point, existing everywhere at once, bypassing the effects of wards that are keyed to concepts of "inside," "outside" and "touching."

A mage can also temporarily negate the powers of a ward so that others can evade it. The process is similar, but the mage himself becomes the Correspondence gate through which others access the warded space or object. Since the mage can easily co-locate aspects of himself, though, the subjects don't necessarily need to see or touch him or even be aware of the Effect.

[Bypassing a ward in this fashion typically adds the ward's strength to the required success total on other Correspondence functions. Naturally, the mage need not even step completely into a warded area; she could simply reach inside or even grab a warded object, with no trouble whatsoever. Temporarily breaking a ward requires defeating the ward's strength, as with usual contested magic, and additional successes allow others to bypass the ward with the mage's help.]

***** Limits of Spirit

At this level of Archmastery, the mage can travel anywhere, as with normal Correspondence teleportation or co-location, but still takes material (or spiritual) reality with him. The mage carries some of the characteristics of Earthly space with him when he travels. Even though he does not technically co-locate with Earth, he need not suffer from the harsh environment of his physical location(s).

If an Archmage with this mastery of Correspondence goes from the Earth to anywhere within the Horizon, he must still cross the Gauntlet or suffer the effects of space. The mage

brings the material aspect of the Earth with him; he does not create it wherever he goes. The extreme cold and radiation of space are still deadly. If he travels outside the Horizon, he does not carry this material aspect with him, as that region rejects the separation of spiritual and material. Mastery of Spirit is required to survive here. Thus, this power does not protect against the invasion of outside environmental forces, but allows the mage to draw upon safe Earthly reserves, breathing normally, walk on (non-existent) ground and so on.

Since the mage can easily create bubbles of space that share characteristics with other space — essentially co-locating spatial features instead of just objects — it's a simple matter to section off a pocket of space to which only the mage and others with this level of Archmastery have any access.

[The mage must score enough successes to maintain the field for the duration of her trip into hostile territory. Building a pocket of bounded space requires an extended ritual of moderate complexity (generally ten to fifteen successes) depending upon the area built and the duration that the space is supposed to exist.]

***** No Limits

At this level, any movement is possible. Mages of supreme Correspondence Archmastery can break through any barrier, even the Gauntlet and the Horizon. To the mage, all space is one space.

[To reach any place on Earth requires only one success; two if the place is warded. Traveling within the Horizon from the material side of the Earth's Gauntlet takes two to five successes and travel from the Earth to any place outside the Horizon takes seven to ten successes. Survival beyond the Horizon still requires a Mastery of Spirit, however.]

Entropy

Archmastery of Entropy is both easy and impossible. The mage must realize that his fate is his fault. He goes where he goes because of the choices he has already made. He must also realize that he cannot change this fate without changing who he is. This is much deeper than simply saying "Great, I accept that I make my own fate." It's an understanding that every action the mage has taken has colored his future, and that he cannot escape the consequences of his existence. The mage may be able to bend the universe to his whim, but ultimately he must live with himself.

***** Stultifying Order/Utter Chaos

At this level of understanding, the mage gains total determinism over chance. The Archmage can deny any change, or call upon Entropy to reduce an object or being to its component parts. Whereas lesser levels of Entropy allow the mage to affect the outcome of chance as long as some element of chance exists, this power lets the mage generate raw chaos or completely remove probability. A wave of the hand can disperse an object into randomly moving molecules, or assemble a form from scattered elements.

[Although a mage can build or destroy Patterns with this level of Entropy, such Effects are usually conjunctive with other Pattern magic if they're to be lasting. Creatures and objects can be reduced to their component parts (suffering Entropy damage) or they can be turned into totally static automata for the duration of an Effect, rendered unable to learn, grow or change.]

***** ••• Destiny of the Species

At this stage of Entropy, the mage can control the evolution of a species. While the lesser mage sees the work of Entropy in single Patterns, chaotic probabilities and intellectual constructs, the Archmaster understands Entropy on a meta-Pattern scale. He sees Entropy not just in Patterns, but in the interactions between them. He can make a species more suited to its environment, making it more prolific. He can also do the opposite, causing its extinction. Without access to Correspondence magic, this may take several generations, as the mage blesses or curses nearby members of a species. For a migratory species, or for a species spread across the Earth, Mastery of Correspondence may be necessary for any real effect to take place. Still, this potent Effect is, essentially, infectious Entropy. The mage touches Patterns in a way that causes the cascading Effect to spread.

[Naturally, affecting a number of creatures is a huge undertaking. The mage should cast the Effect consistently several times as an extended ritual in order to affect enough creatures. This use of Entropy is a bit more gradual than lesser levels; the inertia stored in so many Patterns takes some effort to change. Used conjunctively with Time and Correspondence, a mage could theoretically reduce a species to extinction in a day or hyper-evolve it, though such incredibly vulgar actions are best left for pocket universes and personal experiments.]

***** ••• Breach Shroud/Deny the End

The Archmage literally opens the Shroud, or closes it off. Tied closely to the Underworld, the mage's control of Entropy breaks the barriers of death. With but a step, the mage can walk into the Underworld like the Masters of Spirit. However, the mage can also reorder the powers of death to her liking. Though manipulating the Underworld is a hazardous undertaking (see Chapter Three), the mage is fully empowered to reassemble life from the swirling nihilistic energy of death or halt Oblivion's hold on an object or creature.

[By twisting the progress of Oblivion, the mage can slow or halt the processes of death, disease and injury. Archmasters with this level of Entropy can keep spirits of the dead from dissolving into the nothingness of the afterlife or channel the storms of the Underworld in different directions. Such Effects are fairly trivial, though a botch can be disastrous.]

Actually stepping into the Underworld or raising the dead is, of course, a feat worthy of Orpheus. The mage must undertake a quest to perform the appropriate Effect, literally piecing the subject back together by tearing the barrier between life and death, thus destroying the distinctions

between chaos and order. Such feats are tasks of great complexity (20+ successes) and difficulty.]

***** ••• True Destiny

The universe is an open book to the greatest students of Entropy. Chance and fate are writ large, and the supreme Archmaster recognizes no contradiction in luck, choice and predestination. Instead of simply manipulating the outcomes of probability, the mage can see the course of the Tellurian's every facet. He can watch the lines that influence all Patterns and the eventual end of being.

[The mage can alter the Destiny Background freely, raising or lowering it, or even change the actual destiny. Scrying with this level of Entropy lets a mage determine a creature's Destiny as well, and only the most potent magics can bar such perceptions. Although the mage does not necessarily see through time, he immediately understands all possible outcomes, and comprehends the ones that will come to pass unless phenomenal forces are brought to bear. Changing Destiny is a complex (10+ successes) action, while modifying a mage's Destiny rating means rebuilding the interaction of chance and fate within her Pattern, requiring five successes and ten points of Quintessence per dot changed.]

Forces

As with all Pattern magics, Archmastery of Forces requires that the mage understand Forces on an interconnected level instead of an individual Pattern level. The mage must tap into the universal Pattern of Forces. By questing in the appropriate Shard Realm, the mage gains a glimpse of the unified Force, the Pattern that describes the sum of all forces in the universe. Since this Pattern (theoretically) expresses every possible force, this means that the mage experiences just about every combination of Force Patterns possible. This is typically lethal.

***** ••• Economy of Force/Sense Universal Force

Opening himself to the universal force, a mage can see the interactions of Force Patterns and their natural beginnings and endings. Though normal Force perceptions allow a mage to spot interactions of such Patterns, this level of Archmastery lets a mage draw connections between a Pattern and its origins, its interactions with other Patterns and its eventual destination. Such a broad view allows the mage to determine where and how to apply force for maximum effect with minimum effort.

[With the ability to sense universal forces, the mage's other Forces Effects become much more efficient. Perceiving Forces lets the mage trace a Force Pattern back to its origin or extrapolate its likely results. The mage can also direct other manifestations of Forces with half the usual required successes, as long as the mage has already activated universal perception.]

***** ••• Plate Tectonics

By manipulating entire strings of Force Patterns at once, the mage can drop portions of a continent into the ocean, or raise parts of the sea floor. Without Correspondence or Time magic, though, he is sure to be caught in the



devastation. By the way, does anybody in the class remember our discussion of Fleck's Folly?

[Simply put, the mage can move entire continents with Forces. Instead of grabbing or creating individual Forces, the mage collects all forces acting on an object into a single vector and modifies them at whim. Though the consequences of this manipulation are phenomenally devastating, the mage can extend her Force Patterns to affect as much area as she can score successes for on her Effect. The vulgar consequences are best not contemplated.]

***** ••• Toss Around Realms

Normally, a mage's command of Forces is limited to the interaction of forces that deal with other Patterns. With supreme concentration, though, it's possible to make forces that interact with Tellurian space, designed specifically to push the boundaries of reality itself.

The mage can now move Realms. Mage-made Realms are fairly easy to move, while the larger and more static Realms take a bit more effort. Under the proper circumstances, a mage could alter the apparent positions of various locations in the Umbra, even shoving normally separate Realms into brief contact. Realms are generally too large to be pushed through the Gauntlet, though; the resistance would be phenomenal.

[Use your imagination — the mage at this level of power can move Umbral Realms, making access easier or harder. Small pocket Realms and Steadings may only take 10 or 15 successes to move, while a full-sized Shard Realm would require the work of several mages acting together for 30 or more successes. Remember, too, that historical inertia means that Realms tend to move back to their original states if unattended.]

***** •••• Alter Universal Forces

At this level of Archmastery, the mage can alter forces that affect the whole Tellurian. He can manipulate the interaction of the Shenti, moving them closer to one another or separating them. The mage can briefly change how a universal force functions, or even invent an entirely new force ("This is the Force of Thon, which removes the distinctions of gender!")

Some Euthanatoi have wondered if Oblivion itself is an aspect of an Exemplar of Forces. Could it be that every force is just an emanation of the will of some ancient mage who imagined the cosmos into being?

[By making a phenomenal Effect roll, a mage can transmute the nature of a universal force — altering how magnetism works, for instance, or changing the strong nuclear force. This sort of Effect rapidly cascades out of the mage's control, as historical inertia resists; such a change lasts only a few turns at most. Still, changing the gravitational constant of

the universe has its uses. Also, a mage can briefly create a new universal force and then use more mundane Forces magic to conjure or modify forces of that new type. Either is a very complex (15+ successes) task, though once added to the Tellurian, a universal force may last for some time.]

Life

To become attuned to the universal Pattern of Life, the mage must flow through a great many smaller Life Patterns, understanding the flow between predator and prey, between rot and rebirth. Life forms the Patterns that are intimately tied to the Tellurian by change. Though other Patterns change as well, only Life Patterns naturally dovetail into the flow of universal energy, taking and giving Quintessence from the cosmic pool. The mage must experience this flow of Quintessence, the Life force itself, by traveling through many and varied Life Patterns. The quickest way to do this is probably to become a plague.

***** Perfect Transformation of Others/New Life

While an Archmage of Life has previously been able to mutate her Life Pattern at will, now she can transform others into forms of life she has studied before with no loss of the subject's intelligence. Even Masters of Life cannot create completely new forms of life, but with this understanding, an Archmage can create a Pattern that has no relation to any creature she has ever seen before. The Archmage can also make Life Patterns that have unique properties not normally found in natural life — Patterns that subsist on base matter, that are unaffected by certain Forces or Matter Effects, or that interact with other life in strange and unpredictable ways.

[Strange new Patterns of Life can be created just like other life forms are made with lesser Life magic, and the mage can specify how they interact with other Patterns. Similarly, the mage can transform other life forms just as she could transform herself with her own Life Mastery, into nearly any form of creature with no loss of native intellect.

Furthermore, massive Pattern manipulations are easier. The mage can affect whole groups of Patterns without difficulty, attaching a single Effect to all of them — healing everyone in an area or transforming a group of animals — just as easily as she could change a single creature. For such mass manipulation, the mage need only affect the desired area, without worrying about the number of subjects.]

***** •• Scale of Life/Infection

Though individual Life Patterns each carry their own Quintessential flows, they are all joined by their primordial connection to the Prime. With this understanding of Life, a mage is no longer limited to shifting individual Patterns or creating changes in groups of Patterns; instead, he can cause a change to the underlying flows of Life, altering all Patterns of a certain type within the area of the Effect. This is not simple Pattern manipulation, but rather a change to the Quintessential flow itself, which in turn causes the Pattern to shift accordingly. The mage could cause all mammals in the area to become able to subsist on air alone, or change just the human

in an area to make them unable to walk. Doing so is as easy as affecting any single Life Pattern. In effect, the mage changes a meta-Pattern of Life so that all life around it responds.

With control over meta-Patterning, the mage can also make effects that jump from one Life Pattern to another. As they interact, Life Patterns alter each other and trade Quintessence. The mage can place an Effect on a Life Pattern so that it jumps to any other Patterns, either duplicating itself or shifting in entirety. Thus, a Pattern could be infected with a debilitating or helpful "disease" that spreads to others, or such an alteration could be made to simply jump from individual to individual without copying itself.

[When performing a meta-Pattern alteration to Life, the mage causes all Patterns of a specified sort to undergo the same general alteration. Instead of requiring a specific change, though, this change can be generalized according to the general Pattern properties involved. "Cause all people in the area to sprout wings" is possible without rewriting each individual Pattern, as is "cause all fish to become able to breathe air, regardless of other differences in their physical structures." The player need only roll as if affecting a single Pattern — in this case, the underlying fundamentals of the Life Patterns involved and their Quintessential ties.

Furthermore, the mage can build an Effect that jumps from Pattern to Pattern as creatures interact. This Effect lasts according to the duration scored by the mage; permanent Effects are theoretically possible, but Life Patterns have a way of adapting to change over time. Still, this is an insidious way to deal with enemies, assist allies or even spread a message.]

***** ••• Create Shifter/Virus

A mage at this level of Life can now grant others the ability to alter their own forms. He can essentially merge two Patterns, allowing the shift between them, and even add forms that combine aspects of the two. He can also create Patterns that pretend to be components of other Patterns, at the very limit between Life and Matter.

[By mutating a Life Pattern to contain flexible elements, the mage can give it the ability to change its own nature — whether through a series of static shapeshifting forms or in a random sequence of bizarre transformations. This follows the normal guidelines for transforming Life Patterns. Note that such a creature is not a true spiritual shifter like a werewolf, but rather a physical mutant. This does not, therefore, grant any of the special spiritual abilities that supernatural shifters possess.

Furthermore, the mage can build Life Patterns that only develop Quintessential flow in contact with other active Life Patterns. Otherwise, these Patterns are inert, their Quintessential flow locked into an inward spiral. Such Patterns straddle the edge of Life and Matter; a viral Pattern like this is barely detectable with Life magics, and may interact with other Life Patterns as a combination of Life and Matter. It is thought that the beginnings of Technocratic cybernetics came from such Patterns.]

***** Perfect Immortality

The penultimate understanding of Life renders a mage's own Pattern immutable. Only through the mage's will can her Life Pattern be affected. Age and disease are no threats, as with lesser Life mages, but now even physical injury causes no real harm. The mage's Pattern sustains itself regardless of perceived damage. Indeed, the Pattern that was once the mage's life force is now extraneous. The mage simply expands her Life Pattern to tie directly to the Tellurian. No amount of damage can destroy that connection.

[A mage who reaches this level of perfection is functionally immortal. She can suffer the complete disincorporation of her physical form; her Life Pattern itself is no longer tied to the simplicity of her gross physical mass. Of course, surviving extreme injury or age is quite Paradoxical on Earth, but in the Tellurian the mage is essentially immortal in the face of anything less than another Exemplar or a god.]

Matter

Understanding the universality of Matter may seem the safest and easiest of the Pattern magics, but it is actually the quickest way to lose oneself. Like advanced Forces, Matter Archmastery comes with comprehension of the relationships between Matter Patterns throughout the Tellurian. The mage must delve into the nature of matter, its existence as a solidified state of Quintessence, and ultimately learn the most basic properties of Matter through its differences from the mage's own Life Pattern.

***** Alter State

Although alteration of matter may seem similar to earlier levels of skill, at this level the mage can easily shift matter through various states.

[All necessary properties are altered to induce a change in state (solid, liquid, gas, plasma, ether), requiring one success per state shift. A change to plasma technically requires Forces 3, and ether (or Quintessence) requires Prime 2. This change can be accomplished with any Matter Pattern in the mage's sensory range. It is important to note that plasma created in this manner is not hot. Rather, it is more a state between a Matter and a Forces Pattern.]

***** Transform Pattern

The Archmage of Matter can turn anything (or everything) in sight into whatever he wants. Again, this is a function of scale. While earlier Mastery of Matter allows a mage to transform Patterns on a small scale, this level of Archmastery lets a mage grasp multiple disparate Patterns and alter them simultaneously *en masse*.

[Generally, every change in property requires a single success. Thus, each success lets the mage alter one fundamental property—hardness, density, weight, light absorption and so on. Instead of working with individual bricks in a wall, the mage just grabs the meta-Pattern of the wall and twists it appropriately. A castle turned into butter with one success is still hard as stone, but tastier.]

***** Create Pattern

Archmastery of meta-Patterns allows an Archmage to exceed the normal bounds of scale that lesser magics enforce. Instead of creating individual Patterns, the mage creates a form that holds multiple replicating Patterns. Individual changes to specific pieces can be done later. Moving multiple-element components poses no difficulty. The mage doesn't bother with weaving each piece of the Pattern from the inside out and instead just makes an outline of the Pattern, letting it fill in according to its needs.

[The Archmage can, within sensory range, weave as large and intricate a Pattern as he likes, assuming, of course, that he has both the Prime knowledge and the Quintessence to fuel it. For instance, instead of just creating a brick, the mage builds a Pattern for a Pattern, using a template of a castle and recursively filling it with bricks. The difficulty is no greater than creating any other sort of Matter, so although it's harder to cast this Effect correctly, it allows the mage build larger, more complex objects.]

***** Subjective Reality

At this Sphere's pinnacle, the mage creates Matter Patterns that respond not to other physical Pattern forms but to etheric Patterns such as Mind. These Patterns alter their properties according to their pre-programmed responses to Mind or Spirit impulses. Thus, the mage can make Patterns that have certain properties to one person and different properties to another.

[The supreme Archmaster's command of Matter is so great that her creations appear differently to those who view them. She can have material properties, for instance, that are poisonous to specific Natures or Essences. The Matter Patterns can be keyed to respond to certain Spirit Effects or emanations of Prime, as desired.]

Mind

Early students of Mind magic perfect the no-mind technique, emptying their thoughts. Masters delve into the complexities of mental Patterns and independent thought constructs. Archmasters do both at once: thinking, not thinking, mind and no-mind. To the Archmaster, thought and its absence are just like shadow and light.

***** Relive Past Lives/Sense the Universal Mind

The Archmage can delve into her past lives, find amazing insights and remember ancient trials and even more ancient wisdom. She can understand herself more fully, and sometimes learn useful information about friends or enemies. By reaching into the web of all minds, she taps the pieces of wisdom contained in all waking Avatars.

[With a simple Effect, a mage can easily delve into the recesses of Dream, even beyond her normal reserves. By spending a point of Quintessence, the mage can fuel her mind to traverse the limitless thoughts mirrored in her Avatar, pulling out bits of former lives or reflections of wisdom from other Avatars. Each success on such a roll allows the mage to tap into an extra dot of Past Life for a single roll. Such an Effect

cannot be extended and is not cumulative — whatever the mage scores on the Arete roll is what she gets.]

***** •• **Universal Subconscious/Reprogram Avatar**

At this stage, the Archmage understands the Sleeper world as well as he understands the waking one. With care, he can guide his Avatar to repair his faults for tests in his next life.

[Just as a mage could sense the Avatar's past thoughts through the earliest applications of Mind, this power enables a mage to imprint thoughts, memories and impulses specifically onto his Avatar. The Avatar carries these images, playing them out in later lives and Seekings. Though this would seem to be of limited utility, it is perhaps the last hope for an Archmage who has realized the futility of attempting to reach Ascension through Mastery of the Spheres alone.]

***** ••• **Self-Awareness**

The mage who progresses this far understands the true insignificance of mental achievement in attaining Ascension. The process of thinking is not nearly so important as the state of being. As the saying goes, "Try to be a human being instead of a human doing." At this level, the mage gains precise control over his actions and emotions.

[Once a mage achieves this total self-awareness, she is no longer subject to states of emotional turbulence. Though she cannot necessarily force enlightenment, she can cast aside any remaining mental barriers and weaknesses with ease. An extended ritual can remove specific mental Flaws from the mage or a specific subject. Similarly, the mage can expend Quintessence to refresh her Willpower by fortifying her mental Pattern on a one-for-one basis limited by the number of successes scored on the Effect roll.]

***** •••• **One Mind**

The province of the extremely rare mental Archmasters (or the extremely power hungry), One Mind gives access to all minds. The mage understands the inner workings of all the minds around him. He sees the reflection of every thought in the Quintessential flow of the Tellurian, opening his consciousness to a realm of total intuition. His Mind Pattern, no longer fettered to his Life Pattern, exists independently in the flow of the universal Mind.

[The mage at this level of Archmastery no longer requires a body. Even if his physical form is killed or his body destroyed, his Mind Pattern remains intact and able to float through any realm of consciousness. The mage can sense the emotions, intents and thoughts of nearly any creature, as with the lesser levels of Mind magic, but can also determine the general flow of multiple Mind Patterns. Thus, with a simple Effect bounded by an area, the mage can identify the tide of emotion over an entire group, the "gestalt mind" of a mob, species or collective.]

Prime

Prime is the fundamental component of the Tellurian. It's no surprise that the ability to manipulate the greatest

Prime energies also grants the power to repair the warps and tears of reality, smoothing out the pain of Paradox.

Because Paradox is, in many ways, simply a reaction to unrestrained change, the power to repair Paradox is the power to regulate one's own flaws. Paradox warns the mage when his power is out of his control — Archmastery of Prime lets the mage recognize that flaw and deal with it.

***** • **Paradox senses**

Although at first this may seem of limited use, Archmages of Prime realize the ability to see Paradox manifest, not only in themselves and others but in reality as both disbelief and the domino effect. Their view of the interaction of Prime energy and Paradox also allows them to see when mages have entered Quiet. Furthermore, the Archmage can channel Quintessence into this Paradox, canceling both. This last effect is coincidental.

[With a simple sensory roll, the Archmage can determine the source and nature of Paradox energies. Channeling Quintessence can only be done once on any given source of Paradox, and the number of successes scored limits the Quintessence that may be used to negate Paradox energy. Paradox nullified in this way has a tendency to explode, doing aggravated damage, so it's a dangerous way to help other mages. Note that permanent Paradox is beyond the ministrations of this power.]

***** •• **Weave Odylic Paradox/Violate Pattern**

By understanding the true nature of Prime, an Archmaster can access supposedly "involute" Quintessence. The Archmage can tap directly into another person's Avatar and harness the stored Quintessence. The mage can even direct Paradox at his enemies, increasing the severity of reality backlashes and creating disturbances that nullify magic.

[An Archmage can access another mage's stores of Quintessence by making a Prime attack. He need only use his Prime as a directed Effect. Each success that isn't dodged or countered steals one point of Quintessence. Furthermore, the mage can amplify the severity of Paradox backlashes, using a fast (non-cumulative, non-extended) Effect to add his successes to the Paradox Pool of a backlash. The mage can even cause Paradox to turn and strike a different target, using the guidelines for altering Forces. Of course, if the mage screws up the Effect, the Paradox is likely to strike him instead. Do not botch.]

***** ••• **Channel Paradox**

The ridiculously vulgar Effect of giving someone else your store of Paradox rarely breaks even. Taking another's load of Paradox is also possible, though hardly desirable. Still, moving around Paradox — shifting the blame, so to speak — is possible with enough esoteric knowledge.

[For each success scored on an Effect roll, the Archmage can channel one point of Paradox away from someone else, causing it to immediately burst into a backlash or even throwing it at a victim who fails to dodge or counter the Effect. Every two successes scored can be used to move a point of Paradox from the Archmage's pool to someone else or cause it to immediately backlash.]

***** Expel Base Paradox/Create Universe

An overachieving Archmage can toss his Paradox off into the ether. Those few who know of this power theorize that this is what creates Paradox spirits.

An Archmage at the pinnacle of Prime can also use Quintessence to create a pocket universe. The internal dimensions of this universe, and all other properties, are at the Archmage's discretion; his knowledge of Patterns is the only factor limiting the universe's internal properties. This pocket universe is a small piece of folded space where the Tellurian naturally balls itself off in a sort of protective shell. Naturally, watching this universe evolve can provide all sorts of insights for less-experienced fledgling mages, and it may even be an interesting place to visit for the Archmage creator. The mage simply gives the tiny Pattern a spark of creative force, and lets it run. Perhaps this is the way our own universe started...

[By scoring three successes per point of Paradox, the mage can expel his Paradox energy into the void. This is an all-or-nothing affair — the mage must score enough successes to eliminate all of his Paradox, or the Effect fails (with the consequential gain of additional Paradox).

Creating a universe is best left to the Storyteller's imagination. Due to the differences in primal Patterns, objects from a created universe cannot survive in the parent universe (the Tellurian of the creating mage). They are, at best, insubstantial shadows of that higher reality. The reverse is not true; the creating mage (and other creatures or objects of his reality) are quite functional in such a pocket universe, unless the creating mage specifically builds its Pattern otherwise. This can be a unique way to explore some very bizarre stories.]

Spirit

To achieve the greatest understanding of Spirit, one must be subsumed by it. An Archmaster of Spirit undergoes the shaman's journey, becoming possessed by the spirits, symbolically (or literally) dying and returning with their wisdom.

***** Awaken Ephemera

While awakening Ephemera may seem a minor trick, its effects can be devastating. Ephemera are the sleeping spirits of objects, trees and places. When awakened, they sometimes possess incredible power to affect the real world. Most mages in their home turf are on friendly grounds with nearby spirits. As a result, an Archmage can call upon all manner of spirits to aid him and may be able to summon spirits in other places as well.

[Just about any sort of Pattern object or creature can have its own Ephemera spirit. Rousing such a spirit is a fairly simple task (5 successes or so) — a testament to the powers of Spirit over the complexity of the other Spheres. Once awakened, such a spirit can often exert control over its physical host, and may have powers associated with its mythical properties. The spirit is not automatically friendly to the Archmage, but an Archmaster of Spirit is probably no stranger to dealing with spirits. This power does not function on intelligent beings.]

***** Create Realm

The Archmage is now adept enough to weave spirit stuff in almost non-spiritual ways. He can create a "pericarp" — a wall similar to the Gauntlet, through which one must step with Spirit. The pericarp walls off an area, turning it into a tiny Realm of sorts.

[Although the mage does not actually shift the locale into the spirit world, he does create a membrane of spirit around it. People wishing to cross into the delineated area must pass through the pericarp in some fashion. Each success scored translates into a level of effective Gauntlet rating for the pericarp, or can be used to extend duration and range as usual. Creatures with no ability to enter the spirit world find the pericarp to be an impassable, hazy, slightly reflective barrier.]

***** Remember the One

Although some Characters hearing of this power consider it rather blasphemous, this is only because they are completely wrong about what it does. This power allows the Archmage to bring overlapping Realms together, with no Gauntlet between. It is named for the mythical First Age, when all Realms were one.

[By scoring three successes for each point of the Gauntlet, the mage can pull together overlapping Realms. Additional successes add to the duration at one-third the usual rate. Realms pulled together this way are not harmed and are treated as whole and complete locations where their inhabitants may interact. Typically, this functions only over a small area — use the range chart with one-third the normal values. When the Realms split apart again, creatures return to their native planes, even if they had somehow crossed over beforehand.]

***** Awaken Avatar

Yes, it is possible to force the Awakening of another. It is rarely a good idea. Awakening needs to come when the mage is ready for it. Very few people Awakened this way remain useful to their awakeners. The Awakening is traumatic enough; a forced Awakening can kill the victim with shock or leave the Avatar damaged and deranged.

Some rare and powerful Umbrood possess this power. These Umbrood are generally known as demons. Infernal mages have to get their powers somehow, after all.

[Awakening a mortal's Avatar is no mean feat; it typically counts as an extraordinarily difficult (20+ successes) task. The subject immediately loses a permanent point of Willpower from the trauma, and must then make a Willpower roll. Failure indicates that the subject gains a derangement and suffers some sort of damage to her Avatar (manifested as Sphere Incompetence, no Avatar rating or a similar handicap), while a botch kills the target. This power has no effect on supernatural or already-Awakened creatures. Even if the Awakening is successful, the individual might not be friendly to the mage or even able to act after the sudden, terrifying experience.]

Time

Frankly, altering the past is a power that the Storyteller needs to keep out of the hands of the players. There is no rule system that describes time travel because a story is a linear progression of events. Realize that if the Archmage can affect the past, then the past can also be affected by the Consensus of those living in the present. People who write history can literally change history. This explains the Technocracy's efforts to change perception and historical documentation.

A character that finds ways around this should see time changed to suit his vision of it. Also, a mage trying to affect a different age finds his rating in the Time Sphere reduced by one per age removed. If the mage improves his Sphere rating in another age, his rating can be increased to his normal rating at a cost of 2x new rating in experience points. This also means that a mage cannot travel to even the High Mythic Age (the most recent previous age) until his Time Sphere rating is eight. Once he achieves such a Sphere rating in more than one age, doorways in time can pass the age barrier. Also, a mage cannot exceed his highest rating in Time in an age other than his own.

In order to surpass Mastery, the potential Archmage of Time must enter a temporal loop and realize a way out of it. It's almost like getting stuck in a Paradox Realm from a Time backlash. However, the mage deliberately triggers paradoxical Time circumstances, and then forces a resolution. The trick is returning the Archmage to his original time stream.

***** • Aid the Past

This power allows an Archmage to send objects, or even Quintessence, back in time. When an Archmage changes the past, the alteration is greatest at the moment of interference. Thus, Paradox may backlash on the Archmage not only when he sends the materials back, but also at the receiving end. Naturally, Time Sense picks up all sorts of weird vibes from this interference.

[Prime, Matter, or Life are generally required to send items back through time. Successes must be spent for both the size of the item and the degree of alteration to the present. The object sent to the past literally shunts the mage into a new time stream; the more divergent the time line, the more successes required for the Effect to take hold.]

***** •• Go to the Past

At this stage, the mage's abilities to alter the past are vastly improved. She becomes a dynamic force in the time stream, and can follow the course of time, greatly altering the present. She can easily step back further than any of her former Time abilities allowed her to see or alter. The drawback, however, is in Paradox. The mage must be careful to step only briefly into the time stream and affect minor changes without calling upon additional magic. Magic displaced through time causes great strain on the Tellurian, reflected by extreme Paradox.

[Any magic used in the past draws Paradox as if the mage were using Arch-Spheres, even if she is only doing subtle, simple Effects. Paradox that would normally be gained from the Effect is gained as normal, but all other Paradox becomes stacked in the "present." If the backlash in the "present" is large enough (20+ points), then ALL of the changes made by the mage revert to normal upon the cessation of her time trip. This is in addition to whatever damage the backlash causes her. If the backlash hits 30+, it's time to retroactively write the mage out of the chronicle.]

***** ••• Time Door

Doorways in time can move forward or backward through time or not at all. When an Archmage at this power level steps forward or backward in time, he no longer exists as a traveling Effect along the way. He cannot actually be affected, even by those who understand the Sphere of Time. Effectively, he jumps from one point in time to another.

Often, however, a mage may create a moving door in the present. Observers see merely an open doorway. Such a doorway is often created to go to a specific point in the time stream, so the other end is non-moving—it always exits at the same point in time in the past or future. The door in the present moves forward with the time stream, remaining open and available for use (a non-moving doorway would just exist for a moment, and then as the present moved on, it would continue to exist in that static moment in the past). Theoretically, a mage may even make a door that moves backwards through time; stepping through the doorway at an early point in its creation takes one back only a short time in the past, while stepping in later takes the individual back a great deal of time.

All doors with a non-moving end—like those used to visit a specific point in time—collapse as soon as somebody steps through. If the two ends of the doors move in different directions through time, they can either converge or diverge. Converging doors collapse when they meet. Diverging doors and doors with both ends going in the same direction exist until collapsed at either end.

For example, if a mage creates a door with a static end in the past and a forward-moving end in the present, the door continues to exist with the present (it moves forward with the present). The static end in the past always exits to the same time, regardless of when someone uses the door. If the past end is moving backwards, then stepping into the door at the moment of its creation places someone at the original destination of the door's exit, but waiting to use the door later catapults the user further into the past, since the door's exit has retrogressed into history.

[Time Doors could be better named Plot Doors. The metaphysics of Time Doors can be staggering in their complexity, so it's best just to leave them as portals built to fulfill a specific role in the story. Remember, if a mage builds a Time Door and alters his past, he winds up in an alternative time line where his actions have spawned the appropriate changes.]

***** Exist Apart from Time

It is the privilege of the very few to view the time line as a whole from beginning to end. The annoying problem with such perceptions is that they do not truly span the ages. While all but a few warded times in this age are clear to the mage, the previous and upcoming ages are difficult to view with any detail. Archmages speaking of this perception of time over the past few years have called it "watching the Armageddon clock."

[After achieving this Archmastery of Time, the mage no longer exists as a static moment in the present. Instead, his Pattern's entire span of existence is fused into a single "moment" that encompasses the whole age. The mage can "coalesce" to a second and decide to work within the time line at any point. As usual, modifying the time line places the mage in an alternate time stream. This is annoying, since determinism is pretty much meaningless and the mage finds himself constantly in time flux if he takes any actions at all. About the only thing that the mage can do at this point is create Time Doots for others.]

Cascade Spheres

As every Archmage knows, each Sphere falls into one of three groups:

Dynamic — Correspondence, Mind, Time

Pattern — Forces, Life, Matter

Primordial — Entropy, Prime, Spirit

Each group represents an aspect of the metaphysical trinity. They embody creation, existence and death. They are commonly expressed as Dynamism, Stasis, and Entropy.

As an *optional rule*, an Archmage's understanding of linked Spheres may cascade from her understanding of an Arch-Sphere. With enough knowledge of Entropy, for instance, an Archmage's understanding of the Primordial elements of the universe allows her to grasp the rudiments of Prime and Spirit energies, based upon their common foundations. Therefore, once the mage achieves Archmastery of a Sphere, she can access the other Spheres in that same group at ratings five dots below his Arch-Sphere. This power has its own price, however. Effects generated from the derived Spheres are assigned difficulties as if they were the Arch-Sphere, with the normal modifiers. Thus, a mage with Mind 7 attempting Time Sense using cascade Time 1 has a difficulty of 9/2 successes. Also, unless the mage already has the derived Spheres at or above the rating she can control with the Arch-Sphere, she can no longer increase her



rating in those Spheres. Her understanding is limited to the basic principles of her narrow focus on the Arch-Sphere.

Although it may look as if certain Essences go along with certain Sphere groupings, the opposite is actually true. Questing Essences yearn for heights of magical power, but often the Avatar starts to move toward the Essence of the group. For instance, a Questing Essence takes on Dynamic features as the mage Masters a Dynamic Sphere. Of course, enterprising mages develop more than one group of Spheres. This invariably shifts her Avatar to the Essence of the third group. This shift comes more from the use of these powers than merely from learning them. As with all things magical, the more you change the world, the more it changes you.

Paradox

Let's face it — Arch-Sphere Effects always break the rules. The question is really "How bad is it?" On Earth, Arch-Sphere Effects are always large enough to have witnesses, no matter how well the mage secludes himself. Sanctums offer no protection, because making a Sanctum coincidental to these Effects weakens the Tapestry so much the mage "falls through," his very magic twists the Tellurian about him and catapults him into the Null Zone.

The real problem, though, is that these Effects are vulgar in a way that violates the laws of Science, Faith and even Superstition. Therefore, in all times, in all places on Earth, these Effects must garner Paradox. Mages working countermagic against these Effects can even increase the severity of a hotch.

There are no special rules for inflicting Paradox against Arch-Spheres. The Earth is a bad place to use that sort of magic, and even in the rest of the Tellurian, universe-bending magic tends to draw Paradox. Backlashes still take their forms as spirits, explosions, flaws and so on. Not even Archmasters of Prime are immune; their spells to banish Paradox can create still more.

Rotes of Immortality

Caveat magus: These are by no means the only tested rites that can slow or reverse aging. Nor are they necessarily perfect. After all, any system sustained for too long is likely to deteriorate. However, these rites have been grudgingly shared by allies for centuries and have proven more effective than most. They are somewhat ubiquitous — the foci and rituals may change from faction to faction, but the systems remain the same. Feel free to introduce these rites with whatever name or methodology seems appropriate.

Shed the Years (*** Prime, **** Entropy, *** Life, ** Mind, ** Time)**

This is a "maintenance" rite preferred by mystics who can't bother with constantly active magics on their physical person. Some Verbena brew potions of youth; Sons of Ether boast of their Phoenix Engines. Whatever the outward trappings, this rite reverts the mage's body to the state it was in

nine years ago, effectively giving her almost another decade of life. Mystics who use this rite tend to perform it in a Horizon Realm, since the Paradox backlash could be intense indeed.

[This Effect requires five successes, and the difficulty is appropriately frightening. The pretense of high ritual usually aids the process, as does the presence of Tass. The mage temporarily halts entropy while using Life magic to rejuvenate her body. The Time Sphere helps the mage recall what she was like (not what she thinks she was like) nine years back, and the Mind Sphere helps her mentally adjust to the resetting of her brain without losing the memories of the last nine years. Finally, the adept must be a Master of Prime to fuel such an incredible regression to a younger, stronger state. Once the rite is completed, the willworker ages normally.]

Serenity of the Stone (*** Prime, ***** Time, ***** Entropy, *** Life, *** Mind)**

This rite, a favorite of the Akashic Brotherhood, slows the aging process so drastically that the mage doesn't seem to age at all. Once performed, the mystic need not recast the rite time and again.

This rite can seem coincidental if the mystic secludes himself from regular contact with Sleepers. His Mastery of Prime creates a mostly self-sustaining Pattern that slows time and entropy. Life and Mind magic keep his faculties, both physical and mental, in proper working order.

The downside is that the mage is still a "thaumivore" of sorts, and must periodically refresh the Prime Pattern maintaining the Effect.

[Since this rite is more effective than most, the mage need only consume a point of Quintessence every week or so. If Quintessence isn't available, the mystic takes a Health Level of lethal damage per day, and begins aging more rapidly. In some cases, Paradox strikes willworkers at this delicate stage, rapidly withering them beyond their actual age. The cause is unknown, although the Chorus theorizes that the irregular ebb and flow of energy is an affront to Divinity.]

This rite cannot stop aging, merely slow it to a crawl. The mage typically ages one year for every 50 she lives.]

What Price Age?

Immortality for a mage comes with a price. If the immortality rites were not originally "vulgar with witnesses," then the mage suddenly accrues one or two points of Paradox the first time someone realizes that she is younger than she should be. If this has not happened over multiple castings of these rites, then the mage may suddenly gain many points of Paradox.

Also, the mage becomes more out of touch with reality as the years progress. See Chapter Two — very old mages tend to lose their human perspective. Quiet, Jhor and similar fates are typical problems for ancient mages. Without the grounding of human contact, they quickly fall prey to madness.

Finally, immortality rites can be cast on others. The problem, though, is that a mortal develops Quiet or Jhor as

a mage would, but lacks the mage's understanding of how to deal with it. Mortals also suffer Paradox breakdowns over time when given immortality. Only specific transformations — such as the mummy Spell of Life — turn a mortal into something else, avoiding Paradox.

Quiet

Storytellers and players who want an additional roleplaying challenge can separate Quiet into three aspects: Clarity, Jhor and Madness. Madness is usually seen by most Tradition mages and Marauders as Quiet. Jhor, as explained in *Mage*, is the taint of entropy, the stench of death about an otherwise living being. Clarity is the realization that the universe is meant to work in a particular way. The three are not necessarily exclusive, and any mage who cleaves too closely to a particular set of behaviors — or carelessly partakes of certain practices — can suffer from any of them.

While characters with extreme levels (7-10) of the same type of Quiet often view the world similarly, those with low levels often have very different views of the universe. A few points of Madness can lead to hobgoblins, delusions and erratic behavior, but the focus differs for each sufferer. By contrast, large amounts of Quiet apply the mage's particular bent to all facets of his life.

Most mages experience Madness as their primary form of Quiet — the affliction of an overabundance of Dynamism. As per the *Mage* rulebook, this causes hallucinations, fugue

states and hobgoblins. Eventually, Madness leads a mage to become a Marauder.

The *Mage* rulebook also describes Jhor. As a mage dabbles in destructive Primordial energies, she returns structure to the original seething morass of the unformed universe. This association with death and decay afflicts a mage with heavy Resonance, turning her physical visage (and mental processes) pallid and languorous. With too much Jhor, a mage may eventually choose the Fallen Road.

Mages who are too heavily locked into Stasis suffer Clarity. Clarity is a problem for Technocrats or other mages who perceive an extremely orderly and linear universe. Mages who succumb to Clarity have trouble with distinctions and probabilities — they see the universe only in concrete, black-and-white terms. See the *Book of the Weaver* for more information about mages who fall under the thrall of Stasis.

Characters with five or more levels of any of these types of Quiet should be removed from play. If a character develops more than one type of Quiet, rate her as follows:

Madness and Clarity: A mage developing both actually gains a balanced respect for the concepts of dynamic and rigid reality, and should have neither Quiet. These forms of Quiet cancel out.

Jhor and one of the others: Rate the character for both Jhor and the other. Give the higher rating to the character in Jhor. Jhor taints everything that it touches; a character twisted even a little becomes further corrupted.

Friends and Enemies



When you have enough power to bend the cosmos to your whims (much less win the lottery), everybody wants to be your friend — except those who want to take it all away from you. Just as the compatriots of lesser mages tend to be unusual, Archmages seem to attract the sinister, the powerful and the downright weird.

Allies

Mages pick up many friends and allies on their journeys. Some are other mages. Some are magical creatures. Some, if the mage is wise, are just normal folks with the compassion to stick by the mage. An Archmage's allies are rarely as powerful as she, but often compensate with special capabilities or wisdom that the Archmage can't match.

Familiars

The typical agreement between a mage and his familiar is for the mage to provide Quintessence and protection to the familiar while it acts as both mentor and ally. The mage also gets a source of knowledge and sometimes even a friend. The familiar gains a home on Earth, a mage to amusement it,

and whatever else it can get the mage to agree to. The problem with this relationship, though, is that humans change, so the relationship changes as well.

Eventually, the mage learns all he can from his familiar. As the mage grows more powerful, the familiar becomes more of a hindrance than an aid in battle and exploration. The familiar, after all, is essentially a spirit and can't really grow. If the mage chooses to exile himself from Earth, he can live in a Horizon Realm and deal with his familiar as a spirit being, but the mage and familiar are hardly well served by isolating themselves in the far reaches of the cosmos. The mage must find a way to continue his quest for personal growth without endangering his familiar.

One solution is to discover a new, more powerful form for the familiar. But the problem is that the familiar has already chosen its animal incarnation. With the right Spheres and Effects, the mage can enhance the body the familiar is using. Remember that the familiar's form reflects its spiritual nature — and the mage's. Alterations to the familiar change the link between it and the mage. The answer may be to let the familiar go as part of the passing of time, the cycle of life. In the end, the Storyteller has the



final say over what can happen to the familiar, but we've got a few suggestions to think about.

When a mage changes, it's usually to become more powerful. For the familiar, this means a steadier supply of Quintessence and other goodies. More risk, too, as the mage seeks greater challenges in the pursuit of enlightenment.

Ultimately, the mage has an ally that becomes more of a liability with each passing year. This weakness can be limited magically, by strengthening the familiar, but this is a stopgap at best. Eventually the mage outgrows the knowledge and power of his familiar. The only options are to sever the tie to the familiar, or to find a way to protect it.

For game purposes, a familiar can be any object or creature that has been prepared using Pygmalion's Paradigm or Imbue Flesh, respectively. The power of a familiar is limited by the mage's *Arete*, with a maximum of five dots (see *The Book of Shadows*.) When the mage progresses in power, he can call a new familiar, but not without risk: The mage must sever his tie with the familiar — a task requiring strong knowledge of Spirit (at least four dots). This causes great animosity between the mage and the familiar spirit. A newly summoned familiar, seeing this mistreatment, often leaves as well, refusing the binding ritual. Even if the mage's familiar dies or is sent away, the old familiar always leaves some mark on the mage. This means that the new familiar knows that its summoner had a familiar before, and may wonder what happened to it. A mage is, essentially, stuck with his familiar unless he wants a permanent black mark — and, possibly, the damaging Resonance of a snapped familiar cord.

To summon a new familiar during the course of a chronicle, the mage must find an object or creature of exceptional value. This becomes the host material for the new familiar. In some cases, the spirit creates its own form, but finding an existing template is usually easier than to making a body from scratch. The agreement between the mage and the familiar should be roleplayed — the familiar demands care, Quintessence and attention. Many spirits also have other interests, demanding that the mage perform specific tasks ("I require a sacrifice of three rubies of exceptional luster every month!") or requiring specific bans of the mage ("If we are to cooperate, you must never harm a cat."). In return, the familiar offers its knowledge and magical powers. The mage binds the familiar spirit to his Pattern. The two become linked and only the powerful aforementioned magics can separate them.

While a familiar has interesting and helpful magic and information, it isn't normally placed in a powerful body. When a mage works his way to Archmage status, most familiars understand that they need to grow in power as well. Such modifications can only be done to the physical shell of the familiar, and — because of the close bond to the mage — the familiar usually insists that he make the alterations personally. Also, a familiar rarely agrees to sweeping changes and only allows minor improvements when convinced that such changes are necessary. Thus, a mage may slowly cast enchantments over his familiar to make it more resistant to magic, to give it better defense from harm or make it quicker or stronger. The familiar always keeps some element of its initial form.

Binding a new familiar isn't very difficult. The mage casts the usual familiar ritual. But changing his current familiar, especially without damaging the bond, is a bit tougher. The mage reshapes the spirit's nature, simultaneously altering his Pattern and reforging the familiar bond to accommodate. This is tricky work — the mage needs a strong ritual to perform such an Effect, and the player must score a number of total successes equal to or greater than the mage's Avatar rating, the familiar's rating and the rating of any changes made. A botch indicates that something went awry; the mage suffers Pattern bleeding, the familiar becomes hostile or weak, or (in a particularly bad case) the cord itself is snapped. Even if successful, such a change always reflects the mage's own nature with Resonance. Making a familiar stronger and more aggressive could cause the mage to pick up violent Resonance in his magic. Giving it powers of deception and stealth could cause the mage's Resonance to become more shifty.

Some mages, of course, won't be convinced that the rating of the familiar cannot be improved. The only way that a particular familiar can ever be rated higher is if it becomes a more powerful spirit. Although ways can be found to do this, such a change breaks the familiar-mage bond. The mage would have to sever the spirit link, find a new spirit or somehow drastically increase the power of the current spirit, and then rebind the familiar — not a pleasant prospect for either party.

Bonding a Better Buddy

Given the trouble in altering a familiar, some mages don't bother with the process. Still, there's no mistaking the benefits of a familiar that's better able to defend itself or capable of more magical feats. Some mages opt to replace their old familiars instead of bolstering its strength.

Snapping the cord that binds mage and familiar is a spell that must be cast by the mage himself, or with his participation as a combined ritual. Either way, the process costs him a permanent point of Willpower. Second, the mage must convince the new familiar of his sincerity in light of his betrayal of the old one; this requires good roleplaying in addition to some difficult social rolls (a mage relying on Spirit compulsion can pretty much write off the possibility of a helpful familiar). Third, the mage must typically use Spirit magic to perform any desired alterations. Finally, to create the bond, the mage sacrifices a number of experience points equal to the level of the familiar summoned.

Spirit Mentors

By the time an Archmage reaches her exalted status, her past mentor has generally exhausted his store of knowledge. However, because the Archmage tends to rewrite large sections of the Tellurian, important spirits might notice. Although spirits can't usually teach anything of Spheres to the mage (excluding, perhaps, Celestines), they do have unique perspectives on reality. No matter how long she searches, though, a mage cannot find a mentor of

greater power than her own understanding of the Spirit Sphere. The mage must be able to understand what the spirit is saying and translate the spirit's often narrow viewpoint into her own paradigm.

Remember that any spirit's role in the universe is defined and mostly unchangeable. A spirit only has access to specific information. Granted, powerful spirits have a great deal to say, but they simply aren't concerned with knowledge outside their domains. A fire spirit can't talk much about books other than how well certain types burn, and a spirit of secrets never shares everything that it knows.

Acquiring a spirit mentor is typically a matter of roleplaying as a mage seeks out an appropriate spirit in the Umbral Realms and convinces the spirit of his sincerity with tasks or sacrifices. More information about spirit mentors is in the character creation section on p. 82.

Archmages and Consors

An Archmage is a member of a select group — a group whose members want little to do with each other. Somehow, Archmages get the idea that all other Archmages use vulgar magics. Certainly, individuals like Porthos Fitz-Empress didn't help this image. With the store of Paradox an Archmage can collect, he doesn't want to be around when another mage explodes. Also, Archmages have rigid views on how the world should be. For most, the only answer is to deal with younger, less powerful mages.

While there's no shortage of those willing to help the Archmage, this help never comes without a price. Tradition mages are expected to provide training in return for favors other mages provide. Convention Scientists and Comptrollers alike serve the Inner Council of the Technocracy, but the Inner Council provides "lab assistants" both to researchers and those working on the edges of reality.

Typically, an Archmage serves as a part-time mentor to a lesser mage or even as an ally to a mortal, in return for company, influence, or just the occasional mental chore. Archmages must select their consors carefully — one unbelieving person can unintentionally derail the entirety of the mage's work. Therefore, most Archmages, when they decide to take mortal acquaintances, spend their time with other mages, sorcerers, friends and family members who understand their quest.

Archmages are unlikely to have many special Merits, Flaws or Backgrounds dealing with normal humans. Those few who do generally have just a handful of friends, family or allies among the Horizon Realms. Storytellers should adjust Backgrounds accordingly to account for Archmage predilections — perhaps making a Contact a political messenger for a Tradition Chantry, or an Ally a colonist in a Shard Realm.

Adversaries

Unspeakable monsters, things from beyond, alien horrors in the Horizon, literal demons locked away from Earth

— in the process of Mastering the Arch-Spheres, the Archmage is almost guaranteed to piss off some of these nasties. And some problems don't just disappear with a wave of the mage's hand because he's got Arch-Spheres.

Nephandi

Arch-Nephandi — do any get that far? The general theory is that they don't. Powerful Nephandi seek to control those beneath them, keeping their subordinates from the rank they think they deserve. Nephandi leaders still kow-tow to greater beings, which limits the power they can have. Those who teach the Arch-Spheres test their pupils rigorously before any instruction begins, and those pupils never Fall. Or so it is hoped.

Also, the step between magedom and Archmagedom requires giving up control to more powerful forces in the universe. The mage must allow the elemental Patterns of the Tellurian to guide him. This lack of personal control is, ironically, feared by the powermongering Nephandi. So there are no Qlippothic Arch-Spheres. Such incredibly destructive powers would certainly tear apart the Nephandus himself.

Still, if there are any Fallen Ones who've surpassed Mastery, they likely exist far, far out in the Deep Umbra. They certainly can't be fought on or around Earth; it's too dangerous, and they can always leave the corruption of mortal society to lesser Nephandi who don't have anything better to do.

Nephandi present a problem to Archmages by virtue of their normal routines. Even without Arch-Spheres, Nephandi wind up mucking about with the affairs of other mages, and if they can corrupt the plans of an Archmage, so much the better. The key is subtlety. A Nephandus doesn't face an Archmage or similar foe directly; he subverts the mage's friends, leaves misleading information and ensures that the Archmage's existence is so frustrating that the mage has no choice but to concede to darker powers.

Perhaps the only way that a Nephandus could functionally pursue Archmastery is through the intervention of his overlords. Few greater spirits wish to invest such power in a fallible and ambitious underling, so luckily such an opportunity must be rare.

Other Archmages

There's the Tradition Council — but can you really deal with someone who sees the world in a fundamentally different fashion? Members of different Traditions see each other's magic as flawed and are usually trying to prove their magic superior to others. Tradition mages are at one another's throats just as viciously as everyone else. By the time someone reaches Archmastery, he's so firmly entrenched in his paradigm that conflict with other viewpoints is unavoidable.

There are also the Disparates — what are these groups doing? In general, Disparates stay out of the Ascension War when they can. Staying away from conflict is not an entirely

bad thing. However, they usually lack the drive for Archmastery, so they produce relatively few potent mages. Given their small numbers, this is no surprise.

A Disparate mage is likely to get the hell out of Dodge if he runs afoul of an Archmage. Every Archmage has an agenda, and the Disparates don't need any more people breathing down their necks. However, their specialized knowledge can attract Archmages seeking to broaden their magical horizons. Naturally, since Disparates draw their magic from their cultural secrets, they're unlikely to share. Most mages aren't even aware of the motives of the various Disparate groups, so they can be antagonists who stymie Archmages for reasons that nobody understands.

Any Tradition Archmage is a threat to the Technocracy as well. The Union's upper echelons don't even bother trying to convert him, because such power is best avoided. Of course, the Union has its own "High Scientists" and the like, though they are few and often cloistered away in special research facilities or institutes beyond the Horizon. The dedication needed to achieve Archmastery through technology is no less than the drive required of Tradition Archmages.

The real threat from the Technocracy comes from specialist op teams or colonies. Out in the Horizon, the Technocracy's Void Engineers establish colonies and investigate disturbances. An Archmage who lives in a private Realm may find a group of armored marines knocking on his door, and when the Void Engineers encounter strangeness in the Horizon, they tend to shoot first — anything that weird could be very dangerous, after all. Furthermore, the Technocracy can encroach on an Archmage's paradigm with its technological toys. Reality stabilizers, orbital arrays and special sensors can quickly strengthen the Gauntlet and neutralize magical constructs, wrecking years of changes to the Umbra.

Of course, some Archmages hold a grudge against the Technocracy in their later years. This can be part of a chronicle, though it's not recommended. Archmages who drop hideous Effects on Technocratic strongholds suffer repercussions as other Archmages band together to stop the offender from blowing up the universe and have to deal with killing multitudes of humans whose only crime was believing that technology could give them a better, safer and more interesting life.

A better rub for Archmages is the influence game. Undermine the Technocracy's Consensus and insinuate mystic paradigms instead. This, of course, assumes that the Archmage decides that the Technocracy is worth fighting. After all, they do good things for so many people that the Archmage might overlook a few wrecked credit histories and smudged medical records in favor of the long-term improvements that the Technocracy has brought to most of humanity.

And, of course, there are Marauders. Although few Marauders have the drive to go reach Archmastery in any

Sphere and many have difficulty in further Sphere advancement after they are wrapped in chaos, those few that have the power still have the drive to actually succeed at their objectives — total dynamism. Individually, Marauders pursue many disparate goals. Since their madness drives them in separate directions, they don't generally have any unified agenda. Still, this chaos can be frustrating (and enlightening) for Archmages — especially if they can't counter the Marauder's powers.

The Archmage's existence is driven by the perfection of his power. There are as many reasons to pursue this power as there are mages who pursue it. It is a rare student that is unprepared for the first problem that comes his way. Those who understand power, however, see its trap. They know that wars aren't won on the battlefield, especially wars as cosmic as the one for Ascension. More experienced willworkers realize that unleashing Arch-Spheres leads to horrendous devastation and ruin. As a result, Archmages

rarely invoke such powers. Archmages are far more effective as ideological rivals. For example:

- Archmages compete through duels for prime real estate in the Umbra.
- Archmages fight over a potential student.
- Archmages fight to mold society so that a specific event does or doesn't happen.
- Talismans and esoteric wisdom are favorite prizes, and Archmages compete for them.
- A specific mentor or spirit accepts only one Archmage as a student or ally.
- Archmages vie for influence over other supernatural factions in the World of Darkness.
- Archmages maneuver to have a rival removed by more mundane sources, plotting without magic so the enemy doesn't see them coming.

Creating an Archmage



Running an Archmage chronicle is challenging, but with the guidelines about adversaries, hooks and locations in this book, it's possible. However, it takes so long to achieve Archmastery that it's unlikely during the course of a typical Mage game. You may want to create Archmage characters from scratch.

Making Archmages is just a variation of the system used to build normal mage characters. Instead of using the values given in the Mage rulebook, use the values shown hereafter for the character.

Attributes: The Archmage has eight dots to distribute to the primary Attribute category, six for the secondary and four in the tertiary.

Archmages can use experience points to increase certain attributes above five. Possession of an Arch-Sphere increases the capacity of the Archmage's human capabilities. In effect, the total understanding granted by the Arch-Sphere makes the Archmage a bit more than human. Attributes can be increased up to the rating of their corresponding Sphere without risking additional Paradox.

The Life Sphere enables the mage to push her body to feats of incredible exertion. Forces magic makes the mage keenly aware of kinetics and vectors, improving her coordination. Drawing upon the Patterns of surrounding Matter

improves the mage's stamina, allowing her to mimic the resilience of stone, metal and similarly unyielding materials. Spirit magic allows a mage to better relate to others with greater empathy. Similarly, Entropy lets a mage manipulate emotion to his own ends, while Prime magic grants a mage a tangible sense of power and responsibility. Mind magic naturally improves one's thinking abilities. Correspondence expands the senses and Time sense improves reaction speed — it's hard to be surprised when you've already seen it coming.

Abilities: Archmages have 19 primary Ability dots, 13 secondary and seven tertiary. Assign at least three dots to any Ability that is key to your paradigm. A Hermetic mage, for instance, probably has at least three dots of Linguistics and Occult, while a Virtual Adept has similar minimum levels of competence in Computer and Technology.

Spheres: An Archmage begins with twelve dots of Spheres. Six dots must be applied to one Sphere (probably the character's specialty Sphere, though this is not required). Divide the remainder as desired, though of course the mage must have at least one dot in his Tradition's specialty.

Arete: Archmages begin with an Arete rating of six.

Willpower: 6

Backgrounds: 10 dots. Remember, the Archmage's Backgrounds in mortal society are markedly different from those of

Sphere/Attribute Correspondences

Strength — Life	Charisma — Spirit	Perception — Correspondence
Dexterity — Forces	Manipulation — Entropy	Intelligence — Mind
Stamina — Matter	Appearance — Prime	Wits — Time

other mages. When you live in the Umbra, your Allies, Contacts and Mentor are definitely not normal people.

Freebies: An Archmage has 30 freebie points, and may buy additional dots, Merits and so on at their normal costs. However, the Archmage should not have any Sphere rating above six, and be sure to get Storyteller approval before raising Arcane.

Merits and Flaws: Like anyone else, an Archmage can have up to seven points of Merits and Flaws. For every century of existence, the Archmage can have one additional point of Merits or Flaws — particularly old characters may be very skilled, very eccentric or both.

The Merits and Flaws listed below are especially appropriate for an Archmage. This is not to say that any Flaws have to be taken, though Archmages are, by nature, extreme personalities and tend to be a little strange. See *The Book of Shadows* for a full explanation of these Merits and Flaws.

New Background: Spirit Mentor

For a mage who's outgrown her mortal mentor, there's the possibility of acquiring a spirit mentor. This Background represents a mage's communion with a specific spirit. The spirit's form and area of influence should be chosen when the Background is taken. Note that a spirit mentor, unlike a Totem, does not directly assist the mage with magical Effects; it simply gives advice or information when the mage studies strange magic or deals with denizens of the Umbra.

Although it seems that an Archmage could gain direct access to an Incarna or Celestine via this Background, this is far from the case. An Incarna almost always works through an intermediary, and even if five dots are taken in this Background, the Archmage probably doesn't realize that he is communicating with a Celestine. (For more information on spirits, see *Axis Mundi* or *The Spirit Ways*.)

Note to Storytellers: The Resonance of the mage involved determines what sort of spirit mentors him. This does not mean that a weaver spirit attempts to calcify its student and bring him directly to the weaver. In fact, many spirits allied with Pattern are not totally "Pattern mad," and some Primordial spirits are not wholly concerned with corruption. But if a death mage needs a Celestine for a mentor, this may mean that the Wyrn has taken personal notice of the mage (assuming that you use the Triad in your games)....

- A minor spirit of little consequence, typically a Gaffling
- A Gaffling of some ability
- A knowledgeable Gaffling with several powers
- Independent Jaggling of limited scope and responsibility
- Jaggling of moderate knowledge and power
- Jaggling associated with an Incarna/Independent Jaggling of great responsibility
- Minor Incarna/Totem spirit
- Incarna associated with a Celestine



- Aspect of a Celestine or powerful Incarnate
- Celestine

Special Merits and Flaws for Archmages

Student's Reputation (2 pt Merit or 2 pt Flaw)

One of your students has made a name for herself, and her deeds reflect on you. Perhaps she is a vibrant young talent who brings a fresh perspective to her Tradition. On the other hand, she may be a bad seed who went

Recommended Archmage Merits and Flaws

Psychological
Driving Good, Flashbacks, Higher Purpose, Obsession, Overconfident

Mental
Absent-Minded, Iron Will, Self-Confident

Aptitudes
Age, Jack-Of-All-Trades

Supernatural
Cursed, Echoes, Magical Prohibition or Imperative, Psychic Vampire, Spirit Magnet
Sleeper Society

Any, because an ageless mage needs a front.

Restricted Archmage Merits and Flaws

Psychological
Hatred, Phobia, Sadism/Masochism, Shy, Speech Impediment, Vengeance. Of these, the lesser flaws can be repaired, and the greater flaws make advancement to Archmage status impossible.

Mental
All flaws but those listed above as recommended, because any others have probably been cured by advanced Mind magic.

Awareness
All flaws — although the development of Arch-Spheres tends to cause "tunnel vision" with respect to reality, a mage who starts with such a Flaw needs it repaired before he can perceive the mind-shattering implications of Arch-Spheres.

Supernatural
The mage should not be Sphere Inept in his Arch-Sphere(s).

Mage Ties
All but Boon, Enemy (3-5pt), Notoriety and Reputation are restricted.

Physical
All flaws—an Archmage can easily rid himself of most of these with magic.

Marauder some time ago. Whatever the case, her activities bring you great respect or embarrassment, and her exploits are the talk of your peers.

Ascension Message (3 pt Merit)

An Archmage cannot take this Merit.

In a past life, you imbedded a message in your Avatar. You achieved Archmastery and learned your mistake too late. Though you couldn't do anything about it in that life, you implanted certain impulses, images and blocks in your own Avatar so that now, in your current life, you will avoid the same fate.

You'll never be an Archmage. Your Avatar just won't cooperate. Although you can Seek for high Arête (six or more), you can't develop Spheres above Master level. Though this seems like a liability, it's not. Your Avatar forces you to broaden your picture.

Because you adapt to other viewpoints, you not only get rid of foci more quickly, but also learn to use other paradigms. After you've achieved an Arête of six or more, you can access the paradigms of other mages, though you suffer a +4 difficulty on all magical Effect rolls that are done outside your paradigm. For each point of Arête beyond six, your difficulty penalty drops by one, until you can work just about any sort of magic.

With luck and effort, your forcibly broadened vision may actually prevent you from falling into the myopic trap of the Archmagedom and guide you toward Ascension.

Grand Reputation (5 pt Merit)

Word of your deeds has traveled far and wide. Younger students revere your name. You are welcome at most allied Chantries and find assistance throughout your Tradition. You are also a highly visible presence in the Ascension War, and you attract plenty of unwanted attention.

If you make your identity known, just about anyone in your own Tradition has a friendly reaction to you, and even other Tradition mages are likely to treat you with respect unless they have a specific reason to dislike you. Most other mages of your faction are willing to assist you. While most mages are loath to share knowledge, magical resources and Talismans, you can lean on other Tradition mages to grant you access. With the appropriate social rolls (generally, Manipulation + Chantry Politics or Destiny), you can negotiate a brief loan of a Talisman, Node or other beneficial item.

Years of Wisdom (5 pt Merit)

You've seen and done almost everything imaginable. Once per session, you may add one automatic success to any one non-magical action, whether it is an attack, dodge, research or persuasion. When undertaking the task, you remember doing something like it before ("When I was at Shiloh...") and draw upon your experience to help you.

Powerful Allies (5-8 pt Merit)

Over the years, you have managed to befriend—or at least establish cordial relations with—a few beings of great power. This may be a sept of Garou, another ancient mage, a vampire prince, Umbrood Preceptor, faerie noble,

an ancient ghost, a mummy or something truly bizarre. Although neither of you risk life, limb and soul for one another, you're in the habit of assisting one another.

This Merit can serve as a springboard for many adventures. The Storyteller has the final say on what allies the character may take and how much they are worth as a Merit. She also defines the statistics for the ally; although the character knows the basics, he shouldn't have an omniscient overview of his friend's capabilities.

Exemplar (7 pt Merit)

You've subsumed your specialty Sphere into your very existence. No longer even remotely human, you have become a flesh-and-Avatar representative of a basic cosmic force.

As an Exemplar, you have several benefits. You can improve your specialty Sphere to its ultimate limits without gaining further Arete; you simply absorb more of the Sphere into your own nature, until you become a powerful spirit entity of the appropriate Sphere at a rating of 10. The cost to improve your Exemplar Sphere is just 4x the new rating in experience. By tapping into the Shard Realm of your Sphere, you can refresh your own Quintessence pool just about any time; you must meditate as normal, but you use your Exemplar Sphere instead of the Prime Sphere for the feat, and you can do it anywhere you can tap into the Shard Realm (from the Umbra for Spirit, near a huge fire for Forces). You may automatically use offensive countermagic against manifestations of your Sphere, without taking a separate action; this can even be done if you've already used magic in the turn. If you're in the appropriate Shard Realm, your Avatar's pool of Quintessence automatically refreshes every turn.

On the downside, you're no longer entirely human. You can't improve your other Spheres. You can't improve your Arete, either. You work only within the paradigm of your Sphere. Quintessence that isn't drawn from your Shard Realm is useless to you — universal energy is too raw for your now-shackled Avatar. You'll never Ascend — you gave up that goal in exchange for the knowledge that, someday, you could become a pure spirit being.

Exemplars are demanding characters to roleplay, since their view the universe is highly skewed. This particular Merit is recommended only for the most talented roleplayers. Storytellers shouldn't hesitate to ban Exemplar characters from chronicles in which they don't belong. Even if this Merit is allowed, the character must have an Arch-Sphere rating in his Exemplar Sphere — it's not appropriate for normal mage characters.

Permanent Paradox Flaw (2 pt Flaw)

You suffered a nasty Paradox backlash at some point, and the effects linger on, resisting all attempts at a magical cure.

Pick a relatively simple flaw with the Storyteller's approval. That flaw affects you constantly, and you can't get rid of it without some major work (like severing part of your Avatar or finding an Exemplar of Prime). Some ideas:

- You suffer from chronic pain that occasionally causes you to lose two dice from all of your Dice Pools.
- All technological devices that you touch rapidly fail, but almost never to your benefit.
- You attract some sort of force like magnetism, electricity or fire.
- Living creatures around you become sick or hyperactive.
- You are incapable of speaking certain words, letters or sounds.
- Your body is twisted in some way, perhaps with an inhuman feature, giving you a +1 difficulty to rolls involving social reactions or certain types of physical feats (trying to throw something with a withered hand, or jumping with a twisted leg).

Wistful (2 pt Flaw)

However uncomfortable and hectic your youthful days were, you still miss them. You have a tendency to drift off into recollections of the glory days, sometimes acting foolishly or becoming depressed. A Willpower roll usually puts aside your nostalgia, for a while....

Rivalry (3-5 pt Flaw)

Some mighty being in your own functions seeks to thwart your ambitions. This may be a professional rivalry (like those within the halls of Doissetep, before its destruction) or a deep, abiding loathing spawned centuries ago (over a lost love, slain friends or worse). Although your rival can't openly attack you, she does everything in her considerable power to make sure you never reach your personal goals — unless they suit her purposes better than yours.

Immortal Enemy (5-8 pt Flaw)

A supernatural enemy has fought you for years — a vampire, mage, Umbrood Lord or something else entirely. Over the decades of your rivalry, this enemy has learned several of your secrets and foibles and is quite willing to use them against you. The enemy is well-entrenched in modern society. You have time to thwart his plans and make a few strikes of your own, but dropping in and kicking his ass is currently out of the question.

Story Questions for Archmages

In addition to answering the normal background questions for mage characters, Archmages have several other aspects that must be addressed. Players should think about their characters' history in detail. Archmages have decades (perhaps centuries!) behind them as mages.

What prompted you to stay with your Tradition?

Some mages become disillusioned with Tradition politics. Others have a sort of hanger-on mentality. Very few actually regard their Tradition as a holy cause, yet the Tradition's paradigm determines the Archmage's view of reality. The same can be said of Technocrats. Every Archmage is so focused on a particular way of doing things that his Tradition or Convention's methods still influence his mystic

style. Did your character owe such a debt of gratitude that he adopted his Tradition's beliefs wholeheartedly, or did he see it as the best route to power? Did your mentor instill you with such respect for your Tradition that it guided your steps for decades, or do you simply embrace any cause passionately?

How do you deal with Paradox?

Every mage who survives long enough worries about Paradox. Archmages have to worry about it more than most. Most have a variety of clever means to cheat the backlash. What's your character's reaction to Paradox? Does she avoid it completely, or just roll with it? Does she use Talismans to evade it, or does her familiar mitigate it? What about a mage with permanent Paradox, from age or Pattern modification — what sorts of problems do you have, and how have you compensated for them over the years?

Do you have any remaining friends or family? How do you deal with them?

While some mages remove themselves from normal human contact, they still deal with a few people. Archmages, by contrast, are generally barred from Earth, both by Paradox and the Gauntlet. They still need human contact, but can only get it through proxy or with the consors who live in the Horizon. Did you bring friends and family to the Umbra, or does he pop in to Earth from time to time? Do you even care about humans any more? Do you shun mage contact in an attempt to regain the life you left behind?

What drove you to become an Archmage?

Although the push for Archmastery is internal, the motive varies from one mage to the next. Was it a desire for power? Greed? Lust? Did you want knowledge? Control? A sense of completeness? Do you seek information for its own sake, or did you think it a route to Ascension? Do you have scars that hurled you relentlessly to Archmastery, or were you firmly in charge of your own destiny?

Where do you live now?

Chances are you aren't living in your parents' basement. Do you have your own Steading? A safe Sanctum? Or do you float through the Tellurian, taking pleasure where you find it? Do you wander from Chantry to Chantry, or do you have a home in some Horizon Realm?

What is your agenda?

Everybody's got one. However, an Archmage's agenda requires some thought. They have already accomplished incredibly difficult and trying goals. They have the power to

easily accomplish most of the things that they want to do. Thus, Archmages have larger, more abstract goals. Do you want to see your relatives follow in your footsteps? Do you want to Ascend in your next life? Are you out to strengthen your Tradition, or tear it down? Maybe you want something lasting, like your own Realm or Steading. Maybe you just want to be left alone.

Final Considerations

If some of these numbers seem low, remember that an Archmage has spent years, even decades, studying one Sphere to the exclusion of all other knowledge. If the requirement of specific ratings in Abilities seems odd to Storytellers or players, remember that the mage has to learn a great deal about the theory of magic and its history to advance — Abilities such as Occult, Linguistics, and even Secondary Knowledges. As always, these rules are a guideline for the Storyteller. If she wishes for a Chantry of mages with *Arete* 10, that's up to her.

The major problem here is for the Storyteller. She must keep characters with broad capabilities from attempting to solve everything with the application of Arch-Spheres. Remember the twin powers of Resonance and hubris. Everything the mage does at this stage has resonant effects. His magic emits waves that sometimes ripple across the world. Quiet can be a more dangerous solution. Archmages become so attuned to one aspect of reality that all others become superfluous. This does not mean that they do not see attacks coming, but that the smaller details of life become less important. An Archmage can find himself slipping away from reality. The greater the height, the more devastating the fall.

Archmages retain many of their own human foibles as well. Play around with their motives and past when developing your chronicle. Have all of your players answer the Archmage story questions and use the answers as hooks. Mix and match the answers with those of other characters for an engrossing mesh. Archmages often find themselves at loggerheads over belief; let the players argue among themselves. If mages agreed on everything, the Ascension War would never have happened.

Above all, of course, remember to *have fun*. If you want big explosions and mindless devastation, it's your game. If you want a more cerebral experience with ancient, wizened mages, you can do that, too. Better still, give both a try. There are, after all, infinite worlds out there.

Burnout

Quote: Leave me alone.

Prelude: Life can be so vibrant! Growing up in the suburbs, you didn't have to worry too much about money or family problems. Your parents were happily married, you got along great with your younger sibling, you had good grades and you just had a *je ne sais* that annoyed the hell out of others.

You took up anthropology in college. Not only did you enjoy learning about other cultures, but you loved reading myths and legends. From time to time you studied some ancient tribal ceremony or dug up a timeless secret, and you treasured every new discovery.

While dancing with pagans on a retreat in Europe, you drove yourself until you collapsed. Heavy drink, ecstatic dancing and ritual blood-letting took their toll, and you hallucinated from exhaustion.

But the hallucinations didn't stop, and one of your hosts told you that you had Awakened.

Gleefully adopting their rituals, you set about learning real magic, the truth behind all the dry texts that categorized everything as tradition.

For the better part of a decade you practiced with the Verbena. As you learned more, you took on a decidedly darker cast. Grim fortitude replaced joy as you learned rites of sacrifice.

Elaborate preparations, lists and personal demands eroded your confidence. Squabbling with other mages of the Tradition left you disillusioned. You finally decided to give it all up.

You couldn't stop, though. It was like a drug. Something always demanded your attention. The most powerful members of the group wanted to be pagan gods, and you didn't agree with their methods. The other Traditions scoffed at your hard-won knowledge, but you developed better ways to do things. Every step burned, but forced you to become the best, just so that you could get them to stop pushing you.

Eventually, you left the Earth completely. Heading for some secluded Realm, you decided to leave the assholes behind, shacking up somewhere you didn't have to prove yourself again and again to

every gung-ho prima donna with something to prove. Damn it, though, now they ask you to teach them....

Concept: Basically a nice guy, you burned out on the whole Tradition political machine and decided to make your own road. In the process, you forced yourself to be better than your detractors, and that pushed you to Archmastery. Ironically, you wish that you could just settle down on Earth and have a normal life again. When the calling comes, though, you find that you have no choice but to play the hero once more.

Roleplaying Tips: "Cynicism" is your middle name. Whenever you meet someone new, you put him off with rude and snide commentary. Those who stick around get a mouthful of how much you hate magic. Anyone who really looks past the hurt shell discovers that you're just tired—tired of dealing with shrill morose who have nothing better to do than tell you what you can, can't, should and shouldn't do. But with a truly patient few, you finally open up and reveal the compassionate lover of life who just wishes that people weren't so stupid.

Magic: When coaxed into using magic, you use old Verbena styles. Chants, prayers, bloodletting, song, plants and reflecting pools all focus your concentration. Your little Steading is shaped to resemble a small cottage in the woods, so there's plenty of supplies for this sort of thing. However, you feel nauseous from the very idea of using magic, and you have to overcome that if you plan to get back into the nice.

Equipment: Athame, sensible rugged clothing, coffee mug that says "Mean People Suck, and So Do I!"



Masters of Art

Name: _____	Nature: Savage	Tradition: Verbena
Player: _____	Essence: Primal	Mantra: _____
Character: _____	Deception: Carnation	Color: _____

Physical

Strength: ●●●●●

Dexterity: ●●●●●

Stamina: ●●●●●

Social

Charisma: ●●●●●

Manipulation: ●●●●●

Appearance: ●●●●●

Mental

Perception: ●●●●●

Intelligence: ●●●●●

Will: ●●●●●

Talents

Arms: ●●●●●

Defense: ●●●●●

Assault: ●●●●●

Shield: ●●●●●

Dodge: ●●●●●

Explosion: ●●●●●

Survival: ●●●●●

Intimidation: ●●●●●

Resistance: ●●●●●

Presence: ●●●●●

Stealth: ●●●●●

Skills

Dr: ●●●●●

Drive: ●●●●●

Intuition: ●●●●●

Reason: ●●●●●

Leadership: ●●●●●

Meditation: ●●●●●

Alms: ●●●●●

Swarm: ●●●●●

Health: ●●●●●

Special: ●●●●●

Technology: ●●●●●

Knowledge

Combat: ●●●●●

Craft: ●●●●●

Culture: ●●●●●

Finance: ●●●●●

Investment: ●●●●●

Law: ●●●●●

Linguistics: ●●●●●

Law: ●●●●●

History: ●●●●●

Crush: ●●●●●

Science: ●●●●●

Attributes

Charisma: ●●●●●

Body: ●●●●●

Force: ●●●●●

Attributes

Int: ●●●●●

Attr: ●●●●●

Mana: ●●●●●

Attributes

Time: ●●●●●

Life: ●●●●●

Law: ●●●●●

Backgrounds

Arts: ●●●●●

Contacts: ●●●●●

Profession: ●●●●●

Security: ●●●●●

Attributes

Willpower: ●●●●●

Qualifications: ●●●●●

Perseverance: ●●●●●

Health

Bound:

Blinded:

Deaf:

Muted:

Paralyzed:

Other Traits

●●●●●

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Experiences

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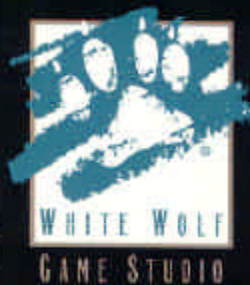
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