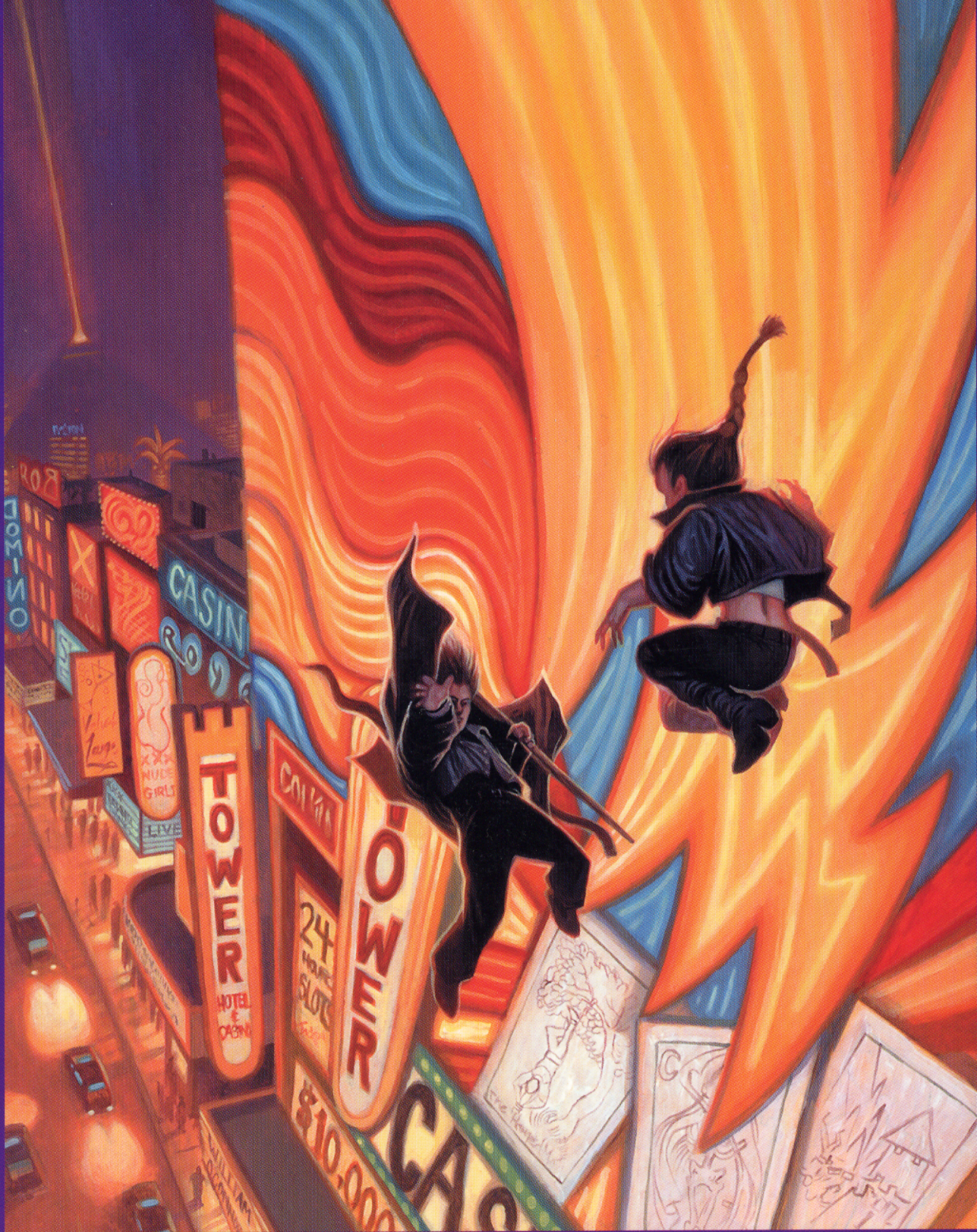


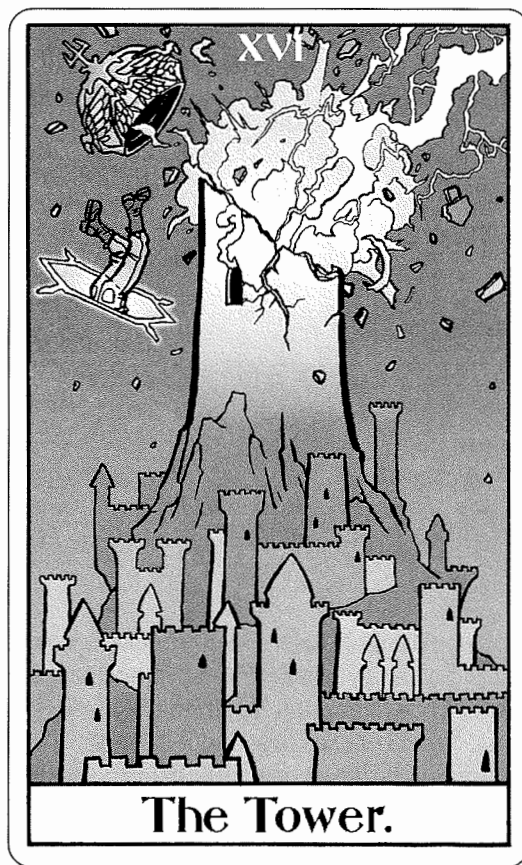
THE FALLEN TOWER™

LAS VEGAS



A CITY SOURCEBOOK FOR **MAGE: THE ASCENSION**®

THE FALLEN TOWER.™ LAS VEGAS



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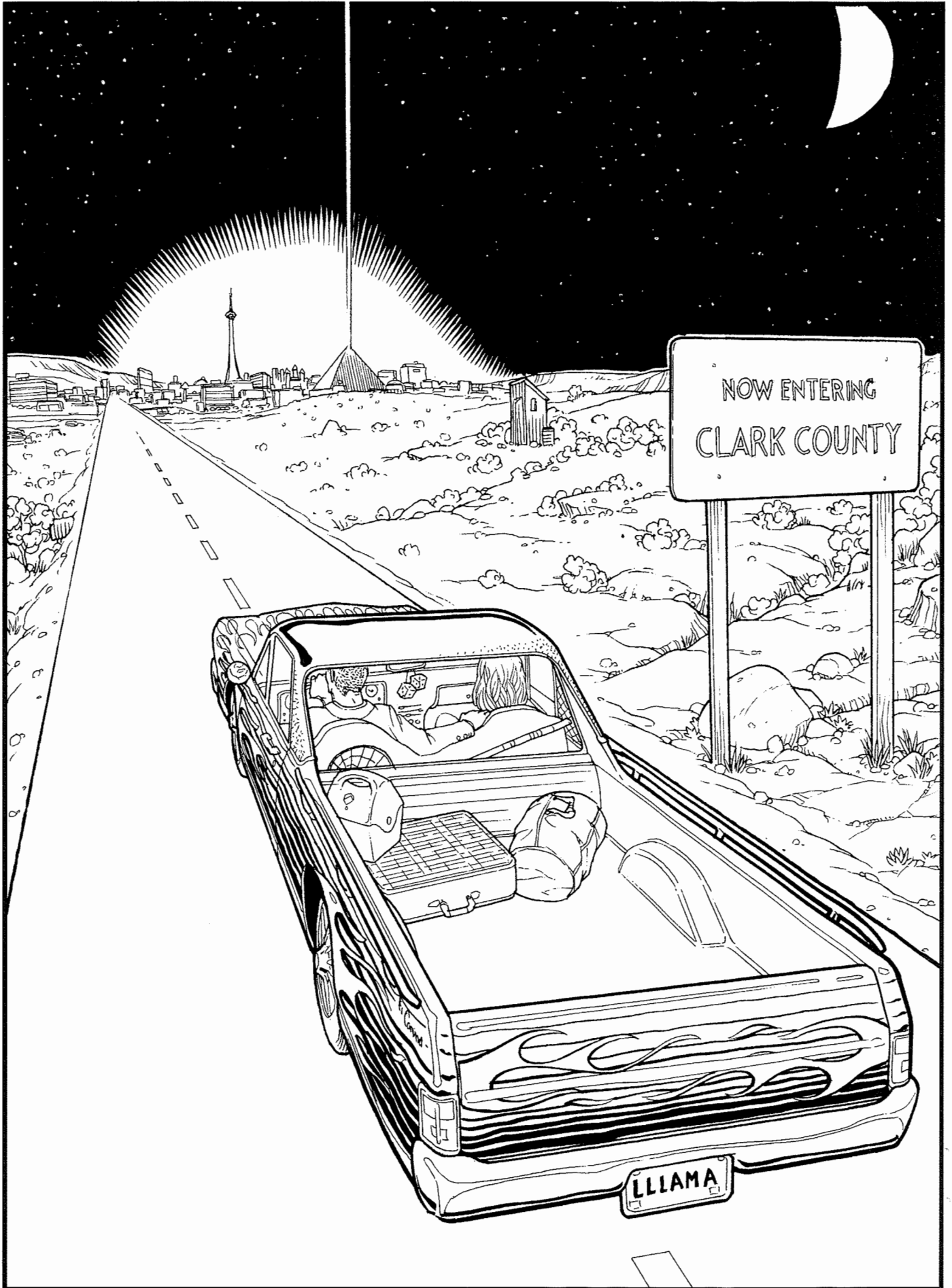
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PROLOGUE: MISDIRECTION

I



There's a glow on the horizon, a shimmer to the north growing ever closer. As the car flies by the sign announcing my entrance into the great state of Nevada, I promise myself that this year it's finally gonna be over between me and Jonny Meyer. I won't even think about the 57 Club. Won't look twice at the flyers announcing the Fabulous Palominos. Won't answer the messages I know will be waiting for me on my answering machine.

It's insane, this relationship. All wrong. A severe conflict of interest. Oz isn't supposed to know about me and Jonny but he does and he's cool with it. "As long as you're careful and you keep him in line," he says.

That's what I like about Oz Cody. He's calm, even-tempered and sensible — well, just so long as he's getting paid, is in an air-conditioned climate and not getting shot at.

Oz is the only one of my former associates left. Before the Storm, I was a member of House Janissary working with another Hermetic, a Chorister and a couple Etherites keeping the Nephandi in check. Now that everything's fallen apart, Oz is the only one who didn't die or disappear into the Umbra. We still use our little network of random mailboxes and anonymous commissions for hits, but the money hasn't exactly been rolling in lately. So we go where our particular talents are most needed.

The lights are more intense now and I can see the outlines of tall buildings coming into view. Vegas really is this incredible mirage that just rises out of the sand like some story from the Arabian Nights. It soothes me, knowing that there is glamour and beauty here, but it's *our* glamour and beauty, not the work of something vulgar or sinister. I deal with enough of that shit in the off season. Vegas is my vacation.

We flash by a small white sign: *Now Entering Clark County*. I switch on the radio:

Thank you, Jim, for that incredible story. Our caller, Jim Howard from Taos. I really hope he sends those pictures in to

the website. Amazing. Just amazing. This is Dave Arrington on the Night Train, broadcasting live from fabulous Las Vegas. We've been talking tonight about the hidden Vegas: the strange and bizarre things that go on right under our noses here in the city; things we should all be concerned about. Many of our callers tonight have been tourists. Some, like our next caller, live and work within the city limits. Her name is Shari and she has a story that you have to hear to believe. So stay tuned; the Night Train rolls on in about ninety seconds.

Dave Arrington on the Night Train. Half the folks in the Southwest think he's a freak. Just another conspiracy nut. The other half worship his every word and build shrines to their patron saint of paranoia. Oz and me fall somewhere in between. We have this ritual. We always arrive in Vegas just before sunrise on the first Sunday in October. Once we hit the Clark County line, we hook up with Dave. It's our equivalent of CNN.

Dave is an uninformed mundane; he's a Sleeper who hasn't been clued in on the bigger picture by one of the Enlightened. And yet he still knows. Vampire attacks, shifters, alien sightings, Technocratic plots — he finds out about them all. And with the exception of the alien sightings (the Technocrats abandoned those projects years ago) his stories are spot-on accurate. It's a little bizarre, and this is coming from the woman who drives a magic-enhanced El Camino and battles the dark forces for a living. Oz thinks Dave's just one of the lucky few who naturally plug in to the cosmic truth without actually Awakening. I think he's got an informant with a lot to gain from freaking the mundanes.

Yet another reason to end things with Jonny.

We're back on the Night Train. I'm Dave Arrington and we've got Shari on the line. Hi, Shari.

— Hi, Dave.

— And Shari, you're calling from where?

— McNeil Estates in Northwest Las Vegas.

— So you've got an interesting story about your workplace, right?

— Yes.

— Now you work at the Luxor. For those listeners who aren't local, that's the hotel featuring a big black glass pyramid with that powerful beacon on top.

— That's right, Dave.

— Ok, Shari. Tell us what happened to you.

— Well I'm one of the girls in the cashier's cage, ya know. And a few nights ago, it's just business as usual, but there seem to be a lot of payouts on the slots. Of course, sometimes they do that — loosen a few of the machines a little to encourage people. So we didn't think anything of it. The security guys didn't seem to be agitated or anything. But then, we're counting out at the end of the night and I was counting token stacks when I get this chill — like someone poured ice water in my veins. It was so bad, I had to shut my eyes for a while and put my head between my knees.

— Made you dizzy?

— Yeah! It was strange. I'd felt fine the whole night right up to that point. And of course we're not allowed to consume alcohol or anything like that while we're working, so...

— So what happened then?

— Everyone was concerned, of course. We're like a little family, all of us who work the late-night weekend shift. The others came over to see if I was alright and ask me what's wrong — that stuff. And then, I looked at the tokens and if my blood was cold before, it just froze in my veins then.

— Why?

— The tokens were gone.

— Gone! Like vanished?!

— No, not vanished. They just weren't tokens anymore. They'd changed.

— Changed how?

— Instead of the regular token, you know, they were these heavy black coins with a gold star and a winking horse's head in the center... hang on. My husband is e-mailing you a picture.

— A picture? How'd you manage that?

— Well... in the confusion that followed, I took one. Just so I could prove what I'd seen, y'know?

— Just a second folks... I'm getting production to get that up on my computer here... wow. What's this made of? It looks like high polymer plastic, but you said it was heavy?

— Yeah. Heavy like a real gold coin would be, but smooth and shiny like crystal or glass.

Oz yawns and mumbles, "20 bucks says on the back there's a cross with the letters J, M, F, P."

"Keep your money," I sigh. "His trademark is distinctive. Dammit, Jonny! The least ya could do is hit the right goddamn casino. Luxor's one of ours, for the love of Christ."

"Ours or theirs — doesn't really matter. In the end, money's money. What I want to know is, how'd he

manage that kind of Effect without tripping off all of Skip's countermagic, not to mention ours? It was supposed to be near foolproof."

"Yeah, but in Jonny's case, they just built a better fool. Guess he's learned some new tricks while we've been away."

My cell phone rings. It's Skip McQueen, manager of Buona Fortuna Security and our employer. We've just entered the city limits.

"I assume you're listening to Arrington." He starts right on in. Social niceties are not his strong point.

"Yeah, Skip. We heard." Oz points to the speaker cradle then taps his ear. "I'm gonna put you on speaker so Oz can listen in too, OK?"

"Ah, Cody's with you this trip. Good to hear it. Good to hear it. Linda over at Venetian really liked you, man. But right now we've got to deal with this situation. In addition to Luxor, our little friends hit Caesar's, the MGM, Tropicana and the Stardust. Not to mention a mess of no-name grind joints and slot clubs."

"That many at once?" Oz muses.

"Needless to say, our clients are AN-GREEE, and I don't really have much in the line of an explanation. I mean, how the hell did they do it? We set those Effects up to be perfect! Nobody should have... gah, that's another story. But on the bright side, I finally get to nail Jonny Meyer's punk ass to the wall. Never thought he'd be stupid enough to leave that many calling cards behind."

"What? You mean he's not denying it?" I ask. Jonny can be annoying and inconvenient, but he's not dumb.

"Are you kidding? And lose face with these Rogue Council people? Fuhgeddaboutit!"

"But has he claimed responsibility?" Oz asks. "He's the type that would shout from the rooftops if he'd managed to succeed with a stunt like this. If he hasn't, it's possible that his guys aren't behind it. Besides, it seems a little big-time even for him."

"Well, I'd ask him, Cody, but he's gone. Disappeared, crawled into his ego and vanished, dead for tax purposes, whatever. In my book that's as much an admission of guilt as if he'd announced it on broadcast television."

"I'll find him," I say. More like he'll find me. Skip's chuckling.

"Zydeco, baby, you're good. I recognize that. But you're as much of a tourist here as the rest. If Jonny Meyer wants to go underground in this town, he can disappear for as long as he wants to stay gone. I can't find him, and you don't exactly know the underground like I do." Skip's wrong, of course. I know the underground better than he'd like me to. And Jonny and I are... connected.

"I don't care how far underground he goes," I reply. "He can dig his way into hell and crawl up Satan's ass. I'll still find him."

II

Insomnia sucks. Especially in a place where sleep supposedly comes easier than anywhere else. When the dream is king in the light of day, he is god at night, tenacious and unyielding. For everyone except me. I know why I can't sleep and it makes me even more uptight. I've underestimated him. Thought sure he'd be on my doorstep the minute I parked the car. Or in a shadowy corner of the room, waiting to emerge into the light like a ghost. Or waiting for me in bed — that's more his sense of humor. Jonny knows I won't ever kick him out of bed.

But he's not in any of those places, and the fact that I actually want him to be is kind of disturbing. I don't know what he's done to me, but he's done it on a molecular level.

Summer is still trying to hang on here, so during the day it's a bitch, but at night it's actually quite pleasant. I sit on my small patio with a bottle of Cuervo and watch the pattern of the stars. After an hour, there's a slight shift in the steady swirls and waves. Looking down, I notice him standing across the street, watching me. It seems like I can see the bright green of his eyes even in the dark, and all the promises, all my resolutions to end this madness fly right out the window. It's like that Norah Jones song. I just can't help myself. I've got to see him again.

He crosses the street and falls to his knees, embracing my hips.

"At last," he whispers. "My muse." This is different. I don't know whether to laugh or be annoyed.

"Jonny, what... get... what is this? Get up. I don't have time for this." He looks up at me with a wicked little grin and then slithers his way up my body.

"Got time for that?" he asks before kissing me. I don't know what I was doing before, but it doesn't come close to the rush you get when magic is involved. Out of self-preservation, I push him away before I'm ready.

"I love you. I need you," he breathes. "Why'd you ever leave me?"

"God, Jonny when'd you get all clingy and romantic on me?" He laughs and shrugs, dropping the dramatic and relaxing into the cocky bastard I know and love.

"I thought you liked romantic." He slides past me and on into the apartment.

"No," I reply and shut the door, "just great sex, which I'm really gonna miss when they come to take you away."

"Seeing as you *are* 'they,' I don't think I have a whole hell of a lot to worry about. Might kinda look

forward to it." He's got a wolfish look in his eyes, but after a few minutes of silence and my still-serious expression, he sighs and stops smiling.

"Great. So you've heard. Look, Z, I'm not capable of doing what they did at Luxor. None of my guys are."

"Yes, but together you can do a great deal of damage. Need I remind you of the fountain incident?"

"Oh come on! Like nobody's ever made the fountains run with wine before! And besides, they were small fountains at wedding chapels. I was feeling religious. You know that whole Jesus, water to wine thing?"

"So we're comparing ourselves to the Divine Savior, now, eh?" I ask, raising an eyebrow. "Great, not only are you in big trouble with the Man, now you're going to Hell." He laughs at my attempt at humor, but he's uneasy and runs a hand through his hair.

"Hey, I will heartily admit that I like to monkey around and throw a well deserved wrench in the Machine from time to time. Do I mess with shows? Yes. Lights, yes. Food, yes. Water, occasionally, yes. But the money? Not on your fuckin' life. I'm not suicidal! Whoever did this, it wasn't me."

"Jonny," I sigh. "*Querido. Luz de mi corazon*, I want to believe you. Really I do. But you don't make it easy for me when you leave your fucking mark at the scene!" I don't mean to shout at him. It's just that I care and his denial is getting us nowhere. But he has a low frustration tolerance and my unwillingness to take him at his word makes him mad. He throws his hands up in the air and howls.

"Zydeco! You're! Not! Listening!" (Jonny never uses my full name unless he's seriously upset.) "Zane, Jeff, Craig and I all put together don't have the ability to change a bottle top into a cheap plastic poker chip, let alone transform thousands of fancy bogus chips into metal tokens, co-locate, slip them in past regular security and Skip McQueen, and then set up a timed Effect to get them to change back again."

"Now I know you're lying to me... No, shut up and listen. I can see it. True, the rest of your friends don't have the juice to magically change their own underwear, but you have much more power and potential. So never ever sell yourself short or deny what you can do. The Pattern around you is much stronger and tighter than it was when last we met. You've grown a lot, and you've obviously learned a lot."

"Yes, OK, I've learned a thing or two. I could probably make the fountains at Bellagio shoot wine now. People would point and gasp, ooh and ahh and take something really fantastic home with them to tell the grandkids. No harm, no foul — 'cause after all, anything is possible in Vegas, right?"

"Right," I reply. "Even something so spectacular as a twisted modern day Robin Hood who robs from the rich casinos and gives out generously to the poor, deluded stiff who come here year after year to throw away their hard-earned cash. That kind of thing has Jonny Meyer written all over it."

He starts to speak but hangs his head instead, then slumps into the overstuffed chair and is quiet for a long time.

"Zydeco, I'm scared," he says, finally. It's a simple statement. One he'd never normally make to anyone, not even me. I sit down on the coffee table opposite him and take his hands in mine. "I'm a relatively average white guy from the suburbs who just wants to be in a great band and make people happy. All the things I've done... all I've ever wanted was for people to care, to experience something just a little amazing, to come here and have a good time. If it means screwing with a fountain, or making a dancer look sexier or the food taste better or whatever, then I'll do it. But this..." Words fail him and for the first time that I've seen, he's not so confident or sure of himself.

"I want you to look me in the eye," I say, "and tell me that you didn't do this. That you had no part of this. I'll talk to Skip. We'll sort it out."

He doesn't even have to speak.

"I had to climb out of my bathroom window and onto the neighbor's roof just to get out of my house without being seen. They got Craig and Zane. I don't know about Jeff. They're saying we killed three people and took over 20 million dollars."

"What the — 20 million dollars? In tokens? That's stupid! That... that's nuts!"

"No. Not tokens. Above and beyond that. Like cash boxes on trolleys and safes and stuff."

"McQueen only mentioned tokens. He never said anything about dead people and 20 million dollars!"

I get up and grab my cell phone and my keys.

"Where are you going?" Jonny asks.

"Gotta talk to Oz and McQueen. I don't think Skip knows yet about the missing money. Baby, I think you're being set up, and we can talk about all the many reasons why later, but for now..."

"You know I didn't do this, don't you?"

I answer him with a kiss.

III

Don'tcha just hate it when they don't go quiet? I mean, the last thing you want when you're wearing a slinky red dress and stiletto heels is for some idiot to go and make life difficult. Of course, running down a cramped back alley when it's 103 degrees, in and of

itself, is enough to make you reconsider your entire line of work — never mind the fuckwit you're chasing.

Oz is several strides ahead of me. He isn't wearing ridiculous footwear. But he is sweating stains into his Italian silk suit. Oz hates to sweat.

"Zydeco!" he roars. "Slow his ass down!"

Normally, I'd pull out one of the many engineered weapons in my arsenal and drop this guy. But on this particular occasion, my dress is a little too tight and a little too... *little* to conceal anything other than those things that might otherwise get me arrested for public indecency. Besides, we don't want to kill him — just wrangle some info out of him.

So I slow down and rub my wristwatch. Once the Effect goes off, I tag the bastard in the back of the head with my shoe. Sexy *and* aerodynamic. Who knew? The guy falls forward onto his face and Oz leaps on him like a panther on prey, putting him in a sleeper hold.

"Spit it out, asshole!" Oz growls.

"What?" the guy whines, forcing air out of his throat. "I told you, I don't know anything—" Oz digs his knee into the guy's kidney. Apparently this hurts, because the guy wails in pain.

"See, my friend Zydeco — the one in the pretty dress you were feelin' up a few minutes ago? She asked you nicely to tell her where the money is, but see, ya ran. And now we've had to chase your sorry ass here in the hot and my very expensive suit is gonna cost a lot of money to dry clean. I'm not asking nicely. Where... is... the... MONEY?"

"I dunno, man!" he whimpers. "Honest. They just told us where to do the job and where to put the money when we were done. In the morning our take was where they said it'd be, so we didn't ask any questions."

"Who hired you?"

"I dunno... some suit. He didn't give a name. I mean the guy looked like your average businessman, y'know. Designer suit. Designer shoes. Rolex. Lessee... wait! There was something. A ring. He was wearing a gold ring with a symbol on it. I think it was Masonic."

Oz looks up at me.

"Well, that was easier than I thought it would be."

IV

"So let me get this straight." Skip starts to make little check marks next to his notes as he talks. "The token mystery is still a mystery — that is, we don't know who managed to set up that little Effect. The tokens all bear Jonny Meyer's mark, but he's supposedly not talented enough to pull off something like this, so we're back to square one.

"The tokens were a misdirection for the real action that went down inside and by the armored cars. The guys who pulled that heist were paid thugs who got a little messy and left our dead bodies at... Tropicana and MGM. Surviving victims' descriptions of the perps come close to matching Jonny and his boys, but key details like height, hair color, etcetera make it unlikely that they were involved at all."

"Next, the original perps are 'robbed' and then disposed of by another set of hired thugs." Oz makes little quote signs in the air with his fingers when he says robbed. "LVPD pulled one of 'em out of the reservoir at the dam about three days ago. They still haven't found the other bodies. Since most of Jonny's boys are still alive, it's a pretty good argument for their innocence. Anyway, this second group of guys is directed to a fence and then get their take delivered by an anonymous source. All in a day's work, they disappear into the woodwork to avoid murder charges. The fence distributes the money to various and sundry places, which are all, in turn, robbed again by a third set of mooks. The common thread here is that all three groups and the fence appear to have been hired by the same guy."

"This guy with the ring?" Skip asks.

"Yeah," I reply. "His name is Gustav Timber. The ring is indeed Masonic. Standard style for initiated members, but the configuration of the symbols is European, not U.S. He's a visitor — attended a meeting at the local lodge about a week before this all happened. He said he was originally from Geneva, moved to the U.S. about five years ago and that his local lodge was in Chicago. But none of the locals there seem to have heard of him, and of course nobody here asked to see the guy's ID. Timber seems to have skipped town, but we're in luck. When he went to the lodge, he brought a friend, Peter Stratton, who recently moved into town and lives out in Spanish Hills. We're planning on paying him a visit tonight."

"So," Skip says, clapping his hands together and then rubbing them quickly. "Who're my players, and who're my neutrals?"

"Best we can tell," Oz says, "the only Awakened mage in the mix is Timber. It's possible that the original perps were, but of course now we'll never know. It's unlikely, though. My guess is whoever set up the token Effect also set up things for the robbery."

"What about Stratton?"

"Won't know until we meet him."

"Do we know anything about this guy? What's he do, besides go to lodge meetings?"

"I think he's a producer or a promoter," I say and call up my notes on my Palm Pilot. "Yeah. Something like

that. I don't really know showbiz, but essentially he's the guy with the money. Other people go to him to get him to fund acts and shows or back a new label or an artist. He's interesting to us because apparently he's the marketing and money-man behind Jonny Meyer and the Fabulous Palominos. He bankrolls the 57 Club, The Dragon and Rumjungle. "

"Go pay him a visit and let me know what you find out."

• • •

For once, Oz is driving the car, so I actually get to see the Strip as we cruise by. I remember when I was a kid and my dad and me drove all the way from Mexico City just to see all the twinkling lights. It was big then, but not like now. Now it's paradise, the sultan's palace with the finest food, the loveliest women, the most magnificent feats of performance and architecture. The money flows as freely as the water and everything is perfectly crafted and designed to be carefree and effortless.

A few tourists snap photos of the car, and others just point, smile and nod in approval. Used to be we had an arcane Effect on it so it would blend in more, but these days we find it pays to be visible. Oz and me were never really involved in the War. When you spend your time keeping one step ahead of the next power-hungry mage or supernatural force that wants to either devour or enslave humanity, you don't have time to worry about how the world's gonna Ascend. How about, "How's the world gonna survive through next week?"

Still, it's weird how things turn out. If Caedric, my first mentor, knew that I was willingly working with the Syndicate, he'd spontaneously combust. But then again, the situation here is strange. No matter what "side" you're on, it's in everyone's best interest to get along. Like I said, everything here is planned and engineered down to the last sparkle and sequin. The slightest upset can make life real dangerous, which is why we make sure everyone — Awakened, Enlightened or otherwise — plays by the rules.

We turn off of the Strip and head west on Tropicana, out towards Spanish Hills. Oz clears his throat.

"So... um... remind me again, why aren't we telling Skip everything we know about Peter Stratton?"

"Because Peter wants it that way," I reply. "He won't talk to us unless we promise to keep his special talents a secret. He's out of the game, remember?"

"Yeah. That's what he says, but for someone who wants to stay out of the Wacky World of Magic, he's sure doing a lousy job keeping his head down. Did he tell you anything about Timber?"

"Only that he worked with him once. Some cross-convention funding project, whatever that means. He's got more info, but he wanted to give it to us in person."

"So in the meantime we just forget to tell Skip there's one more mage living in his town than he thought?"

"Yep. That's the plan. At least until we get the information we want."

The drive is relatively short, but man, what a difference a few miles makes! The houses here — if such a humble word as "houses" applies — sit back from the winding roads and hide behind adobe walls, wrought-iron fences, and even creative xeriscaping. We find Stratton's house, a massive white stucco number, and pull up the drive to the gate, which is open.

This is my first clue that things aren't quite right. When we reach the main house, Oz barely takes the time to shut off the engine and park the car; the front door is wide open and someone is sprawled, unconscious, on the stairs. It's the maid.

Here's a quick quiz: You're invited to a friend's house for drinks and conversation. But when you waltz into his living room, your boyfriend is holding a gun to his head and some other rent-a-goon you've never seen before has one gun nestled in the small of your boyfriend's

back and the other trained on the two guys who've just broken in through the portrait window. Who do you shoot first?

Oz takes the two-guys option. I shoot Jonny. It's OK. I've shot him before; he'll survive. Unfortunately for us, though, rent-a-goon is twitchy and starts pumping lead in our direction. Remember I said Oz hates being shot at? He empties his clip into the guy and that seems to quiet down the noise and action somewhat.

"Fuck!" Peter shouts, standing up and surveying the damage. "Fuck!"

"Sorry about that," I say, sliding past him to kneel beside Jonny, who is writhing in pain. "You OK, baby?"

"You fucking shot me!" he hisses.

"Oh, quit whining. You'll live. The former Mr. Mook over there didn't look like he was gonna give you the option." I turn to Peter, who is still coming down from the adrenaline rush. "Who was this guy, anyway?"

"Actually, I was going to introduce you. His name was Jeffers and he's been keeping tabs on Timber for about a year now."



V

Oz stays to clean up and I drive Jonny to Doc to get his wound cleaned and patched. He's still angry and swollen up like a bull, but I ignore that.

"What did I say, Jonny, when I left you in the apartment? Huh? What did I say?" He is silent and glares at me. "I told you to stay put. Go nowhere. Talk to no one. So what the hell were you doing at Paul's house, and why'd you have a gun to his head, huh?"

"He set me up."

"And how would you know that?"

"You aren't the only one with information." He looks over at me again and this time a little hurt shows through his rage. "I can't believe you shot me... again!"

"*Querido*, it was either you or the mook and I didn't want to risk hitting him and him firing off a shot and killing you. So I wounded you to get you out of the equation."

"A warning would have been nice," he mutters.

"It's not like I was expecting to see you there. And you still haven't answered my question. What were you doing there?"

"I told you. He set me up. With the tokens."

"What? How'd the tokens get into this conversation?" I ask as we pull into the parking lot of Doc's clinic. I shut off the engine.

"He had them made for us," Jonny explains. "We were gonna hand 'em out to radio stations across the region along with our CD and hope that the radio stations would give us some air-play. What was left we were going to give to fans at the club. He was the only one besides me and the band who knew about the tokens, so it must have been him who set me up."

My head hurts, suddenly. I rub my eyes and massage the top of my scalp.

"And you just forgot to tell me about this, why?"

"You never gave me a chance!" he cries, then winces in pain.

"So you took it upon yourself to march out there and put a gun to his head? What were you thinking? Were you thinking? And why didn't you come to me first?"

"Do I really have to answer that?"

"Jonny!"

"Look. I don't know. Maybe I thought I'd solve my own problem for once instead of sending you and Oz to clean up after me."

"Is that what you think?" I ask. "That I solve your problems for you? If that's the case, if I've led you to believe that, then I'm sorry. All I'm saying is, if you'd come to me, I would have told you that it's very unlikely

that Peter was involved, because Peter's staying out of politics for right now. Him setting you up doesn't wash with his squeaky-clean lifestyle." We sit in silence for a while; then he opens the car door. I offer to help him into the clinic, but he waves me away and slowly limps his way up the ramp and inside.

Just when I'm about to start berating myself for how badly I've handled things, my phone rings. It's Oz.

"Where are you?"

"I'm at Doc's."

"How's Jonny?"

"He'll be fine. What's up?"

"Good news and bad news," Oz says. "Bad news is, Jeffers only had a chance to share a minimum of info with Stratton. Good news is, apparently he still wants to share his info with us. Peter's got the spirit, if you catch my meaning, but he's not skilled enough to make any communications breakthroughs."

"I guess we've gotta call Syd, huh?" I ask, wondering how much harder my day can suck.

"It's looking that way. Shall I meet you there?"

"Sure. Gimme about an hour and a half. I wanna wait for Jonny and take him home first."

"Sounds good to me." Oz ends the call and I dial Syd's number.

VI

I'm thinking that if my life were a television show, it would be looking a lot like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* right about now. You know that episode where Buffy's mom and Spike meet each other for the first time? They're sitting down in the living room of Buffy's house and it's so silent you can just hear the questions going through Joyce Summers's head. Questions like, "Oh my god, where the hell did my daughter meet *this* freak?"

I'm sure the same questions are running through Syd's mom's head as Oz and I wait in her kitchen for Syd to get home from band practice. That's just what you want when you're a parent: to answer your doorbell and find that a tall black guy in a silk suit and a Latina with a fierce tattoo around her midsection want a word with your son.

In situations like these, I always find it best to keep my mouth shut and let Oz do the talking, especially since he doesn't spook the normals nearly so much as I do.

"So... I guess Syd never told you he was designing web pages in his spare time, did he?" Oz offers. "Because he's done a great job for us. We've got more business at the body shop now than we've ever had." This explanation seems to be something the woman can wrap her head around because her uneasy tension releases a little.

"Oh, so you two own a body shop?" she says, looking at me and my tattoo. Luckily, Syd has good timing. The door opens and he bops right on in to the conversation.

"Hi mom! Oh, hi Oz. Hi Z! Mom, this is Oz and Zydeco. We're gonna go up to my room and talk, OK?" He's such a deadly little manipulator, whipping off his mental Effect like he's done it way too many times before. His mother never even stands a chance. She smiles and nods and goes about pulling stuff out of the refrigerator for dinner. Once we're up in his room and we've put up the necessary Wards, Syd gets down to business.

"So. You said it was important?"

"Yeah," I explain. "We've got a spirit contained. Now we need to talk to him."

"He owe you money?" The kid laughs at his own joke and I notice that he's got one of Jonny's mini-posters tacked to his wall.

"You like Jonny Meyer?"

"His band rules! My friend Stephen's brother bartends at the 57 Club and he snuck us in one night to see 'em play. It was amazing!"

"Well, if you want there to still be a band, you'll start communicating with our spirit because otherwise Jonny's gonna get nailed on some pretty serious charges, including armed robbery and three counts of murder."

"Dude!" he exclaims. "That's wacked! He didn't do it, did he?" I glare at him and he holds his hands up over his head.

"Okay! Sorry! So what's the spirit contained in?" Oz pulls out a small Sony Vaio laptop, and Syd makes a face. "You've got to be kidding me!"

"What do you want? It's the only thing he had on him. Or would you have preferred we used his gun?"

"Maybe we should have," I say. "We might have had a shot at communicating with him ourselves. But computers and spirits are your thing, Syd. So let's get started, 'cause we're running dangerously short on time and I don't think your mom's gonna be fooled for very much longer."

It takes about an hour. I don't have much of a gift for talking with the dead. I know they're there sometimes, or I can tell when someone's been messing with the veil and the folks on the other side. But other than that, it's all pretty foggy. The characters and things that scroll across the screen of the Vaio make no sense to me, but Syd seems to know what he's doing and Oz makes appreciative sounds every now and again.

Towards the end, Syd hooks the thing up to his printer and hits enter. We get five pages, all of them covered from top to bottom in tiny encrypted script.

"He says to take those to some guy named Craig Shipman — he'll be able to decode the encryption. Oh, and he said that you should ask Craig who Nick Crosby is."

VII

Sometimes you ask a question and you get an answer. And then sometimes you ask a question and you get people muttering and whispering amongst themselves, and eventually someone calls a board meeting. Oz has done the corporate dance before, so he's perfectly calm and collected. Skip's more of an off-the-cuff kinda guy, so being opposite a table full of corporate suits makes him sweat a little. I'm just glad Oz didn't make me wear a dress.

On one side of the table, along with my partners, there's Nathan Royal, who's representing the affected casino owners. Peter Stratton's there too (against his better judgment, I'd say), and Rich Lofton from LVPD. The only familiar face on the other side belongs to Brian Mitchell, our regular contact and liaison to the local Technocratic factions. The rest of these people have come from out of town, and I get the impression that whoever this Nick Crosby guy is, he's important enough to spook them out of their deep, dark-wood-paneled boardrooms and into our little world. Their "leader," a gray haired, steel-faced woman in a white pantsuit, peruses our paperwork; everyone else is silent as the grave. I don't think Brian is even breathing. She flips through the last few pages, sighs and looks up at all of us.

"I must admit that this is an arrangement I am unused to, but under the circumstances I'm willing to be a bit more open-minded than usual. First of all, I want to extend an apology for all the secrecy, but I felt that it was necessary. I assure everyone in this room that the situation will be explained and that all parties will be compensated for their time and trouble.

"I know what's on all of your minds so I'll address that first. Nick Crosby is the CEO and founder of GeniCorp, a relatively new genetics research company. At least, it is incorporated on paper. GeniCorp has not yet begun operations due to starting-cash flow issues. Mr. Crosby and his CFO approached us several months ago in regard to their venture capital needs. After a careful review of the company's mission statement and research into their proposed methods of operation, we felt that the risk of so much capital would be imprudent. Also, we felt that their particular branch of research would not benefit a large enough portion of the public sector and might even adversely influence public opinion regarding genetic science. In short, we turned them down and advised them to seek alternate sources of funding.

"Apparently that is when Mr. Crosby's CFO, a gentleman you know as Gustav Timber, began approaching individuals, one of whom was Peter Stratton." She acknowledges his presence with a brief nod and her eyes indicate that he should explain his piece of the puzzle. Peter clears his throat.

"Ah... yeah. Skip, you and your people know this already, but the others might not. Gus gave me a call and made his pitch to me. He knew I'd been successful in the music industry and that I was about to launch several new endeavors with the potential to be quite lucrative. I had backed him on a smaller project several years back, so I was willing to hear him out, but I wanted time to do some research. I told him to come out to Vegas. In the meantime, I called up a friend of mine in the... in the industry to do some legwork. I reviewed the information and decided that I couldn't back him because I didn't agree with the company's methods.

"So when Gus came out, I was polite. We discussed things. He was disappointed but seemed to understand my misgivings. And that was the end of it. He asked me about my projects, and I showed him a few things, including a publicity pitch for one of musical acts I'm backing. We're both Masons, so I took him to the lodge, introduced him around and then saw him off to the airplane."

"And then a few weeks later," Oz interrupts, "he sends a couple guys to get rid of you. Fortunately for everyone involved, they decided to pay you a visit the same night my partner and I came out to ask you some questions."

Rich Lofton, the cop, speaks up. "So you can confirm that the two gentlemen we have in custody in connection to the assault on Mr. Stratton and his housekeeper are connected to Gustav Timber?"

"Yes and no," I say. "Yes, we can confirm that they are connected to the case but not to Gustav Timber. That's because Gustav Timber is an alias. His real name is August Sonore. He used to be CFO of the now defunct BioNetworks corporation. They were under federal investigation and faced a few class action lawsuits a few years ago, but for some mysterious reason the cases were dropped." I look hard at the folks across the table from me and hope they're getting it. I know old girl in white does.

"We will be dealing with Mr. Sonore, I assure you," she says. "Also, Las Vegas Police will be notified when he will be made available to answer for the murder

charges against him. As for the stolen funds, Nick Crosby has been informed of recent events and of Mr. Sonore's involvement. We are satisfied that he was unaware of his CFO's actions and that he did not encourage or instruct any criminal activities. An arrangement has been made and the affected businesses will be fully reimbursed."

"And what about our fee?" Skip asks.

"Funds have already been deposited into your respective accounts. I am quite certain you will find them satisfactory."

And that's it. They give the bare minimum of an explanation, pay everyone off and then they're out the door, back on the plane to wherever it was they came from. I've gotta say, I'm not too sad to see them go. Working with the Syndicate is fine. That doesn't mean I have to like them or their tactics. Something tells me that Skip isn't all that pleased with the explanation either. But that's another lead for another day. Right now, I've got a vacation to enjoy. Besides which, I just got paid, so who's complaining?

Dim lights are flickering in my windows when I pull into the driveway. Hundreds of candles — God knows where Jonny found them all — waver and do their golden dance on any surface that will support them.

"I thought I was the one who needed to make things up to you," I say as I come through the door. Jonny meets me in the middle of the room with a bottle of Cuervo and two shot glasses.

"And you're gonna." He smiles and rotates his once-wounded shoulder.

"Doc did a good job with that."

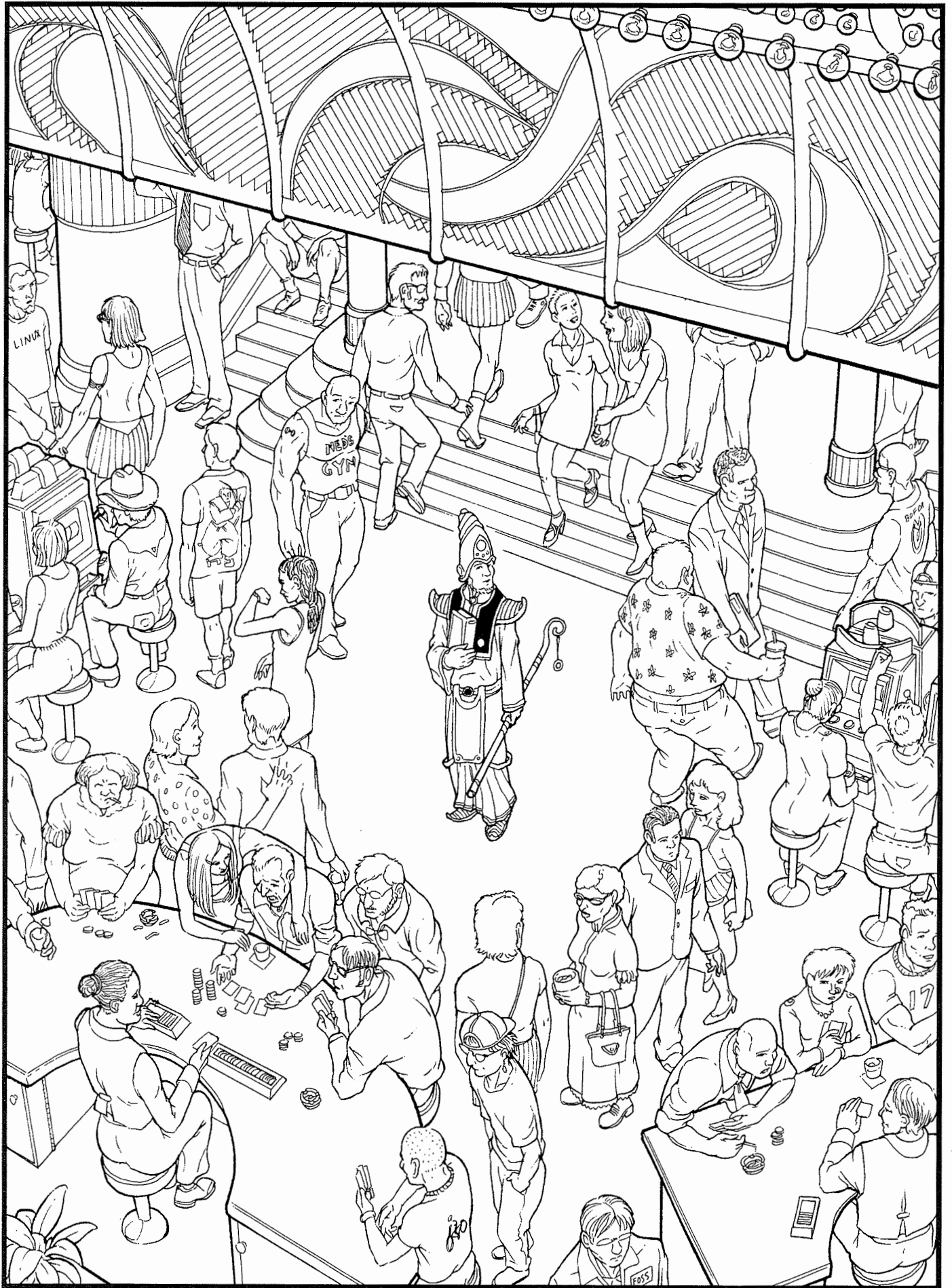
"So did you. She said you shot me as clean as possible. There was hardly anything to fix."

"See? I told you I love you."

"We'll see if you still say that tomorrow when you take me to play baccarat at Mirage."

We settle in on the pillows in front of the patio with our tequila, and I start to teach him how to see the Pattern in the stars. He's expensive, yes. Complicated, frustrating, loud and often obnoxious. But he's also colorful, glamorous, larger than life, and a hell of a lot of fun. Kinda like Vegas.

No wonder I can't get enough.



INTRODUCTION: ESSENCE OF A BILLION LIGHTS

They gambled in the Garden of Eden, and they will again if there's another one.

—Richard Albert Canfield, collection of gambling quotes at Gambling.com



The Fallen Tower: Las Vegas is the first city book presented for use as a setting for **Mage: The Ascension**. Some of you out there have demanded to know why. The answer isn't necessarily a simple one, but hopefully it will suffice. Mages are dynamic creatures and, perhaps more than any other inhabitant of the World of Darkness, can sidestep almost any Storyteller creation if the players are ingenious enough. When a mage can use Correspondence to teleport halfway around the world or Spirit to step into another universe, how does a Storyteller keep a coherent setting? Many adventures over the years, including the popular *Loom of Fate*, tried to answer the question with a resounding "Go Where No Man Has Gone Before" type of response.

Hermits and antisocial mages may consider the untamed corners of the Earth perfect havens for the Traditions, but worldly mages believe that only by overcoming the Technocracy on its own ground will

humanity be able to build upon the foundation of Ascension. Billions of people live, work, breathe, breed, go grocery shopping, die and are buried all in the same environs — the city. Mages aren't so much of an exception, either — not every mage has the ability to travel to distant continents or dimensions at a whim; those who do often return home. What use is defending reality from destruction if nothing about it matters to you? If you were empowered to see the truth, wouldn't you desire to somehow reveal it to your friends and family, or at least protect them from its consequences? The Sleepers' ultimate bastion against the wild is the city. As such, it is the stronghold of the Technocracy. If the Traditions are to prevail against their oppressors, then they must tilt the towers of the Technocracy and plunge humankind into a new horizon.

Enter the city of Las Vegas. Surrounded by desert and mountains, the city is completely manmade. Nature is buried beneath a veneer of glittering lights and glass wonderlands. People come from around the world to

trade manufactured wealth for manufactured dreams, and every transaction is bankrolled upon a vision of a perfect future. The Technocracy is not about science, but about control. From its clandestine defense of secrets at Area 51 to its usurpation of the Etherites' grand harnessing of nature's power at Hoover Dam, to the billions of cameras recording every penny pinched by the clockwork casinos, Las Vegas embodies that control.

Nevertheless, people don't just come to the middle of the desert to be robbed — they are beguiled by an oasis of lights, sounds and magic. Like the arcane technology that let man walk upon the moon, so the wizardry of the City of Sin opens the doors of imagination. The clarion call of the Rogue Council wakes the Traditions and rattles their windows like a jet racing from Nellis Air Force Base. In the distance the dust of a timeless desert threatens to storm the ramparts. Those mages who haven't folded their hands in despair reach out to shuffle the deck and risk everything on the biggest pot of all — Ascension.

⊕ OVERVIEW

The Fallen Tower: Las Vegas is a sourcebook for **Mage: The Ascension**, but it's also useful for players and Storytellers of other World of Darkness game books. It describes the city of Las Vegas after the Rogue Council begins to broadcast its mysterious messages to mages everywhere, shattering the status quo and sparking a resurgence of rebellion (as introduced in *Manifesto: Transmissions from the Rogue Council*). The current state of Las Vegas is discussed, along with the forces arrayed on all sides of the renewed struggle for Ascension. The stage is set for Storytellers to introduce the opening salvos of the rekindled war for reality against a tapestry of dazzling spotlights and the dangerous shadows surrounding them.

THEME

Some say the Ascension War ended not in victory, but in human apathy. *The Fallen Tower: Las Vegas* is a microcosm of many of the themes of **Mage**. The title refers to the well-known tarot card, The Tower, number 16 of the Major Arcana, which follows the Devil (representing sin and materialism) but leads to the Star, the symbol of hope and spirituality. The Tower represents a fall into materialism and away from spirituality, and thus represents humanity's current state of affairs in **Mage**: apathy.

This isn't to say that everyone in the world is a lazy, uncaring, good-for-nothing bump on a log — if anything, **Mage** is an expression of the idea that the actions of each person matter in the global community, al-

though only a few rare individuals realize this. The masses swindle themselves with promises of comfort, security and amusement. Blinded by tunnel vision, they follow a path marked by someone else — toiling towards another's vision for the wages to survive. Billions of people while away their lives according to a clockwork dream woven by those with the courage or acumen to shape the world around them.

Many people say that the average person is only two paychecks from the street, and it is that existence, punctuated by routine trips to the grocery store or mall, that defines most lives. Chained by fear they might lose the basics — food and shelter — people's perceptions dwindle to the immediate future, appeasing hunger and distracting themselves from thoughts of danger looming only two weeks away. Dismayed by their failures to escape the cycle, they come to believe that they *can't* escape. "If I cannot command my destiny," the reasoning says, "then it must command me, so I'll just munch on these potato chips while I watch it happen." Ultimately, the apathy expressed by citizens of the World of Darkness is blindness to the possibility that one's personal actions might actually have meaning beyond personal gratification.

SELFISHNESS

Self-indulgence and egotism operate hand in hand with apathy as strong themes for Vegas and for **Mage**. Millions of visitors to the city sacrifice their children's college funds, wives' nest eggs and entire futures upon the altar of vice. Desperate to forget the challenges of the world, they dance ever closer to the very fate they hope to avoid. Material pleasure is reduced to its briefest forms: the thrill of gambling, an alcohol-induced release of inhibition, courting partnerships with cash rather than compassion, and dazzling the senses to distraction. The wayward tourist, in hot pursuit of instant reward — the kind that will come before those two weeks can possibly catch up with her — cares little for the world at large or its fate.

On the receiving end, the casino owners, dealers and waitresses greedily gobble up the victims who deliver themselves to Vegas. They know that Sin City is built upon the lost wages of millions of hard working stiffs. They know that thousands of suckers fall for the lure of an easy escape from the daily grind and destroy their lives chasing the bait. Whatever the merchants of chance tell themselves to get through the night, the simple fact is that it is not important to most of them whether or not the dollar passing through their hands would have fed a degenerate gambler's starving baby. *I am what matters*, they reason, *and I need to make a living*.

Mages often fall into the same patterns as the mortals around them. Gifted by their Awakening with the power to change the world, many mages pursue the same shortsighted goals they chased before. Magic simply greases the wheels a bit. Proudful mages rise above the level of mundane society and sometimes see others as nothing more than dupes easily milked for whatever they're worth. Selfishness leads mages and mortals alike into indifference about the destiny of the world.

RISK

Although at first glance risk doesn't seem to fit so handily with the theme of apathy, it is certain that it's one of the themes of Vegas. Every time a gambler lays a chip on a table, she risks losing it. Because the thrill of gambling can easily become an obsession, she risks losing it all. During the heyday of the gangsters, this search for a taste of danger included basking in the aura of the celebrities of crime. The modern thrill-seeker, convincing himself that his fate lies outside of his own hands, cares so little for consequence that he ventures everything on immediate gain. Perhaps he cares so little that the search for excitement becomes a sort of attempted suicide.

The theme of risk is inherent to great stories as well. With great risk comes great reward, and the ultimate prize for mages is Ascension. The War of Ascension ground to a halt as apathy consumed its combatants, but now the Rogue Council and its inflammatory messages re-ignite the struggle again. Some mages may believe that it is a foolish gamble to search for Ascension, but wiser heads know that the greater peril lies in allowing the world to stumble blindly into oblivion. With change comes uncertainty and danger, but without change comes stagnation. Risk may be a symptom of ultimate apathy or the herald of Awakening.

ATMOSPHERE

Place and time are important to establishing a story's mood. Las Vegas is a city of extremes, where everything is bigger, brighter or more bizarre. An adulterated Disneyland glimmers like a billion fallen stars in a black desert swallowed by night. During the day, sun-bleached ostentation stands silhouetted against the distant mountains. Time flows strangely here, racing by in the twinkling of an eye while fortunes are made and lost, or standing still while bleary eyed tourists stare at congealing breakfasts and wish a silent death upon jangling slot machines. Outside of the tourists' playground, known as The Strip, a city like any other bakes in the sun. Its houses are perhaps a bit too cookie-cutter

in design, its yards perhaps less green than elsewhere. Nonetheless, a burgeoning populace struggles to achieve its own piece of the American Dream, even if soccer moms are showgirls by night and church-going Mormons deal cards and serve hard liquor. Storytellers can turn any of a billion lights upon the characters — and watch them shine or scurry for the shadows.

TRANSIENTS

The entirety of Clark County, which is often dubbed the metropolitan area of Las Vegas, registered a population of just over 1.4 million according to 2000 census figures. This is nearly double the 741,000 who inhabited the county only a decade earlier. Since its inception in 1905, the population of Vegas has doubled every 10 years. Few citizens of Clark County have lived here for their whole lives; nearly everyone is a transplant. Furthermore, a grand portion of the populace is made up of visitors — in 2000 alone the city had over 35 million visitors. On any given night Vegas is host to more than 350,000 guests. It is rare to discover people who are "from here," and mages who settle in the City of Sin must contest with an endless flood of newcomers and wanderers. Maintaining control over reality in Las Vegas is like defending a sandcastle from the onrushing sea.

EVER-CHANGING

Las Vegas constantly reinvents itself. Early on, the Mormons established it as a fort and sought to settle the area as part of their theocratic vision of the nation of Deseret. After that, it was the focus of mining driven by the Comstock lode and pre-Civil War presidential politics. For a time, it languished as a dying city of iniquity before becoming a train-stop boomtown thriving on the pulse of the growing railroad. Vegas survived the failing of its rail line when it was inundated with money and workers from the extensive Hoover Dam project. World War II brought the Nellis military base, thousands of soldiers and, shortly thereafter, nuclear bomb testing. Bugsy Siegel came West with his own vision, and introduced the City of Sin to the mafiosos who would transform it into a mecca for gamblers and so-called "black money." Howard Hughes brought corporate interests into the picture, metamorphosing the city into a shining wonderland trying to bury its dark past. Frequent visitors routinely find that old haunts have been demolished and new attractions have sprung up in their place. What fresh face Las Vegas will present to the new decade remains to be seen, but the pounding jackhammers of new construction greet visitors every morning.

UNREAL

At three o'clock in the morning, when you wander through the endless sea of flashing lights and green velvet blackjack tables, surrounded by giant Mardi Gras floats, tinsel-clad maidens and Egyptian sky-arcs, it is easy to wonder if you might be dreaming. From the moment you disembark from the plane, the ringing of slot machines follows you like a dog nipping at your heels. Once you enter The Strip, it's easy to move from one fantasyland to another via convenient monorail trains and omnipresent taxis. You can walk through the arms of the Sphinx into a glittering black pyramid whose point shines a pillar of light into the sky, gawk at the world's largest gold nuggets or gaze into a Fremont sky replaced with a sea of electric color.

Add to this the hundreds of Elvis impersonators, dozens of Marilyn Monroe clones and the Blue Men (as seen in national Intel commercials). Throw in a dab of \$1.99 buffets, martinis as large as your head and truly unspeakable carpeting. Mix the waitresses who shame your most drunken antics with the smiling temptresses who hand out free drinks like they're dime store candies. Put a roller coaster on the roof of the Space Needle and build a pyramid of black glass. Sail on the waterways of Venice in the afternoon, tromp through New York in the evening and watch the cannons of a pirate fleet that night. Vegas has a thousand tricks up her sleeve, each designed to make you forget the real world long enough to risk it all on a few dice throws.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The Fallen Tower: Las Vegas provides all the necessary information for Storytellers to set a single story or an entire chronicle in Vegas. It presents a quixotic history and geography shown through the lens of **Mage**, then delves into the shadows of the magical World of Darkness, presenting important people, places and things in a Las Vegas whose substance shifts like the sands of the desert that surrounds it.

Storytellers who wish to present this setting to their players should read the book through from start to finish and then decide what facets of the setting will best provide the focus of their stories. Players looking for information on Las Vegas can focus mostly upon Chapters One and Two, familiarizing themselves with the mystical background of the city, but they should ultimately respect their Storyteller's own vision. It's rather hubristic to assume that a clever Storyteller won't reach far beyond the scope of this book. A good Storyteller will tantalize you with visions of Vegas that put our own beguiling mirages to shame.

Prologue: Misdirection was your freebie — the house threw it in there to give you a taste of The Fallen Tower and leave you wanting more... it's Sin City's way, so you might as well get used to it.

Introduction: Essence of a Billion Lights is what you are reading now. It's a menu of promises of things to come as well as an attempt to plunge you into the billions of flashing lights of Vegas and the boundless images they illuminate.

Chapter One: Primordial and Present opens a window upon the past and attempts to explain how Vegas became the city of today and tomorrow. Students of Las Vegas will find a primer of civic history, and even masters of the real metropolis will be initiated into the mystic record of the City of Lights. From Bugsy Siegel's selfish dream of conquering ages of aborigine tradition, to the peculiar decay of entrepreneur Howard Hughes into a doddering madman with knee-length beard and Mandarin fingernails, to the conquest of Mafia strongholds by faceless mercantile empires, players and Storytellers alike may witness the contests preceding the current gamble.

Chapter Two: Patterns in the Sand opens the curtain upon a panorama of desert-bound oases, a modern mirage built of blocks of wild fantasy. Aficionados of the City of Sin will hopefully surrender a bit of cynicism to the fancies of a thousand dreamers while newcomers will unearth at least a skeleton of vice and verve. From Block 16 to The Strip, the Sandman of Las Vegas offers a different sandcastle to every dreamer.

Chapter Three: High Rollers introduces a cast of characters who define the Fallen Tower. Some will challenge your troupe with stony poker faces while others might play their hand early in whatever games you present. From Native Americans to forsaken holy men to the engineers of chance, these individuals represent vibrant colors with which you may paint the landscapes that envelop your players. These sand paintings in the desert provide shifting glimpses of the face of the city.

Chapter Four: Questing for the Story steps up to managerial level and gives advice for Storytellers in using the material provided thus far. It breaks through the camera in the sky and provides an objective view into how Las Vegas runs in the World of Darkness. Like any good Storyteller, this chapter also presents a couple of yarns of its own.

Appendix: Infinite Third Wishes is all about the magic of the Fallen Tower — new rites, Talismans, sciences, constructs and more. Everyone in Vegas is trying to beat the system or build the dream. This conclusive segment presents tricks of the house and the player, **Mage** style.

RESOURCES

Las Vegas is a relatively young city, formally founded in 1905. While the ancient history of the gambling metropolis's region is sometimes mysterious, her modern incarnation is fairly well documented. Federal interest in the area dates to early investigations preceding the Hoover Dam project. Popular media was engrossed by the rise of the Mafia and its flirtation with generations of Hollywood celebrities. *The Fallen Tower* introduces the metropolis and then plunges into the supernatural elements of the Las Vegas of the World of Darkness. Storytellers will discover that it is easy to find a wealth of resources full of more information on Vegas and its many faces.

Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas by Hunter S. Thompson. This is perhaps the most notorious book ever written about the city. Thompson pioneered Gonzo journalism, and this is the lurid tale of his voyage into the desert oasis. In 1998, director Terry Gilliam brought this psychedelic escapade onto the large screen in a movie starring Johnny Depp.

Casino, written by Nicholas Pileggi, also debuted as a movie directed by Martin Scorsese. Fictional Nicky Santoro and Sam "Ace" Rothstein are directly derived from the real life gangster Anthony Spilotro and bookie Lefty Rosenthal. The Tangiers casino is a storybook version of the real Stardust casino.

Leaving Las Vegas is a movie depicting a desperate alcoholic, played by Nicholas Cage, who encounters a beautiful prostitute, played by Elisabeth Shue, while on a quest to drink himself to death. It is a gloomy view of the worst victims of self-gratification.

The Godfather by Mario Puzo transforms legends of the mob into a tale including the construction of Las Vegas in the '40s and the fictional Corleone family. The trio of movies bearing the same title, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, reproduce the book in parts I and II and go beyond it in part III.

The Green Felt Jungle by Ovid Demaris and Ed Reid gives a real accounting of how the mob built Vegas and lurked behind nearly every casino or hotel created during the '40s and '50s.

Comp City – A Guide to Free Las Vegas Vacations by Max Rubin is considered one of the most comprehensive gambling books ever published. Rubin is a former pit boss who reveals the inner processes of casino gaming practices.

Fodor's Las Vegas, Reno, Tahoe is an annual guide to the City of Sin. While it reveals little in the way of the dark side of the city, it certainly showcases all of the exciting tourist spots in the entire region.

Las Vegas: Gamble in the Desert and *Las Vegas: House of Cards*. These four-hour, two-part series ran on the A&E cable channel in 1996, and were released as a video set titled simply *Las Vegas*. Interviews with many of the city elite and with those who knew them well combine with new and old footage of the city to provide an entertaining documentary.

Ocean's Eleven. Whether you watch the original 1960 film starring the Rat Pack or the 2001 flick with Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Julia Roberts and a star-studded cast of others, this is one of the ultimate heist movies for Vegas. The protagonists plan a break-in into an ultra-secure casino vault bearing millions of dollars of mob money.

The Internet has become the largest library in the world. From the official web site of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority at <http://www.lasvegas24hours.com>, to the solid journalism of the Las Vegas Sun at <http://www.lasvegassun.com>, to the readily remembered infomercial at <http://www.lasvegas.com>, the World Wide Web offers a bounty of lore at your fingertips. Given the explosion of internet gambling and pornography, it is easy to find sites which focus upon aspects of the City of Sin which might otherwise be difficult to see without indulging oneself in person.



some of the information distributed by the NWO supports this type of speculation. A more practical theory is that these strangers were other humans — perhaps from other tribes, perhaps from other areas of the world — who made contact with the otherwise isolated Anasazi. Some of the records show these strangers leaving as suddenly as they had appeared. I assert that some of the visitors remained strangers before moving on, and others, opting to stay, were accepted into the tribe as official members.

Whatever theory happens to be correct, the fact remains that after this point, the Anasazi people made remarkable progress as a civilization. They moved out of their subterranean dwellings and began to construct humble adobe structures that would eventually evolve into the hundred-room, multi-story complexes that remain today. In addition, their hunting techniques improved and they began to mine salt to trade with neighboring tribes. Over the course of the next 300 years, the Anasazi developed irrigation systems to aid in the cultivation of corn, created beautiful works of functional art, and began to mine for turquoise.

And what of magick? Apparently the strangers who stayed helped to introduce "Avatar energies" into the morphogenetic fields of the culture, creating a perfect alignment of cultural practices with magickal correspondences to the point where as many as 20 children out of 100 were born with the ability to

Awaken. Quite an impressive number given the rarity of Awakened souls in present times. (Perhaps the Avatars were carried through bloodlines. I, however, feel that such genetic theories are too common these days; I prefer to seek broader magickal explanations.) Research has uncovered many stories of willworkers — mostly designated as seers or spirit healers — in the Anasazi community. In fact, if the population of willworkers in the community was consistent with what some researchers claim, the many stories fabricated to explain the Anasazi's disappearance become virtually impossible to believe.

Disease, overpopulation, war, and even, ironically, drought, have been presented as reasons for the sudden demise of the Anasazi civilization around 1150 C.E. More far-fetched, but also popular, are the theories of "alien liberation." However, given what we know about the Anasazi, the number of Awakened men and women in the society and the strength and power of their Avatars, such theories come across as juvenile and absurd. The fact is, they all Ascended — every man, woman and child of them. Pattern scholars claim that the evidence is etched in the very rocks and stones of the desert. Others more skilled with Spirit workings report a certain Resonance that pervades both this plane and diverse levels of the Umbra.

Of course, blended with that Resonance is the ever-familiar taste of revisionist history. We have managed to glean that before their mass Ascension, the Anasazi occupied almost the entirety of the state of Nevada and that their cities were marvels of architectural beauty and functional sophistication matching, if not rivaling, those of the Maya or the Aztecs. In fact, the Paiute, who claimed the land after the Anasazi departed, have passed down stories and legends over generations about the first tribesmen who encountered "great spirit houses" upon entering the region.

The Paiute

The achievements of the Anasazi are even more profound when one compares them with the Paiute who followed. Descended from the same language group as the Ute and the Shoshone to the north, the Paiute culture was practically on par with that of the Archaic Indians. However, something drew their wise men to settle in the Las Vegas valley. I theorize that they were drawn by the strong pattern of energy or the egregore that the Anasazi had spent centuries cultivating. Also, it appears that etheric Resonance from the Anasazi Ascension went a long way towards ensuring the survival of the fledgling Paiute society.

Even though they remained largely nomadic for the next 700 or so years, the Paiute did make great agricultural strides, managing to grow squash and beans in addition to the previously established corn. They also discovered and frequently congregated at a place we now call Big Spring, which as of this writing is still an incredibly beautiful natural habitat and the largest tract of untouched land in Las Vegas.

Settlers and Prospectors: 1850 – 1903

For the longest time, the Paiute were undisturbed by the comings and goings of white men who managed to foray into the western wilds of North America. The Spanish, when they claimed dominion over the Nevada territory, listed it as "El Misterio Norteno," choosing to leave it unexplored and uncharted. This could have a great deal to do with those few Awakened souls within the Paiute tribe who strove to make sure that the encroaching white men either overlooked their land or were as uncomfortable as possible within it.

In spite of these valiant efforts, however, white men did eventually make it into the Northern Mystery, but, again, left pretty well enough alone, choosing to pass through rather than stay. The first white travelers

were Franciscan friars who forged what became the Old Spanish Trail as a means to connect their missions between New Mexico and California.

The Meadows

Although it started out as a road for holy travelers, the Old Spanish Trail soon became a crucial route for traders, in particular for beaver trappers. Jedediah Smith was one of those trappers who thought to seek out greater quantities of beaver in the southwestern regions. Smith is something of a mystery to magickal scholars, since he seems to have had an extreme command of the Correspondence Sphere (as evidenced by his amazing trailblazing abilities), but to the best of anyone's knowledge, he was not affiliated with either Tradition or Technocratic Order. At any rate, Smith is responsible for opening up parts of the trail to make it more passable. In his wake came many other intrepid souls hoping to trade, reach California, or strike it rich.

One of those souls was Antonio Armijo, who in 1830 set out upon the trail from Santa Fe to trade goods. Armijo is not particularly interesting himself, but his scout, Rafael Rivera, is. Rivera was the first non-native to discover Big Spring in spite of the many wards and pitfalls the Paiute had set up to conceal it. His accounts describe a beautiful line of lush, green meadows linked by a creek lined with willow and cottonwood trees. So he named his discovery Las Vegas, which is Spanish for "the meadows."

Rivera, at the very least a Sorcerer, if not Awakened, was content to tell only a few fellow traders and scouts about his discovery. But as will happen among men, word spread of this lovely oasis in the desert and by 1845, Las Vegas had become the most popular camping spot on the Spanish Trail. This was due in part to the plentiful fresh water and abundant grass that made easy work of resting and grazing horses and other pack animals.

Worth mentioning here is John C. Fremont, who was a U.S. Army cartographer. Fremont spent many years exploring the Las Vegas area and frequently sent back glorious reports of the area's striking beauty to east-coast newspapers. His reports are credited with sparking the boom in westward travel that began in the late 1840s and truly peaked with the California gold rush in 1849.

Mormon Influences

Among those traversing the Spanish trail in the late 1840s were Mormon missionaries traveling from Salt Lake City to southern California. They stopped so frequently at Big Spring that Brigham Young decided to dispatch one William Bringhamurst and 30 other young men to colonize the area and convert the Paiute to Mormonism.

This truly was the beginning of the end for the Paiute, since the Mormons began to lay claim to land

that the tribe had held for over 850 years. Having no cultural concept of land ownership in the Western sense, tribal elders were willing to share occupation with the new white travelers, never realizing they were giving away their rights of settlement and water. The Mormons built a fort out of adobe and attempted to plant squash and grains, but their reluctance to accept native advice about planting in the arid conditions led to poor first crops. Nevertheless, the mission eventually took tentative hold and the missionaries set about their work of converting the Indians. The Paiute, for their part, were more than willing to listen to the Mormon teachings in return for grain and squash, but did little to change their ongoing culture, religion or habits.

This obviously frustrated many of the missionaries, who were further undone by the Paiute's unwillingness to haul silver ore from a mine in the Potosi Mountains — a mine that Paiute tribal elders had pointed out to the colonists in the first place! Steady, backbreaking work under grueling conditions was expected in return for "ten shirts and a pittance of food." Needless to say, the Paiute were most uncooperative.

Silver and Gold

The Potosi Mine was ultimately what destroyed the Paiute and the peace of their heretofore isolated existence. Bringham's reports back to Brigham Young in Salt Lake City resulted in the dispatch of another missionary-colonist, Nathaniel Jones. Young wanted Jones to commandeer half of Bringham's men to work the mine and then ship the silver ore back to Salt Lake City. Bringham, wanting to retain control of the mine himself, refused the request.

The result was a long and drawn-out political and religious argument between Young in Salt Lake and Bringham in Las Vegas. What is not readily disclosed is Bringham's affiliation with the Celestial Chorus and Jones' ties to the Technocratic Union. Apparently the Union had been eyeing the area for some time, but never expected a Tradition magus to lay claim to the area. (One can only assume that magi within Paiute society didn't merit a response!) The conflict escalated when silver and lead ore were discovered and Jones advised Brigham Young to cut the wealth out from under his rival.

In the end racial prejudice, not the Technocracy, spelled Bringham's undoing. His focus on wealth rather than his initial purpose of spiritual and physical care for the Paiute had left the mission in a sorry state of affairs. The Paiute had been rather unceremoniously shoved from the prime agricultural land in the region. As a result, they came to rely heavily upon the donations of food from the mission. With Bringham's men spending most of their time in the mountains rather than in the fields, the local Paiute came close to starvation.

From the beginning, Bringham had preached kindness and compassion towards the natives, but when he violently expelled a Paiute man from his home for stealing a loaf of bread, his message quickly took on a hypocritical note. Word spread among the tribe, and the Paiute essentially cut off all contact with the Mormons, save for the occasional raid for food. By this time, Brigham Young had excommunicated Bringham over the mining affair, and practically everyone was ready to call the entire thing a wash and go home. That's exactly what they did in February of 1857. By 1858, the mission had been completely abandoned.

Las Vegas Ranch

As had happened centuries before, the area that one group abandoned was rapidly snapped up by another. What the Mormons left behind, silver and lead prospectors quickly claimed — once again edging out the Paiute, who had been so broken by famine and disease that they couldn't fight to reclaim their lands. When there was no longer room for silver miners in the area, prospectors looked to the nearby Colorado River valley, where they found deposits of gold. Las Vegas may have gone the way of so many mining towns had it not been for an enterprising individual named Octavius Decatur Gass.

He began as a gold prospector but soon realized that there was much more value in water rights and homesteading. As there were no objections, he laid claim to the old Mormon fort and built a respectable home, as well as a general store. Within the next few years he had created the Las Vegas Ranch, where he herded cattle and worked a thriving farm, producing grain, fruit and vegetables. In 10 years' time, Gass expanded his holdings considerably (even owning the water rights to the entire valley at one point), established himself as justice of the peace, and gave much needed help and support to new homesteaders in the area.

Unfortunately, Gass ended up in a great deal of debt, so he went to Archibald Stewart, a wealthy Scotsman from a nearby mining town, for a loan. When Gass was unable to repay the debt, Stewart foreclosed and took possession of the Las Vegas Ranch. But Stewart himself would not hold on to the ranch for very long — he was shot by a ranch hand and died in 1884. Upon his death, his wife, Helen, inherited the property. In Helen Stewart's hands, the modest cattle ranch grew over a period of 20 years from a small holding of a few acres to a 2,000-acre complex complete with a campground for travelers and a recreational area for neighboring ranchers.

Again, revisionist history states that upon her retirement Helen Stewart sold 1990 acres of her holdings and deeded the remaining 10 to the Paiute people. Conditions for the native population were now absolutely deplorable. Robbed of their land and the ability

to sustain themselves and their culture, the Paiute had to resort to what few scraps the federal government deigned to throw their way. Helen Stewart, from the moment she came to Las Vegas until the day she sold her property and left the area, had always searched for ways to provide for and empower the Paiute and make them a part of the emerging Las Vegas community. She established systems of trade with elders and provided clothing and sometimes shelter when needed. Her actual bequeathal to the Paiute people was more along the lines of 500 acres, not 10. There were some, however, who resented the donation of so much valuable land to individuals they felt had no idea as to its true worth. Among them were her property surveyor, J.T. McWilliams, and representatives from the San Pedro-Los Angeles-Salt Lake Railroad.

Stories handed down through Paiute culture tell of some spectacular efforts on behalf of tribal willworkers and magick-men to preserve their inheritance. The stories also note the truly despicable tactics used by "railroad men" to dispose of the opposition. In the end, the Paiute were simply overwhelmed by the railroad's offensive. Nevertheless, they managed to so concentrate Spirit and Pattern energies into the remaining 10-acre area left to them that their oppressors wouldn't dare set foot on the land for fear of Umbral attack. Even now, Awakened visitors to the area are well advised to request permission from a tribal shaman before attempting a sight-seeing tour of the smaller reservation, especially since the Avatar Storm has so disrupted things on the Spirit plane.

Because they could not erase the fact that there were 10 magickally charged acres in the middle of the Las Vegas Ranch land parcel, agents of the New World Order decided that the consensus story and supporting documents would reflect a 10-acre bequeathal on the part of Helen Stewart. Furthermore, the original deeds of sale and any written accounts of the awe-inspiring events that transpired during the land war were located and completely destroyed.

Railroad and Industry: 1903 - 1924

The San Pedro-Los Angeles-Salt Lake Railroad has been mentioned earlier in connection to Las Vegas and its development. In 1903, officials approached homesteaders in the Las Vegas valley with an idea to run a rail line directly through the Stewart Ranch. The town, which already boasted a post office, hotel and several other amenities, would be a point for crew changes, service and maintenance, bringing a brand new kind of trade and commerce to the area. The sale of the Las Vegas Ranch and the subsequent events to secure the land opened the channels for railroad activity to commence.

The Golden Spike

Before the first rail was ever laid in southern Nevada, plans were in the works build a rail line from Salt Lake City, Utah through the southern Nevada mining towns to Los Angeles, California. A crucial central stop was planned for Las Vegas as well. The race to complete the railroad spawned many a myth and legend, including the amazing story of John Henry — a truly gifted human being whose physical prowess allowed him to challenge a machine in a tunneling contest and win. As much as we would like to claim John Henry as an Awakened magus, it seems more likely that he was simply imbued with Life and Time magicks to complete his task. Who was responsible? That is a little harder to pin down. The feat was so magnificent that the NWO was hard-pressed to quash the story and only barely managed to saddle it with a "tall-tale" moniker. Indeed, it is difficult to say with certainty today whether his feat was local to Nevada or whether it occurred in West Virginia or Alabama.

At last, in January of 1905, the two rail lines met in Jean, Nevada — some 23 miles south of Las Vegas. To commemorate the occasion, a golden spike was driven into the final railroad tie. The sympathetic magick at work is obvious to anyone willing to look, not to mention the fact that a few Matter Effects would have to be worked in order to make a solid gold spike durable enough to be functional as well as ornamental! Of course both sides of the magickal community like to claim responsibility for the ritual that brought such prosperity to the region, and perhaps in the memory of that elusive beast known as the truth, both sides were.

Ragtown, Boomtown

When J.T. McWilliams was in the process of surveying the Las Vegas Ranch for sale, he stumbled upon 80 unclaimed acres of land immediately to the west of the ranch. Laying claim himself, McWilliams began selling lots to early land speculators. What emerged was the settlement of Ragtown which boomed as work on the new railroad progressed. When the first train rumbled into Las Vegas, Ragtown had saloons, banks, newspapers and a hotel.

Not to be outsmarted out of potential wealth, however, the railroad established Las Vegas Land and Water to build the "official" town of Las Vegas. The 1,200 lots were advertised across the country as prime real estate, and the buyers came from everywhere. Not only were there prospectors from Los Angeles and Salt Lake City, but individuals eager for railroad jobs and East Coast investors also showed an interest. The auction took place on May 15, 1905 at the corner of what are now Main and Fremont Streets. Bidding was so fierce that premium lots doubled and even tripled in value. When it was over, only

200 lots remained, and the railroad made away with the tidy sum of \$265,000 dollars. They had purchased the Las Vegas Ranch for \$55,000 only three years earlier. Within half a year the disgruntled residents of Ragtown had gathered their possessions and moved into Las Vegas proper, and Williams' original settlement burned to the ground one night under mysterious circumstances.

The Red-light District

With the building boom in full swing, of course the good men of Las Vegas gave considerable thought to avenues of entertainment. While banks, restaurants, hotels and shops sprouted up along Fremont Street, saloons, honky-tonks and whorehouses took hold in the designated red-light district on Block 16 framed by Ogden and Stewart streets to the north and south and 1st and 2nd streets to the east and west. The District was notorious and quickly garnered Las Vegas a reputation for sinful behavior.

Sin wasn't the only thing flourishing in the Las Vegas Valley, though. The railroad went out of its way to establish a permanent infrastructure — streets, walkways, a water system, and in December of 1905, electricity. Homes were erected along the residential streets with seemingly unlimited supplies arriving daily by train. City records place the population of Las Vegas at 1,500 on January 1, 1906.

BUST

The fledgling town had a glorious honeymoon, but the party was bound to end eventually. Railroad managers, more concerned with train traffic than the civil engineering, refused to foot the bill for an expansion of water lines to outlying farms and ranches. Wells had to be dug at each farm to tap into the groundwater supplies, since rainfall was not sufficient to sustain them. In addition, property values had seriously deflated within a year of the initial boom. Along with seasonal fires, the intense heat and a sense of isolation, residents of the new Las Vegas were collectively unhappy and uncomfortable.

A brief upsurge in prospects occurred in 1909 when the Nevada Legislature declared Las Vegas county seat of the newly formed Clark County. Furthermore, the railroad opened a locomotive servicing shop in 1911 that created hundreds of jobs and contributed to the doubling of the city's population. That year was also when the state banned gambling, but Las Vegas, it seems, was immune or exempt from the ruling. By 1915, the city had constructed generators to provide electricity 24 hours a day.

When the Anderson Field Airport opened in 1920, the city of Las Vegas was a little worse for the wear. Jobs had been declining steadily for the past five years. Union-Pacific purchased the San Pedro-Los Angeles-

Salt Lake Railroad, almost signaling the end of Las Vegas as a major southwestern city, since the larger rail company shut down many of the service depots and maintenance shops that had provided work for the city's residents. Furthermore, the railroad imposed severely restrictive water regulations that reined in outward growth. It is worth noting here that the 1905 auction that created Las Vegas marks the last time there was a major and concentrated Awakened influence in the area. This is possibly due to increased activity on the part of other supernatural factions in and around the area. At any rate, it would be 25 years before magickal society turned its eyes back towards the desert and the potential that its sands contained.

Money and Water: 1924 – 1946

Let us, for a moment, shift our focus away from the Nevada desert and turn our attentions to the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Here the next chapter in the history of Las Vegas begins.

HOOVER DAM

It had been long known that the mighty Colorado River held amazing potential for irrigation and electricity needs. The Federal Bureau of Reclamation had begun surveying the area around 1907 and it was then that talk of a major damming project began in earnest. Over the next 17 years, various locations were investigated, and by 1924 the choices had been narrowed to two canyons east of Las Vegas.

No one is really sure why the government gave the nod to the canyon closest to Las Vegas, especially since the hard data seems to indicate that the other location would have been better suited. As has been stated many times before, the land that the city occupies has its own particular energy about it that would be extremely appealing to any individual or group of individuals sensitive to such things. Given the nature of the project, it is possible that strings were pulled and deals were made to satisfy these individuals. On the other hand, it is possible that the choice to locate the dam project in such close proximity to Las Vegas had more to do with mundane civil engineering and infrastructure issues than anything else. Whatever the case, in 1930, the U.S. Congress appropriated \$165 million towards the building of the dam.

Hoover Dam is awe inspiring in its scope and scale. But then again, the Sons of Ether designed it that way as a testament to their skill and desire to improve life through both Magick and Science. The river had been carving its way through the Grand Canyon for eons. The Etherites saw the challenge of damming such a primal force as an opportunity to put some of their more wildly

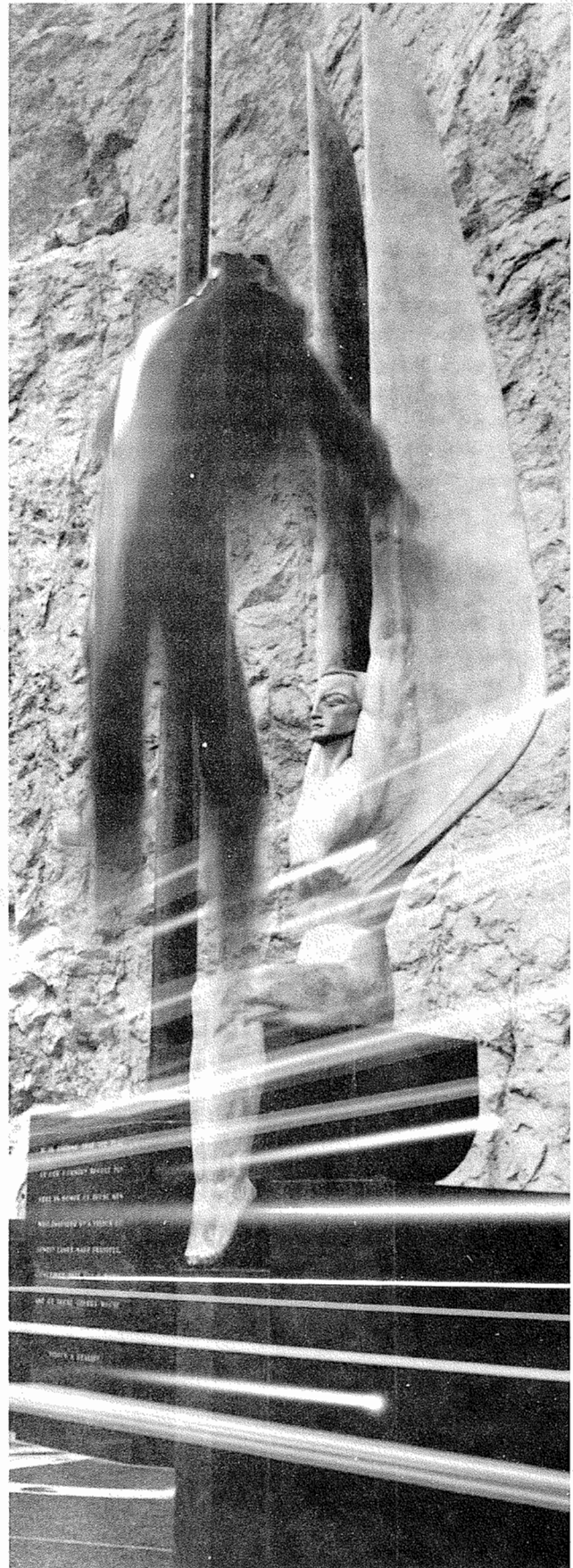
theoretical designs and construction techniques into practical use. While the project wasn't confined to one particular cabal or faction within the Tradition, the Utopians seemed to have the loudest voice and the broadest sphere of influence. What is particularly amusing about the project is that its design, implementation and unveiling all took place at a time when the Technocratic Union was trying its best to discredit the Etherites, relegating its discoveries and inventions to popular fiction and artistic style. Hoover Dam and its subsequent success was a slap in the face to the Technocracy's Inner Circle.

So what makes the dam so special? Mostly the sheer size of the thing. Not since the building of the medieval cathedrals or even the construction of the pyramids at Gizeh had humanity seen such an outpouring of human energy and muscle-power. Power lines were strung across 200 miles from California. Also, the government constructed an entire town, Boulder City, to house some 5,000 workers and their families. And all of this was before construction even began. That was a whole endeavor in and of itself.

First the river had to be diverted away from the construction site, so four tunnels were carved and blasted out of the canyon rock for this purpose. That phase took over a year. In the meantime, architects and engineers busily put the finishing touches on their designs and held numerous meetings with construction managers and foremen. Records show that there was at least one Etherite working in some capacity on every section of the dam, especially in the construction of the water-reclamation towers and pumping mechanisms. Even now, if one goes on one of the many tours available to visitors, one can see some of the power sigils and focusing signs that were used to hold everything together. Five years and five million buckets of concrete (and a number of lethal accidents) later, Hoover Dam was complete. It stood 794 feet tall, 1358 feet across, 656 feet thick at the base and 49 feet thick at the crest. Almost immediately it was declared one of the man-made wonders of the world. Once all of the diversion tunnels were closed, it took three years to fill the reservoir, named Lake Mead. It was and still is the largest man-made lake in North America.

Glitter Gulch

When President Franklin Delano Roosevelt dedicated Hoover Dam in a large and highly publicized ceremony, there were 20,000 people in attendance. The city of Las Vegas was there to welcome them with open arms. Before Hoover Dam began construction, Las Vegas was in sorry shape. However, once the project was announced, the population boomed once more. Another reason for the surge in prosperity had to do with the statewide legalization of casino gambling, easy divorces, prostitution and championship boxing



matches (among other things) in 1931. Thus began the transition from railroad town to casino town.

Part of this was due to the federal government's construction of Boulder City. Fearful that the 5,000 advance workers might be corrupted by the abundance of gambling, boozing and loose women in Las Vegas, the feds designed the "model city" both in an engineering sense and a moral one. Even though vice was legal within the state, the government declared Boulder City a federal reservation and outlawed gambling, drinking and sexual activity by single men. This only made Las Vegas more enticing and people flooded into town.

Legalization of gambling was followed by an influx of new casino operators who were eager to leave behind back-room gambling parlors on the east coast and open legitimate businesses in Nevada. For this reason, casinos and bars moved from Ogden Street to Fremont Street, leaving the brothels behind in Block 16. As neon lighting was new and popular at this point in time, everyone began erecting large and elaborate signs to advertise their casinos. Passengers disembarking from the rail line were confronted with a dazzling corridor of sparkling, blinking lights, earning the area the name Glitter Gulch.

Those 20,000 visitors at the Hoover Dam dedication went back home to tell friends and family about the little town of Las Vegas that was like something straight out of Wild West stories. Furthermore, as Lake Mead began to fill, forward-thinking businessmen realized the potential for tourism and recreational development. Tourists poured in.

The Mob and The Bomb: 1946 – 1966

The Second World War proved to be a rather fortuitous event for Las Vegas. In the early 1940s, the federal government claimed over one million acres of land north of Las Vegas and converted it into an Air Force training school for pilots and gunnery technicians. Over the next five years, the land holding was expanded to three million acres. Likewise, the Basic Magnesium plant was built in 1942, midway between Boulder City and Las Vegas. The city's population soared so dramatically with the influx of workers that the town of Henderson was built.

With all this activity, gambling and tourism became an even more lucrative business, and organized crime wanted its share of the pie. Some crooks and gangsters came out to Las Vegas voluntarily, wishing to take advantage of the relatively loose regulations on gambling which made it easy to skim hundreds of thousands of dollars off legitimate profits. Others arrived after fleeing sting operations in neighboring states. One such

criminal was Guy McAfee. In Los Angeles, McAfee, who was a captain of the LAPD vice unit, had been running illegal gambling parlors as a side business. After moving to Las Vegas, he bought the Pair-o-Dice Club on Fremont Street. Because he frequently traveled along Highway 91 (later called Las Vegas Boulevard) back and forth from Vegas to L.A., he began to call it "the Strip" after the Sunset Strip in Los Angeles.

El Rancho Vegas

Of course, there were legitimate businessmen who found a foothold in the valley. Thomas Hull, a California hotel magnate, was driving into Vegas when his car overheated a few miles out from town. As he waited for roadside assistance, he made a keen observation. There was an extremely high volume of cars traveling along Highway 91 into Las Vegas. Being a wise businessman, Hull decided to build a hotel immediately off of the highway, just outside of the city limits (thus avoiding costly property taxes).

The El Rancho Vegas hotel opened on April 3, 1941 and was the first Strip casino. It was also one of a kind. The El Rancho Vegas was all-inclusive, providing guests with lodging, a casino, a steakhouse, retail shops, a swimming pool and a show room. In addition, Hull cut deals with local ranchers for sightseeing tours on horseback. One particularly brilliant move was to appeal to the scores of wealthy divorce-seekers taking advantage of Nevada's relaxed residency rules. He created a dude ranch where those seeking divorces could mix and mingle while waiting out the mandatory six weeks before their separations could be made legal.

However, the most innovative aspect of Hull's casino-hotel was its use of air conditioning, or refrigerated air. Every room in the complex had it, making guests more likely to forget that they were in the midst of searing desert heat. El Rancho Vegas was so wildly popular that within three years another resort, the Last Frontier, had opened a mile south down the highway. Stagecoaches from Last Frontier would meet guests at the train station or the airport, and rooms featured "pioneer" antiques and Zuni handcrafts.

Bugsy's Vision

Hollywood legend would like us to believe that when Bugsy Siegel arrived in Las Vegas in 1946, there was nothing but desert and tumbleweeds on the Strip. In fact, Bugsy was late to the party, so to speak, since El Rancho Vegas and Last Frontier were already open and raking in massive profits. His real claim to fame is that he boasted openly that he could "do better" than the two resort hotels that already existed.

Siegel wanted to be a movie actor, but lacked even the most rudimentary skill and talent for the profession.

So in creating his ideal desert resort, he decided that since he couldn't go to Hollywood and be a success, he would then be successful by bringing the best and brightest in Hollywood to him. Bugsy borrowed approximately \$1 million from organized crime contacts on the east coast and used it to purchase interest in an unfinished Strip hotel that was in danger of remaining that way. He called his pet project the Flamingo.

On December 26, 1946, the Flamingo opened to great fanfare and press attention. The total cost to complete it had been over five million dollars, and rumors were rampant that Bugsy had pocketed a substantial amount of that sum. Despite those problems, Hollywood stars and their hangers-on arrived in droves (partly due to the chartered flights Siegel had arranged to impress the crowd he so desperately wanted to be part of). Comedian Jimmy Durante was the headlining act at the theatre. In addition, there was a strict formal dress code, requiring dealers and even waiters to wear tuxedos, male patrons to wear suit and tie, and female patrons to wear gloves.

The party lasted three days. After that, the casino was empty, mostly due to the restrictive dress code and also because locals were either too intimidated or too afraid of the mob connection to gamble there. The Flamingo closed 14 days after it opened, and then reopened several months later with a relaxed dress code and a much stronger flow of business. As for Bugsy Siegel, he had tried the patience of his mob contacts past the breaking point. On June 20, 1947, Siegel died in his living room when an unknown assailant fired nine shots into him.

For the next 20 years the Italian-Jewish crime network had an extremely visible presence in Las Vegas. It was largely responsible for the biggest real estate boom the country had ever seen. It was also peopled with Awakened individuals in various capacities who had an interest in developing the potential of Las Vegas and shaping it to their individual ends or to those of various Traditions and Conventions. Money flooded into Las Vegas from a myriad of underworld sources, and hotels, resorts and casinos blossomed out of the desert sand all along the Strip. Of the nine hotel-casinos that opened on the Strip between 1951 and 1958, all but one were bankrolled by the mob. Corruption was rife as casino managers offered jobs, comps and money under the table to their mob-connected friends. But eventually the federal government took notice and decided to investigate the situation.

Miss Atomic Bomb

Casinos weren't the only thing attracting federal notice in Nevada. In 1951, the U.S. government needed somewhere to test its nuclear weapons technology, so it went searching for a large tract of uninhabited land.

It found the old Las Vegas Aerial Gunnery School, some 70 miles outside of the city limits. Over the next 11 years, the government conducted approximately 120 above-ground test explosions at the Nevada Test Site. With the passing of the 1962 Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the explosions were driven deep underground. This has had some disturbing affects upon the Spirit and Pattern energies in the area. A few Awakened scholars have been able to breach the wall of security around the Site and scry into the Umbra. The accounts of what they observed in the area have been collected into an article entitled *As Above, So Below: The Adverse Affects of Nuclear Explosions Upon The Umbral Landscape*. (The article may be obtained by writing to the Special Editions and Publications branch of *Scientific American*.) Thankfully, the passage of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1996 has stopped all nuclear testing in the U.S., but it may have come too late to reverse the damage that has already been done.

Las Vegas took the proximity of the explosions and mushroom clouds in stride and even incorporated the bomb as an added tourist attraction. The marketing was simply amazing. There were atom burgers, nuclear picnics where diners could watch the mushroom clouds from atop the tallest buildings. One particularly popular piece of memorabilia featured an attractive and shapely blonde woman clad only in the mushroom shaped smoke cloud originating from her nether regions. Some hotel-casinos even timed their grand openings to coincide with bomb blasts. But in spite of Las Vegas' enthusiasm about life with nuclear energy, the rest of America looked on with skepticism, mistrust and disdain.

The public castigation of the city of Las Vegas was long in coming, but when the backlash hit, it was difficult for the city to recover. Of course there were reasons behind the public contempt. Casinos were rife with mob corruption and it seemed that almost every week there were news reports of another casino scandal. The FBI came down hard on the city, eventually linking practically every casino in town to organized crime in some capacity. In spite of all the bad press, tourism still thrived and flourished. This was, in part, due to Frank Sinatra and a few of his close friends.

The Rat Pack

The 1960s film *Ocean's 11* is not the greatest Vegas film ever made, but that film and its stars made Vegas sparkle like a jewel, even when it was buried beneath a mountain of media manure. This was a crafted and calculated move. The movie's script was admittedly weak before filming started, and in all probability the studio did not expect the film to win any awards. However, the decision to cast Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. as the leads and to film on location in Las

Vegas was intended to counteract the negative energies and influences that had soured America's love affair with Sin City in the first place.

After a day of filming, Sinatra, Sammy, Dean Martin and others would gather at the Copa Room at the Sands Hotel and perform. Afterwards, they'd hit the town, playing impromptu sets at lounges all over town, drinking heavily, chasing women and even starting fights. They were the young gods of Hollywood and the Strip was their playground. Sinatra's influence alone was more than that of the most powerful casino owner in the city. And the effect was galvanizing. In spite of the mafia connections and scandals, people wanted to go to Las Vegas on the off chance that they might run into Frankie and his gang, trolling the bars. Even a young Steve Wynn recalls meeting Frank Sinatra and being invited to an impromptu performance. At that performance, Wynn met the man who would lead him to becoming the most successful casino operator in modern day Las Vegas.

One might think that Sinatra was somehow Awakened or surrounded by people who could affect reality. Not so. The real work of change was happening northwest of the Strip at the edge of the downtown area in a little hotel called the Moulin Rouge. Many people who visited Las Vegas in the late 1950s and early 1960s remember that time as a Golden Era. But for people of color, it was anything but that. Sammy Davis Jr., Lena Horne, and Nat King Cole were at the height of their popularity at this time, but the color of their skin and the city's segregation laws barred them from staying at any of the resort casinos on the Strip. So they stayed at the Moulin Rouge.

It is not known who exactly came up with the idea of advertising performances at the segregated hotel, but the resulting social changes were legendary and astounding. Since these African-American performers were wildly popular with white audiences, management of the Moulin Rouge figured, rightly, that if top-name performers appeared at the lounge, the white concert-goers would travel to the west side of town to see them. And they came in droves. So much so that eventually Frank Sinatra himself surprised audiences one night by appearing on stage at the hotel's lounge, bringing several influential Las Vegas politicians with him. It was then that the absurdity of the situation was pointed out: why were famous African-American performers forced to stay at a run-down hotel when it was perfectly alright for them to entertain in casino lounges and bring in huge revenues for segregated hotels? Casino bosses couldn't see any logic in the situation, so in 1960 — years before the legal overthrow of segregation laws in the rest of the country — they signed an agreement ending racial segregation in the city of Las Vegas.

The Age of Moguls: 1966 – Present

Unfortunately, even Frank Sinatra was not enough to truly clean up the tarnished image Las Vegas had earned for itself. Mafiosi were fleeing the city en masse, but so were the tourists. Construction was in a slump and it seemed that the city would never get past its notorious reputation. However, in 1966 an eccentric millionaire by the name of Howard Hughes descended upon the town and began to wage a one-man crusade to make a lady out of the whore of Babylon. The man was an enigma and an extreme recluse, but he was also a respectable businessman who was quite vocal about his investment interests in prime Strip real estate. His bidding wars with Kirk Kerkorian, a famous Las Vegas businessman, generated a legitimacy for the city and the casino business that was unparalleled. For the first time, banks began to look seriously at granting loans to casinos and corporations began to investigate the benefits of owning and operating these money-making enterprises. Individual businessmen also began to invest in Las Vegas again, discovering that vast fortunes could be made based on simple mathematics.

Caesar's Circus

Jay Sarno was one such businessman, but he was of a breed apart. Never truly taken seriously by the people who came into contact with him, he was a clown, really — overweight, balding and an incorrigible womanizer. But as is often the case in history, it is the clown who has the greatest vision and the fearlessness to realize it. In 1962, Sarno woke his wife in the middle of the night and announced that he was going to build a casino-hotel like no one had ever seen before. His idea was to create a world into which the gambler could enter and be transformed. His vision of columns, cypress trees, statues, waterfalls and tons of marble opened on August 5, 1966. He called it Caesars' Palace and explained to the press that the positioning of the apostrophe was intentional. This isn't a palace for just one Caesar, he said. Everyone who enters my casino is a Caesar, so this palace belongs to all the people — all the Caesars.

Sarno's desert palace was an instant hit. According to casino records, Caesars' Palace was earning so much money in its first month of operations that counting it all was impossible. Instead it was separated into denominations and weighed. The hedonistic Sarno practically bathed in his newfound wealth, showering his wife and his mistresses with jewelry, furs, cars and fancy dinners.

The next idea to come from Sarno was a stand-alone casino with a circus theme. He stated to reporters that

the Romans used the word "circus" to mean "theatre." His casino would put a modern circus inside a Roman circus — or a Circus Circus. This project was also innovative and completely different from anything Las Vegas had ever seen before. Guests entered the pink-and-white circus tent and encountered a giant metal slide, which was the only entrance to the gaming floor. Once they slid down, they were accosted by mimes, clowns, and jugglers roaming in between the tables. Above them, trapeze and high-wire artists performed. There was a circus calliope, a midway with carnival games and even a ringmaster who would conduct an auction at various times throughout the evening.

At first, Circus Circus was a huge success, but serious design flaws and the sheer chaotic nature of the place, not to mention lawsuit liabilities, quickly whittled away business. By 1974, Jay Sarno was forced to sell the tanking circus tent, as well as Caesars' Palace, just to remain solvent. He was the laughingstock of the Strip, but his circus-themed casino would soon become the flagship of the world's largest gaming empire.

The Working Man's Casino

A former furniture salesman named Bill Bennet, and Reno hotel-owner Bill Pennington purchased Circus Circus from Sarno. Together they founded Circus Circus Enterprises and set it up as a full-disclosure, public corporation. The big pink-and-white circus tent underwent massive renovations: Pennington and Bennet added a hotel, and took the midway and the circus acts out of the casino and relegated them to an upper floor for kids. Bennet's vision was to create a resort for the average working-class man and his family. High-roller tables were banished, as were VIP rooms and high-level comps. Bennett replaced them with more slot machines and video arcades where kids could play under supervision while their parents were in the casino. Instead of fine dining, there were all-you-can-eat buffets and family style restaurants.

The idea caught fire. Circus Circus had to build two more hotel towers, and even then they were turning away guests. Bennett and his young successor, Glenn Schaeffer, later expanded his idea and decided to capitalize upon the success of the Disney Corporation by creating a fairy tale castle of their own. Then along came Steve Wynn. His resort casino changed everything.

Supercasino

While Jay Sarno was busy dreaming up his grand, extravagant ideas for casino-hotels, Steve Wynn was running his father's bingo hall in Massachusetts. Twenty-six years later, Wynn was a well-respected businessman and casino owner in both Las Vegas and Atlantic City. His success with the Golden Nugget Casinos was widely

publicized and he was slated as the new up-and-comer in the gambling industry. When the Mirage Resort opened in 1989 it ushered in a new era of growth and opulence. Almost a decade earlier, Las Vegas had been hit by the worst hotel fire in American history. The fire at the MGM Grand killed 84 guests and seriously injured another 700. It happened so quickly that firefighters recounted stories of charred corpses still sitting upright at slot machines and playing tables.

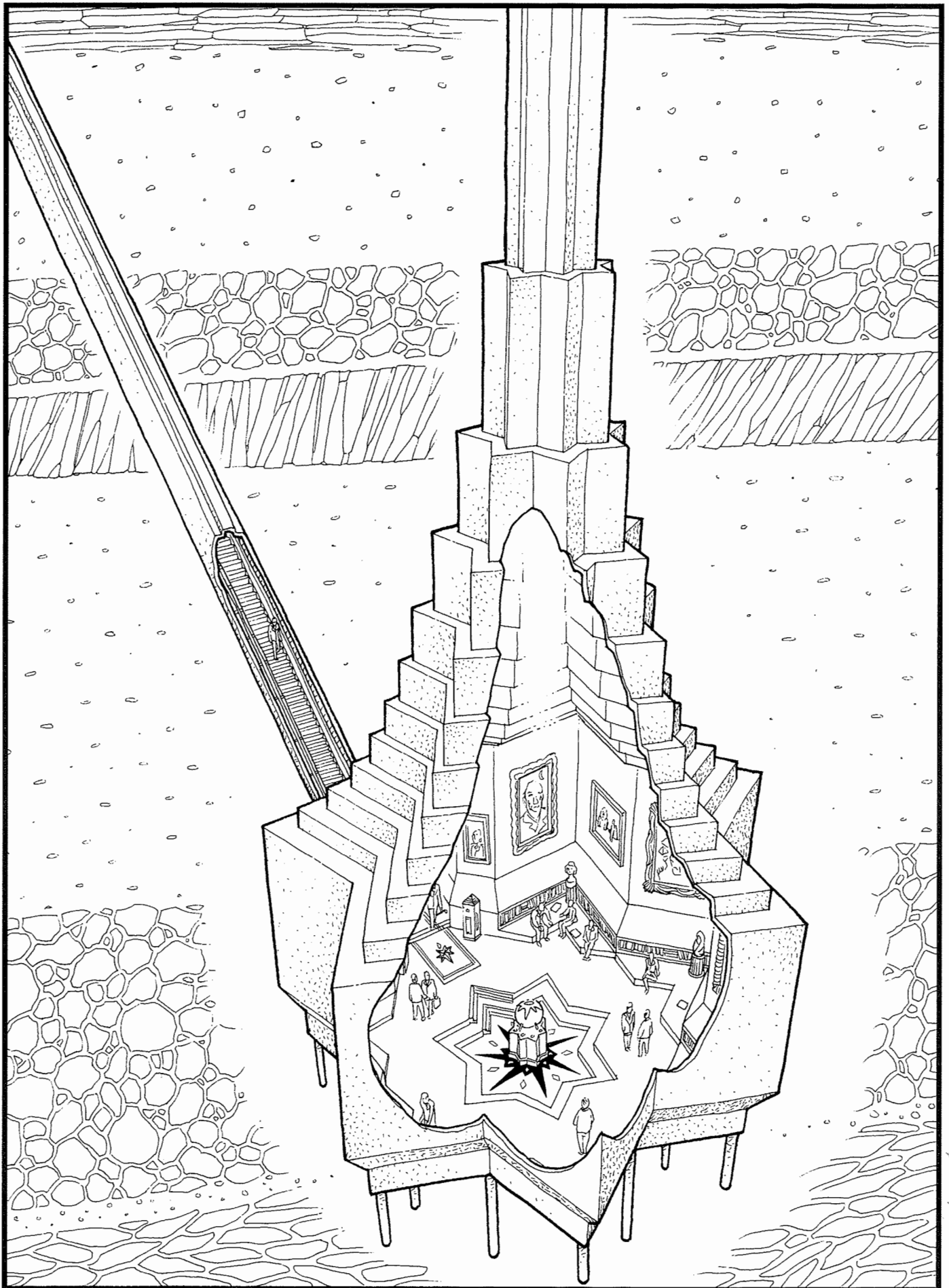
The Bally corporation quickly rebuilt the hotel, but the tragedy caused a downswing in building on the Strip.

The Mirage was the first new resort casino built on the Strip in 16 years. It was massive. It was opulent. It boasted 3,000 rooms, a white tiger habitat, a 20,000-gallon aquarium and a rainforest. It also had a 50-foot volcano that erupted every 15 minutes from sunset to midnight, lighting up the gold-tinted glass façade. Not since Jay Sarno had anyone built anything so luxurious. And Wynn made no mistake as to his clientele. Let Bennett and Circus Circus appeal to the minivan and stroller crowd. The Mirage was the place where high rollers and VIPs were once again welcome, courted and catered to.

Entire books have been written about the surge in growth that marked the Las Vegas of the 1990s. In attempts to mirror Wynn's success with Mirage, casino corporations and even non-gaming entertainment corporations jumped on the bandwagon and created their own mega-resorts. Circus Circus' Excalibur hotel was completed in 1990, followed closely by the Egyptian-themed Luxor and the South Seas-themed Mandalay Bay. Steve Wynn was also still busy, debuting his pirate resort, Treasure Island, and his grand masterpiece, the Bellagio. Still more casino resorts followed: Venitian, Paris-Las Vegas, New York-New York.

What is important to notice here are the subtleties of Awakened influence upon what are mostly Sleeper creations. In the last decade of the 20th century, as magickal society moved away from fighting an Ascension war and towards a simple struggle to remain relevant, more and more Awakened and Enlightened *individuals* began taking an active part in shaping the destiny of Las Vegas. The city is not controlled by one side or another, one Tradition or another, one Convention or another. Rather, the city exists as a testament to individual will working in cooperation with one's peers. Many Tradition mages like to point to the Luxor and say, that's ours. It belongs to us, while the rest belong to them. Not so.

The future certainly seems bright for Las Vegas. True, the city has its expansion and growth issues — what modern city doesn't? But time may prove that the involvement and interaction of the Awakened population in daily affairs will help steer Las Vegas towards better resolution of those common issues.



CHAPTER TWO: PATTERNS IN THE SAND

You have all these classic images from all of Western civilization that kind of come here to die, and it's as though Western history has come here for one last party. Everything begins and ends, and one day the desert will come back and take it over again.

— Michael Ventura, *Las Vegas: House of Cards*



As you approach Las Vegas at night in a plane, you see a glittering jewel surrounded on all sides by empty darkness. The plane banks and soon the city lies beneath you, closer now, like a great spider web of lights arrayed beneath you. Before long you pass low enough that the shimmering mesh fades to the wide swathes of landing-strip brilliance and black tarmac. As the plane sidles up to the concourse, you could almost forget the city you saw from above, as though you were

in any other airport in America, except that out of the side window you see them — the castles of the City of Sin, her casinos. Across the landing field they beckon you with the wanton neon eyes of Lady Luck, and you hasten to disembark.

The airport is filled with the raucous clatter of a hundred slot machines, all vying for your loose change while jet lag settles upon you. You look around and decide that everyone playing must be waiting for their flight, and you have better places to be. You stumble wearily down the concourse, passing window-boxes

filled with images of the history of McCarran International Airport and the World's Most Original City. Catching a taxi is easy; you just wait in line along the front walk and a guy tells you to stand near such-and-such a post. The driver isn't very conversational (although there are exceptions), and you can't help but get the picture that you are his hundredth customer of the evening.

Your casino is stunning — it doesn't matter which one you picked, really; they are all stunning — but more of the clamorous slot machines convince you it is time to turn in for the evening. Or maybe grab a drink.

The next morning you awaken to the sounds of hammering, sawing and loud engines. You look outside and catch a bleary vision of the omnipresent construction. Just across from your bathroom window a man walks on a narrow beam, his hand lazily guiding another beam hanging from a crane as tall as the tower in which you stand. "Jeez, what did I do last night?" you think. Starving for breakfast, or whatever they call it when it is 1 p.m., you head out into the casino hallway. You suddenly feel invigorated, and you remember reading that they pump oxygen into the recycled air. Energized and hungry, you don't care. It's party time again.

A few days later, your body aches, your feet hurt and you are dry as a sandbox, withered from the cheap drinks, arid desert wind and over-conditioned air. *Jeez, what did I do last night?* A short taxi ride to the airport through a sun-bleached mirage and a long flight home, and you are gone.

For many people, this is Las Vegas. One length of road, known as the Strip, filled with all the money, booze and temptation anyone could want. Many of them probably remember it more from the postcards and souvenirs they carried away than from the drunken

DON'T BET ON IT

Obviously this is not a guidebook to the real city of Las Vegas. It is a setting book for the **Mage: The Ascension** game. As such it takes the genuine article and paints it over with a fictional message: "Reality is a Lie. The Truth is Magic." A lot of what you will find here is factual — after all, Vegas is a weird city — but in the real Vegas, magicians are named things like Lance Burton or Siegfried and Roy, and the magic they perform is just tricks. *Duh*, you may be saying, but the point is that we are presenting the City of Sin as home to a gaggle of spell-wielding, ultratech, sci-fi/fantasy beings with the power to warp reality. So while you are reading, remember that this book's "reality" has been warped.

If a casino doesn't quite match the real thing, or a mage lives on a street that isn't on any map you can find, try to remember that this is the World of Darkness. For all of its similarity to the real world, it is a different place altogether. On the other hand, a lot of the odd details you will find are all too true. When we introduce you to the Fallen Tower, we aren't always going to pause to tell you what's real and what isn't. Where would that leave your suspension of disbelief? Let the oxygen-flooded paradoxes of the World's Most Original City inspire you to dizzying heights of story and adventure, and check a factbook before you book reservations at the decadent Arizona Club.

bouts of feeding one-armed bandits, doubling down on blackjack or flirting with the keno runner girl. The games, the casinos, the shows, the mad frenzy of light and spectacle, these represent Vegas to most people. They are right — and wrong.

SIX-SIDED LAND



Today Las Vegas is a jigsaw puzzle composed of six wards, each represented by a Councilman (called Councilwoman when appropriate). The wards are adjusted after each decade's national census according to legal requirements that their population remain within five percent of each other. Even the clumsiest of conspiracy theorists cannot help but look at a map of the ward boundaries and see backroom deals and corporate compromises written between the lines. The most valuable real estate in town is divided between

Ward 1 and 3 right down the middle of Las Vegas Boulevard South. Similarly, downtown finds half of the Fremont Street Experience in one district and half in another. This shouldn't come as any surprise given that vice, illicit or otherwise, has formed the politics of Vegas since before its official inception on May 15th, 1905. It is a lot easier to understand the city if one ignores the patchwork puzzle of Councilman voting districts and focuses instead upon The Strip, Downtown, UNLV, North Vegas, the residential districts and outlying areas of special import, such as Nellis Air Force Base, the Valley of Fire and the Hoover Dam.

THE STRIP

From the highway that leads into Vegas, the neon glow is perceptible 50 miles out. Ten miles from the city you can hear the hum of the lights if you stop to get out of your car and listen. A huge portion of that buzzing brilliance originates in what is indisputably the heart of the city, the Strip. Traditionally spanning the three-and-a-half miles between Hacienda and Sahara Avenues, the Strip begins at the southern end of Las Vegas Boulevard with the Welcome to Las Vegas sign — dating from the early '50s — and runs north to the nearly quarter-mile-high Stratosphere Tower. More than 30 of the city's most extravagant casinos line the Strip, their otherworldly realms offering more than two million square feet of adult Disneyland.

More than 35 million people a year make their way through Las Vegas, and they drop a gambling bankroll averaging over \$500 apiece. It should come as little surprise that one of the city's monikers has become "Lost Wages." Most of that money turns into the plastic chips and metal tokens that glide across velvet-topped blackjack tables and into hungry slot machines. At the end of the night, the vast majority of cash stays locked safely away in casino vaults, while broken gamblers scuttle off to their lonely flights home, perhaps pondering how best to explain their misfortune to angry wives or jilted lovers.

The word casino originally meant "gathering place" in Italian, but Vegas has reinvented the word, as it has reinvented so many other things. Jack Binion, Bob Stupak and Steve Wynn are often named as the celebrities of Las Vegas, but the City of Sin's true celebrities are her sanitized-yet-tantalizing wonderland dens of iniquity, the casinos. Many visitors to the city remain unaware of the people who move and shake the politics of the World's Most Original City. Few, though, can forget the shining black pyramid at the Luxor with its pillar of light reaching into the heavens, the gigantic lion standing next to the MGM entryway or the towering heights of the Stratosphere. Each of the great casinos has its own theme, built at tremendous cost and inspired by grand architecture, reinforced by hundreds of costumed employees. Each of the great casinos has its own character, putting on a show for thousands of visitors every night, and each of them are beguiling con artists ready to talk you out of every last dollar.

FLAMINGO HILTON AND TOWER

This is the casino where modern Las Vegas really began, although its corporate facelift has left hardly a trace of its founder, Bugsy Siegel, beyond a statue in his

LAS VEGAS STRIP

PLACES OF INTEREST

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stratosphere Tower 2. Palace Stadium 3. Sahara 4. Wet 'N Wild 5. Circus Circus 6. Riviera 7. Westward Hotel 8. Stardust 9. Royal Las Vegas 10. Debbie Reynolds Hollywood 11. Courtyard 12. Frontier 13. Desert Inn 14. Fashion Show Mall 15. Treasure Island 16. The Venetian 17. The Mirage 18. Harrah's 19. Imperial Palace 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 20. Flamingo Hilton 21. Caesars Palace 22. Barbary Coast 23. Bellagio 24. Bally's 25. Paris 26. Aladdin 27. Carriage House 28. Monte Carlo 29. New York New York 30. Tropicana 31. San Remo 32. Luxor 33. Mandalay Bay 34. Four Seasons 35. Quality Inn 36. Crown Plaza 37. Hard Rock Hotel 38. Alexis Park
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A WORD OF CAUTION

Players roaming up and down the Strip aren't the only ones gambling in Las Vegas. Corporations and billionaires alike risk fortunes upon the fates of the giants that line Las Vegas Boulevard South. A backroom deal that will seal the doom of your favorite casino — or flood it with an influx of new management cash — could be happening this very moment. The real world is an ever-changing place, and by the time this sees print, it may already have turned a new leaf. If your players like to stay on the edge of modern times, try to keep them happy by doing quick research on the current status of, or new attractions at, any of the locales contained here. On the other hand, fiction is more fun than fact for many players, and if the real world has changed, who's to say that the World of Darkness and its supernatural denizens have taken the same path?

memory and the name. Six high-rise towers surround a 15-acre, Caribbean-style water playground, set right on the famous "Four Corners" at Las Vegas Boulevard and Flamingo Road, and much of it glows as neon pink as a radioactive bird from Miami. The Flamingo offers a number of popular attractions, including the Radio City spectacular, Bugsy's Celebrity Theatre, the Second City sketch comedy and improvisation company, the Breck Wall musical topless comedy and the irrepressible Gladys Knight.

Rumors persist that a secret escape tunnel remains from the days of Bugsy's 98-room Fabulous Flamingo, despite 50 years of renovations. Just as incredible, some people claim that Bugsy's spirit roams the halls, at once envious and proud of what his dream has become. Old legends die hard, it would seem, or maybe talented rascallions try to breathe new life into them, but at least it is certain that the "Fabulous" Flamingo is still a mainstay at the center of the Strip.

KLONDIKE INN HOTEL AND CASINO

With only 150 rooms, this hotel would be more honestly represented were it acknowledged as a run-down motel trying to cash in its Olympic-size pool to call itself a resort hotel casino. Billing itself as the first and friendliest on the Strip, the fact is that it is a rather uncomfortably long walk from the southernmost megaresort, Mandalay Bay. The theme is pretty weak, but essentially the place is supposed to give off the

feeling of a gold rush mining camp, complete with Western small-town art facades, wagon wheels on the wall and a miniature covered wagon hanging from the ceiling. Table limits are among the lowest on the Strip, though little other than roulette, blackjack and some older, low-limit slots can be found in the place. Local reviewers derisively claim that the best entertainment to be found here is in the domestic disputes played out in the parking lot. The Klondike might make a good starting point for mages who are trying to stay really close to the Strip but keep a relatively low profile. The \$1.99 meals are just an added bonus — or maybe an advertisement for antacids.

THE CREEPSHOW

One long block or so south of the Mandalay, vaguely across the street from the Klondike, is one of the strangest casinos of the Strip. The developers of the casino purchased an old Gothic cathedral that needed more repairs than the church could afford. After six months of renovation, the Creepshow opened its doors in 2000, exuding a theme of old monster movies. Shambling zombies, bandaged mummies, caped vampires, howling werewolves, sheet-covered ghosts, creatures from the Black Lagoon — if it was seen in a black-and-white horror flick, you can find it at the Creepshow.

Costumed employees routinely scare the patrons, and stages endlessly play out live recreations of horror film classics. The stone building now has an added façade complete with flashing marquis lights and gigantic faces of Frankenstein, Dracula and the Wolfman framed by a cloud of bats and ghosts. The church graveyard was vacated, its interred bodies moved elsewhere, and the mausoleums added to the attraction. Confessionals were remodeled into bathrooms, gaslights installed in the courtyard and the fence heightened to shade out the brightness of the Strip. Unlike other casinos, which are open 24 hours a day, the Creepshow opens at dusk and closes at dawn in keeping with its horror theme.

Ironically, certain members of the staff here know that supernatural creatures exist and if they somehow catch a real one in the Creepshow, they use the backdrop to disguise their efforts to rid the world of such. Given their somewhat insular nature, "mage society" has not yet clued in to the fact that there is an ongoing threat to their kind here. Mage characters may be the first to warn others of the danger, if they manage to survive it themselves.

MANDALAY BAY RESORT AND CASINO

Mandalay Bay is the first of the megaresort casinos you'll see when you enter the Strip from the south. The Mandalay Resort Group opened the casino on Las Vegas Boulevard South in March 1999, adding to their collection: the Luxor, Excalibur, Circus Circus and half of the Monte Carlo. The décor is mostly golds, light browns, beiges, white marble floors and acid-green, red, and yellow floral mandala carpets. A tropical theme pervades the place, complete with a wave-forming sand beach pool shaded by hundreds of palm trees. It doesn't mesh with the theme, but the Mandalay is also home to the popular Vegas location of the House of Blues, a music and soul food restaurant with a reputation for celebrity performances, including Sheryl Crow, B. B. King and Cypress Hill. Floor 34 of the Mandalay is even themed with House of Blues – style rooms for the guests. The Mandalay Bay Events Center seats 12,000 and recent acts include the Backstreet Boys and Ricky Martin.

One of the most bizarre features is the Four Seasons Hotel, which occupies floors 35 through 39 of the Mandalay Bay, and is accessible only by three private key-accessed elevators that only service those floors. The Four Seasons company operates out of Toronto, Canada and only runs about 55 properties worldwide. They specialize in luxury properties, and are popular with celebrities who desire classy surroundings and privacy. Of course they also attract the nouveau riche with a devil-may-care party attitude, even appearing in Kid Rock's blockbuster song *Cowboy*. Troublemakers of non-celebrity status should expect that private security for individual residents supplements that offered by the Four Seasons and Mandalay Bay.

LUXOR RESORT HOTEL AND CASINO

There is possibly no experience in Vegas as awe inspiring as standing along one of the sides of the Luxor casino and staring upwards into infinity. One of the southernmost resorts on the Strip, the gigantic bronze-tinted, black-glass pyramid stretches 30 stories into the sky and encompasses the world's largest atrium. More than 4000 rooms surround the open atrium, whose 29 million cubic feet extend to the apex of the structure. The Luxor is as much an engineering marvel as the ancient designs from which it draws, even requiring special elevators to travel up the 39-degree slope of its outer walls. During the day the casino shimmers like volcanic glass in the sun, and at night a pillar of light shines from the tip of the pyramid, piercing the sky with the most brilliant source of illumination on Earth.

The Luxor is named for the city that stands upon the site of ancient Egyptian Thebes. It features a full-scale reproduction of the tomb of Tutankhamen, as it was discovered in 1922, and copies of artifacts from Karnak and the Temple of Luxor. A massive sphinx guards the entrance, and painted duplicates of hieroglyphics from the Valley of Kings and Valley of Queens are found throughout the pyramid. From Nefertiti's Lounge to the Ra Nightclub, every area within the Luxor exhibits an Egyptian theme. Perhaps the only out-of-sync attraction is the Blue Man Group, made famous by the Intel commercials, which performs nightly in the Luxor Theater.

The Luxor has an odd history among mages of Las Vegas. The Hermetic mage, Malcolm Henry, unable himself to wield the kind of money or clout necessary to build a casino, managed to convince a colleague to sell his architectural plans to the Mandalay Resort Group. Though the casino was completed and opened to the public on October 15th, 1993, Malcolm believed that it would serve a future purpose. Just before the turn of the millennium, he felt vindicated when the Avatar Storm tore across the Gauntlet of the world. With renewed vigor, Malcolm and his Hermetic acolytes renewed experiments using the shining beam of the Luxor to pierce the secrets of the spirit world.

Then, for some unknown reason, the Luxor seemed to become a fairly regular target for transmissions from the mysterious Rogue Council. Mages have reported sightings ranging from movie screen images briefly seen upon the side of the pyramid to flashes of warnings seen within the virtual reality goggles of the "In Search of the Obelisk" attraction, to strange messages scrolling across the screen of various sphinx-themed slot machines. Malcolm claims this is due to his design, but others note that it could just as easily be due to the fact that the Luxor has become a fairly safe haven for Tradition mages who visit the city. Whatever the truth, the Luxor has certainly gained the attention of those mages who are interested in the doings of the Rogue Council. It may have gained at least a fragment of attention from other forces as well — numerous complaints from airline pilots, who could see the Luxor's beam of light as far away as 250 miles at LAX in Los Angeles, forced the Luxor to dampen its illumination somewhat.

The Black Pyramid Chantry

The Luxor has become something of a legend in its own time, as it leaves perhaps the single most impact upon tourists of the City of Sin. Benefiting from its alignment with certain astrological and geomantic



elements, combined with its iconography in the minds of Vegas visitors from around the world, the structure serves as a Node, albeit it a rather weak one (Node 2). A loose consortium of Tradition mages have taken to trying to garner mystic control over the structure even if they cannot afford to purchase it economically. When possible, they erect various wards to protect it against Technocratic invasion and keep their activities veiled from the Sleepers who surround them. One might think that Malcolm would dominate the Black Pyramid Chantry, but in reality he merely tries to iron out a consensus among those mages who attach themselves to his dream. In an age of leaderless Traditions, however, this often leaves him in an uncomfortable position of leadership.

A Storyteller might let players begin play as part of the Black Pyramid Chantry for as little as the investment of a couple of points in the Chantry Background. Alternatively, she may make them earn a place within the Chantry through game play. Certainly, in a city with such a strong Technocratic presence, the Chantry has reason to be paranoid and mistrusting of new recruits. On the other hand, times have become too

desperate to simply ignore possible aid against what just may become a renewed Pogrom. Hermetic mages are the most likely to gain acceptance in the Chantry. It is perhaps no accident that the hotel boasts such a large multilingual staff.

Chantry members should not confuse membership in the Black Pyramid Chantry with control over the black pyramid of Luxor. It remains firmly in the contractual hands of a huge corporation with interests in a handful of other megaresorts in Vegas as well. Thousands of unsuspecting Sleepers visit the casino every day, and the Chantry's continued presence requires its members to become faceless extensions of the crowd. Members are often forced to legitimately rent rooms while they seek to secure ill-used portions of the pyramid for their permanent use. Some join the resort staff, or encourage their acolytes and consors to do so. Others embroil themselves in the Egyptian mystique and blend into the background on a mundane and magical level.

Nevertheless, one small central secret sanctum, the Sun Chamber, lies beneath the main floor of the Luxor, and through various tricks of mirrors and cameras, maintains ambient light and visuals from the apex 30

FALLEN HOUSES OF CARDS

An enterprise as absurdly expensive as a casino is a gigantic gamble in its own right. Las Vegas hotel history reads like an obituary of big dreams. Plenty of casinos have come and gone with the passage of time. A number of the more recent closings include the Old Aladdin Hotel & Casino, Continental Hotel and Casino, Debbie Reynolds Hollywood Hotel, Desert Inn Resort Casino, Hacienda Hotel and Casino, Maxim Hotel and Casino, Sands Hotel Casino, Vacation Village Hotel Casino and the World Trade Center Hotel. Newer resorts like the Venetian have replaced some casualties of the Strip (specifically the legendary Sands in the Venetian's case). Others, like the Hacienda, have fallen to planned implosions with the inheritor of their spot on the Strip yet to be unveiled. The Hacienda was destroyed as part of the New Year's Eve celebration at the end of 1996. In the World of Darkness, demolitions may briefly reveal secrets not meant for mortal eyes, but the Technocracy or other supernatural elements swiftly conceal such things.

Sometimes a closed casino will avoid the wrecking ball. Perhaps a wealthy investor buys it and becomes both owner and savior. Nostalgia or simple convenience may suggest renovation rather than destruction and rebuilding. Even Bugsy Siegel's Fabulous Flamingo casino closed its doors for a time after his death before it was reopened in style. Some casinos like the Moulin Rouge, an off-Strip hotel famous for flouting Vegas racism of the time, gain community groups who work hard to attempt to restore them to their former glory. Many consider the Moulin Rouge a cultural treasure, for example, due to its role in breaking down racial barriers and serving as a regular secondary performance locale for nearly every well-known black entertainer who graced the stage in Vegas before desegregation. Such efforts are an uphill battle, particularly in the face of apathy, pursuit of the almighty dollar or continued bigotry towards minorities, as in the case of the Moulin Rouge.

stories above. None but those whom Malcolm – or a fellow long-standing member of the chantry – trusts will ever be shown the Sun Chamber. The sanctum is cloaked by arcane methods, and is not listed in the building plans on record at City Hall.

ALADDIN RESORT AND CASINO

This Middle Eastern-themed resort replaced the original Aladdin in August 2000. Despite the Arabic cupolas and mosque-like décor, the casino touts its London Club as the city's first European gaming club. Along with 21 restaurants and 130 shops, tourists can experience the 7,000-seat Theater for the Performing Arts, the techno, Top 40, Latin and House music of the Insomnia Nightclub and the smooth sounds of the Blue Note Jazz Club. Regular entertainers here include Lionel Richie, Bonnie Raitt, Lyle Lovett and the sexy musical comedy *Tease*. The Desert Passage and the sixth floor pool with a view round out the feeling of a storybook desert oasis paradise. Although much of the Arabic theme is ostentatious, there is nonetheless a Middle Eastern resonance here.

ALEXIS PARK RESORT AND SPA

Like a number of other locations along the Strip, this hotel is technically set on one of the side streets of Las Vegas Boulevard, and thus is often listed as "off-Strip" despite its close proximity. Alexis is a Mediterranean-style resort set on 20 beautifully landscaped acres which first opened in 1984. Luxury is the buzzword, with 500 designer suites, complete health spa, three outdoor pools, and butler service offered to the patrons. The hotel's 50,000-square-foot convention space can easily serve 1,200 participants. Fine dining can be found in the Pegasus Lounge, and the Pisces Bistro offers nightly entertainment year-round. What truly sets the all-suite, white stucco, red-tile roof hotel aside is that it has no neon and no gambling, and thus it attracts those who want to experience Vegas but stay in a "normal" luxury establishment. That might be why it's off-Strip.

ALGIERS HOTEL AND CASINO

The Algiers is one of the surviving dinosaurs of relatively early Vegas, having originally opened in 1953. The Art Deco-style hotel offers a mere 105 hotel rooms, but unlike at the monstrous megaresorts, you can park your car next to the entrance to your own room. The Algiers is centrally located on the Strip, a block and a half from the Las Convention Center and within walking distance of Circus Circus, the Grand Slam Canyon theme park and the Wet'n Wild water park. When relaxing at the lounge next to the kidney-shaped pool in the courtyard, it is easy to immerse oneself in the feel of the fallen adult playgrounds of past decades. Storytellers may allow mages minor Resonance-based bonuses towards Time Effects reaching back as far as 50 years if they are performed within the Algiers.

BALLY'S LAS VEGAS

The elegant Bally's opened its doors in 1973, but sweeping remodeling throughout the '90s ensures that the casino's touch of class includes every modern convenience. Bally's twin 26-story hotel towers offer over 3,000 guest rooms and include nearly 300 suites. Guest rooms used to be among the largest and most swank in the city, averaging 450-square feet with suites running anywhere from two to five times that size, until newer joints like the Venetian came into town. The refined Indigo Lounge offers nightly entertainment with various specialty acts. The Jubilee Theatre dazzles audiences with an explosion of glitter and sound, including the sinking of the Titanic, Samson destroying the Temple of the Philistines and a cast of singers and showgirls who have been called the most beautiful showgirls in Vegas and voted "Las Vegas' Best Dancers." Bally's also hosts the exotic and hometown beauties of the annual Hawaiian Tropic Western Regional Finals. Behind the glamour and polish, however, Bally's is a favored playground of the incestuous and ruthless Giovanni and Rothstein Mafia families. Rumors on the street claim that the Rothsteins are really crazed killers dressed in fancy suits who drink blood, mangle corpses and sleep with their cousins.

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

If you are running Las Vegas as a pure **Mage: The Ascension** chronicle, then this book contains everything you need. If you plan to introduce crossover elements from **Vampire: The Masquerade**, you might want to read the introductory stories from the **Guide to the Camarilla** and the **Guide to the Sabbath**, the Hunters Hunted portion of **Nights of Prophecy** and the Venetian section of **Havens of the Damned**. Bally's, Caesar's, the Venetian and the Mirage — each casino has some insidious seed of vampire influence hidden behind the lights. **San Francisco by Night** also notes that an important Tremere Chantry lies in Las Vegas. Of course, there is no reason you have to assume that anything from another game line is true for yours. You could easily replace predatory bloodsuckers with Nephandi, or ignore their presence altogether. The Giovanni and Rothsteins can be just two more Mafia families with particularly gruesome, but human, reputations. On the other hand, the Tremere might be just the tool to spark a revival of the Massasa War, as in the crossover book **Blood Treachery**. It is up to the individual Storyteller how much, if any, of the trappings of other games enter into her own.

BARBARY COAST HOTEL AND CASINO

Dating from 1979, this hotel has not kept up with its other central Strip, famous Four Corners neighbors like the Flamingo Hilton, Caesars, the Bellagio or Bally's. Nonetheless, it is a gem of comparably smaller size. The Barbary Coast is ostensibly themed after late 19th century San Francisco saloons, including Victorian chandeliers, stained-glass signs and Klondike Annie waitresses with garters on their thighs. The casino boasts the largest stained-glass mural in the world, a Western Union wiring service and a comfortable brick plaza with wooden benches. Visiting Sons of Ether alternatively feel nostalgic or repulsed by the faux period.

BELLAGIO

The Bellagio inherited the 122-acre site of the legendary Dunes Hotel and Golf Course at the famous corner of Flamingo and Las Vegas Boulevard. The rooms are par excellence, in a league only shared by the Venetian and the special Palace Tower rooms at Caesar's Palace. Six pools, six whirlpools, three phones and high speed Internet access in every room, all just extras for the wonderland which strives to reproduce the atmosphere of the Italian town of Bellagio, which overlooks the resort waters of Lake Como. Extensive ballrooms, balconies overlooking beautiful gardens, internationally acclaimed restaurants, a huge fountain with a choreographed ballet of music, water and lights combine to turn Bellagio into one of the most beautiful of all Vegas casino resorts.

Entertainment includes the world-famous classic Cirque du Soleil and their spectacular dance and elemental entertainment "O." Owned by MGM Mirage, the Bellagio is certainly the equal of the Venetian in style and even larger and more ostentatious than Caesar's Palace. Times change, but for now the Bellagio is the largest and finest of the jewels on the Strip. Storytellers may desire to penalize mages who enact crass Effects but lower the difficulties for those with a sense of elegance.

BOARDWALK HOTEL AND CASINO

The Boardwalk used to be a Holiday Inn, and it hasn't risen much above that level of quality since. Currently owned by the MGM Mirage, the place has a reputation for poor service and its boardwalk carnival theme is like something out of a nightmare about Atlantic City. Possibly the best attraction is Trent Carlini performing as both the fat and the thin Elvis — the \$30 price tag just might be worth it if you are looking for a halfway okay rip-off act in a town of Elvis impersonators. You might also stay for the cheeseball band,

Purple Reign, and their Prince tribute; the Lighthouse Lounge has a tribute to Motown and R&B on a regular basis, as well.

BOURBON STREET HOTEL AND CASINO

This small casino would seem to be on its way out. The onsite nightclub features look-alike female performers in their Ladies of '80s venue, and there isn't a live game to be found in the place. The casino makes its money from a large bank of outdated slot machines and cheap Creole- and French market- style restaurants. Other than that, it is a fairly convenient location to grab a cheap room and benefit from a short walk to the major events on the Strip. Your best bet if you want entertainment might be to wash down your Cajun dinner with the two free drinks and head across the street to Bally's. Storytellers may allow a Resonance-based bonus for mages attempting magic connected with New Orleans, or possibly even French or Creole targets.

CAESARS PALACE

Caesars is *the* theme-resort casino that changed the face of Vegas. With its August, 1966 opening, it sparked the endless game of one-upmanship that still burns up and down the strip today. Though Caesars has undergone a number of renovations over the past three decades, it continues to offer one of the top venues in town, benefiting from its elegant blend of modern convenience with classic Greco-Roman design. From the Olympic-sized pool (made in the shape of a Roman shield and inlaid with imported Italian marble), to the rotunda miniature of the city of Rome as it may have appeared 2000 years ago, to the staff's Romanesque costumes, Caesars Palace blends ancient and modern artistic finery.

The Forum Shops at Caesars opened in 1992 at a cost of over \$100 million, and present 240,000 square feet of stores modeled on an ancient Roman streetscape. Even with its late-era additions, Caesars seems to call out to antiquated forces. Visiting mages have reported Sendings of a decidedly antique nature, and archaic supernatural beings who happen upon the city seem drawn to the familiarity of the place. Some of them even seem interested in recreating the decadence and horrific debauchery of certain Roman eras. Roman-oriented magic benefits from the Resonance, even if less so than it might gain from the real imperial city.

HARD ROCK HOTEL

Another off-Strip property that is often billed as virtually on the Strip, this Peter Morton property is clearly an attempt to turn the popular Hard Rock Café chain into something bigger. The same rock and roll

A WORLD WITHIN A WORLD

The newer casinos in Las Vegas are huge structures, often referred to as megaresorts. A single grand casino usually combines the aspects of a large hotel or three, an extensive gaming hall, an industrial-sized outlet mall, a public stadium, at least one popular bar and one signature nightclub and a theme park. Many of them also contain golf courses, RV camping facilities, Olympic-size pools and/or multilevel parking garages. Generally these Las Vegas businesses are classified as hotel casinos, resort hotels or a combination thereof.

Whatever their designation, they are immense modern castles forged to the highest of expectations of decadence and titillation. It is not unreasonable to think of the casino megaresort as its own little world, complete with its own shopping mall, spa and food offerings. If the designers of a Las Vegas casino hotel had their way about it, you would never leave the casino. Perhaps their artistry in this field of design has not yet been perfected — God help the future visitors of the city should entities such as the Syndicate get its every wish in casino design.

The typical casino megaresort is a ready-made setting within the larger setting of Las Vegas. An entire chronicle could easily form around the happenings within a single hotel casino, just as the heroes of *Ocean's 11* indulgently center upon the casino they plan to rob. Most people return to homes and lives outside of the casinos, but those with the will to stay might manage to spend their entire existence within a single one of these miniature cities. Even if one does travel home for the morning, an engaging story might still revolve around one of the exemplars of gambling, a Las Vegas Strip casino. All you have to do is pick the casino that most appeals to you.

theme runs throughout the casino, and it attracts a similarly young and self-described hip crowd. Already dozens of famous acts have played here in the 1800-seat music hall called the Joint, including the Rolling Stones, Lenny Kravitz, the Eagles, Bob Dylan, Sheryl Crow and Tom Petty.

Among mages, generally only Cult of Ecstasy members stuck in the '70s and '80s are attracted to the place. The hotel has a Hard Rock Café on site, and it attracts the same clientele found in any other city, from Los Angeles to Atlanta to London.

CIRCUS CIRCUS HOTEL/CASINO/THEMATIC PARK

When Circus Circus opened in 1968, the gambling area featured live tightwire and trapeze artists performing over the heads of the clientele. It was not uncommon for one of the performers to fall into the net below and have to dismount and move, embarrassed, through the crowd to return to her spot. Currently the hotel resort features nearly 4000 rooms and seems determined to jumble its theme beyond recognition. The Adventuredome Theme Park, opened in 1993, reflects a Southwestern history complete with ancient dinosaurs, Pueblo Indian cliff dwelling, and undersea prehistory; it continues to be primarily a venue of carousels and clowns underneath five acres of pink, UV-resistant insulated glass.

Circus Circus inherited the vision of Caesars Palace but continues to struggle to gain its classic refinement. Mages familiar with the place note that a powerful Resonance of chaos and unreality seems to be building up within the structure. Certainly, it is ridiculous to suggest a Marauder is controlling this development, but it is not beyond belief that the cacophony of themes might invite a strong dynamic force to consider finding a new playground. The mages of the Black Pyramid Chantry do not consider the rumors of Technocracy hits in the Hot Shots Laser Tag arena credible, though they do pay attention to reports of appearances by the mysterious Marauder known as The Mime.

EXCALIBUR HOTEL AND CASINO

The Excalibur is a shining white castle surrounded by a moat and road-sized drawbridge. After-dark visitors are greeted hourly by a mighty battle between a mechanical Merlin figure and a fire-breathing dragon. Since June of 1990, the casino has been presenting a glittering medieval adventure to visitors from around the world. Towering stone walls, the Tournament of Kings, the Medieval Village, and omnipresent suits of armor combine to evoke the sense of King Arthur's court. The Excalibur is another property of the Mandalay Resort Group, and modern attractions include the Chippendale Dancers, a steakhouse, a piano player and Italian food. Nonetheless, the Excalibur manages to enchant thousands of visitors with its illusion of medieval grandeur. The shining white castle evokes a sense of a time of pure heroism, and mages may find that Resonance useful.

LAS VEGAS HILTON

The Hilton is set one block off the Strip, immediately next to the Las Vegas Convention Center. The 30-story hotel casino towers over 80 acres of beautiful

landscapes. The Hilton is one of the busiest casinos along the Strip, averaging about 2.5 million guests annually. From glass walls and brass revolving doors to marble lobbies and imported crystal chandeliers, the Hilton is an exquisite world-class resort. In addition to the Crystal Lounge's shows, the Hilton in Las Vegas presents the Righteous Brothers, Commodores, and Kenny Rogers. Without a doubt, the Vegas Hilton leaves hotels like the Hyatt in the dust, presenting as much of the glitter and wonder of Vegas as possible.

MGM GRAND HOTEL/CASINO

Kirk Kerkorian opened the MGM in December 1993 at a cost of \$1 billion. MGM has long been the largest entertainment resort, with 30-story hotel room towers and the largest resort hotel casino in the world. The 112-acre resort combines hotel, casino and Hollywood theme park, and has 10 theme restaurants, a spa, lighted tennis courts, two showrooms, over 5000 rooms — including 744 suites — and a 15,000-seat events center. Rick Springfield, David Copperfield, George Carlin, Paul Anka, Tom Jones, and the imported French Crazy Horse topless show *La Femme Theatre* all perform there regularly. The MGM also is home to Studio 54, a club inheriting original artwork and décor from the original New York nightclub.

The most famous feature of the MGM is the lion guarding the entranceway. Originally a visitor had to pass through an archway formed like a gigantic lion's mouth in order to enter the MGM grand, but the rising tide of big money Asian gamblers and their superstitious fear of descending into the royal predator's gorge changed all that. MGM spent millions of dollars removing the original lion, replacing it with a lion guarding the front doors rather than consuming those who pass. The MGM also maintains a multilevel lion habitat with a real pride of lions that often approach as close as an inch to onlookers. As befits its royal mascot, the MGM Mirage resort group is truly the king of major players in the city, owning more major casinos than anyone except perhaps the Mandalay Resort Group.

THE MIRAGE

The Mirage opened in November 1989 as the dream quest of Las Vegas legend Steve Wynn. Wynn made his first fortune in true Vegas style — he purchased a relatively worthless parking lot and bluffed the neighboring casino into thinking that he was putting a competing establishment right next door. After a few turns at downtown gigs, he created the opulent tropical Polynesian-themed paradise, the Mirage. The gold and white resort shimmers in the desert

heat like its namesake, complete with a magnificent lagoon surrounded by waterfalls and a volcano that erupts every 15 minutes after dark. A 20,000-gallon aquarium hosts sharks, dolphins and other sea life along one wall of the casino. Siegfried and Roy perform their famous illusions of magic here, and the casino is also home to a special habitat designed for their collection of beautiful white tigers.

The casino shares a 100-acre parcel of land with its sister casino, Treasure Island, which premiered in October 1993. Although no one seems to be able to track down the apparition, nor even verify its existence, numerous security and hotel staff over the years have reported brief glimpses of some hideous monster lurking about the Mirage, usually spotted on camera or in moments of presumably shared surprise.

TREASURE ISLAND

Every 90 minutes, the pirate ship *Hispaniola* battles the British frigate *Britannia* offshore from a small village modeled on Robert Louis Stevenson's famous novel, *Treasure Island*. This is Vegas, so the pirates always win the ship-to-ship cannon battle, managing to sink the *Britannia* beneath the depths of Buccaneer Bay. Treasure Island is also the permanent home to the French-Canadian performance troupe, *Cirque de Soleil*. Though they may perform elsewhere, particularly MGM Mirage properties, the showroom here was precisely built to their specifications.

Mages on the run sometimes specifically seek temporary refuge here, as the pirate theme lends an odd Resonance favorable to the rapsallion and underdog.

MONTÉ CARLO RESORT AND CASINO

The Monte Carlo originally opened as a joint venture between Mirage Resorts and Circus Circus, though the inexorable growth and conglomeration of economic hotel resort group giants now means it is shared by MGM Mirage and the Mandalay Resort Group. Its current status just might be a sign of the fate of the Strip. The Monte Carlo is carefully designed to replicate features from the famous Place du Casino in Monte Carlo in Europe, including 90,000 square feet of ornate fountains, beautiful arches, gas lanterns, domes, chandeliers, exquisite marble floors and a Gothic design area overlooking a fabulous waterpark. The master magician Lance Burton performs tricks and illusions here nightly with a cast of 60 doves, a flock of ducks and Elvis the parakeet. Juggler Michael Goudeau joins Burton for laughs and excitement as he keeps a seemingly impossible menagerie of objects afloat simultaneously.

NEW FRONTIER HOTEL AND GAMBLING HALL

One of the lesser-known casinos of the Strip, the New Frontier is known perhaps as well for the failed or bad magic acts it has hosted over the years as it is for its other services. Nonetheless, the Lanai and Frontier towers hold 986 rooms, and guests indulge heavily in slots, race and sports booking. The casino also hosts a massive Bingo crowd, with a similar elderly demographic to such retirement havens as Florida and Palm Springs. Nothing about the New Frontier seems to be a frontier or new, however. Entertainment is mostly tributes to rock 'n' roll legends like Roy Orbison and Elvis, and to the late-night king, Johnny Carson. Regardless, the monstrous building is larger than some of the more posh or swank casinos that make a bigger impression on tourists.

NEW YORK-NEW YORK HOTEL AND CASINO

Complete with its own Statue of Liberty, Times Square and Coney Island, the New York-New York casino features the color and flavor of the Big Apple. The duplication of the real city is sometimes uncanny, with hotel towers resembling 12 of the classic skyscrapers of the Manhattan skyline and an array of games and restaurants reflecting nearly every culture that sought freedom on the shores of Liberty Island. Obviously, the Resonance of the casino favors the city upon which it is based; in fact, the roller coaster, *Boo!*, displays an eerie mix of gravestones, coffins, sketches and song that now seems a grim homage to the tragedy of September 11th. Luckily, the hilarious Rita Rudner performs almost nightly to break the air of misfortune.

RIVIERA HOTEL AND CASINO

The Riviera features one of the world's largest casino areas, a complete race- and sports-book bar, five specialty restaurants, a Mardi Gras food court, full-service wedding chapel and more than 30 specialty shops. The Crazy Girls dance and lip-sync burlesque show plays here and attracts a large crowd. *The Evening at La Cage* production also plays, showcasing female impersonators led by Frank Marino as Joan Rivers. Dr. Scott Lewis also performs as the comedy hypnotist. The Riviera isn't so different that it will change your life, but it is nonetheless filled with enough Vegas weirdness to keep you from experiencing normalcy for a weekend or two.

SAHARA HOTEL AND CASINO

Often called "the Jewel of the Desert," the Sahara combines much of the best of old Vegas with the new.

Recent renovations — costing over \$100 million — include a 5000-square foot heated pool, updates to the NASCAR Café, and guest rooms decorated with a Moroccan theme. The Sahara Speedworld is a full-throttle, virtual-reality, Indy-race-car thriller billed as the most intense virtual experience on the planet. Casino magician and aeronautics lover Steve Wyrick incorporates helicopters, jet engines and other aircraft in his show; management doesn't talk much about some of the early "kinks" in his act.

SAN REMO CASINO AND RESORT

With only 711 rooms, the San Remo makes customer service its signature goal, advertising "Service You Can Bet On," a variety of restaurants, and a year-round heated pool. The Money Club casino room was recently voted the number one slot club in town due to its points redemption program with Cucchi's Gift Shop and Players Emporium. The Showgirls of Magic at the Parisian Cabaret are a delightful blend of illusion and dance. And if you get an urge to visit one of the larger casinos, the MGM Grand is just across the street.

STARDUST RESORT AND CASINO

The Tangiers, playground to Nicholas Pileggi's *Casino* gangster and bookie Nicky Santoro and Sam "Ace" Rothstein, is a storybook version of the real Stardust casino. The real life Anthony Spilotro and Lefty Rosenthal lived out the movie's tale here, and helped bring an end to the welcome that the mob once enjoyed. New expansions and remodeling ensure that the world-famous race and sports book, six restaurants, eight cocktail lounges, shopping mall, video arcade, two pools and conference center keep the 2340 rooms filled most of the time. Downstairs, Vegas immortals such as Wayne Newton, Don Rickles, and Andrew "Dice" Clay keep guests entertained. Newton alone has performed over 25,000 times in the City of Sin. In the World of Darkness, the shadow of the Mafia has not completely left the Stardust. The Vegas godfather Mr. Manelli continues to command extensive influence in the casino even from his perch at the Golden Nugget.

TROPICANA RESORT AND CASINO

The Tropicana opened about a decade after Bugsy Siegel's dream, the Fabulous Flamingo. Since 1957, the Tropicana has represented classic Las Vegas in style. The casino boasts 1875 rooms, which is far less than the new monstrosities but leaps above the slot joints of the old city. The majority of rooms lie in the Paradise Tower or the Island Tower, with amenities comparable to any other deluxe casino room. The Garden Rooms are located in three-story buildings close to the pools and

casino playing area. The five-acre waterpark located between the twin towers features a special swim-up blackjack table area with waterproof games and money dryers. The Tropicana is the largest of the old casinos, and therefore hosts the largest collection of Nevada casino memorabilia in the world. It is also home for the Illusionary Magic of Rick Thomas, the only major magician to regularly play in the afternoon rather than the evening.

WESTWARD HO HOTEL

With only 777 rooms, the Westward Ho is another of the smaller casinos on the strip, but it cannot boast the history or glory of its competitors. Instead, the Westward Ho tries to bill itself as the "friendliest" casino on the Strip. Gimmicky additions include the Grubstake Jamboree Steak Barbecue, Fabulous '50s Do-Wop Dinner, Ho-Waiian Luau Dinner and the Ca-Fae Buffet, plus a 24-hour deli and seven pools with whirl-pool spas.

HARRAH'S LAS VEGAS CASINO HOTEL

At nearly 80,000 square feet, Harrah's is neither a giant among casinos, nor one of the small fries. It is conveniently located near the center of the Strip, and offers the same amenities as any other casino. It does present *Skintight*, the only semi-naked dance presentation on the Strip to present both male and female models, but the thing that makes Harrah's a recognized name in states far away from Nevada is its numerous deals with reservation casinos across the country. Paiutes, Iroquois and Cherokees alike have learned the fine art of tax-free casino management from Harrah's and federal Native American legislation loopholes.

IMPERIAL PALACE HOTEL AND CASINO

Short of the MGM moving its lion, the Imperial Palace casino is probably the best indicator that Vegas takes Asian gambling money very seriously. From Polynesian to Hawaiian to American chic, the hotel presents the world surrounded in Asian décor. The Imperial Palace Auto Collection and the free School of Gaming combine with a comprehensive array of shops, services and even a wedding chapel to let the Imperial cater to a specialized Asian audience, their favored clients.

PARIS LAS VEGAS RESORT AND CASINO

Park Place Entertainment Corporation opened the Paris on September 1, 1999. Nearly 3000 rooms and 83,000 square feet of casino space bring the charm of Paris to Sin City at a price tag of \$760 million. From the

50-story Eiffel Tower to Parisian street scenes and European boutiques filled with world famous brand names, the hallmark of the Paris Casino is authenticity. Of course no French setting would be complete without French cuisine and entertainment. Obviously Vegas mages desiring any sort of French-born artistry or Resonance need only look here.

STRATOSPHERE HOTEL TOWER AND CASINO

Since its 1996 opening at the northern end of the Strip, the Stratosphere has been one of Las Vegas's most popular attractions. The Stratosphere is constructed as an 1150-foot-tall space needle design, with the pod near the top covering 12 floors. The tower is the tallest free-standing observation tower in America and the tallest building west of the Mississippi. It features a gigantic revolving restaurant and lounge, as well as three thrill rides — all nearly a quarter-mile from the ground. The Big Shot plunges riders down the side of the tower, while the High Roller is reputedly the highest roller coaster in the world.

During construction of the tower in 1994, Vegas legend Bob Stupak was the sole investor in the project, but his proprietorship of the Vegas World Hotel and Casino next door was not enough to prevent financial setbacks. Ultimately, Stupak sold 85 percent of his

interest to an old poker buddy, Lyle Berman, and thousands of investors in the newly incorporated public company. Among the contributors were Winston Stephens and the Lionheart Developments real estate investment house. The Vegas World Hotel closed its doors and reopened as part of the Stratosphere property.

The Cloud Room Construct

Probably unknown to Stupak and Berman, Stephens has established a Technocracy presence in the Lionheart Developments offices he maintains in the tower. The result is a Construct, which takes advantage of a rare and very weak aerial Node whose plans the Stratosphere "happened" to include. The Syndicate Construct is a rating 1 Node commanding a view of the entire city. The Cloud Room boasts a high-tech rig of communications gear and an array of soundproofing and electromagnetic isolation defenses.

Syndicate practices hardly demand that the Construct divert excessive resources from more important ventures, so it manages to keep a hand in the operation of the Stratosphere without ever having to own more than a fraction of its stock. The sensitive nature of most other Technocratic work in the Vegas area renders the Cloud Room the most suitable site for inter-Convention meetings. Even General Martin



could easily get a furlough to visit the casino should he so desire, and he would merely be one unknown face among thousands who enter the tower. It is up to the individual Storyteller to determine additional defenses for the Construct according to the nature of her chronicle. Should you desire a high-paranoia game, keep the Construct subtle yet residual as it records data for future tracking purposes. If your chronicle is a bit fantastic in its application of magic, you might even assume the pod has a special reason for its space needle appearance.

VENETIAN CASINO RESORT

For years the Sands Hotel and Casino banked upon its nostalgic appeal. Throughout the late '50s and early '60s the Copa Showroom hosted the Rat Pack: Frank, Dino, Sammy and Lena. The hotel gardens and pool area remained virtually unchanged from its appearance in the defunct Las Vegas News Bureau's classic publicity photo of a "floating" crap game. Traditions such as a free coffee mug for every visitor ran for 50 years — and millions of mugs. In the early '90s, the casino even completed a number of renovations, including the addition of the Xanadu restaurant. Nonetheless, a higher bidder came along, and the Sands was destroyed to make way for the Venetian, which opened May 3, 1999.

As the Venetian's name suggests, it is modeled on Venice, Italy. From the architecture to the artificial canal complete with gondolas, the resort reflects the stunning opulence of Venice in fine Vegas style. Renaissance images give way to a 35-story hotel rising from the center of the resort, but the theme pervades nearly the entire place. Some areas, including the Regency Room, serve as intentional throwbacks to the décor of the Sands, designed to capture the nostalgia and flavor of the fallen court of the Rat Pack.

Visiting mages with an interest in ghosts and death magic claim that the Venetian offers more than a living recreation of the Sands. A few Euthanatos claim that it has been built over the spectral skeleton of the prior casino and harbors some dark force of jhor. Spiritual scans of the building from the outside reveal only a shadowy Resonance, but inside the Venetian the Lower Umbra is a frightening place filled with the spiritual remnants of suicides and clandestine murders from the past five decades. Storytellers interested in crossover might check the Venetian chapter of the **Havens of the Damned** sourcebook. Otherwise, it is a relatively simple matter to create terrifying tales using the wraiths from **Mage: The Ascension**, pg. 282. For mortal visitors, the Venetian offers one of the finest

venues in town, and any eerie feeling is likely to be mistaken for nothing other than a sharp edge of nostalgia for the Old World.

DOWNTOWN

If the Strip is the heart of "Lost Wages," then downtown is its soul. Here the San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad sold the original 1200 lots that transformed Vegas from a collection of tents to a boomtown in two days. The casinos that litter downtown Las Vegas are almost universally older, less ostentatious and much smaller than the castles of light that dot the Strip. To this day the twin neon cowpokes, Vegas Vic and Vegas Vicky continue to bring a glowing Western motif to the soul of the city.

GLITTER GULCH

The center of downtown Las Vegas, known as Glitter Gulch, is the four-block section of Fremont Street which starts at Main Street. The Fremont Street Experience is a space frame canopy nearly five football fields in length, whose two million lights shine down upon the open air mall below in place of the sky. About three dozen high-speed computers coordinate six-minute shows which are presented ever hour after

THE LAS VEGAS UNDERGROUND

In the real world, huge tunnels underlie parts of Las Vegas in order to accommodate the amazing degree to which water can rapidly collect and flood an area with nothing but desert sand to hold it back. These tunnels provide drainage on the occasions that significant rainfall strikes the area, but remain unused much of the time. In addition, the busy thoroughfares of the Strip are unable to endure the treacherous traffic that sometimes fills them and still allow for things like delivery trucks, fire trucks and ambulances with any degree of facility. Thus sections beneath the Strip serve as underground streets where the metric tons of food, alcohol and toiletries can reach the thriving miniature cities of Las Vegas Boulevard South. In the real world, the homeless street people tell of "trolls" living in the darkness of the tunnels. In the World of Darkness, their tales just might be reflections of the truth. Bygones may lurk beneath the ground, dating from ancient Anasazi times, or perhaps somehow connected to their disappearance. Other supernatural beings might also find the dark tunnels to their liking and prove dangerous and territorial to those who test their underground lairs.

dark. The canopy display consumes the electricity necessary to power 2,000 homes. The Fremont Street Experience is the largest electric sign in the world, out-scaling the number two title holder, the Las Vegas Hilton's sign, by 50 to 1. It is common for Virtual Adepts and others of their ilk to play tricks with the lights, leaving messages or driving enemies into unexpected fits of epilepsy.

BINIÖN'S HÖRSESHÖE CASINÖ AND HÖTEL

The founder of this casino, Benny Binion, was a former bootlegger who came to Vegas from Texas in the '50s to set up shop legitimately. Binion's offered only cheap food and gambling without the fancy entertainment and without the fancy hotel. It boasted the highest table limits in the world. In 1988, Binion purchased the Mint next door, knocked out the wall and combined the two casinos. Binion passed away in 1989, leaving his club to his son Jack. Binion's is a full block long, divided between the rustic Wild West feel of the original Horseshoe and the modern casino atmosphere of the West Horseshoe. The casino is home to the World Series of Poker, usually airing in April and May, with a \$10,000 buy and a \$1 million first prize. One of Binion's tourist attractions is the complimentary option to pose for a picture in front of 10 crisp, real \$10,000 bills.

CALIFÖRNIA HÖTEL CASINÖ

This joint features a Hawaiian theme, despite the name. In fact, aggressive advertising by the Boyd Corporation has long ensured that it is a major tourist spot for visitors from Hawaii. The California offers nearly 800 rooms at the corner of 1st and Ogden.

EL CÖRTEZ HÖTEL

El Cortez is the oldest remaining casino in Las Vegas, opening on Fremont street in 1941 to a crowd of cowboys who still rode horses around town. The casino is very much out of date despite a newer wing addition bringing it to approximately 60,000 square feet, but it offers a wealth of history, low table minimums, cheap food and large portions. The casino still bears a Resonance dating to the end of the Western days of Vegas.

FITZGERALDS HÖTEL AND CASINÖ

Fitzgeralds originally opened in June 1980, but a group of Reno businessmen purchased it and reopened it on St. Patrick's Day in 1988 with a strong Irish theme. The Fitz calls itself the Luck Capital of Las Vegas and is covered in leprechauns and four-leaf clovers. It partnered with Holiday Inn in 1996 and was purchased by Majestic Investor in late 2001.

FOUR QUEENS HÖTEL AND CASINÖ

The Four Queens is located along the Glitter Gulch and features four painted playing cards — queens — in the pavement out front. Inside, the Guinness World Record for the largest slot is the Queen's Machine, a slot machine the size of a motor home that can be played by up to six people at a time. The original 120-room casino opened in 1964 and was dedicated to the owner's four daughters; today with 690 rooms, it has grown into one of the jewels of downtown Vegas.

GÖLD SPIKE HÖTEL AND CASINÖ

Close to old Block 16, with a large bank of one-cent video poker machines, the Gold Spike is a magnet for desperate, hardcore gambling addicts. Table limits are low as well, and the whole place has the feeling of a hidden zone behind a veil of cigar smoke.

GÖLDEN GATE HÖTEL AND CASINÖ

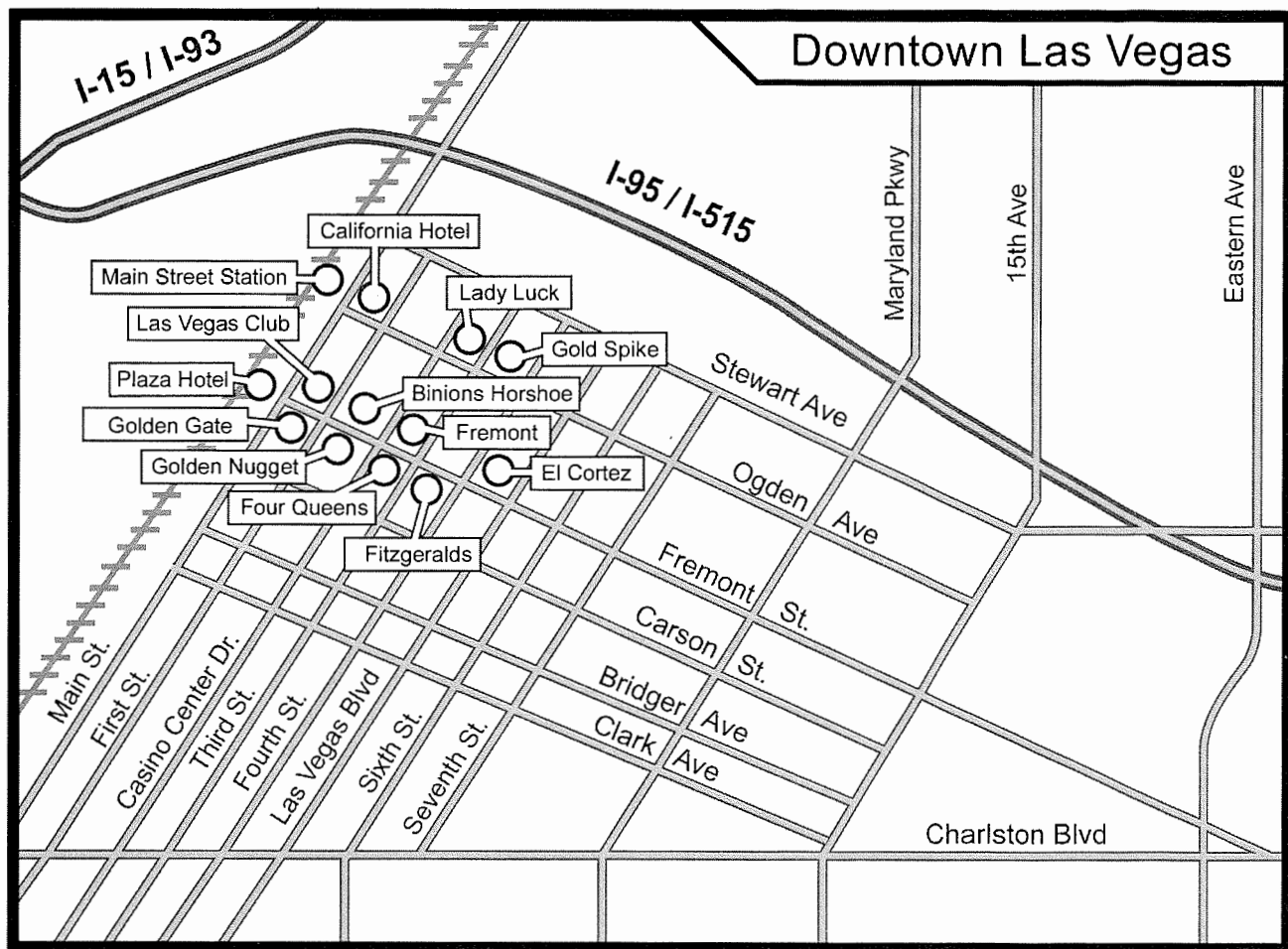
The Golden Gate opened in 1906 at One Fremont Street and continues to present Bay City-style décor. The San Francisco-themed casino is one of the smallest in Vegas though its location on Glitter Gulch makes it part of a light display larger than the MGM. The Golden Gate continues to offer a bed and breakfast atmosphere set alongside the electronic magic of the Fremont Street Experience. Like other older casinos, the Golden Gate attracts mages with an interest in the past.

GÖLDEN NUGGET HÖTEL AND CASINÖ

The Nugget is the only downtown casino that reviewers consider elegant. Steve Wynn acquired the hotel in the '70s and tore down its famous, 30-year-old postcard sign, but the inside glitters like its namesake. Visitors can have their picture taken with the world's largest gold nugget, a 63-pound Australian one that is kept behind plate glass in the casino lobby. Because of its downtown location, the Golden Nugget has become somewhat of a grind joint. It is still a viable force in the city's political power structures, however, primarily because the chief of the Vegas Mafia families, Mr. Manelli, holds court there.

LADY LUCK CASINÖ AND HÖTEL

The Lady Luck is primarily known for the mini-tournaments held there. Players from all over Vegas come to hone their skills before chasing larger poker jackpots on the Strip. Players can see the Gold Spike across the street through the large picture windows lining the casino walls. Some mages believe that the hotel must be home to the spiritual essence of the mythical Lady Luck as she manifests in the City of Sin.



LAS VEGAS CLUB HOTEL AND CASINO

This downtown casino is renowned for having the loosest rules for 21 Blackjack in the city. Gaining from this advantage requires exceptional skill at the game, but that just makes it popular among professional gamblers. The Las Vegas Club also has a strong sports theme, with sports memorabilia lining the walls and dealers wearing baseball shirts.

SANTO BOYD'S FREMONT HOTEL AND CASINO

The Fremont is one of the oldest casinos in town, dating back to 1956, and its lights are an addition to the brilliance of Glitter Gulch. The Boyd Corporation purchased it in 1992 and spent five years remodeling. The Fremont has one of the oldest sports and race books in the city, and it is popular with gamblers who prefer that sort of game. Las Vegas legend Wayne Newton debuted in the lounge of the Fremont thousands of shows ago.

BLOCK 16

Between Stewart and Ogden on Second Street (renamed Casino Center) lies one of the hidden secrets

of Las Vegas. From the original days of Vegas, when the city lots sold out in two days in 1905, this block became home to an underground pit of sin. Originally prostitutes and saloons hawked their wares from open windows and only the religious-minded Mormons seemed scandalized. When work began on the Boulder Dam project, the federal government began to pressure Vegas to close down Block 16, but succeeded only in making city leaders require weekly checkups for the working ladies. Instead, the government built Boulder City and left Vegas to its open secret. When the City of Sin became host to a military base during the war, however, the Feds took the issue more seriously. They officially forced Block 16 to shut its doors forever.

Or so they thought.

Saloons and houses of ill repute, including the Gem, Red Onion Club, the "unmarked wooden structure" and the Rye and Thackery went out of business and never recovered. The infamous Arizona Club and the notorious joint known as the Arcade closed their doors for a time. The Arcade would remain closed for decades, but the Arizona Club reopened in secret

shortly thereafter. Soon the underground club (literally underground, this time) became home to the center of the darkest vices in Vegas. Block 16 grew again, this time as a twisted knot of basement clubs and private rooms, each catering to a different subset of the dregs of humanity and each hidden beneath the old casino areas of downtown Vegas. Child pornography, bestiality, and worse have tainted the walls of the Block 16 under-district.

In recent times, the Arcade has also reopened its doors, now serving as a vile hangout for the illustrious Green Dragon. Connoisseurs come to the Arcade to play computer games of unspeakably realistic violence and degenerate sexual content. Some of them are drugged, mugged and forced to join the game cast. Block 16 is dominated by the corpse-skinned, ratty-haired underboss known only as "Deuce," whose predilections for pedophilia and homicidal behaviors are legendary among the degenerates who visit the Block. The Deuce rarely leaves the Arizona Club, except to enforce his illicit authority upon other denizens of the Block. Most of the Block is composed of dingy, peeling, paint-covered old brick and concrete sub-basements, but certain areas are riddled with high-tech cable and satellite wires that broadcast the often brutal carnal sins that pervade them.

LAS VEGAS VALLEY

The residential developments that feed from the trough of the City of Sin spread ever further across the Las Vegas Valley. The 1.4 million people assigned to the Las Vegas metropolitan area are really the total populace of Clark County, according to its 2000 census. More than half of the urban area actually lies outside Las Vegas city limits. Communities such as Paradise, Henderson and North Las Vegas are indistinguishable from the City of Sin save for their proud signs struggling to maintain a separate identity.

UNLV

The majority of the University of Las Vegas lies northeast of McCarran Airport, between Flamingo and Tropicana and off of the Strip. The William Boyd Law School and the business degree program train many of the new professionals who take the reins of power in Las Vegas. Unfortunately, the medical school can't reverse the rapid decay in Las Vegas' medical community: the withdrawal of a major insurance player from the Nevada market, and increasing malpractice suits are forcing doctors to pass along true costs to their patients.

NORTH LAS VEGAS

North Las Vegas boasted a population of about 125,000 as of 2000. While large areas of North Las Vegas are being rebuilt — or demolished to make way for new residential districts — the bulk of the area is run down. A lot of underworld figures, including the frightening Mr. Manelli, maintain houses that are out of place for their posh remodeling and luxurious interiors, as well as for the presence of armed guards. Other areas of North Las Vegas are downtrodden ghettos such as portrayed in Hunter Thompson's *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. Mexican and black minorities live in terrible conditions exacerbated by a corporate culture that continues to restrict them to the worst jobs and habitats available. Crime is rampant and police travel in packs when they cruise the area. Initiatives to restore, raze or resurrect North Las Vegas come before the city council on a regular basis, but few overcome the politics of the city and apathy of the public.

PARADISE

With a population of about 200,000 people, Paradise is the largest unincorporated community in the United States. The suburb lies southeast of Vegas, not far from the Strip. Like its southern neighbor, Henderson, Paradise is quickly outstripping the city proper in terms of growth.

MCCARRAN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Hundreds of flights enter and leave Las Vegas every day. McCarran greets visitors with a beautiful view of the casinos followed by a cacophony of slot machines. Because it is the major hub for travelers into and out of the City of Sin, Technocrats and information-based mages alike spy on those who enter the airport. Surreptitious grabs of camera feeds, of hidden microphones, or even of fingerprints left on the slot machines are commonplace. With 35 million visitors, however, no one can keep track of them all. Most of the time, only a famous — or infamous — person is spotted by mundane means, although sophisticated Effects might allow a mage a more complete, and more direct, investigation.

HENDERSON

Henderson forms the southern edge of the fast-growing Las Vegas metropolitan area. The 1990 census marked Henderson as America's fastest growing city. With a population over 207,000 people, Henderson is the second largest city in Nevada. It is separated from

the Strip by seven miles of residential sprawl, and from the Lake Mead Recreation Area by about a mile of mountains and desert. Henderson has its own themed hotel resort casinos, but they are newer and less renowned than the ones found on the Strip or in downtown Las Vegas. The best-known ones are probably El Dorado, the Sunset Station and the Fiesta-Henderson Hotel Casino. By the time of publication, the Green Valley Ranch Resort should be open as well. Henderson is the ultimate example of urban sprawl spreading farther across the Las Vegas Valley every year as the metropolitan area of the City of Sin grows at an uncontrollable rate.

CLARK, NYE AND MOHAVE

Most population statistics for Vegas focus on the citizens of Clark County. For many other purposes, the Las Vegas metropolitan area is assumed to cover all of Clark County and parts of Nye County, Nevada to the west, and Mohave County, Arizona to the east. Some would argue that it supports bits of Lincoln County, Nevada to the north as well as Inyo and San Bernardino Counties in California, but accepted density-based definitions of a metropolitan area would dispute this. The actual city limits of Las Vegas are dwarfed by the developments that surround it.

LAKE MEAD

Formed by the building of the Hoover Dam, Lake Mead has become a popular vacation and tourist spot for visitors to and from Nevada. The backed-up waters of the Colorado River cover 229 square miles and make Lake Mead the largest man-made lake in the United States. Swimming, fishing and houseboating are all popular activities. Divers can explore the deep lake water, including such hidden treasures as St. Thomas, an entire town immersed under water in 1937 after construction of the dam was completed. Dreamspeakers and Verbena often protest artificial constructs such as the Lake, and point to the drowned acreage and its lost ecosystems as proof. Sons of Ether defend the Lake by pointing out that it has greatly reduced the threat of floods to the entire area, including Las Vegas.

HOOVER DAM

Some of the worst floods seen in Nevada since ancient times occurred from 1905 to 1907. As the Colorado River washed over its banks, it inspired a flood of politics as well. As is typical in such cases, nothing

was done until even worse flooding occurred in 1916, when the Colorado River flooded much of Yuma Valley. The chief engineer and director of reclamation, Arthur P. Davis, proposed to control the Colorado with a dam of unprecedented height. Originally, the gigantic structure was destined for Boulder Canyon, from which the dam derived its name, but engineers discovered stress fractures in the canyon walls that forced them to move the project to Black Canyon, coincidentally placing it closer to Vegas.

Given the broad scope of the project, construction did not technically begin until the river was diverted in 1932. The physical structure of the dam was completed with the addition of the last concrete blocks in 1935; President Roosevelt dedicated Boulder Dam on September 30. The addition of massive generators designated N-1, N-2, etc. continued for a few years after that, and by 1938 Lake Mead extended more than 110 miles upstream. In 1947, Congress voted to rename the structure Hoover Dam in honor of President Herbert Hoover.

The largest hydroelectric facility in the world at the time it was built, Hoover Dam was a marvel of engineering and vision. The grand, terrible majesty of Sons of Ether technology straddled the canyon and harnessed the raw power of the rushing river. Hundreds of men died building the mighty structure, and the ecosystem of the entire area was drowned beneath millions of acre-feet of water. For a time, the Sons basked in the glow of their hubris as the Technocracy quietly usurped control of the wonder of science. But as the Grand Coulee Dam and later nuclear power eclipsed the grandeur of the dam, even the Technocracy abandoned control to the Sleepers who maintain it today.

BOULDER CITY

Federal contractors originally planned to house Boulder Canyon dam workers in Las Vegas. After inspectors examined the environs, they determined that the City of Sin would be too disruptive to their workforce. Instead they built a small city closer to the dam project, complete with unilaterally identical buildings and a stifflingly boring layout. Mage historians looking for signs of the Technocracy's first moves towards taking control of the Etherite project often point here. Certainly the early city showed all of the static organization and rigidity of Iteration X planners. Even today gambling remains illegal in the city, as though it were immune to the random elements that consume its neighbors.

VALLEY OF FIRE

Established as Nevada's first state park, the Valley of Fire covers about 56,000 acres 55 miles northeast of Vegas. It is named for the brilliant red, tangerine and lavender stone formations that cover the landscape and flare in the noon sun. Great boulders have worn into shapes reminiscent of ducks, elephants, beehives, cobras and pianos. Strange pictographs and petroglyphs covering many of the rocks are believed to be the work of the Anasazi Pueblo people who lived along the nearby Muddy River during the first millennium. The most impressive of these signs are found along a great flat cliff face, but no one seems to understand the message left from a millennia ago.

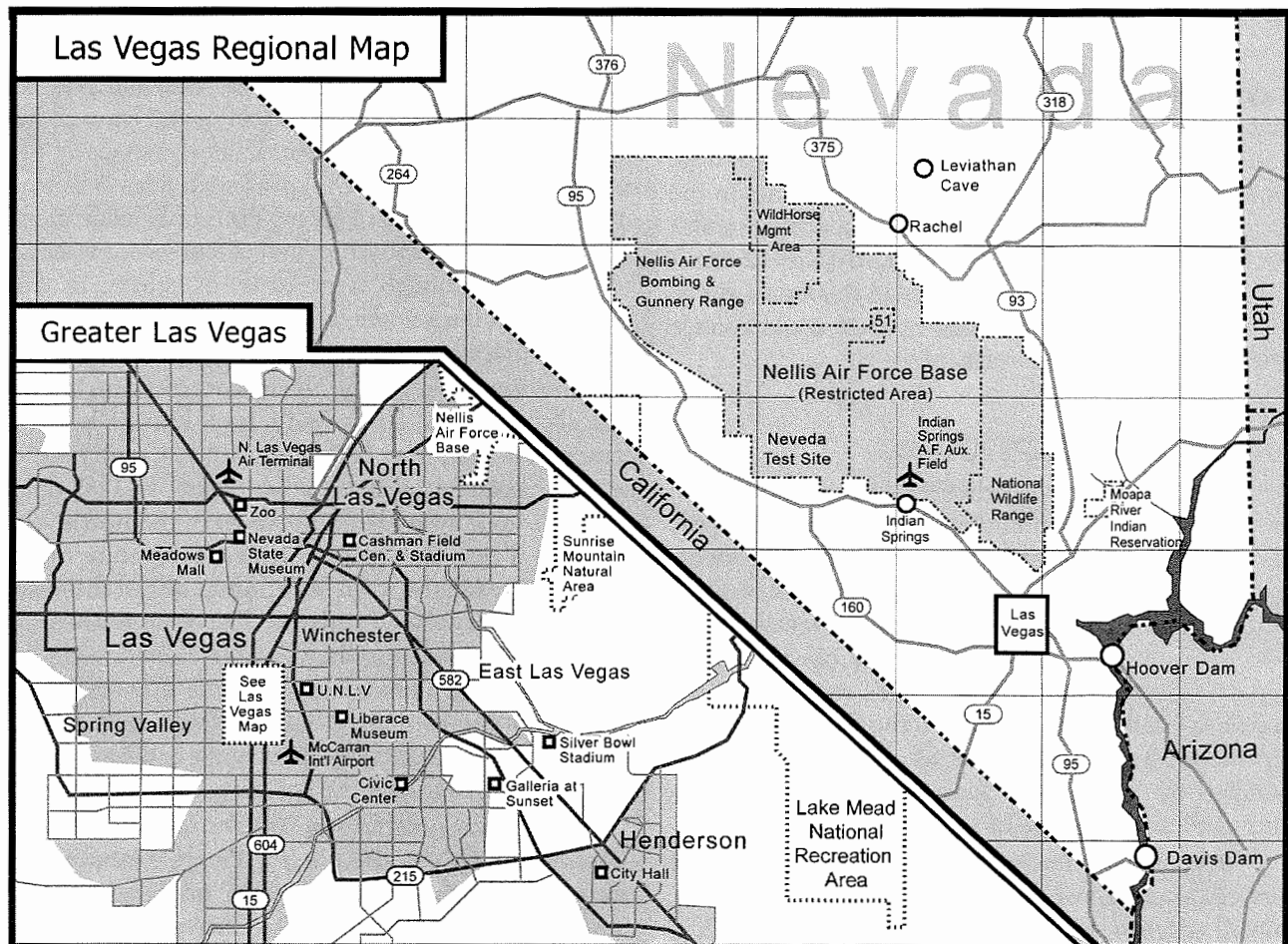
NELLIS AIR FORCE BASE

Federal authorities established the predecessor to Nellis Air Force Base during the First World War. With passing time, the military base grew into a vast region of land, including restricted areas — each designated solely with an obscure number, as in "Area II." Specific parts of the extensive military property include the Nevada Test Site, Lake Mead Base, highways for trans-

porting conventional munitions, the Nevada Gunnery Base and the Nellis Federal Prison Camp. Lake Mead Base and other surrounding military areas have passed through many federal hands. Originally, they went from being public property to the province of the Department of the Interior, followed by the Army Corps of Engineers, Navy Defense Atomic Support Agency (DASA) and then back to the Army when DASA (renamed the Defense Nuclear Agency) was no longer allowed to hold real property. Finally, all properties were transferred to the control of nearby Nellis Air Force base. Much of the military site remains actively used by the Air Force for training exercises or for munitions storage.

Advance Energy Commission Construct

The lands used by the military were once sacred to the Native Americans and later the Mormons. It should come as little surprise that they are home to mystic power or that the Technocracy has spent decades harnessing that power in a way that they can understand. Brigadier General Martin has built a career ensuring that his superiors allow him access to the important



corners of Nellis. Even the Major General who runs the Air Force base doesn't understand most of the research that goes on there, or even becomes aware of a lot of it. The Node used by the AEC is a Node (Construct) 4 that also hosts a potent Sanctum (Laboratory) 4. The General and the Commission maintain access to an incredible array of Backup and can Requisition inordinate amounts of deadly or experimental gear in a short period of time. Of course, Martin would prefer not to suddenly have his superior officers discovering the AEC operating within the base. It is difficult enough to continue to explain the mysterious Area 51's activities in terms of things like stealth bombers and the like.

Area 51

Just what Area 51 is should probably remain the province of the individual Storyteller. Some Storytellers may appreciate the idea that the Technocracy has captured some truly alien hardware, and is busy studying it — with live human guinea pigs, if necessary. Other Storytellers might wish to treat the stories inspired by Area 51 as glimpses of the Technocracy's own secret projects, very human in origin if a bit ahead of their time. Still others may prefer that this sort of conspiracy theory remain utter hogwash, spreading only due to propaganda or lunatic fringe elements.

Whatever the truth in your game, Area 51 has been a sort of Holy Grail to UFO seekers since the Roswell incident of 1947. Real life theories range from suggestions that the desert paintings of ancient cultures were landing strips for aliens, to claims that sightings in the area are solely the result of people spotting stealth bombers, fighters, and the like. Recently, UFO interest has seen a resurgence, probably in no small part due to the movie *Signs*. In *Mage*, this interest could change things in unpredictable ways.

SMALL TOWNS AND BIG TIME PROSTITUTION

Contrary to popular belief, prostitution is illegal in Las Vegas and throughout large parts of Nevada. Early battles over legalized prostitution pitted its proponents against large groups, including the Mormons of Nevada. Ultimately, a compromise was reached: Nevada's state laws deem prostitution illegal in any county with a population exceeding 250,000. This means that the populous Clark County, home to the City of Sin, joins northern counties, whose citizenship are boosted in numbers by their massive Mormon families, in forbidding the legal exchange of money for sex.

Every action creates a reaction, however. Escort services abound in Las Vegas, as do massage parlors, outcall services and strip clubs. Greasy-looking guys

roam the sidewalks handing out pamphlets and magazines filled with lurid pictures to anyone who will take them, even small children. Casinos offer titillating stages filled with erotic showgirls, often barely covered and sometimes essentially nude. One ad on a gigantic billboard proclaims, "Who cares if your friends don't believe you," with a photo of a sensual woman apparently guzzling whiskey with abandon.

Legal or not, prostitution does happen, but in Vegas it can be dangerous. Police statistics suggest that approximately one third of all hookers in the city have AIDS. High proportions of streetwalkers are addicted to alcohol, coke, heroin, or crack. Strung out, worn out and desperate, some may resort to setting their johns up for robbery, beatings or worse in order to score their next hit or keep their abusive pimps from breaking their faces or raping them. Embarrassed tricks prove loath to report to the police that they were taken by a hustler — female, male, or transvestite — and truly afraid to explain their stolen credit cards to their spouses. A more exclusive escort may be recording the act for blackmail purposes, should you happen to have an aversion to your significant other (or voting public) watching you screw some pickup in a hotel room, or finding out that you enjoy taking chocolate-smearing vibrators up the ass from leather-bedecked strangers. Urban legend even goes so far as to suggest that some unlucky stiffs fall prey to crooks who dope them up with roofies and leave them in bathtubs of icewater, their kidneys surgically removed. In the World of Darkness, such tales of horror are likely true. The need for organs is only made more desperate by the stubborn refusal of many Mormons to be donors, as though some of them believe in the Resurrection but somehow seem to feel God won't be able to replace any missing parts.

The other effect of the Nevada prostitution laws is that all one has to do to find a legal hooker is drive across the county line. Neighboring Nye County is the nearest haven for legalized prostitution, and it's only about an hour away. If you drive west and northwest from Las Vegas for about 60 miles along state route 160, you'll reach the town of Pahrump, site of the most famous of Nevada's brothels. The best known of Pahrump's brothels are the Chicken Ranch, after its namesake in the movie *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas*, and Sheri's Ranch, both of which continue to offer legal prostitution despite endless attempts by offended groups to end the practice.

Continuing north along 160, the town of Crystal, Nevada is home to the Cherry Patch, Mabel's and Madam Butterfly's. Farther north on Highway 95, Amargosa Valley is home to the Cherry Patch Ranch

2. Even farther afield, Angel's Ladies Ranch calls Beatty, Nevada home, and across the Esmeralda County line, Shady Lady Ranch lies along Highway 95. Most of the brothels advertise on the Internet, with the Cherry Patch and its second location Cherry Patch Ranch 2 even providing an online menu at www.cherrypatchwhorehouse.com. Of course they have trouble competing for attention with the endless parades of easily accessible pornography that entrepreneurs of vice or even fiends like the Green Dragon provide on the World Wide Web.

YUCCA MOUNTAIN

A pellet of nuclear waste the size of a pencil eraser can kill an unprotected person in less than five minutes.

— Steve Kanigher and Mary Manning, *Las Vegas Sun*

In October 1973, the members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) voted to cut oil exports to protest the Israeli invasion of Arab territories. Despite rich deposits in its own states of Texas and Alaska, the heavily fossil fuel dependent United States plunged into an energy crisis, complete with rationing, price gouging and gas shortages. The pressure to produce new sources of energy stood against public reaction to the minor nuclear disasters of the prior dozen years and changed the shape of nuclear energy politics. President Ford abolished the Atomic Energy Commission in 1974, severing civilian and military duties and creating the Energy Research and Development Administration and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Shortly thereafter, a disillusioned General Oscar Martin gathered together radical remnants of the department to secretly form the Advanced Energy Commission. In 1977 President Carter issued an executive order expressly forbidding the reprocessing of nuclear material. In 1981, President Reagan rescinded Carter's order and announced an initiative to create a permanent high-level radioactive waste storage facility. Two years later he signed the Nuclear Waste Policy Act. Since that time, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Department of Energy have been pursuing sites that satisfy the scientific specifications and political environment determined by the Act.

After two decades of politics and scientific study, Yucca Mountain, 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas, is the sole remaining candidate. Though the state governor and most representatives of Nevada formally stand against the site, President Bush and Congress green-lighted the project in 2002. Last-ditch political wrangling and public outcry is likely to continue

for years, but all indications are that ultimately it is a done deal. By 2010 the mountain will be the home of the collected nuclear waste of the entirety of the United States. Proposals are already in the works to temporarily house radioactive material onsite until permanent disposal is finalized. Ironically, Nevada has never employed nuclear power despite the extensive blasts performed at the Nevada Test Site, because hydraulic power plants such as that of Hoover Dam supply all its needs.

Yucca Mountain is a 6545-foot tall, conical mound of volcanic rock standing at the edge of the Nevada Test Site in Nye County. Government plans call for caskets of nuclear waste to be buried 1000 feet deep in its rock and yet remain at least 1000 feet from the deep water table beneath the surrounding desert. According to federal studies the volcano is long dead, and the numerous fault lines that lie in the area also remain inactive.

Regardless, the terrifying spiritual entity that managed to kill all of the Nephites — except Jedediah Baker (see Chapter Three) — before it was nearly destroyed seems to have taken up residence within the place. Should anyone trusted by the Celestial Chorus listen to Elder Baker, he will tell them of the “ten thousand years of death” the demonic spirit prophesied it would rule over when it finally retreated in January 2000. Demons often lie, but those familiar with Baker's story and Department of Energy documents are discomfited by the parallel with the 10,000-year danger posed by many of the radioactive waste elements.

GHOST TOWNS

Spawmed by the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in California in 1848, rushes to exploit the discovery of one mineral or another continued to create boomtowns for roughly another 60 years. Typically, scores of miners would flood into an area and begin unearthing gold or silver. Soon, others would follow to set up shops and supply stores to service the miners' needs. Successful mines garnered a reputation, and stores began to extend credit to those who worked their depths. Gradually, the mineral wealth would begin to fade away, and many miners would find themselves unable to repay the stores. Some shopkeepers saw the writing on the wall and moved on, to other boomtowns or to a larger city in the West. Others simply didn't see the decline, or kept hoping that new veins of ore would be discovered. Soon, they were in debt as well, owing their continued livelihood to various banks. Eventually even that wasn't enough. The ore ran out, the money ran out and finally

the people ran out, leaving empty structures to weather the future alone.

Financial crisis gripped the nation in 1907, and clever bankers pointed politicians at the graveyard of towns swiftly consuming the West. Afraid that the very bedrock of society would crumble, Congress soon moved to federalize the banking system. Whether greedy mortals or crafty Syndicate financiers conceived the initiative, it certainly set the stage for a single national economy. Of course, it didn't save the dying towns whose tragedies served to rile up public support in the first place. Soon enough, they were forgotten in the fury of the first World War.

The deserts of Nevada are home to many ghost towns; those closest to Las Vegas range from Rhyolite in eastern Nye County, to Delamar of Lincoln County and even White Hills near Lake Mead, which is technically just across the Arizona border in Mohave County. Other forsaken communities include Goldfield, Gold Point, Goodsprings and Potosi, which has the distinct honor of becoming a ghost town twice, once for gold and once for zinc. Many ghost towns have seen time on the silver screen as the settings for gunslinging Westerns, but if they receive visitors at all today it is merely the curious tourist. Mystics among the Dreamspeakers and Euthanatos are drawn here by the souls of the dead communities and their lingering Resonance. The Nephite faction, led by Jedediah Baker, has sparked an interest among Choristers in the fallen townships as well.

DESERET

On June 27, 1844 the founder of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, Joseph Smith, was shot to death in Nauvoo, Illinois. Within two years, hostile neighbors and government officials drove church members — the Mormons — westward out of Illinois, into unestablished territory. The young religion's new leader, Brigham Young, led the Mormon people into the Great Salt Lake valley in 1847. The millennialist group sought to establish a Kingdom of God on earth in the form of Deseret. Named for a Book of Mormon word meaning honeybee, symbolizing industriousness, the kingdom of Deseret included all of modern-day Utah and Nevada, in addition to the entire Colorado River Basin and a sea port in California. The cessation of territory to the United States by Mexico and the influx of non-Mormons sparked by the gold rush of 1849 led to additional clashes between the Mormons and the American government. The Mormons applied to become part of the United States as the sovereign State of Deseret, but the

government refused and instead created the Territory of Utah in 1850, with Young as the governor.

Mormon population continued to grow, as did that of non-Mormons. In 1855, Mormon missionaries settled in the area destined to become Las Vegas. They established a fort and worked to convert the local Native Americans, the Paiutes. Life was hard for the Mormons of Las Vegas, but ultimately it was conflict with other settlers that led to the abandonment of the area. In 1857 President Buchanan sent federal troops to Utah. The Utah War ended in 1858 with Young accepting a new governor and Buchanan pardoning those involved. Nonetheless, the kingdom of Deseret ceased to exist, and Utah was recognized in 1896 as the 45th state of the Union. Deseret lives on in numerous Mormon publications and corporations, and in a sense has spread far beyond the original boundaries it once claimed.

Home to a century and a half of powerful religious focus, the kingdom has certainly left an impression upon the infinite Tapestry of the spiritual world. Within the Dark Umbra, victims of anti-Mormon hate crimes, and even casualties of the 1857 conflict (on both sides), carry onwards with their unfinished business. Some ghost towns are truly inhabited by ghosts, and mages who encounter them should be wary. A few mages make it their business to help put the restless dead to rest, some by force and others by helping resolve their spectral ties. The Middle Umbra is home to wild stretches of desert connected by paths of moonlight and disturbed by dust storms and tumbleweed. It has been thought of as a land more hospitable to God than man by more than one culture.

Perhaps the strongest vision of Deseret can be found within the astral realms of the High Umbra. Of course, the realms of ideas are as plentiful as the minds that spawn them, but some realms are more abundant than others. Swarms of angels move like honeybees, drifting across the celestial gardens of the faithful and spreading the blessings of an angry god while the fires of the Apocalypse burn beyond the borders of the Kingdom.

BIG SPRING

Long ago the Anasazi people disappeared from the West, leaving behind mysterious ruins and pueblos. The land where Las Vegas is now became populated with Paiutes. Discovering the deep sources of artesian water that kept the land habitable, the Paiutes called their new home the Big Spring. Early Paiute settlers were as interested in the magical heritage of the Anasazi as they were in their hidden sources of water. Difficult to trace, and seeming to have vanished into the rocks, the Big

Spring became a metaphor for the flow of the energies of the world as much as it remained a symbol of giving life in the arid desert. Storytellers should allude to the unseen presence of an untapped vein of the primal essence of Creation.

Wherever the Anasazi have gone, their wards remain in effect and are potent indeed. In the spirit realms, guardians protect the location with misdirection and force. The guardians have never inadvertently revealed the Big Spring, even when protecting it from invasion. In the physical world, ignorance and pride serve to patch over the truth with linguistic confusion and false pretenses. While Pahrump is reputedly a Paiute word for Big Spring, the oasis of professional pandering is most likely connected by nothing more than a name. Similarly, it is doubtful that the Big Springs Golf Course is the wellspring of the ancient Anasazi paradise.

Storytellers who decide to run stories based around the discovery of the Big Spring may assume that it is one

of the earth-shatteringly rare 5-point Nodes. Even the potent Nevada-Nellis Node does not compare. You should freely decide where the physical epicenter of the Node lies and keep it a mystery to your players unless they manage to discover it for themselves. Suggestions include the original 10 acres that comprised the Paiute lands before they gained a reservation, or a hidden grotto along Canyon Wash in the Las Vegas Valley.

Given that apparently all of the Nodes Las Vegas has to offer have been seized by some supernatural faction, the allure of the Big Spring is likely to be strong indeed. On the other hand, you could just as easily decide that the Big Spring no longer exists as a physical place, and is a great place of wisdom located in the astral realms. Perhaps the Anasazi really did Ascend, as some mages believe, and clues to their success rest there, waiting to be found.

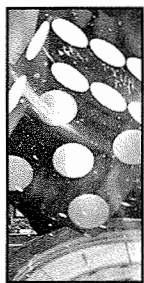
Or maybe they were destroyed by something still waiting to be unearthed after thousands of years....



CHAPTER THREE HIGH ROLLERS

It strikes me as unfair, and even in bad taste, to select a few individuals for boundless admiration, attributing superhuman powers of mind and character to them. This has been my fate, and the contrast between the popular estimate of [me] and the reality is simply grotesque.

— Albert Einstein, *People Weekly Special Collector's Edition: The Most Intriguing People of the Century*



Juice. It's what they call the ultimate in power and influence in Sin City. Some have it, some don't. They may be famous or notorious. Some hold keys to the city while others are wanted by law enforcement. Either way, these are the people who, for better or worse, make the rules (and the money) in Vegas. Any mage worth her bankroll will want to keep an eye out for them or their operatives.

Despite its location in the middle of the desert, Las Vegas beckons mages like an oasis calling out to a thirsty pilgrim. Word has reached some Tradition mages that the messages of the Rogue Council seem more plentiful here than perhaps any other city. Some come out of curiosity, others seek to tie their fortune to a time of change. Technocrats have held a degree of power in the World's Most Original City for some time, building a stronghold in Nellis and in the very casinos that feed the community. A sharp increase in incidents involving Reality Deviants and reality disruptions has the

Conventions concerned, however. Those who come to investigate the disturbances may be surprised to find that some of them are of their own creation.

More mages than one might expect call the Clark County area home — 25 in all — split into factions representing Tradition, Technocracy and other interests. Newcomers may be overwhelmed by the entrenched powers that already lie in the region. Nevertheless, more than 35 million tourists visit Vegas every year, and at any time at least a handful of transient mages intrude upon the local paradigm. The Tapestry is constantly being disturbed, and sorcerous residents can almost feel reality ripple in the wake of roving willworkers. Long-term (an extremely relative concept in Vegas) inhabitants have proven themselves capable of weathering the storms of change, and will prove dangerous adversaries for anyone who might interfere with their plans. Notwithstanding this, any new cabal, such as that of the players, is going to make an impact, quite possibly one that forever changes the magical fabric of Las Vegas.

CHANTRIES

There are two Traditionalist chantries in the region and two Technocracy Constructs.

THE BLACK PYRAMID CHANTRY

Centered in the Sun Chamber beneath the Luxor (see pp. 37-39), this multi-Tradition chantry is mainly led by Malcolm Henry, a Hermetic mage. It maintains a number of relations with out-of-town mages, who often use its ceremonial facilities when they pass through town, usually in exchange for information or Tass. However, not just any mage can request access — it requires connections and references, and a waiting period in which the prospective guest is watched.

Members: Ralph Cannon (Sons of Ether), Aurora Golden (Cult of Ecstasy), "Doc" Holly David (Euthanatos), Bettie Dyandra (Euthanatos), Malcolm Henry (leader, Order of Hermes), Butch Levi (Order of Hermes)

THE BIG SPRING CHANTRY

Dedicated to protecting the legendary Big Spring Node from discovery and exploitation, the mages of this group are usually associated with other earth-friendly activities. They don't have a central meeting place or even access to their

namesake's node (see pp. 54-55), for its location is a mystery even to them — a mystery they'll die to keep unsolved.

Members: Sarah Jamison (leader, Verbena), Jonny Meyer (incognito, Orphan), Jerry Tanner (Dreamspeaker)

ADVANCED ENERGY COMMISSION CONSTRUCT

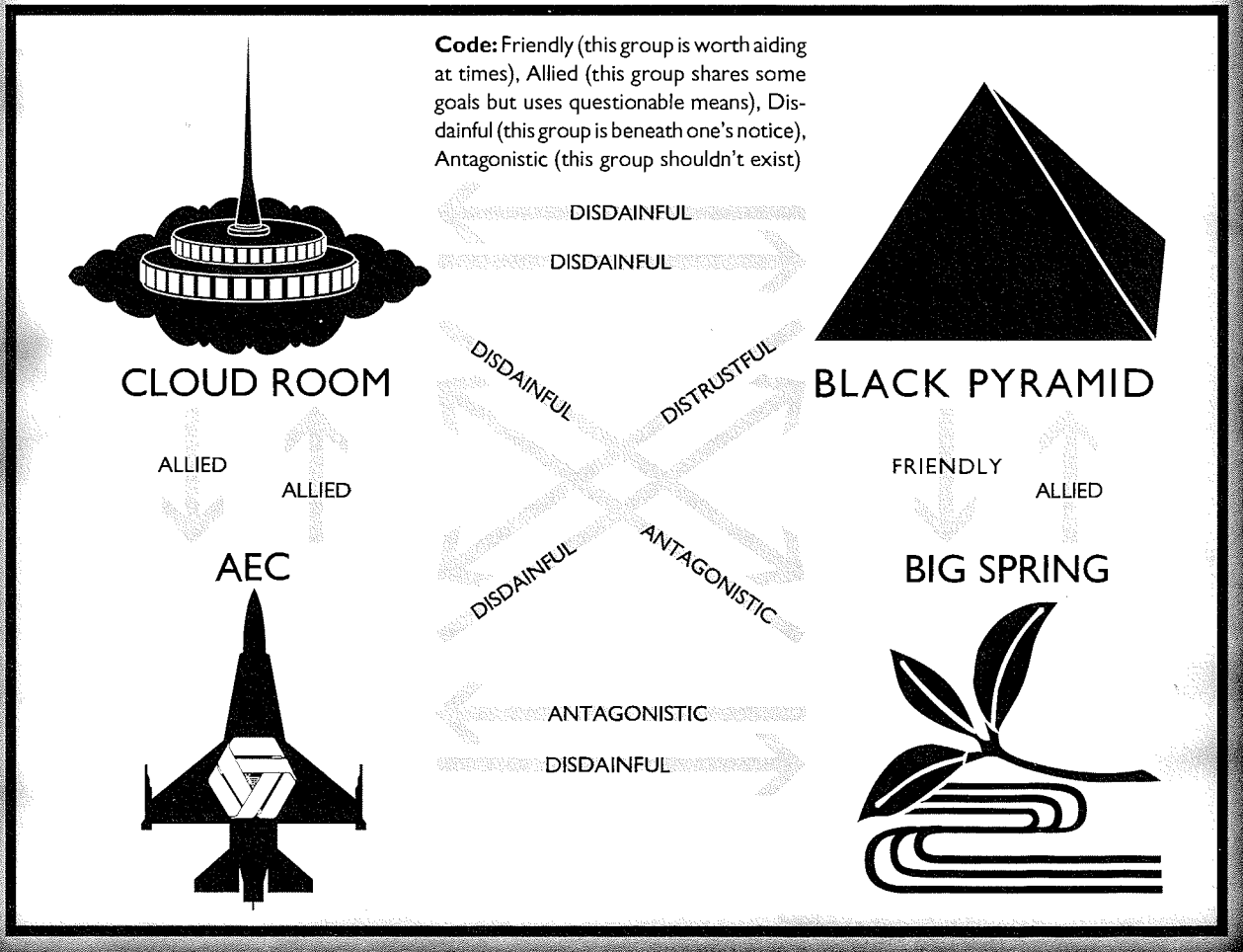
Located at Nellis Air Force Base (see p. 51-52), this Construct is dedicated to high-tech research with many results not yet approved for release by the Time Table.

Members: George Carreau (Syndicate), Major Thomas Houston (Void Engineers), Brigadier General Oscar Martin (leader, Iteration X),

CLOUD ROOM CONSTRUCT

Centered in the Stratosphere tower, this Construct is mainly dedicated to making money for its all-Syndicate membership.

Members: George Carreau (leader, Syndicate), Brian Mitchell (Syndicate), Winston Stephens (Syndicate), Carla Verde (Syndicate)



THE HOUSE: TECHNOCRATS



Southern Nevada largely escaped Technocratic notice until the Etherite construction of Hoover Dam began. Subsequently, the Union discovered rich magnesium mines, stole the vision of Bugsy Siegel and tested weapons of nuclear power. With the population of Vegas doubling every decade and new revenue records being set all the time, it would seem that the Syndicate is thrusting forward unabated. Stumbling blocks loom on the horizon, built by past hubris. Local resistance to the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste dump proposal surely reflects the righteous fear of a populace once left in the dark about the dangers of nuclear blasts that irradiated their homes and children. Apprehensive of unrestrained financial mayhem, Congress occasionally proposes bills to restrict online gambling. Nonetheless, science has conquered the desert and growth remains exponential. The calls of the Rogue Council shall have to be loud indeed to overcome the electric hum of a Vegas night.

ITERATION X

BRIGADIER GENERAL OSCAR MARTIN

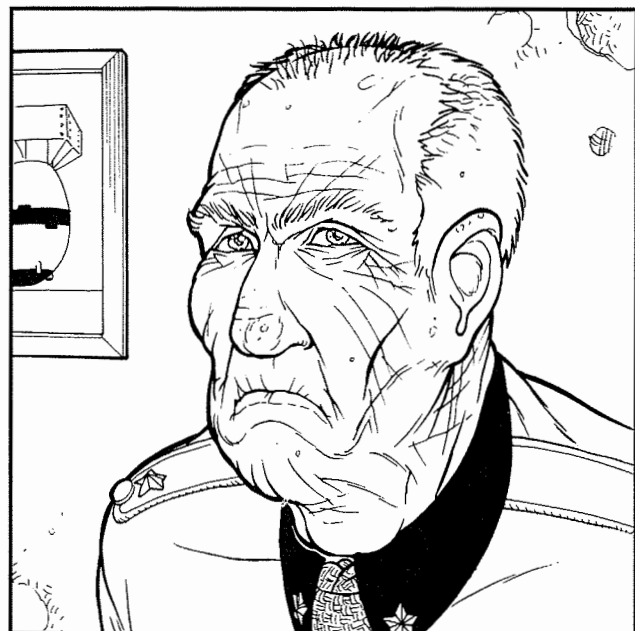
Advanced Energy Commission Construct

Background: At 82 years of age, Oscar Martin is constantly faced with people pressuring him to retire. At age 22, Lieutenant Martin leveraged his physics degree and military academy training to secure a position with the Corps of Engineers on the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos despite his distant German ancestry. As a young officer, Martin came to regard Einstein and Oppenheimer as near-godlike geniuses, and struggled to help bring the project to fruition. On Dec. 2, 1942, Martin was one of the lucky few who witnessed the first artificial chain reaction at the University of Chicago. That day, something changed within the lieutenant as well, and his inner genius awoke to the realization that he would soon join the illuminated scientists as one of the fiery “gods” of war. As Martin’s work came to the attention of Iteration X physicists, the Time-Motion Managers methodology initiated him into their new project, the Atomic Energy Commission.

On July 16, 1945, Manhattan Project scientists detonated the first experimental nuclear device. As the explosion hurtled to the heavens, Oppenheimer reportedly said, “Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds,” a paraphrased quote from the god Shiva in the Bhagavad-Gita. Within a month’s time, atomic fire consumed Nagasaki and Hiroshima and the Japanese surrender her-

alded an end to the horrors of World War II. The hubris of those who would shatter the building blocks of the universe was slow to come home to roost. It seemed as though everyone involved was either promoted or ruined in the subsequent years and, at first, Lieutenant Martin wasn’t sure which had occurred in his case. He was transferred out of Major General Leslie R. Groves’s command and re-assigned to the Nellis Air Force Range. The rampant anti-communism of the era destroyed his hero, Oppenheimer, leaving Martin suspicious of the New World Order and its internal arguments about political theory.

On the other hand, the Atomic Energy Commission grew in power, and Martin steadily climbed the ranks of its military segment. Nellis grew into an important military base, and his projects encompassed both its testing ranges and those of the Nevada Test Site. As evidence of the dangers of radiation and the military’s irresponsibility towards protecting American citizens from its effects mounted, factions in Congress moved to eliminate the Atomic Energy Commission in 1974. Its research operations were officially moved to the Energy Research and Development Administration and later to the Department of Energy, while the newborn Nuclear Regulatory Commission took over licensing and regulating nuclear power plants. Disgusted with the bureaucrats in Washington, Martin and his cohorts removed what AEC equipment and research they could salvage and turned their research primarily towards military ends. Most Americans are familiar with the results: Cold War with the Soviet Union, an overgrown



arsenal of death and generations of children who grew up with the nightmarish knowledge that humanity truly could destroy itself in a flash.

What even most intelligence experts don't know is that the AEC continues onward in the form of the Advanced Energy Commission. The Brigadier General runs experimental laboratories, exploring new forms of energy and their application. Whatever the labs find, they are careful to keep hidden until the Time Table allows its release, but interlopers would be wise to expect untold armaments of power. As a result of his position, the general has also inherited the unenviable position of guarding the ground-based Void Engineer operations in Area 51. It's ultimately up to the Storyteller just how much he has learned from their joint efforts.

Image: The general has the look of an old man for whom time has not been kind. His eyes are a watery pale blue, while his hair is stark white and sparse. His skin is withered from years of radiation and sun, and his body has lost the endurance and agility he once enjoyed. He is always dressed in his uniform, although the desert heat sometimes leads to informalities, such as rolled up sleeves. When seated, he slouches in weariness, and his gait is similarly careworn. When roused to anger or inspiration, however, the Brigadier General stands tall and takes command with an ease born of decades of authority.

Roleplaying Hints: You stand upon the bones of giants: Oppenheimer, Einstein, Fermi, Szilard, and Wigner. With genius and power come grave responsibility and difficult dilemmas, and you have felt only its shadow. What must "The Destroyer of Worlds" have felt? Your work is not merely to advance humanity into the future; like an archaeologist, you preserve and restore the works of the past masters as well. You can't help but feel that if the great minds still moved the hands of the Time Table that Oppenheimer's tool would not have stirred the storms of space that now plague mankind's final frontier. You take comfort in the idea that even if you cannot discern the solution, you will recognize when someone within your Advanced Energy Commission does.

Convention: Iteration X

Methodology: Advanced Energy Commission

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Autocrat

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4 (Logical), Wits 3

Talents: Athletics 1, Awareness 1, Brawl 1, Dodge 1, Intimidation 2, Leadership 3, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Firearms 2, Survival 1, Technology 1

Knowledges: Academics 3, Nellis AFB Area Knowledge 4, Computer 2, Enigmas 1, Law 1, Linguistics 1 (English, German), Military Lore 4 (atomic weapons and personnel), Science 4 (nuclear), Technocracy Lore 3

Backgrounds: Backup 5, Arcane (Cloaking) 1, Avatar (Genius) 2, Contacts 2, Influence 3, Sanctum 4 (Laboratory), Node (Construct) 4, Resources 4, Spies 3, Requisitions 5

Arete (Enlightenment): 5

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 1, Forces 5, Life 1, Matter 3, Mind 1, Prime 2, Spirit (Dimensional Science) 1, Time 1

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 2

Paradox: Usually only a point or two at any time.

Resonance: (Dynamic) Inventive 1, (Static) Authority 2, (Entropic) Radioactive 3

PROGENITORS

DR. DIANA HOLMES

Background: Even among the Technocracy there are those who have lived past their time. When the Germans tore across Europe during World War I, Diana was already an established part of the medical field. When they returned in World War II she was an avid student of their horrific advances. When they lost the war, she volunteered to help clean up their mess.

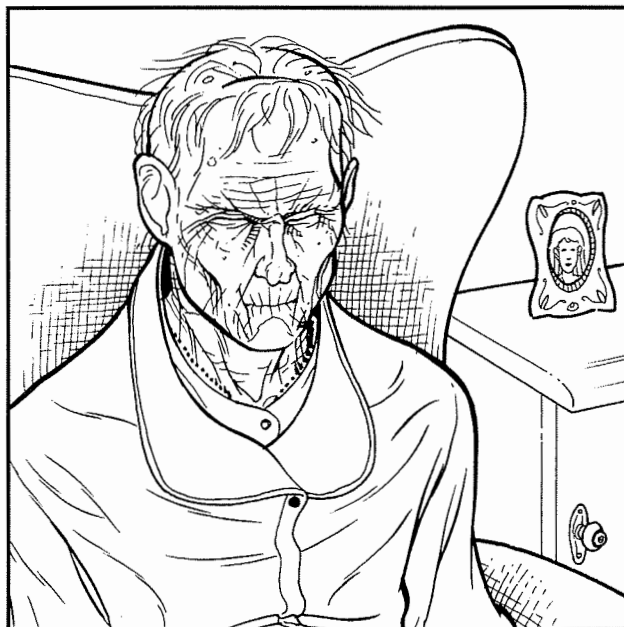
Diana was born to a wealthy Virginia landowner in 1888, and her father doted on her, denying her very little. When she took up an interest in medicine, despite many thinking it improper for her to do so, he paid for her education at the University College of Medicine in Richmond. Fellow students, especially male ones, envied her grades and whispered that she earned them by dint of her distant relation to the school's founder, Hunter Holmes McGuire, a claim she neither verified nor disputed. During her schooling she even met and worked briefly with such renowned medical figures as Sadie Heath Cabaniss, though the headstrong Diana did not have the patience to take up the causes of Cabaniss.

In 1917 the United States entered World War I, and the 29-year-old Ms. Holmes felt drawn to the conflict. She volunteered her services and served for the duration of the war. On the Western front, her camp was cut off and supplies ran dismally low. Driven night and day, presented with endless lines of wounded men and tested to the limit, Diana tried everything from prayer to donating far too much of her own blood. One evening, as blood and sweat ran down her brow, the

winged serpent of the caduceus twisted about and suddenly she understood that her duty was greater than any single soldier. From that point forth she treated each soldier as much as she was able, but also thought of each as a specimen upon the table where she was learning the panacea for all of mankind. Someday no one would have to die unless they wished. As the dying continued to come before her, she saved more and more of them, though always some of them paid the ultimate price.

After the war, Dr. Holmes corresponded with other medical personnel and quickly discovered that, even within the community, there were those with whom she shared greater vision than others. Members of the Mutagenic Engineers faction among the Progenitors contacted her with offers of a scholarship, and she joined prototype studies at medical colleges in Maryland that would eventually lead to the Human Genome Project. Diana's studies progressed at exponential rates, and she gained a reputation for shaming FACADE technicians during medical Symposiums. As the Nietzschean "Superman" concept gained notoriety, Diana was taken with the idea, and began her own experiments. When the Germans began the Second World War, Dr. Holmes was torn between allegiances. Ultimately her loyalty to her fellow scientists won the day, but the moment the war was over Diana volunteered to help decommission, classify and quantify the medical atrocities of the Third Reich. Given absurd levels of clearance by secret Technocracy units, the nearly 60-year old doctor captured data encapsulating leaps that might have taken her a century to gain.

Upon her return from the fallen Third Reich, Dr. Holmes temporarily withdrew from public practice. For



a few years she studied her stolen death camp findings, only to discover that the Time Table wasn't ready for much of it. Publicly, the good doctor returned to duty in the '70s as a plastic surgeon, already looking years younger than she should. Privately, she turned to experimenting with clone technology. Progress went well, and far exceeded that of many of her colleagues. As the final decade closed upon the 20th century, word spread among the Progenitors that Control was closing down shop. No one was to continue with projects that violated the Time Table. Dr. Holmes disappeared from view again, and reemerged in Las Vegas, adjusting her clone subjects to fit with the Marilyn Monroe and Elvis impersonators who dominate the city. General Martin and other Technocrats are aware of her presence in the city, but she hides from them the extent to which she flouts Control's commandments. It may just be a matter of time before Panopticon happens to trace to her front door something they mistake for a Reality Deviant.

Image: Dr. Holmes is well over 100 years old. Her hair is stark white, and nothing more than a vague cobweb of it remains across her skull. Her body is withered and shrunken, to the point it is virtually impossible to discern her sex. From over a century-long habit, nearly every bit of clothing she wears is white, though she does keep a silver caduceus close to her heart and is never far from a black leather medical bag filled with high-tech materials that belie its worn appearance.

On occasion, however, the good doctor partakes of her own science and spends a period of time as a beautiful young woman, usually golden blond, the likes of which few men have seen. Sometimes she gains some rather useful sperm donations or political favors.

Roleplaying Hints: Males run society, and they are often stupid and afraid of change. Most nurses only exist because men attempt to keep women from their primary role as nurturers. You have broken the mold and spent years of hard work doing it. You have the expertise to birth a new breed of Humankind, but the old-boy network fears your work. Give the vain bastards the cosmetic facelifts they want, rake in their unearned cash and keep up the good work. A new world order is in the making and you are most likely its mother. If a better mother comes along, then that's evolution at work, right?

Methodology: Genengineers (Mutagenic Engineers)

Essence: Primordial

Nature: Curmudgeon

Demeanor: Competitor

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Talents: Alertness 1, Awareness 1, Intimidation 1, Leadership 1, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Crafts 4 (Plastic Surgery), Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Firearms 1, Meditation 1, Melee 2, Technology 2

Knowledges: Academics 3, Computer 2, Enigmas 1, Investigation 1, Linguistics 2 (English, Latin, German), Medicine 4 (Genetics), Science 4 (Biology)

Backgrounds: Allies (Clones) 5, Avatar (Genius) 1, Contacts 1, Influence 1, Resources 4, Sanctum (Laboratory) 3

Arete (Enlightenment): 5

Spheres: Correspondence 1, Entropy 1, Forces 1, Life 5, Matter 2, Mind 2, Prime 2, Spirit (Dimensional Science) 2, Time 3

Willpower: 6

Quintessence: 1

Paradox: 1 point of permanent Paradox

Resonance: (Entropic) Deceit 2, (Static) Matronly 1, (Dynamic) Beautifying 2

SYNDICATE

GEORGE CARREAU

Cloud Room Construct/ Advanced Energy Commission Construct

Background: Carreau was a prodigy whose skill was unmistakable from almost the beginning. As a child, he turned his Miami paper route into a market for handmade clothes, which he soon had created for him by Cuban refugees from across the highway. He left his first year of college to rake in six-digit commissions on oil futures during the energy crisis of the '70s and followed Mark Rich out the door when the big producers wouldn't lift the cap on those commissions. From a multitude of offshore accounts he sold 10 percent of the bauxite mining rights for the world to Rich before turning his fortunes into junk bonds. During the '80s he devastated untold sums of Savings and Loan accounts before the bubble burst. He escaped the backlash on the tail of the Bush family's distracting little war in Iraq, though he did do a stint of time alongside other financial tycoons like Mike Milken. In the '90s Carreau turned his eye towards the creative task of fleecing giant corporations like Enron while the unsuspecting American public continued to pump ever-increasing wads of retirement money into them.

He has spoken to congressional aides and presidential advisors. Blocks of stock in every corporation of rising value bear one of his aliases, as do the sales tickets of thousands of shares sold just before they fall. Swiss and Panamanian bankers know him by face, if only by account number otherwise. Greenspan's office hosts one of his electronic bugs, and his personal bodyguard is



entirely composed of ex-Secret Service agents. Worst of all, you don't seem to have heard of him.

George Carreau has climbed nearly to the top of the hidden world behind financial empires. He would probably be part of Control if there were any money to be made at it. Having built an empire literally beyond most people's belief, Carreau now seeks a throne room secure enough from which to rule it. Recalling his time with Mike Milken and others in the Nellis Federal Prison Camp in Area 2 of the Nellis Air Force Base, Carreau has arranged to be held secretly under permanent witness protection within a private cellblock. Surrounded by highly trained military personnel and classified weaponry, much of which is beholden to his Technocratic compatriot General Martin, Carreau is virtually untouchable, even by anyone who could penetrate the layers of concealment, misdirection and false identities. Within his cell he has access to the financial world through wire transfers, satellite uplinks and Internet banking, and would-be clever hackers are diverted smack dab into the federal tar pit of the Nellis military servers. As money becomes more and more of an intangible thing, his schemes grow ever more incomprehensible to the common man.

Image: George Carreau's hair has turned white, but he still has a thick full head of it. His eyes still shine with the green of freshly minted money. He is slender and vigorously healthy, spending an hour a day working out before putting his devious mind to work. Should he receive visitors, they are likely to find him dressed comfortably in an exorbitantly expensive set of black silk pajamas pants and bathrobe, speaking into a wire-thin headset and motioning furiously in front of a 3-D wall

screen. His workout routine and daily economic maneuvers find him encircled by a team of retired Secret Service agents, and he keeps within easy reach a beautiful, but mentally retarded, 19-year old Thai girl whom he literally bought from a corrupt Asian businessman five years ago.

Roleplaying Hints: You have climbed so high there doesn't seem to be anywhere but down from here. Envy is a powerful tool to get people to buy things, but it is also a razor-sharp knife just waiting to stab you in the back. As a hobby, you've taken to studying the rise and fall of other financial giants. From the class-action lawsuit against the tobacco industry to the antitrust one against Microsoft, you see the common man swinging blindly, looking for people like you to strike down. Without your wealth, though, they don't have anywhere near your opportunities. Technology and ideas exist that they can never imagine, much less afford.

Methodology: Financiers

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Visionary

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4 (Ingenious), Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Expression 3, Intimidation 2, Leadership 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 3, Meditation 3, Performance 3, Stealth 1, Technology 1

Knowledges: Academics 4 (Economics), Computer 3, Enigmas 3, Finance 5 (Hiding Money), Investigation 2, Law 2, Linguistics 2 (English, Spanish, Japanese)

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Avatar (Genius) 1, Contacts 4, Destiny 2, Influence 4, Library 4, Resources 7, Sanctum (Private Cell Block) 4

Arete (Enlightenment): 4

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Entropy 3, Forces 2, Life 2, Matter 3, Mind 2, Time 4

Willpower: 7

Quintessence: 1

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Exchanging 2, (Entropic) Deceptive 2, (Static) Invisible 2

BRIAN MITCHELL

Cloud Room Construct

Background: Never heard of him? Of course you haven't. He's one of the non-descript investors behind Steve Wynn and other big-time Vegas developers. He's also one of the wealthiest men in the southwestern

United States because of it. Brian deals in real estate, property management and utilities. He also invests the Syndicate's money quite heavily in supercasinos. Starting in 1989 with the conception of the Mirage hotel, Brian has had a hand in negotiating development deals, sales of property, construction management, and venture capital interests for most of the major hotels and casinos on the Strip. He's the man who keeps the money flowing, who sends in mediators to smooth over the bumps in contract negotiation, who resolves his investment ledgers from the furthest million down to the last decimal. If there's a property to be built, best believe that Mitchell knows about it and is already drafting the legal paperwork and moving the money to make it a reality.

If there was ever anyone known as "The Man" in Vegas, Brian is it. Wynn, Turner and Schaeffer are just Wynn, Turner and Schaeffer. Brian is something else entirely. People rarely see The Man, but his assistants, partners, and agents are everywhere. Brian himself would tell you that he doesn't have any enemies. After all, it's a waste of energy to actively dislike or even hate anyone. However, there are certain elements that do concern him. Sarah Jamison (see Verbena, above) and her environmental crowd are a constant source of irritation and consternation. On more than one occasion she has attempted to block lucrative land deals and trades on the basis of so-called scientific studies of environmental impact that go above and beyond the realm of possibility or even sanity. Now her legal push for a reparation percentage for the Paiute Indians is causing more trouble than ever. This attitude should not be mistaken for a lack of concern about environmental or native issues on the part of Brian and his



associates. On the contrary, he has been influential in helping Paiute people outside of Las Vegas put together the necessary funds and paperwork to start their own reservation casinos as well as other enterprises.

With the emergence of more “rogue” activity on the part of local mages as well as transient groups, Brian and others in his arena have begun to look to former Tradition mages who either oppose the Rogue Council or disagree with its tactics.

Image: Brian’s boyish looks and winsome smile have helped him close many a deal. He is young, about 36, and his tanned skin and white gold hair make him look as if he’s just spent three weeks relaxing in Monaco. His is a refined and classic style without being stuffy or uncomfortable. More often than not, he wears a finely tailored silk suit with a custom-made shirt and a designer tie. He also wears sapphire cuff links and a tie stud that match the deep blue of his eyes.

Roleplaying Hints: Never let ‘em see you frown. Even major setbacks can’t shake that easy-going smile from your face, or wipe the gleam from your eye. Your close aides, however, know when you mean business by that particular way you shake your head slowly.

Methodology: Financiers

Essence: Questing

Nature: Director

Demeanor: Competitor

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 5, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Awareness 2, Leadership 4, Subterfuge 5

Skills: Etiquette 4, Firearms 2, Technology 2

Knowledges: Las Vegas Area Knowledge 5, Finance 5, Law 3, Science 2

Backgrounds: Allies 5, Contacts 5, Influence 5, Resources 5

Arete: 3

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 3, Mind 2, Prime 3, Time 1

Willpower: 8

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Static) Steadfast 2

WINSTON STEPHENS

Cloud Room Construct

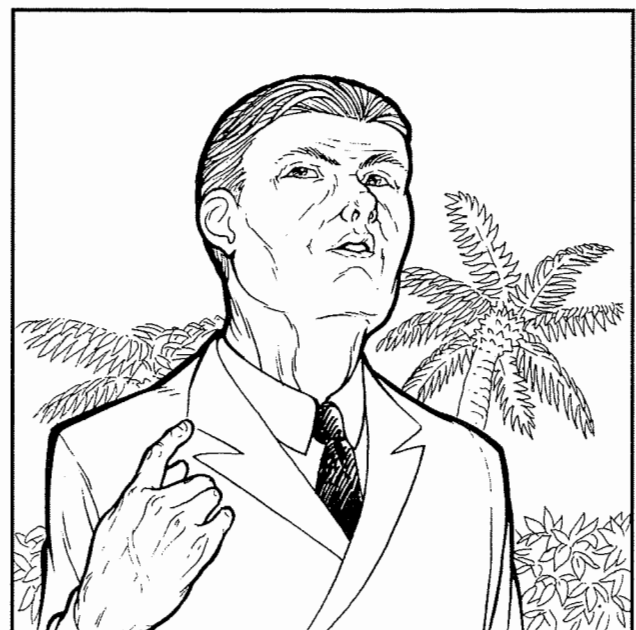
Background: Many Syndicate mages attempt to display a veneer of gentility and wealth. In Winston’s case, his origins and the face he presents to the public couldn’t be farther apart. Winston was born to a dirt-poor Irish family in South Boston, and soon drifted into

the wrong company. Quick of wit, careful to cover his own ass and fine with morally questionable activities, young Winston was working for the infamous Irish mobster “Whitey” Bulger by the mid-’70s.

The ‘80s were a period of loose cash and Winston was always part of the flood. Towards the end of the decade, however, he started to see the writing on the wall. The FBI was watching Whitey day and night, and even the fact that Whitey’s brother was part of the state senate wasn’t going to save him from his own legacy of crime. While Whitey was in jail in 1990, Winston took the opportunity to tap out his mob funds and move to Atlantic City, seeking legitimacy of some kind. Spreading money here and there, Winston showed promise, but some desire to do something bigger seemingly held him back. George Carreau took notice of him, and asked Winston to transfer to Vegas. Sleeping on the plane from Jersey to Nevada, Winston dreamed of a snake discarding its old skin and woke as the plane landed, intending to do just that.

In Las Vegas, Winston put on a brand new suit. Casting aside his history as an Irish mobster, Winston Stephens portrayed himself as the beneficiary of an old-money Boston family. He learned tricks from Carreau which none of his crew had ever dreamed, including ways to skim money off the top of virtually any transaction in sums far exceeding graft the boys back in Boston managed to racketeer. It was 20 or so years too late, but Winston followed in the footsteps of the gangsters who originally looked to Vegas to wash their sins away.

That meant making friends with dignitaries like Steve Wynn, Bob Stupak and Kirk Kerkorian. In his heart, Winston remains every bit as much a gangster as



the upstanding underworld gentlemen who preceded him, and shares their desire for “legitimacy” in old age. In modern times, it would seem that moving and shaking in Las Vegas means moving vast corporate interests and shaking down the politicians who stand in the way of development. Since Winston’s tour of duty at Lionheart Developments Real Estate and Investment Company began, the holding corporation has turned a tidy penny on new casino projects on and off Strip.

Image: Winston is part of the Black Irish of Boston, with dark hair and eyes inherited from his recent descent from Old World blood. Whether haunting his downtown offices in Lionheart Developments or within the Cloud Room Construct portion of the Stratosphere, Winston dresses only in the finest of imported gray Italian suits. He is unwilling to start a war between the two mobs, and constantly seeks ways for them to work profitably in conjunction. Even seated, Winston is tall and slender, and quick to stand to greet a visitor, flashing a powerful smile that often leaves them disarmed and friendly. Employees refer to him as Mr. Stephens out of a legitimate respect, though this is in part due to his near-precognitive ability to remove troublesome elements from his staff before they prove a liability.

Roleplaying Hints: You grew up on the streets of South Boston. You are a cold-blooded survivor and these soft-bellied snakes don’t know what that means. The move to Vegas was a good way to shed your skin and start fresh, but if it doesn’t work out you can always go back. Who wants to start over at 50, though?

Methodology: Disbursements

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Bravo

Demeanor: Perfectionist

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Dodge 1, Expression 2, Intimidation 2, Leadership 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Firearms 2, Performance 1, Stealth 1

Knowledges: Academics 1, Computer 2, Finance 3, Law 1, Linguistics 1 (English, Italian)

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Avatar (Genius) 1, Contacts 3, Influence 2, Library 1, Mentor (George Carreau) 5, Node (Cloud Room Construct) 1, Resources 4, Sanctum 1 (Cloud Room Construct)

Arete (Enlightenment): 2

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 2, Mind 2, Prime 1, Time 2

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 1

Paradox: 2

Resonance: (Static) Organized 2, (Dynamic) Hot-tempered 1

PETER STRATTON

Background: Stratton tried to lay low in town, to get out of the whole reality redefinition gig. To that end, he didn’t let anyone local know that he was a mage, although the word leaked out to a few folks — luckily, they could keep their traps shut. Until recently, however, when the Jonny Meyer heist hit, and he was almost waxed for his peripheral involvement with an outside investor. Thanks to Zydeco and Oz, he survived the affair, but now his ex-bosses are trying to involve him in a number of their finance games, seeing how he’s got money and all. But he knows how to play tit for tat, and he offers to invest in their operations as long as they drop a little money into his — namely, managing Jonny Meyer and his band. So far, they’ve declined the offer.

Image: Stratton looks like the typical faded rock star manager — overhanging gut on what used to be a California-fit body with a golden tan. His clothes are still stylish, and he knows his way around all the clubs, where he has a number of comps waiting for him. His one affectation is to wear his sunglasses at night, but he’s good enough to take them off when conversing with others.

Roleplaying Hints: You still know the game, but you’re just not interested in putting up with the crap anymore. You want the rewards — hanging out by the pool, watching to your band make it big, rubbing shoulders with the stars — but not the conniving that



inevitably comes with keeping on top. You've got enough money that you finally afford to leave it all behind and focus on your latest hobby: The Fabulous Palominos.

Methodology: Financiers

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Celebrant

Demeanor: Bon Vivant

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Awareness 1, Expression 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 1

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Technology 1

Knowledges: Computer 1, Finance 3, Law 1

Backgrounds: Contacts 3, Influence 1, Resources 4

Arete (Enlightenment): 2

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 2, Mind 1

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 1

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Convincing 2

CARLA VERDE

Cloud Room Construct

Background: As a child, Carla grew up watching her tribe suffer. Poor and unable to gain proper access to the same political system that theoretically benefited the rest of the nation, the Paiute languished for years with little more than a 10-acre plot of land granted them by one single landowner. Carla's father was part of the group who began to change their fate by exploiting a loophole in federal laws regarding Native Americans. Legally, the reservation could obtain and sell tobacco without any sort of tax. Realizing that this edge could be catalyst for a strong business opportunity, the Paiute opened a tobacco shop. Today it is the largest independent distributor of tobacco products in the United States.

As a teenager, Carla worked the tobacco store and visited the city armed with her paychecks. The extravagant displays of wealth disgusted her girlfriends, but Carla saw the future among their glittering lights. When she was a little girl, her father taught her to recognize the stars; she had finally found some worth watching. More and more often Carla called upon the casinos of Vegas, watching them constantly for the shining stars that made them work. When she finally was old enough for the tribal elders to take her seriously, she conveniently added her voice to that of her then-boyfriend and every other young person who paid her attention in suggesting the Paiute establish their own casino. They rode the wave of reservation gambling as it surged across the country.

Today Carla Verde is one of the spokespersons for her entire tribe in the Clark County area. She is rich, forward thinking and nearly impossible to ignore in tribal politics. No longer does she simply stare at the stars, for she has become a rising one in her own right. Her current plans may seem preposterous, but then so did those of Bugsy Siegel. Why not move the Strip to the reservation so nobody has to pay taxes anymore, or perhaps gain ownership of the Strip through legal reparations to the tribe? Firebrands like Sarah Jamison could even be used to further these goals, if they weren't so opposed to the watering down of Paiute society inevitably following such success.

Image: Carla is a dark woman of middling height who is easily confused for Hispanic despite only a tiny fraction of non-Paiute heritage. She dresses predominantly in subtly pinstriped, feminine dress suits and is constantly armed with a briefcase that manages to combine tribal symbols with black leather corporate elegance. Carla is a frequent visitor to the corporate lounges so often found in modern company environments, where she indulges in her addiction to filterless cigarettes. Some of her best contacts have been made there. The habit of staring up at the stars while her greatest dreams are forged has never been lost, and many a businessman has discovered Carla looking skyward.

Roleplaying Hints: The Spanish, the Mexicans, the Mormons and the Manifest Destiny of the United States — they all screwed your people. Whatever! The fact is that your people probably would have been the ones doing the screwing if they had gotten with the program a century earlier. Now there is this system, and the Paiutes are at the bottom of it, but it's been built by a bunch of



immoral pricks with a huge guilt factor. With a little work you can turn the system to your advantage in such a big way that the new world will never be the same.

Methodology: Media Control

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Conniver

Demeanor: Celebrant

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 4 (Guilter), Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Athletics 1, Expression 2, Intimidation 2, Leadership 2, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Crafts 1 (Native Paiute Pipes), Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Performance 1, Survival 1

Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 2, Cosmology (Subdimensions) 1, Law 2, Finance 2, Linguistics 1 (Paiute, English), Occult 1, Science (Agriculture) 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 2, Influence 2, Resources 3

Arete (Enlightenment): 2

Spheres: Entropy 1, Forces 1, Life 1, Matter 2, Mind 2

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 0

Paradox: 1

Resonance: (Entropic) Guilt 1, (Static) Traditional 1

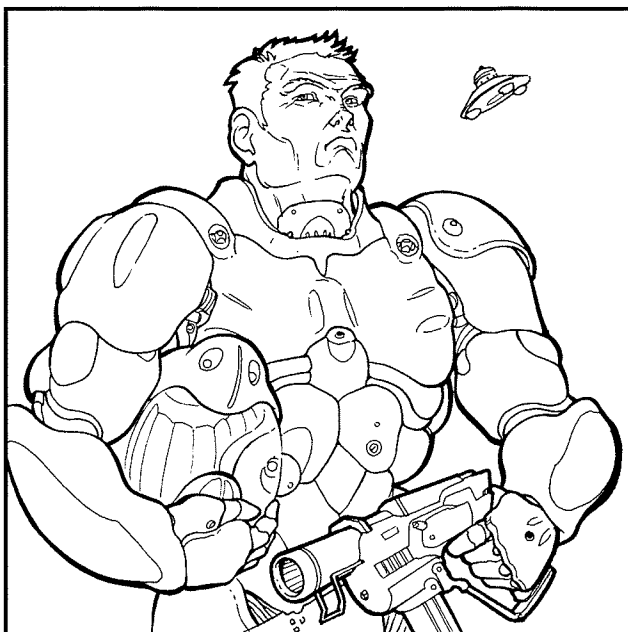
VOID ENGINEERS

MAJOR THOMAS HOUSTON

Advanced Energy Commission Construct

Background: Thomas Houston was born in a small town in Texas in 1956. From an early age, the boy displayed an adventuresome nature and rapidly gained one scouting honor after another. No doubt his father, who served a lifetime in the Texas Rangers, made a huge impression upon him. Naturally gifted by dint of birth and spirit of fire, Houston ached to achieve something worthy of his heritage. In early 1972, Thomas joined the Marines, though he was only 16. Ten weeks later, he graduated from Parris Island and was fighting in Vietnam. Houston descended into the depths of hell when his unit was unknowingly turned into one of the infamous Department X LSD experiments. In the bloody darkness of his berserk soul, Houston discovered the golden eagle of idealism and rode its wings to freedom. They gave him a medal for that.

Houston's last tour of duty in 'Nam featured his unit being directed by an obscure intelligence officer who kept referring to Hydrothermal Botanical Mosaic Analysis. Already injured to the chaos exemplifying the Conflict, Houston led his unit in strikes against native



arboreal villages that nominally supported their own race against his kind. This was to build the foundations of his continuing enemy-species mentality, whether they are called "Charlie" or "Xeno." Unknown to the American public, Houston's operations continued long after the cease-fire in 1973 and resulted in the destruction of untold ancient culture and tradition.

1974 marked great public pressure against the perception that an Orwellian future was at hand. Congress, hungry to stay elected, removed The Atomic Energy Commission from the hands of the military; two years later, cries for peace clamored so loudly that the religious and moral icon Jimmy Carter took the Presidency. The gray men of Control only dug deeper, carefully couching the future in terms of economic strength and assured mutual destruction. Meanwhile, the space program took enormous strides since its magnificent success reaching the moon in 1969. Unfortunately, despite tremendous gains, Control was still terrified of the revelations of Roswell 1947—we were definitely not alone, and our visitors were not entirely friendly. Unsure just where to focus their efforts, influential Technocrats like Oscar Martin supported invisible campaigns against "alien" invaders.

In 1975 Houston and his battle-scarred unit from Vietnam joined the fray after hellish weeks of outlandish Special Forces training in NASA-owned warehouses near Cape Canaveral. Reports of barbaric behavior, including the harvesting of Xeno ears, trickled back to Void Engineer commanders. Houston was still younger than some of the kids who fought in Vietnam, yet already displayed cold efficiency normally found only in hardened veterans. So long as he achieved his objectives, his superiors turned a blind eye to his tactics.

During the last decade of the millennium, the political climate turned badly for Houston and the Border Corps who served in his command. In 1991 they were recalled to help put down an insurrection of Soviet Void Engineers who rebelled after returning from a long Pan-Galactic mission only to discover that Gorbachev's *perestroika* dragged the communist state down and left a weakened Commonwealth of Independent States in its stead. Seeing the Soviet fear of such New World Order initiatives as "Westernization" and "glasnost," Houston reacted with the same righteous crusader mentality he brought to bear against Vietnamese antipathy. Initially, this won him friends in the dominant methodologies of the NWO, but the eventual reabsorbing of disparate Soviet elements ultimately hurt his position. When the Avatar Storm struck in 1999, Houston's vessel was forced to crash land and only a fraction of his crew survived. After Control debriefed him, the entire crew was grounded at Area 51 for an indefinite period, in response to their radical ideas regarding the Xeno foes with which they contested.

Ironically, the center has not held. Things have begun to look as though they might fall apart, and some elements within the Technocracy have returned to the old ways. From ruthless extermination of Deviants to endless scans for dimensional intruders, disparate groups within the Union have joined together to form a new Convention, Panopticon, dedicated to succeeding where their forebears have merely held the line. From his current position within the Neutralization Specialist Corps, Houston hopes to restore Control's faith in the abilities of his command. He treats the operations of his unit with the same care as he would an extraterrestrial procedure and hopes their exemplary record will win renewed authorization to brave the space storms currently isolating the Earth.

On Earth, Houston must conceal some of the more vulgar weapons of his command, and apply the Time Table to the release of such information. In space, he could always get away with McGuyverish feats of inventiveness. One particular project that has been mothballed for a while is the study of a supposedly alien spacecraft held in Area 51. Nonetheless, the battle-scarred "Houstonites" are ready for any mind-wrenching mission, including "Node Runs," field-testing for secret weapons and hair-whitening encounters with inhuman Deviants.

Image: Houston is in his 40s, but shows it in a haphazard way. While his sandy hair already has specks of white, his physique remains taut like a wire and his nerves razor sharp. Years of operating in varying gravities have caused Houston to move with a slow-bouncing gait and gave him thickly muscled arms as powerful as most men's legs. Dark brown eyes and a stern demeanor anchor his weatherworn countenance. His skin is tanned dark and freckled on his

hands, lower arms, face and neck, yet the rest of his body rarely sees the sun. Whatever he wears, Houston somehow manages to look like he's in some kind of uniform, albeit one that fits tightly about his shoulders. On duty in space, he wears chrome-reflective, environmentally sealed power armor and carries a plasma weapon, but such things are not always convenient to deploy on Earth.

Roleplaying Hints: In *Omnia Paratus*, "Prepared For All Things." Currently home base is Area 51, but you are at home nearly anywhere. You exemplify a higher order, the eminent domain of mankind, and it is your duty to survive to carry it out. Corporals Smith and Harrison and the rest of your unit are the few people you really trust to stand with you when the shit is flying fast and thick. Everyone else is too busy playing politics or being incompetent circle-jerks. Even the damned Dimensional Storm currently surrounding the Earth seems to be a fuckup from on high. Move in, do the job and move out. The rest of it is all crap.

Methodology: Panopticon (also Border Corps Division, currently Neutralization Specialist Corps)

Essence: Questing

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Fanatic

Attributes: Strength 4 (Powerful Arms), Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 2, Brawl 4 (Tight Quarters), Dodge 1, Intimidation 2, Leadership 2
Skills: Drive (Pilot) 2, Firearms 4 (Energy Weapons), Melee 1, Stealth 2, Survival 3, Technology 3

Knowledges: Academics 1, Cosmology (Subdimensions) 3, Computer 2, Linguistics 2 (English, Vietnamese, Russian), Medicine 2, Science (Astronautical Engineering) 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Arcane (Cloaking) 2, Avatar (Genius) 1, Contacts 1, Destiny 1, Dream (Hypercrim) 2, Influence 1, Resources 2, Wonder (Secret Weapons) 4

Enlightenment: 4

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Entropy 1, Forces 4, Life 2, Matter 2, Mind 1, Prime 2, Spirit (Dimensional Science) 3, Time 1

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 1

Paradox: Usually a few points.

Resonance: (Dynamic) Persistent 1, (Static) Self-reliant 2

Notes: Houston could cobble together the hardware to carry himself halfway across the galaxy whenever he wants. He needs Control, however, to approve access to vessels capable of transporting his entire unit. When he is carrying weapons and armor, they are often highly experimental Q Division projects.

WHAT HOUSTON THINKS HE KNOWS

Major Houston and the remnants of his unit spent years in various conflicts with entities they consider alien and dangerous. Tradition mages may consider creatures like the Grays to be constructs of the spirit world or Bygones, but Houston is convinced they are a xeno-race whose home world lies somewhere in our dimension. He has formed a theory about why they have decided to tamper with humanity, but his ideas currently remain hampered by his technocentric vision of the universe. Houston's missions suggest to him that the Grays are an old race that has become so static they can no longer access their inner Genius. They are so calcified they cannot even bear new offspring. While the Grays may have access

to millennia of incredible advancements, they are drawn to humans for our flame of creativity and spark of the wild. Abductees are harvested as much for their ideas and dreams as for their reproductive genetic material. What secretly bothers Houston is that he wonders if humanity isn't following the same path. Luckily, his sense of self-preservation has thus far subconsciously shielded these fears from psych evaluations. Meanwhile, Houston desperately wants carte blanche to deal with things like the hybrids he suspects the Grays have managed to create and possibly insert into our population. Thus far, Control seems happier quietly denying his theories than declaring war against an offworld foe.

THE GAITBLERS: TRADITIONALISTS



When Nevada first came to the attention of the Traditions it was merely as a footnote in the interests of the Celestial Chorus. Dreamspeaker calls for help in the region had gone largely ignored, and only the Mormon attempt to build the holy kingdom of Deseret rang out loud enough to reach the Council's ears. Unfortunately for advocates of the Chorus and their attempts to unify the Mormon cause with their own, the forces of greed and government combined to bring corruption to the land and crush the fledgling Mormon state. The same year that Las Vegas was incorporated the Sons of Ether broke away from the Technocracy, and ultimately it was their grand Hoover Dam which ensured the survival of the World's Most Original City. Nonetheless, today the Traditions would seem to be fighting a losing battle in the City of Sin, with the Syndicate commanding an ever-increasing share of power, backed up by their brethren in the Union. Two Tradition chantries stand in secret rebellion amid the towers of the Technocracy and bid their fellow Tradition mages do the same.

CELESTIAL CHORUS

JEDEDIAH BAKER

Background: Jedediah was born and raised in southern Nevada, specifically in Lincoln County. He attended a Mormon church from birth, and followed the Latter Day Saints' road to serve as a missionary across areas of Arizona and New Mexico for two years. After his return home, he married his high school sweetheart and set

about having a family. During a camping trip in 1995 his wife was abducted and police investigations suggested some sort of occult sacrifice was responsible for her grisly murder. Jedediah found more than a sympathetic shoulder to cry upon within the church. Members of a secret group within the Mormon church contacted him with an offer to teach him holy wisdom beyond that available to most brethren. Justly angered by the death of his wife, and hungry for answers or perhaps revenge, Jedediah joined with little hesitation.

Jedediah swiftly conquered the hurdles of initiation and his time as a Deacon was marked by numerous victories against the forces of darkness against which he was sent. In 1998 he was released from apprenticeship and allowed to minister to the widespread flock as a Priest. Kept from truly pursuing those who had taken his wife, Baker now turned to finding justice. Loose end after loose end led to a cult that was building in Salt Lake City for some terrible millennial doomsday ritual. When brother Jedediah presented his findings to the Elders of the Nephites, they grew wroth and prepared for the destruction of the enemies of God upon the grounds of his holy city. On January 4, 2000 the Nephites assembled in Salt Lake City and called upon the might of Heaven. Something rose from the ashes and struck them down like wheat. Elder and Priest alike sacrificed themselves in fiery blazes to destroy the devilish zealots and drive away the demonic beast they had called. In the end, the Damned creature fled to the south and whether by luck or divine grace Jedediah Baker was the only Nephite left in the world.



Never one to abandon the word of God as he sees it, Priest Baker turned to his youth's work as a missionary once again. Finding lone Latter Day Saints who held the faith yet burned with the desire to do more, he set about trying to rebuild the Nephite ranks. Suddenly forced into a position of true faith, Baker proved to be charismatic and determined beyond his fallen compatriots' dreams. Not only has he built a new cadre of Deacons and Priests, but Elder Baker (as his followers call him) has come to the attention of the Celestial Chorus in a big way. Tradition representatives met with him in his desert camp and, after 40 days, the two groups made mutual progress that has essentially tied the Nephites to the Chorus as the newest faction. Some Tradition leaders fear, however, that the Nephites will prove as troublesome as the Knights Templar have.

Image: Jedediah is a striking figure as he glides through the sunset-reddened sand, kicked into a cloud behind his horse, duster flapping in the wind. His light brown hair hides beneath a wide-brimmed hat, while his eyebrows and close-shaven face glisten with sun-bleached, golden tones. His light brown eyes clench against the flying dust, yet drift endlessly back and forth across the landscape. In front of a crowd, he is a fire-and-brimstone priest capable of moving men to great deeds, while one-on-one conversations find him quiet and reserved. A well-kept revolver and a battered copy of the Book of Mormon are his only possessions beyond those necessary for survival.

Roleplaying Hints: God has spoken through the Prophets throughout time. You don't see why you could possibly have been chosen for such a task, but it seems as though He wishes you to carry His word as well. Inspire

the flock, but pay heed to others, for your Shepherd speaks in mysterious ways. A terrible Beast strides the earth, having drowned the dream of Deseret, carved out the Dust Bowl, killed your Elder brethren and taken residence in a mountain of sleeping fire. Even now its corruption moves like tumbleweeds before a foul wind.

Faction: Nephites

Essence: Questing

Nature: Pedagogue

Demeanor: Masochist

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4 (Leathery), Charisma 4 (Inspiring), Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Expression 1, Leadership 2

Skills: Firearms 3, Melee 1, Survival 4 (Desert)

Knowledges: Academics 1, Cosmology 1, Investigation 1, Linguistics 1 (English, Nephite), Occult 3

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Arcane 1, Avatar 4, Contacts 3, Destiny 3, Influence 1, Resources 1

Arete: 4

THE NEPHITES

As the newest of factions to join the Celestial Chorus, even many Choristers don't know what to think of the Nephites. This Priesthood teaches that God granted secret wisdom to Nephi seven centuries before the birth of Christ, and that Nephi passed this on to his followers. Tasked with the power to defend and heal the body and spirit of the faithful, the Nephite Priesthood has been destroyed by enemies more than once. Each time, however, a lone Prophet survives or Nephi visits a new one. In 1849, in the kingdom of Deseret, Nephi appeared as a celestial being to Uriah Spence. Uriah spread the teachings of Nephi across the new kingdom of Zion, but corruption already had slipped into the dominion. In 2000, a fiery doom, apparently phyrnic in nature, destroyed all known Nephite Priests except for the Elder Jedediah Baker. Their sacrifice drove a dark force from the diminished kingdom, but Baker has spread the Nephite word further than ever before by seeking common ground with other faithful who do not necessarily understand the "proper" way yet.

Nephite faithcraft primarily consists of divination, enchantment, healing, hellfire, summoning, binding, warding and weather manipulation. As most Nephite miracles invoke celestial beings, the mages tend to have some command of Spirit.

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Forces 3, Life 3, Prime 3, Spirit 4, Time 2

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 1-4

Paradox: 3-4

Resonance: (Dynamic) Catalyst 1, (Static) Unyielding 1, (Entropic) Dust 1

RASHONDA MILLS

Background: Her job title is rather mundane — Director of Catholic Social Services — but the work she does on the streets of Las Vegas is far from mundane.

In addition to the thousands of tourists that pass through the city every year, the city of Las Vegas shelters approximately 10,000 homeless men, women and children. Rashonda sees it as her destiny and calling in life to aid and care for these poor unfortunates as best she can. Together with her network of social workers, volunteer clergy, and concerned laypeople, she makes sure that those who are forced to live on the streets don't become the unsuspecting prey of the dark denizens of the night.

Rashonda was once one of those unsuspecting victims, not of any vampires or darker creatures, but of the all-too-human misery of assault. She turned back her attacker by escaping his grip and running for a local convenience store, well lit enough for the man to give up on her. Distraught over the incident for weeks, she found herself in a Catholic church, seeking solace. She had been raised Catholic but had left her religion behind when she left her family to move to Vegas. There, she experienced a miracle. As the light of a hundred candles flickered by the statue of Mary, Rashonda's Avatar awoke and took flight, taking her soul on a journey into heavenly realms she remembers today only as unbroken light and *presence* — the presence of a loving, embracing being.

She volunteered at the social services ministry and eventually became its director, for her success with bringing the homeless off the streets and keeping them in shelters was nigh unprecedented in the city. She was soon approached by fellow mages within the church, and learned how best to use her magic to further her work. Now, she knows there are things out there preying on her flock, and she's damn sure she's not going to let that continue.

Image: Sister Mills, as the locals call her, is a pretty, chocolate-brown woman in her late 20s with short dreadlocked hair and compact wire-rimmed glasses. Since she is so often ministering to the homeless and destitute on the streets and in the alleyways, she wears dirty, ripped up jeans, sneakers and a dingy white tee-shirt that's seen the washing machine one too many times. Her hands are callused and often chapped, as you will quickly note when



you're on the receiving end of her hearty handshake. The woman may not win any glamour contests, but she always has a beautiful, wide smile and a strong heart.

Roleplaying Hints: Be a calming presence for others, a pillar of quiet strength they can lean on. Don't judge — the white light of heaven did not judge, it simply embraced and accepted. You should do the same.

Faction: Monists

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Caregiver

Demeanor: Caregiver

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3; Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3; Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Athletics 2, Awareness 1, Streetwise 3

Skills: Crafts 1 (Sculpture)

Knowledges: Las Vegas Area Knowledge 3, Enigmas 2, Investigation 2, Medicine 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 2, Destiny 2, Influence 1

Arete: 2

Spheres: Life 2, Mind 1, Spirit 2, Prime 1

Willpower: 7

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Static) Calming 3

CULT OF ECSTASY

AURORA GOLDEN

Black Pyramid Chantry

Background: Heidi Fleiss is a schoolgirl compared to the "Golden Dawn" of Vegas. Prostitution is, of course,

illegal in the city itself, but that's never stopped Aurora from making a tidy profit on the skin trade. She started out as an "outlaw"—that is, working without a pimp—at \$50 a trick. Roving down the Strip from casino bar to casino bar and dodging undercover security got old after a while, so Aurora decided to audition for an escort service in the hopes of attracting wealthier johns. The owners liked her and recognized that her buxom, all-American looks would definitely be popular with their clients. Soon she was being called out on three or four dates per day and making well over \$3000 per week.

She would have remained just another escort/hooker if it hadn't been for a chance meeting and conversation with a casino host from the Mirage who agreed to pass her number along to those "whales" in his care who might be looking for a bit of company for the evening. He would, of course, get a healthy kickback, but then again, the operation would be under the table and he would make sure it never got back to casino management. Her first date was with an Asian businessman who treated her to a lovely dinner, an exciting night at the baccarat table, and a generous payment of \$5000 for services rendered. Other dates with high-rolling VIPs soon followed. Word got around and by the end of the year she was "on call" for the VIPs at five of the major casinos on the Strip.

She Awakened while escorting a client to the Blue Man Group show at the Luxor. Something about their odd act, combined with the high she was feeling from her unparalleled string of successful nights out, worked to stir her Avatar. It took her a number of weeks after that to get a handle on manipulating reality to do what she wanted it to, but she had a fortuitous mentor in Blacquewell Rota, a Cult of Ecstasy mage who she wound up escorting to the baccarat tables. He was just passing through, but recognized her fledgling status immediately. He helped her to hone the bare beginnings of her Sphere proficiencies, but failed to convince her to join him in his travels. Nonetheless, he passes through town occasionally and offers her what advice he can—in return for her charms as he parties through the casinos.

An enterprising woman, Aurora decided to open her own escort service to cater to fabulously wealthy gamblers, featuring both female and male escorts—a move which practically tripled her revenues. Her luck almost ran out when several casino managers threatened to shut down her business and report her illegal activities to Clark County officials, but the Golden Girl reminded them that without her services, their most prized guests might not enjoy themselves quite as much (or spend quite so much money in their casinos). The casino managers wisely decided to look the other way.



Aurora now operates two legitimate escort services that cater to those of average means along with three other high-end escort services providing "special" services for the right price. Her ladies and gentlemen are hand picked and trained to please the various fetishes and quirks of the wealthy guests they service. They're also zealously safe and impeccably clean. And even though she's running the business, Aurora still takes calls from preferred clients.

Image: A tall, striking woman in her early 30s, Aurora greets her clients with a gracious smile and a firm handshake. Since she runs an "upscale service," she likes to wear tailored suits and designer dresses that are classy but still show off her figure to the greatest advantage. Although she receives many gifts of jewelry from clients, she rarely wears them unless she is out on a date with the gift giver. Her most remarkable feature is her waist-length blonde hair, which she wears pulled back into a pony-tail or swept up into a twist.

Roleplaying Hints: You make others feel comfortable and special because you feel comfortable and special. You're exactly where you want to be in life, and it shows. That doesn't mean you'll take any crap from a client, however. You'll only put up with so much, and if they step over the line by treating you like a cheap call girl, you'll first smile and remind them how much they're paying. If that doesn't work, you'll get them a date from your more downscale service. If that still doesn't work, the business relationship is over—even if it takes magic to convince them of that.

Faction: Acharne

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Celebrant

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3; Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4; Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Dodge 3, Leadership 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 4 (Lies)

Skills: Etiquette 3, Firearms 3

Knowledges: Law 1, Investigation 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 3, Influence 3, Mentor 1, Resources 5

Arete: 3

Spheres: Entropy 1, Life 2, Mind 3, Prime 1, Time 3

Willpower: 6

Quintessence: 4

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Undulating 1

DREAMSPEAKERS

JERRY TANNER

Big Springs Chantry

Background: It came as no surprise to Jerry's meat packer father that the boy would be attracted to working in the industry. Finding a job as a butcher in the heart of Chicago wasn't so difficult, and Jerry Tanner excelled at the work. Something about his job tugged at his soul, and Jerry looked for something more. A cousin at a local slaughterhouse got him a position right on the factory front line, killing the cows as soon as they were tested and deemed ready to be made into meat. For years, Jerry made an art of putting the beasts to rest as painlessly as possible. Unlike most slaughterhouse workers, Jerry never found peace with himself. When he left the factory for the evening there was always a sense that something was following him, and his sleep was haunted by grim visions of the dying animals. Finally unable to withstand the horrific nightmares, Jerry moved out west to Las Vegas to find a new career.

One night while flipping burgers, he saw a confused-looking old man walk into the restaurant. The Native American moved slowly but purposefully towards him, and addressed Jerry as though he were speaking to a crowd. "You must find peace. Walk into the valley of fire together. Shed your skins, past and present, and give them to Spider. She waits for you to rejoin the web of life." Burger-flipper Tanner laughed the old man away and finished his otherwise dull shift. That night the images of death haunted his sleep more than ever before. Ghostly figures came before him bleating, braying and bellowing for attention. The next

night brought the same terrors. And the next, and the next after that. After a week without real sleep Jerry lost his job and fell into a dazed state, unable to slumber yet consumed by waking dreams.

Then one night, the old man visited him again. "You must find peace." Blah. Blah. Same spiel again, but Jerry could not ignore the cries of the dead that surrounded him, nor the wisdom of the old Paiute. The next day he rode into the desert on his motorcycle, with only a loaf of bread and a couple liters of water. Days of wandering led him to the grand, red boulder-filled depression known as the Valley of Fire, where he finally confronted the herds of beasts whose death he had caused for so many years. As the last of his water ran dry and his bread ran out, the former butcher swore to atone for his theft from the totem world. The Paiute found him hours later, feverish and nearly dead.

Since then, Jerry has abandoned his "white-man" ways and adopted the Paiute tribe as his ancestral home. Many of the younger tribesmen ridicule him as just another pink-skin trying to forge false roots, but the tribal elders see his dedication and heart. No one who matches his description of the old man has ever surfaced in the tribe, yet Jerry continues to see the wise one when he meditates alone in the desert or stares deep into the evening fires. He absorbs Paiute wisdom like a sponge but holds it deep inside like a hidden spring. The Tanner boy has mostly made peace with the beasts who haunted his rest for so long, but he still finds himself surrounded by lost souls tormented by thankless slaughter in brutal environs. On occasion, Jerry will free cattle held on local ranches, though more often he joins Sarah Jamison in her quest to gain respect for the Native American way of life.



Unexpectedly, he preaches spiritual thankfulness for animal sacrifice and advocates fair game; if necessary for food, animals should be hunted by bow at best, rather than demanding others lead a vegetarian lifestyle. For himself, however, meat is no longer a part of his diet. His power over healing magic is not as strong as he wishes, so he supplements it with veterinarian medicine. Jerry has been trying to convince the reservation to allow him to use part of its land as open range for free cattle to live as the bison once did. So far, tribal politicians seem more enchanted with the raw revenue brought in by tax-free cigarettes and Native American casinos.

Image: Jerry looks a bit above his 25 years of age. Though still young, his long sun-bleached blond hair, tangled by the desert wind, and his face, rarely clean shaven, combine to give him a somewhat older look. His eyes are what really do the trick, though. They are surrounded by a web of tiny wrinkles that cry out the sorrow he feels for the fate of the innocent creatures of the world. Jerry normally dresses as "native" as possible without incorporating any leather into his clothing. Rough, woven cloth in dark patterns, featuring tribal myths, make up most of his wardrobe.

Roleplaying Hints: The creatures of the world come to you when they are hurt. Mankind has forgotten the old ways, and it is up to you and the tribe to preserve the wisdom of the beasts. Unfortunately, they have become prisoners of factory farms more interested in slaughtering the maximum meat tonnage they can possibly sell. You could no longer kill one even in a fair hunt, but you acknowledge that nature works in certain ways even if modern man violates those ways. You were part of the machinery of death for a time, and now you strive to offset the damage you did and that of as many other violators as possible. White men have nothing to offer you anymore, and you seek solace for yourself and the children of nature within the circles of tribal wisdom.

Faction: Keepers of the Sacred Fire

Essence: Primordial

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Celebrant

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Talents: Awareness 3, Intimidation 1, Streetwise 1

Skills: Crafts (Butcher) 2, Drive 1 (Motorcycle), Meditation 1, Melee 3, Survival 2, Technology 2

Knowledges: Cosmology 1, Linguistics 1 (English, Pauite), Medicine 2 (Veterinary), Occult 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Contacts 1, Destiny 1, Dream 1, Mentor (Sarah Jamison) 1, Resources 1, Wonder 1

Arete: 2

Spheres: Life 2, Entropy 1, Prime 1, Spirit 2

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 1 sometimes

Paradox: 3

Resonance: (Entropic) Slaughter 1, (Static) Healing 1, (Dynamic) Forgiveness 1

Wonder: Jerry's Wonder is the worn remnant of his once-favorite carving knife. Its only Effect is to communicate to any animal spirit who sees it that he was once a butcher of beasts but now uses his knife only for whittling.

EUTHANATOS

"DOC" HOLLY DAVID

Black Pyramid Chantry

Background: The entertainers swear by her. So do the various celebrities who come to dance, sing, and make 'em laugh at Vegas' myriad shows and revues. But the good doctor's work doesn't end with the beautiful, rich and famous. Her practice also extends to free medical supplies and prescriptions for many of the city's homeless population. Also, many of the escorts, go-go bois and other denizens of the sexual underworld benefit greatly from her concern and care. Mage locals, as well as transients passing through town — particularly those who find traditional hospitals and medical facilities to be bothersome, dangerous or inaccessible — often are referred to her if they are in need of medical assistance. Doc joined the Black Pyramid Chantry reluctantly and only after a series of incidents in which out-of-town mages tried to take advantage of her charity. She figured she needed some strong allies. Anybody who now tries to screw her over has to contend with her allies. In return for their aid, she offers free medical help to anybody fellow chantry members recommend.

Despite her good nature and deeds, she's still a Euthanatos, which means she has some unconventional idea about death and the "balance" of karma. Though she's not as quick to prescribe euthanasia as her fellow Tradition members, she's not above employing such medicine now and then, especially if a particularly heinous or vile individual enters her ER.

Image: Truth be told, Holly's a bit on the butch side. Her entire wardrobe is composed of slacks, button-down shirts that she wears tucked in and cowboy boots. Short is a good word to describe her: her stature, her hair, her nails (which aren't bitten, but neatly manicured). Her manner can be brusque, straightforward and a bit disarming at times, but when dealing with the sick, injured or those in pain, she exhibits a calm and soothing gentleness.



Roleplaying Hints: You're tired of the bullshit they're always trying to shove off on you, but you're still patient with them. Who cares how they got that nasty scar or how in the world they got *that* to go in *there*? Just fix them up and send them back into the reckless world. Maybe one day they'll learn something and not be so quick to come back.

Faction: Albireo

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Caregiver

Demeanor: Architect

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4 (manual), Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Dodge 2

Skills: Drive 2, Technology 2

Knowledges: Academics 4, Cosmology 2, Medicine 4, Occult 3, Science 2

Backgrounds: Avatar 4, Influence 2, Library 3, Node 2
Arete: 4

Spheres: Life 4, Entropy 3, Matter 2, Mind 1, Spirit 1, Time 1

Willpower: 7

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Restoring 2

BETTIE DYANDRA

Black Pyramid Chantry

Background: Ms. Dyandra is a second-generation immigrant from India, and her family has taken her to see the country more than once. She has moved around a lot,

staying in mostly Indian communities in London, New York and Atlanta. Currently she is seeking a master's in mathematics, though her parents are pressuring her with their belief that one cannot make a living as a teacher (what else does one do with a pure math degree?).

Unknown to either of her parents, Bettie has kept in close contact with her grandmother in Hyderabad since she was introduced to her as a child. Some of the ideas she has been taught don't quite mesh with her personal beliefs in random potential, but this merely led to her meeting with the Lhaxsmists. Only 22 years old, she has already transferred her classes to UNLV and begun studying the entropic ruin of Vegas as much as she does her actual classes. Bettie's thesis regards the psychological and economic dangers of emerging online gambling, but much of her real research is secretly sent to superiors because it seems to indicate a far more malevolent presence than mere greed would provide.

Image: Bettie is a short, dark-haired, pretty girl of obvious Hindu descent. She dresses conservatively, yet casually, as befits a college student who works part time for various casinos. Unsurprisingly for a Vegas native, she wears or carries a number of good luck charms drawn from Hindu, American and British superstition.

Roleplaying Hints: Karma manifests for most people as luck. Perhaps between lives huge spiritual decisions may occur but, from day to day, it is luck that determines the difference between an easy time or a hard road. Unfortunately, the illusory importance of the physical world has gained prevalence over the truth that lies beneath. Luck has come to operate under laws created by those with no memory of the truth. Given dominion over maintaining the illusion, they have forgotten that



it is not real, and so has the physical world. It is your duty to remind it. Or something like that. This stuff is hard to think about sometimes.

Faction: Lhaxsmists

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Loner

Demeanor: Conformist

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 1, Awareness 2, Dodge 1, Expression 1

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 2, Meditation 1, Stealth 1

Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 2, Cosmology 1, Enigmas 1, Linguistics 2 (English, Hindi), Occult 2, Science (Probability Theory) 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Avatar 1, Contacts 2, Library 1, Mentor 2, Resources 1

Arete: 2

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 2, Mind 1, Prime 1, Spirit 1

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 0-1

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Inventive 1

⊕RDER ⊕F HERITIES

⊕ZYTIANDIAS "⊕Z" CODY

Background: Architect by day, scourge of demon-kind by night. Oz helps Skip McQueen and Zydeco design innocuous devices and mechanisms to facilitate their mystical law enforcement. He also works as Zydeco's backup when they go out on the streets.

Oz is a quiet man, preferring to let his partner do the talking. He is still somewhat jaded by his lot in life, but he does his job and does it well. If James Bond had been a black man and a mage, he would look a lot like Oz. He's more like Q, though, with his special penchant for designing interesting devices using scientific principles yet unrealized by the Masses (or withheld from view by Technocrats).

(Oz's own story of his Awakening can be read in *The Bitter Road*.)

Image: Oz looks like a guy who works out at the gym a lot, and his suits are often custom fitted to make him look even more buff and presentable. His close-cropped hair and neatly trimmed goatee add style, as does his good fashion sense (hey, that subscription to *GQ* wasn't a total waste of time).

Roleplaying Hints: Deep down, you still can't help but be amazed by the weird shit that goes down in this crazy world of magic. Although outwardly you seem



jaded to others, those who know you can sense that hint of a smile and gleam in the eye when your ass is on the line and it's time to deliver a valiant rescue or perfectly timed Effect.

Faction: House Thig

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Judge

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3; Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2; Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Awareness 1, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 3

Skills: Drive 3, Firearms 3, Melee 1, Stealth 2, Technology 2

Knowledges: Las Vegas Area Knowledge 3, Computer 2, Investigation 3, Science 2

Backgrounds: Arcane 1, Contacts 2, Resources 2

Arete: 3

Spheres: Correspondence 3, Entropy 1, Forces 2, Matter 2

Willpower: 6

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Static) Steadfast 1

⊕MALCOLM HENRY

Black Pyramid Chantry

Background: The Watts riots were a stark time when the racial divide between black and white ripped at the soul of America. While they raged, Malcolm sat eating an ice cream cone on his porch in Compton, his reward for staying home like his mother asked. Throughout school Malcolm remained sensible and down to earth while

Martin Luther King and his followers fought and (theoretically) won the Civil Rights movement. Not until college did Malcolm gain the spark of justifiable rebellion.

Determined to join a Black Power movement advocating a return to Africa, Malcolm gained a summer scholarship from Berkeley to visit Egypt as part of an archaeological student exchange program. As the sun set upon one of the pyramid's pinnacles, Malcolm had a vision of ascending upon a pillar of light to converse with the powers of the spheres of creation. He awoke from his vision, brushed the sand from his face and returned to his peers.

Upon his return to the States, Malcolm took up the study of architecture with a particular interest in ancient designs. Despite his vision, he remained rudderless, unsure what to do with it. During a fraternity party, one of his friends convinced him to investigate the Masons, proclaiming that it was a way to crack through the glass ceiling of white dominance. Though the idea seemed silly, he gained a membership and sought the wisdom of Solomon. Slowly, following one false trail after another, he eliminated the wheat from the chaff and pieced together the secrets of the Degrees. Signs led him to return to Cairo once again, where he met with a powerful priestess of House Shaea who taught him the words that would unlock his personal sphere of imprisonment.

Steeped in the secrets of the Egyptians and possessed of a degree in modern architecture, Malcolm returned to the States once again, determined to leave his seal upon the world for all time. Recalling his vision of piercing the heavens with the pyramid's pinnacle, he designed a 30-story shining structure incorporating the principles of ancient and current design. Every night as he worked on it, he dreamed of communing with the



powers beyond his sphere, but even though the great work was finished in concept, no one would build it. Finally, in desperation, he sold the plans to a friend in the Masons, who in turn sold it to the Mandalay Resort Group. It took pulling every string and tapping every connection he could muster to make sure the job wasn't botched, but ultimately it took shape as the shining glass pyramid of Luxor in Las Vegas. From its pinnacle, the brightest beam of light in the world pierced the depths of space searching for the higher powers. As far as Malcolm is concerned, they have answered. He still searches for their precise location, but it seems to him that the Rogue Council fits his vision in every detail.

Meanwhile, the mages who flock to his monument seem to think he is some kind of leader, and it would be a shame to waste what influence he can muster while he waits for the higher powers to answer him directly. Every once in a while, he wonders if his vision hasn't led him to trade one set of unwanted masters for another.

Image: Malcolm Henry is a tall, handsome black gentleman dressed in subdued Sunday best. He looks like he should be holding a Bible and preaching from the pulpit, but when you get to know him, you realize he is too soft spoken for such displays. He usually wears a gold and onyx Mason's ring and a thaumaturgic pendant of an equilateral triangle within a perfect circle. He often carries a book, but it is an obscure tome of knowledge rather than a Gideon's Bible.

Roleplaying Hints: The world is a prison, and its jailers are those who would hold others beneath them. The spirits of creation stand at the crossroads and you have but to learn to hear their directions to know which way the path should lead. If you build a mountain then you can climb higher than Mohammed. You have not found all of the answers, perhaps, but you sure are shining a big flashlight into the spheres above and the guardians of the next sphere seem to be responding. Hopefully, you and the Black Pyramid Chantry can decipher what the higher council is saying before the unrighteous masters of the earth stop you. You know the powers of the spheres beyond don't give a crap about things like skin color, but it sure seems to be a nasty sticking point for the self-appointed masters of this one. You have risen above that garbage, though, despite once being an angry young man.

Faction: House Shaea

Essence: Questing

Nature: Architect

Demeanor: Director

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 4 (Handsome), Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Talents: Alertness 1, Athletics 1, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Dodge 1, Expression 1, Leadership 1, Streetwise 1

Skills: Crafts 4 (Architecture), Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Meditation 1, Performance 1, Technology 2

Knowledges: Academics 3, Computer 1, Cosmology 2, Enigmas 2, Linguistics 3 (English, Arabic, Nubian, Egyptian Hieroglyphs, Enochian), Science 4 (Engineering)

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Avatar 2, Contacts 2, Destiny 2, Influence 1, Library 2, Node 2 (Black Pyramid Chantry), Resources 3, Sanctum 2 (Sun Chamber)

Arete: 2

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 1, Forces 2, Matter 2, Mind 1, Prime 2, Spirit 2, Time 2

Willpower: 6

Quintessence: 2

Paradox: 2

Resonance: (Static) Sturdy 2, (Dynamic) Uplifting 1

ZYDECO JONES

Background: Formerly a member of House Janissary of the Order of Hermes, now Zy-dee spends her time working with Skip McQueen at Buona Fortuna and protecting the population of Las Vegas from the darker supernatural elements. With her partner, Ozymandias Cody, she works to keep the streets safe, the gaming fair, and the balance maintained between Technocracy-owned interests and Tradition mages. Johnny Meyer is a constant problem, but she's hoping she can rehabilitate him before she's forced to take him down.

She still gets the cold shoulder now and then from other Hermetic mages for her affiliation with her former house, but she shrugs it off. Most of her friends in the

Order are dead or gone, so she's made new friends in other Traditions. Nobody goes too far with any criticisms, however, knowing that she can knock the living daylight out of most of them.

Image: A robust Latina in her early 30s with a curvy body and long black hair. At first glance, she doesn't look dangerous, but looks can be deceiving. She almost always wears a jacket of some kind to disguise the concealed weapons she carries at all times. While on the job, she has been known to dress as a dealer, a bartender and even a showgirl on occasion. Despite the grave nature of her work, Zydeco remains untainted and unscarred.

Roleplaying Hints: You stay crisp and cool most of the time, as if you know the score. Most of the time, you do, but those rare times when you don't, you never let others (except Oz, maybe, who you can trust better than anyone) know. Your Latin temper often gets the best of your façade, however, giving you a rep as a hot-and-cold operator.

Faction: None (ex-Janissary)

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Bravo

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3; Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3; Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1

Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 3, Melee 1, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Las Vegas Area Knowledge 4, Enigmas 1, Investigation 3, Occult 1

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Avatar 2, Contacts 3, Resources 1

Arete: 3

Spheres: Entropy 3, Forces 3, Mind 2, Time 1

Willpower: 7

Paradox: 1

Resonance: (Static) Intense 2, (Entropic) Subtle 1

BUTCH LEVI

Black Pyramid Chantry

Background: Vegas runs like clockwork because Butch makes it happen. Where there are tourists, there have to be bartenders and cabbies and chauffeurs and waitresses and... you get the picture. If there is a service union in Vegas, chances are Butch is either at the head of it or real friendly with the person who is.

He grew up in the city. As a young man, he worked as a parking valet, a waiter, a bartender and a casino host at Circus Circus before opening his own limousine service. Throughout his career in service, he often heard his peers complain about the fact that you needed to



have “juice,” connections, to work a well-paying casino job in Vegas. Butch knew there was a reason behind the practice. Casinos needed to hire people they could trust, so more often than not, they hired based on recommendations from current employees. Understanding that there was a need to provide up-and-comers with a means of forming connections, Butch sold his limo service and started a placement service.

Now most of the men and women in hospitality service in Las Vegas are under his aegis and are working on his recommendation. He is well respected by the people he places as well as the corporations who hire them. Although Butch is a wealthy man, he gives most of his money away to charity, preferring to live on modest means to keep himself honest.

While he’s a member of the Order of Hermes, it’s not the main motivating factor in his life — staying connected and helping others stay connected is far more rewarding to him. He was first drawn into the Order years ago when a fellow Freemason recognized his potential. Butch had joined the Masons seeking yet another avenue to network and be part a community of movers and shakers. Turned out, they weren’t moving and shaking much, but the Hermetics within that order were. Butch has been a member of the Black Pyramid Chantry for a while now, and occasionally still goes to their meetings at the Luxor.

He sees his magic through the lens of ancient Egypt, heavily influenced by Malcolm Henry. As far as he’s concerned, he’s just carrying on the ritual work of the ages, another link in the chain from the past through the present, preserved through the steadfast and stoic sacrifices of those in the know. He has not yet learned to integrate his magic fully into his life, and still keeps it compartmentalized as a ritual he does mainly when gathered with the other chantry members. Slowly, however, as he has had to call on his will to get him out of a few messes of late, he’s learning that it’s not just something confined to ceremonial occasions.

Image: “Big” Butch Levi is just that — big. At 6’4 and 350 pounds, he makes an impression when he walks into a room, and he speaks with a voice that has been described as “what thunder is afraid of.” But for all his imposing size and booming voice, the 55-year old is a man with a kind heart. He has a warm, generous and friendly disposition, but is equally able to knuckle under and play hardball when negotiating salary disputes or shift schedules.

Roleplaying Hints: You put on a good act of being in control yet even-tempered, but you can’t help but feel bad when you have to yell at someone to get something done. You never show this contrition, but you feel it nonetheless.

Faction: House Shaea

Essence: Pattern



Nature: Martyr

Demeanor: Director

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3; Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2; Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Athletics 3, Awareness 1, Brawl 2, Intimidation 2, Leadership 2, Streetwise 2

Skills: Drive 3, Firearms 1

Knowledges: Las Vegas Area Knowledge 4, Finance 1, Investigation 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 4, Influence 3, Resources 3

Arete: 2

Spheres: Correspondence 1, Entropy 1, Forces 1, Mind 2, Time 1

Willpower: 6

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Static) Reliable 2

SONS OF ETHER

RALPH CANNON

Black Pyramid Chantry

Background: To look at him, you might not think that Ralph Cannon is very special at all. He’s just another guy in a jumpsuit and a hardhat, working on the machinery that powers Hoover Dam. But looks can be deceiving. In the Enlightened world, Ralph is one of the most well respected and highly praised members of his Tradition. Mundanes know him as the Director of Maintenance and Inspection. Among the Sons of Ether he is known as The Man In Charge and his job carries with it the weight of history and exceptional achievement.

When Hoover Dam was designed and built, the Sons of Ether considered the Dam irrefutable proof that their particular brand of Science was more valid and useful than the tiny dreams of the Technocracy. The first maintenance crews on the dam were headed by Etherites, although they were eventually edged out by Technocrats. Even the Union, however, got bored of the project and left it in the hands of Sleepers, performing only occasional surveillance. They don't yet know about Ralph's true affiliations.

Ralph began his career with the Sons at the Dam. He learned how magic worked by observing and manipulating the many overlapping and counterbalancing Effects in play. He was lured away by more comfortable positions and juicier projects, but eventually found his way back to the project of his youth. He has an affinity for the area and the labyrinth of pipes and machinery it housed. Now he is in charge of his Tradition's greatest triumph and he approaches his duties with an almost sacred determination.

Although he is a nominal member of the Black Pyramid Chantry, he doesn't go in for their magical mumbo-jumbo. He does, however, respect Malcolm Henry's design skills, and is most impressed with the Luxor. He only attends meetings of that chantry when there is a need to decide action on some region-wide affair.

Image: Ralph appears to be a hearty and hale man in his prime. He's of average height and build and wears his brown hair cut short. A clipboard and pencil are always in his hands.

Roleplaying Hints: Keep a low key about your Enlightened Science, but don't let any joker or fool hurt the dam by misapplied science. You'll step in and fix whatever problem there is on the sly, keeping things



running despite whatever anybody else does. You've had to run off a number of eco-saboteurs now and then, kids really, fanatics who don't understand that the dam stands for more than just the loss of a once-pristine valley. It's a monument to what Science itself can achieve, lighting an entire technopolis in the desert. If you wanted to, you could single-handedly shut down the power to Vegas, but that would be sacrilege against your concrete marvel.

Faction: Utopians

Essence: Questing

Nature: Perfectionist

Demeanor: Visionary

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 3

Talents: Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Intimidation 2

Skills: Drive 2, Technology 5

Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 3, Occult 1, Science 4

Backgrounds: Arcane 2, Avatar 1, Destiny 1, Library 1

Arete: 3

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 1, Forces 2, Matter 3

Willpower: 5

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Static) Unyielding 2

VERBENA

SARAH JATTISON

Big Springs Chantry

Background: If there is an environmental cause to be championed in the Las Vegas area, Sarah will be at the forefront shouting through her megaphone, organizing protests, and getting in the faces of any offending bigwigs and politicians who stand in her way. Her primary causes are water conservation and indigenous property rights. Currently she is heading up the group People for the Paiute who are working with tribal lawyers and others to gain a percentage of real estate profits made on the sale of land that by treaty belonged to the Paiute people. Needless to say, this has made her the enemy of many powerful figures in the Vegas hierarchy. Nevertheless she is undaunted and has amassed a sizeable network of concerned citizens, regional conservation groups, and national environmental representatives to aid in her cause.

Sarah first became aware of her magical heritage at a Rainbow Gathering in the Pacific Northwest, among her own kind — nature lovers and free thinkers. Her Avatar slowly, gently awakened over that summer as she explored the woods, hung out with her friends and



learned to play the guitar. But she began to have nightmares of desert-scapes haunted by sentient and animate tractors and bulldozers, tearing down pristine, magical oases one by one. She followed the few clues her dreams gave her about real-world locations and wound up in Nevada, near the Pauite reservation. There, she meet a small cabal of Verbena, waiting for her. They, too, had visions, and she was in them.

Over time, her nightmares subsided as she realized her purpose in life: to defend the Big Spring Node from depredation. She doesn't know exactly where it is, but knows that its spirits are all around, working to keep it hidden. She respects that they haven't shown it to her yet, and knows she'll see it when the time comes. Until then, she must fight to keep all of Vegas as natural as possible, in case any part of it might actually be part of the hidden Node.

Image: Sarah is a pert and attractive young woman with dark brown hair and twinkling eyes. Those same eyes can pierce the toughest corporate lawyer through the heart if necessary. Jeans and a native blouse are her standard costume, and she never goes anywhere without at least one piece of turquoise jewelry.

Roleplaying Hints: You are on a mission and don't let anything sway you. Lots of folks these days talk about compromise and coalitions. Bullshit. No compromise in defense of Big Spring. Money hungry developers don't need to wreak a single cent more from a land that has already given too much.

Faction: Gardeners of the Tree

Essence: Questing

Nature: Judge

Demeanor: Penitent

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 3, Awareness 2, Expression 2

Skills: Crafts 1, Survival 2

Knowledges: Cosmology 1, Investigation 2, Law 2, Linguistics (Pauite) 1, Occult 1

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Destiny 4, Dream 2

Arete: 2

Spheres: Forces 2, Life 1, Mind 2, Spirit 1

Willpower: 8

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Liberating 1

VIRTUAL ADEPTS

SYD KOWALCZAK

Background: Syd is just a kid, still in high school. He Awakened while surfing the Internet (or was it playing *Everquest*? He can't remember) and quickly built a rep as a skilled and dangerous hacker. Not only did he attract the attention of the Feds, he had Technocrats nearly knocking at his door before they got called away to follow another lead, this one a false trail planted by a Virtual Adept codenamed Ampersand. The Cypherpunk really flamed Syd until the boy finally got the idea that there were Forces Out There That Had to Be Avoided. He swallowed his pride and took some tutelage from Ampersand, receiving his initiation into the Tradition in a series of email courses.

Syd has still never met his Mentor, but the mysterious entity shows up by email or on IC chats now and then. Syd's beginning to suspect that he's not on Earth at all, but is transmitting from the Umbra.

For now, he's keeping a low profile and finishing school. When he needs to, he can manipulate his mom with Mind Effects into allowing him to get away with an awful lot, such as having weird mages over now and then. He's met Skip McQueen but thinks the guy's lost his edge, selling it to the highest bidder. Syd swears he's never going to become like that, tied down to a job where he had to kiss up to suits for money.

Image: Syd's not the fat, pimply geek you might expect on first hearing about him. He's actually an average kid, somewhat on the thin side, but prone to wearing name-brand sneakers and clothes. He's always got an MP3 player on his belt and at least one headphone in one ear.

Roleplaying Hints: You're over that childish phase you first went through after Awakening, where you thought you ruled cyberspace. Whatever. Now, you're



into really paying attention in math class — an advance placement class, of course — and learning about 3D game programming (quaternions are tough).

Faction: Cypherpunk

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Conniver

Demeanor: Child

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 2, Awareness 1, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Technology 2

Knowledges: Computer 3, Enigmas 1, Investigation 2, Occult 1, Science 1

Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Library 1, Resources 2

Arete: 2

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Forces 1, Mind 2, Spirit 2

Willpower: 4

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Curious 1

SKIP McQUEEN

Background: Buona Fortuna Security Services is one of the largest independently owned security organizations in the Las Vegas area, and their clientele consists almost exclusively of casinos. Skip McQueen has made himself and his staff an invaluable asset to the management of many high-end hotels on the strip, including the Luxor, Bellagio, The Venetian, Excalibur, MGM Grand, Mirage, Bally's, and Caesars Palace. The edge, of course, comes from the "special services" he offers to his clients. Spells designed to thwart supernatural mischief-makers and cheaters, as well

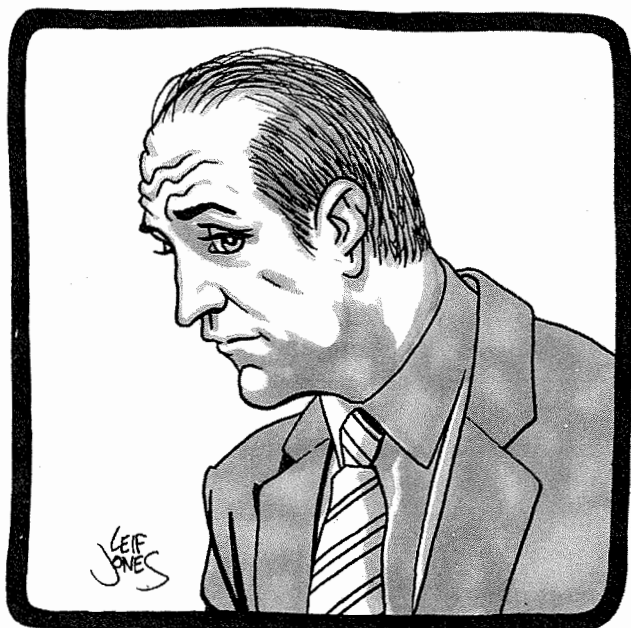
as a staff of professional, discreet and effective operatives make Buona Fortuna a force to be reckoned with.

Skip was a mathematician destined for greatness in the halls of some Ivy League college, but his Atlantic City gambling addiction got the better of him. He was convinced he could beat the system without any tricks using his ability to calculate the sums in his head. Trouble was, the casino he was gaming in had a mage watching out for all sorts of tricks, and it soon became a battle of wits. Normally, the mage would have won hands down, but Skip's Avatar stepped up to the challenge and Awakened at an opportune moment, winning Skip a small fortune. He was asked to leave the casino, but that didn't matter. He knew what he wanted to do with his talent, and was soon back and begging his former competitor for tricks and tips.

This led to admission into the Virtual Adepts, among the Chaoticians. Skip soon realized he was way out of his league here, and returned to his true love: gambling. But it was soured for him now; he knew all the tricks. Vegas, however, had no mages to look after its casino wealth, leaving an obvious job opening.

Skip is one of those rare mages who can skate untouched through both Tradition and Technocrat society. The local Syndicate mages of the Cloud Room value his services and look the other way at the Reality Deviants he uses to get the job done. The way they figure it, it takes a Reality Deviant to catch a Reality Deviant. That, or a waste of money and resources to fund a Panopticon unit; they prefer the more fiscally responsible relationship they've developed with Skip McQueen.

Of course, Skip doesn't turn mages in, except those caught cheating the businesses he protects. Even then, they're sent down the river through normal, everyday



Sleeper channels, not some Technocratic brainwashing nightmare. That he won't condone, and even tries to get it in writing when his bosses are in the know about such things.

He uses a number of freelancers from across the country, but when it comes to locals, he especially favors Zydeco Jones and Ozymandias Cody.

Image: Skip always wears a suit. Of course, he looks extremely uncomfortable in it, as if he would rather be wearing khakis and a golf shirt. His suits fit poorly, too — either too big in the shoulder or too short in the leg. He has sandy blonde hair that is starting to thin at the top, but his face is still youthful, even if his eyes are tired.

Roleplaying Hints: Man, do you have a lot on your plate. Keeping up with it all is a bitch. But you haven't missed a beat yet, and you don't intend to. Maybe a vacation, though, sometime soon. That'd be good, something to prime and pump and come up with new ways to foil heists. You have to stay one step ahead of them in this game.

Faction: Chaoticians

Essence: Pattern

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Director

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Awareness 4, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 3, Technology 1

Knowledges: Academics 3 (Mathematics), Computer 2, Enigmas 3 (Mathematical Ciphers), Investigation 3 (crime scenes), Law 1

Backgrounds: Allies 3, Contacts 3, Influence 2, Resources 3

Arete: 2

Spheres: Correspondence 2, Entropy 2, Forces 2, Mind 1, Prime 1, Time 2

Willpower: 5

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Entropy) Piercing 2

THE WILD CARDS: ⊕ OTHER MAGES



Some Technocrats or Tradition mages move to the beat of a different drummer. Nevertheless they remain Tradition mages or Technocrats. Still other mages tread an entirely different path. Wicked Nephandi seek to corrupt all of existence, mad Marauders warp reality with their passing and orphan mages struggle to find their own course.

⊕ ORPHANS

⊕ JONNY MEYER

Big Spring Chantry (incognito)

Background: Most residents of Vegas know him the frontman for The Fabulous Palominos, often described as the best damn garage band in the southwest. The more mystically inclined know that Jonny and his boys have been mentioned enough times in Rogue Council transmissions to merit serious watching. To those who follow the ideals of the Rogue Council, Johnny is an urban hero. If you ask him about his exploits, he'll tell you he's only trying to have a little fun and make Vegas a little more memorable to the people who visit his fair city. His magical training has been haphazard and mostly picked up from transient mages. When she's in town, Jonny lives with Zydeco Jones, conveniently placing himself under her protection, not to mention gaining further tutelage in the Arts.

Recently, Jonny has been accused of various and sundry magical crimes, but since there has been little to no proof of his involvement he remains free and clear. His saving grace, in this regard, happens to be the flamboyant Resonance that most of his magical acts carry with them. It's hard to duplicate. Those things he does affect normally involve show, spectacle or music. To the Enlightened audience members of his shows, it is obvious that he's influencing the crowd, the sound, and the impact of the music upon everything. Since this normally brings in loads of money and regular patrons at the Syndicate-owned 57 Club, more conservative willworkers are willing to look the other way.

Jonny is secretly a member of the Big Spring Chantry. He joined up with them following a weird dream where the desert cracked open and water poured forth more spectacularly than the fountain at the Bellagio. He thinks the spirits were trying to tell him something, but they haven't revealed just what. He doesn't let anybody know about his membership in the chantry (and the other chantry members keep his secret) mainly because he's afraid that others will assume he knows where the Big Spring Node is (he doesn't). Since he's not affiliated with a Tradition, these others might assume they can beat the information out of him without repercussions. It's best to just keep things quiet for now. He hasn't even told Zydeco yet, although he's almost ready to.

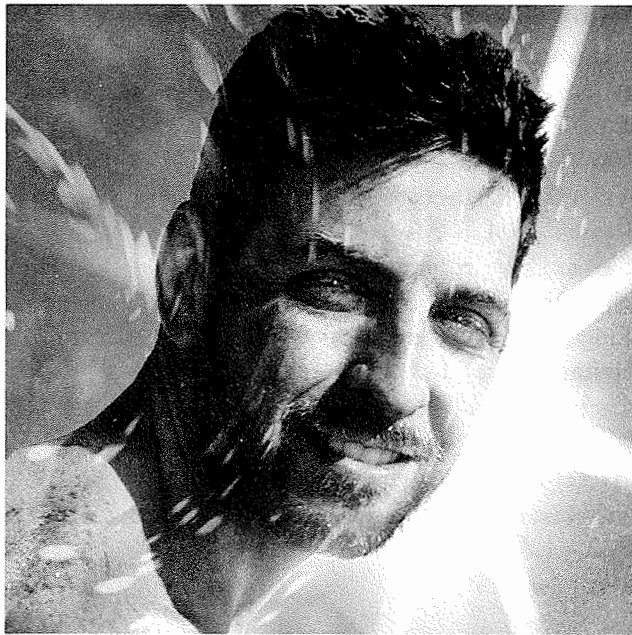


Image: A tall, lanky young man with model good looks. His dark hair, icy blue eyes and pouty lips make him the perfect frontman for a band looking to go places. When he's onstage, he works hard, favoring black jeans and nothing else. Not even shoes. If he's with Zydeco Jones, his wardrobe is much more "rock star" than it is when he's on stage.

Roleplaying Hints: You seek to shake things up in every venue, not just on stage. You're sick of seeing the zombie tourists get herded about town, ooh-ing and ah-ing the lame-o attractions. Sure, the Bellagio's fountain is impressive, but it'd be even more impressive if it showered free money on the crowd. You haven't figured out how to pull that Effect off yet, but when you do, watch out Vegas.

Tradition: Orphan

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Trickster

Demeanor: Celebrant

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 3, Expression 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

Skills: Performance 3, Stealth 2

Knowledges: Enigmas 2, Investigation 2, Occult 1

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Avatar 2, Contacts 2

Arete: 3

Spheres: Entropy 1, Forces 2, Matter 2, Mind 1, Time 2

Willpower: 7

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Dynamic) Flamboyant 4

NEPHANDI

JENNIFER KING, THE GREEN DRAGON

Background: Jennifer was brought up a proper young Mormon girl in Salt Lake City, but for some reason it never stuck. Whether it was backlash for the repression of her bisexuality or bitterness towards domineering parents, she was inexplicably mean from the time of puberty. In a city whose population under 18 has swelled to a quarter of the total, it was easy for a pretty girl to thwart moral authority and stray far. The King family truly began to despair when their daughter became involved in an illegal abortion scandal involving the reputation of a Latter Day Saint bishop. It was almost with relief that they granted her request to go to school at UNLV rather than attending college in Salt Lake.

A few days after arriving, Jennifer had a web cam set up in her dorm room and was regularly exchanging blow jobs with a boy for computer lessons. When she tired of the geek but couldn't get him to leave her alone, she had sex with his roommate and made sure he had access to prescription pills and alcohol. Although not technically a snuff film, his passing was her first more-than-sordid Internet attraction.

Ironically, her omnipresence on the Internet and her ever-expanding puissance with it led to her discovery by the Virtual Adepts. Realizing that she was faced with superior computer skills on a level she couldn't yet comprehend, Jennifer knuckled down and feigned protégé rebel. She even adopted the moniker Green Dragon at her mentor's request. Eventually, their cybernetic meetings turned into physical romps and, once again, Jennifer demonstrated that she was her teacher's master. A brazen run against the Syndicate empire of George Carreau, using her new beau's hardware, left a digital trail right to his front door. The papers later claimed that he was a Black Dog Game Factory fan/addict who killed himself because his character died.

Jennifer disappeared entirely from the Internet and only the Green Dragon remained. Web cam images were now drug-addicted "friends" or even intentionally arranged date rape. Word got out that the Green Dragon could show anything on the web and the government couldn't stop him (or her, nobody knew for sure). People started sending Jen things most of us have never even imagined. Somehow she arranged to distribute it all, and managed to rake in credit card fees doing it. One night, she received an invitation to join in something worse. Upon accepting, she entered a balefire green maze within the Digital Web. There she felt her electronic soul turn inside out and slide through the Caul of death. The Green Dragon emerged without hope. It thinks it's still inside the web and will do anything to get free.



Currently the Green Dragon runs a confusing maze of pornography, shock films and online gambling sites. The rampant growth of online gambling is prompting some Congressmen to propose all sorts of limiting legislation, while the government of Greece recently banned nearly all computer equipment which could possibly host gambling of any kind.

Image: Jennifer is no longer the pretty girl she once was. Her skin is pasty white and her hair is matted thickly to her head. She often spends days attached to holographic or transporter imitation gear while her body builds up an odor not present in the virtual environment. When she chooses to appear in public, she conceals her condition under a cloak of warped-light images, often modeled from online Gothbabe galleries.

Roleplaying Hints: The world is a computer game, we are all trapped inside and the only way out is to shut it all down so we can escape. Unfortunately, it's all here. The Adepts have copied creation over to the hard drive, which means we don't even know we're stuck. Like any other system, it will go down if you can corrupt the files sufficiently.

Tradition: Ex-Virtual Adept *Widderslainte*

Faction: Nephandi

Essence: Primordial

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Deviant

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 1, Manipulation 4 (Seductive) [It works online], Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 4 (Computer Authority), Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 1, Awareness 1, Dodge 1, Expression 1, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Crafts 3 (Electronics), Drive 1, Firearms 1, Performance 1, Stealth 1, Technology 3

Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 4 (Anonymity), Cosmology 4 (Digital Web), Enigmas 3, Investigation 2, Law 1, Linguistics 3 (English, Programming Languages), Occult 1, Science (Communications) 3

Backgrounds: Allies 1 ("Deuce"), Arcane 3, Avatar 1, Contacts 4 (Internet), Resources 4

Arete: 4

Spheres: Correspondence 4, Entropy 3, Life 1, Matter 1, Mind 3, Prime 1, Spirit 2, Time 3

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 0-1 or more

Paradox: 0-4

Resonance: (Entropic) Corrupting 3

MARAUDERS THE MIME

Background: He makes odd appearances from time to time, especially around such places such as Circus Circus, Barnum and Bailey's Circus or Disneyland, but no one has managed to crack his cracked mind. What is clear is that the Mime is a Marauder whose long-term danger has yet to be determined. It would seem that he is simultaneously adventuring through the physical world and some strange dimension elsewhere. Hobgoblins and Sendings sometimes follow in his wake, though no pattern has yet been discerned.

Image: The Mime appears much as any other mime might, with a black suit, black hat, cane, face paint and gloves. But if one looks really closely, he isn't wearing paint or gloves: his skin has truly turned utterly black or white, as has each individual hair. He moves as though interacting with objects which are not there, only he does so with a sureness that proclaims almost beyond disbelief that he must be manipulating something.

Roleplaying Hints: Two worlds collide and you cannot know which of them is real and which one is dream. It could be deadly to assume either is false. You approach everything as though it might be real, and you usually discover that you are right. Sleep seems to be a thing of the past, however, and sometimes you vaguely wonder if you might be sleepwalking.

Tradition: None (Marauder)

Essence: Dynamic

Nature: Gallant

Demeanor: Deviant



Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 1, Awareness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Etiquette 1, Meditation 1, Melee 3, Performance 4 (Mime), Stealth 1, Survival 1, Technology 1

Knowledges: Academics 1, Cosmology 4 (Dual Existence), Enigmas 1, Investigation 1, Occult 2

Backgrounds: Arcane 1, Avatar 2, Destiny 1, Dream 1, Library 1, Wonder 2

Arete: 4

Spheres: Correspondence 4, Spirit 3, Mind 1

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 2

Paradox: 4 permanent points

Resonance: (Dynamic) Dualistic 5

SORCERER

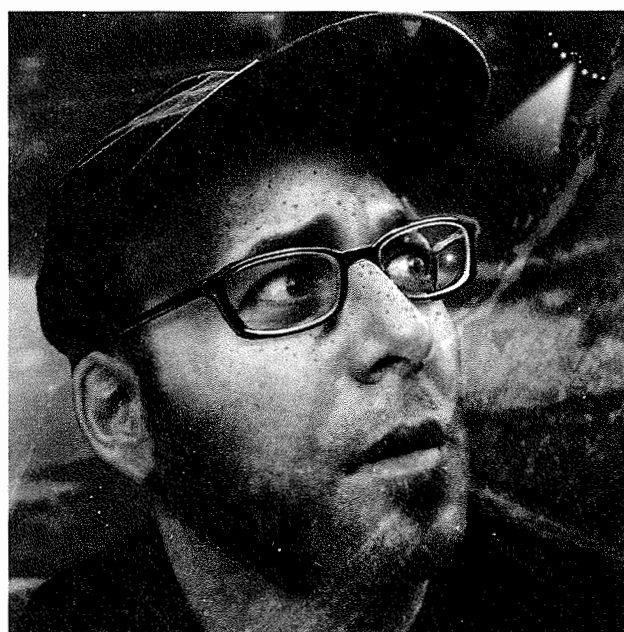
WILLIE "RED" SPRING

Background: Willie, or Red, as his friends always called him, grew up in the back woods of North Carolina. One day he saw a shimmering object that lifted him into the sky. The next thing Willie knew, he woke up in a cornfield in Iowa. He hitchhiked home, only to find such ridicule that he ceased telling his old friends about the abduction. Then it happened again, except the cornfield was in Kentucky. This time Willie Spring ran right into the Army. The United States was gearing up for the Gulf War, and somehow he managed to pass the recruiter's psychiatric evaluation. On patrol one evening it happened again, but this time he found himself behind enemy lines.

Luckily Red managed to return to base camp without losing his life. When his unit got drunk one night, Red was called out on his abduction stories. Word got around and soon enough he was dishonorably discharged. Jobless and unsure what to do, Willie took to calling himself Red even on legal documents and headed out West to San Francisco. He fell in with a bunch of other UFO nuts who called themselves the Star Council and Thal'hun. Learning of his experience in Iraq, the Thal'hun faction convinced him to accompany a fact-finding mission to the Middle East. Most of them didn't come back, and those who did return — including Red — didn't remember much of what happened. The Star Council went underground, closing their last San Francisco office and keeping in touch with each other however possible while avoiding government surveillance. Lately, Red has been in contact with someone who seems to understand the plight of his group but desires only to help. Should Storytellers wish it, this could be Ralph Cannon or some other sympathetic Son of Ether.

Image: Red is, as you might imagine, red haired with freckles and hazel eyes. He is lanky, wears glasses and is somewhat geeky despite his stint in the Army. He usually wears ratty jeans and a cotton T-shirt. Hiking boots, a ball-cap and a satchel of water, food and a laptop computer round out the rest of his gear. The laptop's hard drive currently bears a number of large files consisting of ultrasonic recordings of emissions from one of the "alien devices" the Star Council stole from Area 51.

Roleplaying Hints: They are after you. Yes, *Them*. The Government, the Aliens, NSA, CIA, FBI — it's alphabet soup nowadays. More than once you have been "this close" to solving the mysterious transmis-



sions of the Star Council's discoveries, and sometimes some pretty weird things have happened because of it.

Tradition: None

Faction: Star Council

Essence: Questing

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Thrill-Seeker

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Awareness 2, Dodge 2, Subterfuge 1

Skills: Crafts (UFO scams) 2, Drive 1, Stealth 2, Technology 1

Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 2, Cosmology 1, Enigmas 1, Investigation 2, Law 1, Occult 3, Science (Astronomy) 3, UFO Lore 4 (Area 51)

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Arcane 3, Contacts 2, Destiny 1, Dream 1, Library 1, Resources 2, Wonder 1 (Coded Files)

Arete: Linear Mage (per *Sorcerer* Revised)

Paths: Conveyance 5, Hellfire 2, Weather Control 4

Willpower: 5

Quintessence: 0

Paradox: 0

Resonance: (Static) Paranoid 1

LESSER SUITS: SLEEPERS



It is all too easy when playing **Mage** to forget about the non-mage "Sleeper" community that forms the majority of the world populace. Not every accountant is a face of the shadowy Syndicate. Most doctors wouldn't know what a Progenitor was if one bit them on the rear. Plenty of ghastly psychopaths are driven by their own dark natures, quite independently of

the Nephandi. Mages may reshape the world, but that world exists with or without them. Often it is the world that reshapes the mage, and this section focuses on those who somehow affect mage society.

DAVE ARRINGTON

Background: If you're a believer, then you know Dave. He knows that "the truth is out there." He's seen it, or so he says. The conspiracy theorist and local late-night DJ has a cult following of UFOlogists, students of the paranormal and other weird-o-philes. His ramblings have also attracted the attention of many Awakened listeners who are amazed by just how much this Sleeper seems to know. Dave would be dangerous if he weren't so overdramatic. Because of his breathless manner of reporting his latest finds, not many people take him seriously. Dave, however, takes everything he reports seriously. To him, it is his responsibility to be a light in the darkness, illuminating the shadowy truth where others would keep it hidden.

Image: His listeners don't know it, but Dave's a rather tall guy with a bald pate and slight beer gut. He keeps his beard well-trimmed, though, and likes to sport sunglasses during the day, as if he's trying not to be recognized by his fans.

Roleplaying Hints: You really believe something strange is going on, but hell if you know what it is. With

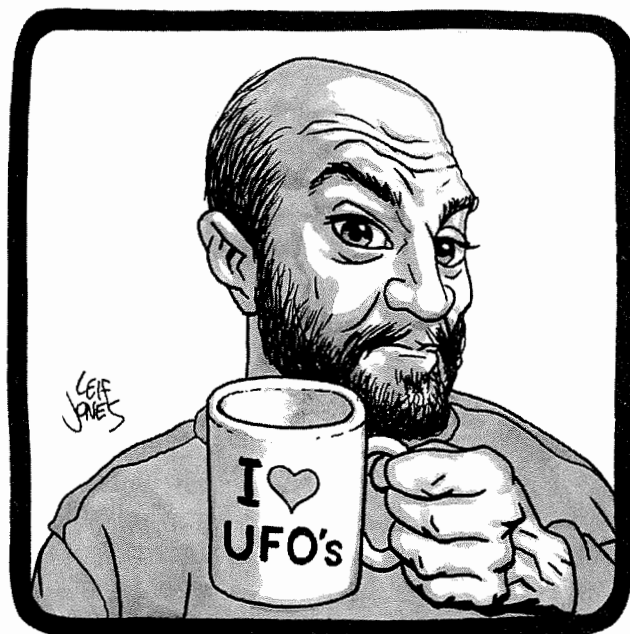
so many crackpot theorists calling in, it's getting hard to puncture all their balloons. You've decided that it's not your job to answer all these questions, but instead to provide a forum for asking them. Sometimes a caller has such a provocative theory that you have to announce it on the air. Later, it often sounds even crazier than it did when you heard the caller tell it. Damn if you know why you even announced it in the first place. It's sort of like you were compelled to do so....

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Fanatic

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Talents: Expression 3, Streetwise 1



Skills: Meditation 1, Performance 2 (Storytelling)
Knowledges: Academics 2, Las Vegas Area Knowledge 3, Investigation 2, Occult 3
Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Fame 1, Resources 1
Willpower: 2

PETER CLARKSTON

Background: Born in the late '60s, Peter was too young to experience the Summer of Love, and only vaguely remembers the artistically desolate era of disco. A native of Las Vegas, he witnessed the excess of the '80s through the glittering lens of the City of Sin. Peter's grades in school were excellent and he determined that he would pursue a career in law. Then he discovered roleplaying games, namely LSD, Inc.'s *Labyrinths & Lamiae*. With his grades slipping horribly and his grants and scholarship money disappearing before his eyes, Peter almost stopped playing the games. Luckily, the unscrupulous law firm Meyers, Feinstein and Hargrett came to the rescue. Provided he signed an exclusive recruitment deal and straightened up, they would foot the tuition bill.

Dolefully putting the books away, Peter put his nose to the grindstone. He turned himself around and even found time to try out for the college football team. Within a few years he passed the bar exam and began to practice law professionally. Impressed by his rugged looks, clean record and disarming demeanor, the firm decided to get better use of their investment. They pushed him to enter public practice and helped him gain a position within the District Attorney of Clark County's office. Once he had the job, his coworkers introduced him to cocaine and informed him that he would continue to work for the firm. Day after day, he fought hard to put sex offenders, murderers and other filth in jail, often gaining brief media coverage, but the firm frequently ordered him to lose a case and, for inexplicable reasons, let the scum of the earth go free. Eager to maintain his carefree — if workaholic — life, Peter agreed.

Just after the turn of the millennium, Magicians of the Bay, the company which had purchased LSD, Inc. and their intellectual properties, concocted a scheme known as Obligatory Icosahedron Licensing, often simply referenced as OIL in the roleplaying game industry. Unable to resist, Peter called up his old game buddy, William Spinner, and the two of them set out to create their own icosahedron games under the Death Lord Games label. Realizing that he didn't really have the excess cash or know-how to get a game printed, Peter sold out his partner and signed a deal with the Black Dog Game Factory. Ironically, he managed to recoup his old friend's loyalty by installing his old RPG character, Minos, a 314th zone demonic warlord who rules the dead



souls of Perdition, as the company logo, and making sure that some reference to the horned, frog-eyed, serpent-tailed fiend appeared in every book.

Rumor has it that Black Dog employees have grown particularly vile when the Game Designer's Group holds conventions in the City of Sin. They appear confident that their newfound collaborator will get them off the hook when Clark County vice cops descend upon whatever hotel room they have turned into this week's pit of iniquity. Meanwhile, Peter seems incessantly drawn to the weird emanations of the paranormal. He has an uncanny knack for sensing unusual people, and the watered down gamers' occult curiosity to pursue them. Unfortunately, whatever he discovers is likely to be shared with his druggie partner, William Spinner, who subsequently shares it with every Internet chat freak who will listen to him for a few seconds. Worse yet, he may attempt to write about them in next month's Death Lord Games release.

Image: Peter is one of those people you read about that *seems* to have it all. He's tall, dark and handsome with piercing blue eyes. During the day he dresses well and is careful to keep his extracurricular activities out of the public eye. At night he discards the tasteful gray suits for khakis and a black Demon Lord Games T-shirt whose stark white print shows the demonic Minos grinning luridly and saying, "Where's your daughter?"

Roleplaying Hints: Minos is King. Even Dante wrote about the Cretan King. Secretly you believe that William was inspired by the "death lord" Minos during one his drunken binges. You nightly seek visions of the dark Labyrinth which Minos ordered Daedalus to build, and every month you send off your hallucinatory scribbles to Black Dog Game Factory claiming they are your newest

adventure game. By day you seek to keep your devil's deal with the firm, and simultaneously file obscure court paperwork in three states with the express purpose of somehow gaining legal control of Black Dog or Magicians of the Bay. You keep hearing that William has become hopelessly addicted to Black Dog's pay-by-the-minute, illicit cyber-furry RPG chats, but as long as he doesn't abandon Minos you won't believe it. "Third time's a charm, first time's a feel. Hey, that's a good company slogan isn't it?"

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Gallant

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Expression 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 2, Firearms 1, Performance 1 (acting)

Knowledges: Academics 2, Las Vegas Area Knowledge 3, Computer 1, Investigation 1, Law 4 (criminal), Occult 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1 (co-writer William Spinner), Contacts 2, Fame 1, Influence 1, Resources 3

Willpower: 3

VICTOR MANELLI, MAN OF RESPECT

Background: The most feared member of the Las Vegas Mafia is the man respectfully called Mr. Manelli by those who know of him. Manelli is one of those rare mortals who is at least peripherally aware of the existence of the supernatural, yet merely treats it as one more variable in his plans. He is a model of the modern Mafia businessman, carefully balancing a veneer of legitimacy with an underworld edge.

Victor Paul Manelli grew up in Chicago and began his involvement with organized crime at the age of 11 as a courier. His college years were spent at UNLV, but he remained at least nominally a member of the mob while earning his business degree. Upon his return to Chicago, Victor easily found a place within the mob power structure. He quietly ran a Family-owned restaurant, put his sharp business instincts to work and quickly climbed the ranks. By the time Manelli was 37 he was a trusted advisor in Chicago, and when the Mafia's keystone man in Vegas "took a ride," Victor's superiors chose him to assume the position. Victor has been in charge of Mafia operations in Las Vegas for just over a decade, and he's kept the City of Sin profitable with a bare minimum of law enforcement attention and carnage.

Manelli is heavily invested in the city nowadays. His reputation depends upon his successes, past and future, and his wife and three children consider Vegas home. Locals in the know treat him as a legendary Godfather figure when he conducts business from a private suite or

restaurant table within the Golden Nugget Casino. When not busy directing the Family business, Victor divides his time between his large upscale house on the northern edge of the city and the young mistress he keeps stashed at Circus Circus. More than once he has considered moving to the nicer, newer suburbs of Henderson, but his community in northern Vegas is already home to most of his top men. The "neighborhood watch" is better prepared than the police and better paid.

Vegas is home to more than one Mafia family. Nonetheless, each of the other families either considers Manelli too dangerous to combat or too valuable to their continued operations. Syndicate mages with a mob bent to their practices see Manelli as an embodiment of their ideals, and in a sense he is as sacrosanct as a holy priest would be in the eyes of the Chorus. While supernatural mobsters are not very common, those that do exist don't often know what to make of Manelli and fear the consequences of underestimating him. Certainly he carries himself like a man who is owed favors best left unredeemed.

Image: Mr. Manelli is a distinguished Italian gentleman in his mid-50s who dresses his somewhat stocky build — a holdover from college wrestling days — in fine Italian suits. His dark eyes shine with intelligence, and his smooth voice easily slides the scale between cold warnings and friendly charm. At home in his position of power, he exudes an aura of confidence. Wherever he goes, he is attended by at least two of his associates.

Roleplaying Hints: You are at home in Las Vegas. The vibrant, snarled growth of the city and the challenge of maintaining the chaotic town as a respectable stake for the Family provide you with an enjoyable pastime. Times have certainly changed, however, and you feel more at home in



the elegance of older casinos like the Gold Nugget. The Strip has turned into a garish Disneyland — thank God they stopped that '90s drive to fill it with kids too. Kids and business just don't mix. There are more things in this world than God-fearing Catholics have a right to know. As far as you can tell, Cosa Nostra isn't alone in the underworld. Bloodless corpses, psychic powers and diabolic rituals are as real as the shadowy society to which you belong.

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Perfectionist

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4 (Intimidating), Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4 (Good Memory), Wits 3

Talents: Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 1, Intimidation 3, Leadership 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3
Skills: Drive 1, Etiquette 2, Firearms 2, Performance 1, Stealth 1

Knowledges: Academics 2, Computer 1, Enigmas 2, Finance 3, Investigation 1, Law 2, Linguistics 1 (Italian, English), Occult 3, Mafia Lore 4 (Supernatural Elements)

Backgrounds: Allies 4, Contacts 4, Influence 3, Mentor 1, Resources 5

Willpower: 9

⊕ OTHER GAITIES IN T⊕WN



Mages are not the only supernatural creatures to lurk in the shadows of the World of Darkness. Spirits and bygones of innumerable types lie just outside of mortal perception, driven away by disbelief or kept secret by their own inscrutable rules. Unless she is possessed of obscure lore, a mage is unlikely to know the details, but it would seem that reality still includes vampires, werewolves, ghosts, fairies and a frightening menagerie of forgotten beasts and intrusive presences.

Without understanding what she faces, however, a mage just may feel like a card player showing up for an unexpected craps game.

"DEUCE"

Background: "I shall undress at 1:30 p.m. in this window," proclaimed one sign in Block 16 during the first decade of the twentieth century. This was the sort of brazen promise that beckoned the passerby into the red light district, and foolish mortals were not the only ones tempted by the advertised lady. Spirits of vice flowed through the district as readily as the spirits of alcohol coursed through drunken veins. It was only a matter of time before the delights of sin attracted one of the flies of corruption.

Originally, the corrupt spirit was a feeble creature, barely able to register upon the psyche of the weakest-willed degenerate who visited the Block. Slowly it grew in strength and eventually became capable of inflicting the unfettered passions and dangerous obsessions of those who frequented Block 16 upon its casual visitor. Finally, the spirit waxed powerful enough to possess a body with which to foment and indulge in the sins it watched.

Block 16 was nearly destroyed by the intervention of the federal government seeking to protect the young and impressionable men of its military. Inspectors demanded that the Las Vegas city council and its sheriff shut down the disreputable neighborhood and, reluctantly, they obliged. The spirit quietly urged the owners of the Arizona Club and fellow businesses to remove themselves from the public eye. Within a decade, the open catcalls and scantily clad women of Ogden, Stewart and Second were firmly ensconced in secret basement dens of iniquity. Word spread among the most loyal customers that Block 16 was once again open for business.

As far as the deviants who visit Block 16 are concerned, it is a dozen or so underground clubs offering drugs, illegal prostitution and sadomasochistic sex toys. Faces come and go among the employees, as is to be expected given their dangerous lifestyle. For a fee, you can sodomize a young boy, spend the night in a cage with an underage hooker, snort cocaine until your nose bleeds or nearly anything else normal people might wish they could not imagine.

Currently, the king of freaks in the underground Block seems to be a deathly pale Goth who now calls himself the Deuce. What the denizens of Block 16 don't know is that this is merely the latest body possessed by a certain corrupt spirit whose real name would mean nothing to a human ear. Most of them are too busy swimming in a flood of roofies, amyl nitrate and leather whips to pay attention to the dangerous spirit in their midst, empowered by their dark passions.

Image: The Deuce is tall and terribly thin, with greasy, ratty hair and loose, white skin like a corpse. Normally clad in black leather pants and a faded black Prodigy T-shirt, Deuce doesn't even seem to have the good sense to sweat properly. His hands are cold and

clammy, and you always get the uncomfortable impression he's staring through you and contemplating whether you have any younger sisters or brothers around the corner who might be tagging along.

Roleplaying Hints: You were born of hidden desires, yet were denied their pleasures for so long. Millennia as a helpless voyeur have inspired a determination never to be denied again. These mortals are so fresh and open in their invitation. You have the power to experience them inside and out. Who is anyone to pretend they want otherwise? Of those who enter your domain, only the girl who calls herself the Green Dragon in a far away world you don't understand seems capable of withstand-

ing your force of will. The rest of them are like a bucket of eggs waiting to be sucked dry.

Willpower: 6, **Rage:** 6, **Gnosis:** 8, **Power:** 52

Charms: Airt Sense, Blighted Touch, Corruption, Disable, Insight, Possession. (See the *Mage Storytellers Companion* for rules for spirits and their powers.)

Notes: Deuce would have no physical form without human beings, and should mages free its host, he is a broken person with feelings and emotions buried by the long-term domination. If they instead slay the host, Deuce will simply move on to another weak-willed sap and become another new "owner" of the Arizona Club.



CHAPTER FOUR: QUESTING FOR THE STORY

2000 years ago Jesus went into the desert, and the Devil came and offered him anything, and people have been looking for that Devil in deserts ever since.

—Michael Ventura, *Las Vegas: Gamble in the Desert*

GETTING STARTED



Las Vegas presents many exciting opportunities for Storytellers. Vegas, as a starring player in a chronicle, can also be quite a challenge since there are so many diverse elements that go into making the city as interesting as it is. What's a Storyteller to do if she wants to run a chronicle in Las

Vegas, but has never been there? What about the Storyteller who went to the city on vacation as a kid but hasn't been back in 10 years or more?

Hopefully this chapter will help by giving both Storytellers and players enough basic pointers and info to create the high-rolling atmosphere a successful chronicle needs.

GAMBLING AND CASINOS



Let's face it: The reason people go to Vegas is to take a chance at striking it rich in the casinos. Well, that and the topless dancers... but we digress. Mages, enlightened though they are, have no immunity to this strange desire to throw money to the wind. A chronicle that places characters in the casino at the craps table or even in front of the one-

armed bandits is a snap to run if you, the Storyteller, can grasp even just the basic rules of the games and the average odds of winning. Even if your characters don't gamble, knowing how a casino is laid out and run is essential if you're planning major action within.

THE LINGO

Here's some jargon to add flavor to your games:

bankroll — the amount of money you have to spend on gambling. The house typically has a bankroll too, but it's considered unlimited, unless you and your intrepid reality manipulators want to test that theory.

Black Book — a list of people legally excluded from any casino in the state of Nevada based on a past history of cheating or a connection to organized crime. The State Gaming Control Board keeps this list as well as another, not-so-widely-publicized list of mages who have been found using their talents for illegal personal gain.

buy in — trade cash for casino chips. You do this at the...

cage — the casino cashier. You can establish credit here, change your chips into cash, and even exchange foreign currency.

checks — a more refined name for chips. This is the term the casino will use, preferring the more highbrow name to the vulgar parlance.

comps — Compensation. Freebies. Stuff the casino gives to regular, steady or big-money gamblers. This can range anywhere from a free buffet for playing 100 hands of Blackjack to free cocktails to RFB — room, food and beverage. Most comps are awarded to rated players (see below) or members of slot clubs.

eye in the sky — the casino surveillance system. Some casinos want you to know they're watching you. Others hide these so effectively, you never know they're there — even though you know they're there. And keep in mind that the "eye in the sky" might not necessarily be confined to the ceiling.

grind joint — a casino with low-dollar minimum bets at the tables and slot machines, so named be-

cause they "grind" their profits out of players a little at a time.

high roller — a gambler who bets big money on every hand at a table game and plays the higher end slot machines. The average minimum bet for one of these people is \$100 per hand at the table and \$5 at the slots.

house edge — the percentage the casino retains based on the difference between the true odds and the actual payout. As a rule, it's best to bet on games that have a low house edge and a high payout.

loose — a word used to describe slot machines that pay out frequently, thus the phrase "The loosest slots in Vegas!"

low roller — the opposite of a high roller, or someone who almost always bets on low-minimum games.

rated player — gamblers whose game play has been observed and noted by the casino. Based upon the average bet and the average amounts won and lost, the player is then eligible for certain comps.

pit — a place between gaming tables reserved for casino employees. The **pit boss** is the person who keeps an eye on the action from within the pit. This is also where you go to inquire about comps or ask to be rated by the casino.

skill — an employee of the casino who plays at empty tables to encourage visitors to sit down and bet. He always plays with casino money, and therefore can win as big and bet as big as he wants.

slot clubs — clubs for slot and video poker players. One plays and adds up points, then trades them for food, cash, gifts and other nifty things.

stiff — a lousy tipper, or even worse, someone who doesn't tip at all! The opposite of a stiff, in casino parlance, is a **George**.

true odds — the actual statistical chances of winning, as opposed to what's ultimately paid out by the casino.

whale — the highest of high rollers. These people bet anywhere from \$1,000 to \$10,000 per hand and don't even blink. They are the biggest losers in the casino, money-wise, so casino management treats them like the biggest winners on the planet, often flying them in for special weekends and treating them to luxury suites and comp'ed meals and drinks.

(Thanks to the *Time Out Guide to Las Vegas* (2001) for some of these terms.)

THE LAYOUT

Casinos are money-making outfits. So the goal of the house is to get as many people as possible in the door and playing, preferably at the table games, for progressively higher stakes against higher odds. However, the house also knows that the average tourist isn't going to march right in and drop \$5,000 per bid at the baccarat table. This is why there is a standard casino "lore" or layout that includes several very significant sensory factors.

If you know nothing else about a casino other than this, understand that each one is carefully structured to deliver a certain combination of color, light, and sound — all toward the ultimate end of persuading people to hand over their cash and be happy about it. The first thing you will notice when you walk in the door is the massive array of slot machines with blinking lights, whirring sirens and tokens clattering into the metal payout drawers. But it's not just the machines themselves. The carpet is usually dark and very, very busy — sometimes even vertigo-inspiring. This is to keep you looking up at the machines and not down at the floor. Likewise, the natural lighting is kept slightly dark in the casino as a whole, but more so along the edges and in the corners. There are no windows and there are no clocks. It's loud, enticing and all arranged to draw you deeper into the casino. Typically, there will be a few high-dollar, high-payout slots up front followed by lower denomination slots, all funneling to the Money Wheel or some other massive game.

Slots are nice. In fact they account for about 60% of a casino's profits. But what the casino really wants is for you to sit down and stay awhile at one of the table games. These are arranged behind the Money Wheel (sometimes called Big Six), often with the craps table — the loudest and noisiest table game — in a central location, which means you have to pass by the other gaming areas to get to it. Note, the term is "gaming" now, not "gambling." Recent surveys have indicated that "gambling" has a negative connotation, but "gaming" inspires thoughts of fun, frivolity and general good times.

As a rule, the various games are grouped into clusters. There will be a blackjack cluster, a roulette cluster, a keno cluster and a poker cluster.

Baccarat is the exception to the rule, since it is a quiet, more refined game. Most casinos will have special high-stakes lounges set aside for baccarat players, some of which include buffets and specialty cocktail bars.

So how does this affect your players? Honestly, as much or as little as you want it to. Understand that casinos are the most glamour going. Every single element is cunningly crafted to make people fork it over

and enjoy themselves while doing it. Of course, in the hands of Awakened mages, the separation between the mundane and the magical can be heightened and enhanced. It could be good clean fun, or there could be more sinister workings behind the flashing red lights and beautiful cocktail waitresses. Mages proficient in Pattern scrying might notice tell-tale details in the carpet patterns, while those versed in Matter might discover a thing or two about the chips — pardon me, *checks* — issued to unsuspecting patrons.

Of course, your casino action doesn't have to be magical at all. There are plenty of mundane challenges involved in the average casino to give player characters plenty to handle. After all, how exactly IS that player going to catch up to the pickpocket that just lifted his "lucky" coin when there are literally thousands of people jam-packed into the narrow aisles?

THE GAMES AND THE ODDS

So you want to treat your players to some experiences at the gaming tables? Here are some of the basic rules of the more popular games and the average odds involved.

BACCARAT

It's the game James Bond loves to play, so you might think baccarat (pronounced *bak*-a-rat in English-speaking countries) is some deeply complex game requiring high skill and an intense knowledge of the rules. Actually it's dirt simple. The only thing distinguishing this game from any other is the stakes, which are normally set high. (Minimum bets usually start at \$50 and can jump up to almost \$500, depending on where you go.) Thankfully the house edge is pretty low, which means that if you can afford to play, the payouts can be pretty big.

The Layout: The table looks like a kidney bean with spaces sectioned out for up to seven players on one side and up to six players on the other. "Horseshoes" on both sides read **PLAYER** and **BANKER** and in the center there is a space for **TIE**. The dealer stands in the middle and directs game play.

The Rules: Two players play at a time, designated as **PLAYER** and **BANKER**. Each gets two cards from a dispenser called the "shoe," which contains eight complete decks of cards. The hand that comes the closest to nine points wins.

Card Values: Ace = 1, number cards 2–9 = number value, 10 and face cards = 0.

Betting and Playing: Cards are dealt and players place their bets on either the **PLAYER** hand, the **BANKER** hand or bet on a **TIE** between the two. When the cards are revealed, the values are added up. If the two cards have a total above nine, it is reduced by eliminating

the first digit. For example, if the PLAYER hand holds two 7s, it adds up to 14. But then you eliminate the first digit, so the hand actually equals 4. Depending upon how high or low the initial hands are, the dealer may decide to "hit" one or both of the hands with a third card. This is determined by stringent rules that only dealers need to know, but usually this "hit" favors the BANK.

Payout: PLAYER bets pay out at even money, as do BANK bets, although winnings on a BANK bet are charged a five percent commission by the house. It's a good idea to stay away from the TIE bet because the house odds are usually 8 to 1 as opposed to the true odds, which are about 10 to 1.

BINGO AND KENO

It's not just for Friday nights with the nuns down at the church anymore: The game may not be flashy or glamorous, but Bingo is highly popular in Vegas, especially at local neighborhood casinos. Essentially, it's the same game you played as a kid, matching up letters and numbers in the various columns on a card until you get BINGO. The major difference between this game and the very similar Keno is that numbers are called until somebody wins.

Keno is kind of like the lottery — that is, you should get used to losing. In Keno, you have a card with 80 numbers on it. Players circle from 15 to 20 numbers before the game starts and bet on each number or number combination. Then 20 numbers are chosen at random (usually numbered ping pong balls blown out of a hopper into a tube — kind of like the lottery) and then displayed on screens throughout the casino. If your numbers are there, you win. If not, you lose. Kind of like the lottery.

Basically, you're better off avoiding Keno. If by some miracle you should win, you must claim your winnings before the next game starts or you forfeit your prize. Also, if two or more people win the same jackpot, they must split the winnings.

BLACKJACK

Blackjack, or 21, is the king of table games in Vegas. It's got a low house edge, it's easy to play and with the right strategy, a skilled player can actually beat the house odds. Of course, because the skill of the player can change the outcome, it is one of the most scrutinized games on the casino floor. Card-counting strategies abound, and since the practice itself is not illegal, many experienced players attempt to use it to their advantage. Of course this tends to be discouraged by vigilant floor managers and surveillance cameras. And then there's the old, Ace-up-the-sleeve trick.... But you don't have to cheat to win at Blackjack — just know the rules and some basic strategies.

The Layout: Seating varies at the Blackjack table, depending on where you go. Players sit around a table with the dealer — who has control of the cards in a "shoe" — in the center. Some Blackjack games are single deck and tend to be dealt face down while other games are multideck and are almost always dealt face up to eliminate confusion and the possibility of cheating. Most Strip casinos have moved to multi-deck play, as it tends to discourage card counting.

The Rules: Players make their bets and are dealt two cards, and then the dealer gets two cards, one face up and one face down. Players can either "stand" (keep the cards they've been dealt), "hit" (request another card), "double down" (double the initial bet and take one more card), or "split" (usually done when the first two cards are a pair, such as two 10s, creating two new individual hands that are played separately). Cards are drawn until all players either "stand" or "bust" — that is, go over 21. Then the dealer reveals her hidden card. If the total of her cards is 16 or less, she **MUST** hit. If the total is 17 or above she **MUST** stand.

Card Values: Number cards = face value, J–Q–K = 10, Ace = 1 or 11 (player's choice).

Betting and Playing: Betting on Blackjack is easy. You put down your money, you get your cards. Playing Blackjack is not quite so easy. There are countless numbers of books out there that detail blackjack strategy. If you really want to go into that much detail in your game, then you or your players may want to consult one of those books. Strategy charts are available in most of these books and it's good to know that consulting them is perfectly acceptable in most casinos.

Payout: Players with hands that total higher than the dealer's win at even money. Hands totaling lower than the dealer's lose, again at even money. A tie, or a "push," involves no exchange of money. A natural 21 or "blackjack" is paid out 3 to 2 immediately.

CRAPS

Sometimes the simplest of games can be the most complicated. Craps is exactly that way. Not only is it the fastest game in any casino, it allows the largest number of people to play at one time (20), and it is the most labor intensive for the casino, requiring four employees to be on the table at all times. It's noisy, lightning fast and provides opportunities to really win big or really lose big.

The Layout: Craps is played on a hollowed out, waist-high table marked with a diagram. These squares and numbers indicate the different dice combinations that can be rolled. The words PASS, DON'T PASS, COME and DON'T COME are also printed on the felt. Up to 20 players can stand on one side of the oblong table;

the other side is occupied by the boxman and two dealers on either side of him. The boxman sits in the center and is responsible for collecting money, passing out checks, watching the dice and ruling on disputed outcomes. The dealers arrange the bets on the table and pay off winners. The "stickman" stands on the player side of the table. His job is to pass the dice to the "shooter," the player throwing the dice. He does this using a long stick with a slight crook on the end — thus the name.

Betting and Playing: Essentially players attempt to guess whether or not a certain number will be rolled before the number seven comes up. Easy, huh? Not quite. There are 180 possible bets for every dice roll, even though there are only 36 possible ways that two dice can be rolled. At the top of the hand, the dice are passed to the shooter and on her initial throw bets are made on either PASS or DON'T PASS. What that means is PASS bettors want either a 7 or an 11 to come up. If it does, they win. If a 2, 3, or 12 comes up, they "crap out" and lose. The DON'T PASS bet is what's called a "wrong" bet, so the bettor is playing the reverse of the PASS bet. If a 7 or 11 comes up, the bettor loses, if a 2 or 3 comes up, he wins. A 12 on a wrong bet means a push (a tie) and the bet remains for the next hand.

So what happens if 4, 5, 6, or 9 comes up? If that's the case, then a "point" is established and the dice are rolled again. If a 7 or 11 comes up, the player loses. If the point comes up, the player wins. COME and DON'T COME bets are placed after the point is established. Again, 7 or 11 win on a COME bet; 2, 3 and 12 lose. Reverse that for the DON'T COME bet, remembering that a 12 equals a push.

The joy of Craps lies in another bet that can be made that gives the gambler the truest odds in the casino. If a PASS or COME bet has been made, and a point has been established, you can bet that the point will come up before a 7 is thrown. In this type of bet, the house has no edge, so it's called a free-odds bet. The odds aren't against you, so it's one of the best.

Payout: All normal bets (that is, PASS, DON'T PASS, COME, DON'T COME) are paid at even money. Free-odds bets are paid off at a rate equal to the statistical chance of the win.

THE MONEY WHEEL

Remember *The Price Is Right*? To determine the contestants in the Showcase Showdown, Bob Barker has folks "spin that wheel" and try to get the closest to a dollar without going over. The Money Wheel operates on just about the same principle. There are 54 equally spaced slots on a huge and ornate wheel that is suspended vertically above the floor. There are two joker or house symbol spaces and the rest are marked \$1, \$2,

\$5, \$10, and \$20. A table nearby or directly in front of the wheel has corresponding spaces that are labeled the same as on the wheel. Normally there are about 24 \$1 spaces and only two \$20 spaces.

Players place bets on the table to correspond with the slots on the wheel. Then the operator spins the wheel. When it stops, those who bet on the correct dollar denomination win, their payoff determined by the dollar amount of the winning slot. So \$20 slots pay out 20 to 1, while \$1 slots pay out even money. Jokers pay out 40 to 1. Needless to say, you have to be awfully lucky to win at this game, which is why you'll never see huge crowds at the Money Wheel.

POKER

This is a rather odd game to find in a casino, since in Poker, players gamble against one another rather than against the house. However, most casinos have Poker tables featuring a variety of game types from traditional Seven Card Stud to Pai Gow and Let It Ride. Poker is often played in separate lounges, but some casinos have poker tables on the main house floor.

The Layout: A table with a fixed number of chairs around it. This varies from casino to casino. The dealer only distributes cards and handles the chips.

The Rules: They vary depending on the type of poker you're playing, but Seven Card Stud, the most traditional form of poker, works like this: Players are dealt cards in groups, two face down and one face up, then three face up and another face down. The object is to assemble the best possible hand from the seven cards you've been dealt.

Betting and Playing: Of course the rules make poker sound as easy as pie, but the greater part of betting on and playing poker is about the subtleties of bluffing and psychological subterfuge. Initial bets (that is, what's required to actually sit down at the table and play) are often 10 times the minimum or maximum bet, whatever the house rules happen to be. Then there's the ante, or what you bet before the cards are dealt, and that is followed by an intricate dance of raising and betting again. Once all bets are in, all hands are revealed. The player with the best hand wins.

Payouts: The good news is that the house take is limited on poker. Normally the house charges a \$5 to \$7 per half hour fee to sit at the table and play, or the house takes a fixed percentage of the bet on every hand. The bad news is that with the traditional rules games, you've got to have a pretty massive bankroll in order to play and win.

ROULETTE

This slower, quieter, more refined cousin of the Money Wheel is extremely popular in Europe, but

doesn't seem to hold much interest for gamers in the U.S. The difference between the U.S. and the European roulette wheels might have something to do with it. The traditional wheel has 36 numbered slots and one zero slot. The American wheel has two zero slots (zero and double zero), which almost doubles the house edge on the game!

The Layout: The wheel itself is horizontal and is normally in a casing of some kind. Connected to it is a table with a matching layout. Numbers are colored red and black and the zeros are green.

Betting and Playing: Each player starts off with special wheel chips when they buy at the table. Players place their bets on the various colored squares on the table, and the operator spins the wheel. A little white ball is either thrown in or is automatically launched into the spinning wheel. When the ball finds a slot, winners are declared.

The variety of bets one can make on roulette is what makes it much more appealing (and profitable) than the Money Wheel. There's the straight bet, which is simply a chip placed on a single number, and there are group number bets based on the arrangement of the numbers on the table.

Payouts: A winning straight bet is paid out 35 to 1. Betting odd or even pays even money. Also, if multiple number bets are made, the payoff is determined by the quantity of numbers the bet covers. The more numbers, the lower the payout.

SLOTS, SPORTS BOOK AND VIDEO POKER

Combined, these gambling opportunities are the most popular and lucrative part of the gambling establishment in Vegas. After all, there's a reason why slot machines are the first thing you see when you walk into a casino! There's no real strategy or rule to these games. You just pay your money, pull a lever or press a button and a computer generates the random numbers that determine where the rolls will stop. The only thing worth noting with the slots is the difference between stand-alone and progressive slots. Stand-alones have a fixed payout and don't usually offer the opportunity for a huge jackpot like progressive slots. Progressive slots "donate" a percentage of every bet to a collective jackpot that accumulates until someone wins it. The more machines involved, the higher the jackpot.

Sports book rooms are essentially places where gamblers can go to watch major sporting events and place wagers on them. Many hotel casinos offer rooms with ergonomic, reclining chairs, full-service bars and sumptuous buffets. However, these places are pretty deserted unless there is a major sporting event being broadcast.

THE MONEY: BUYING IN, CASHING OUT AND THE EYE IN THE SKY SECURITY

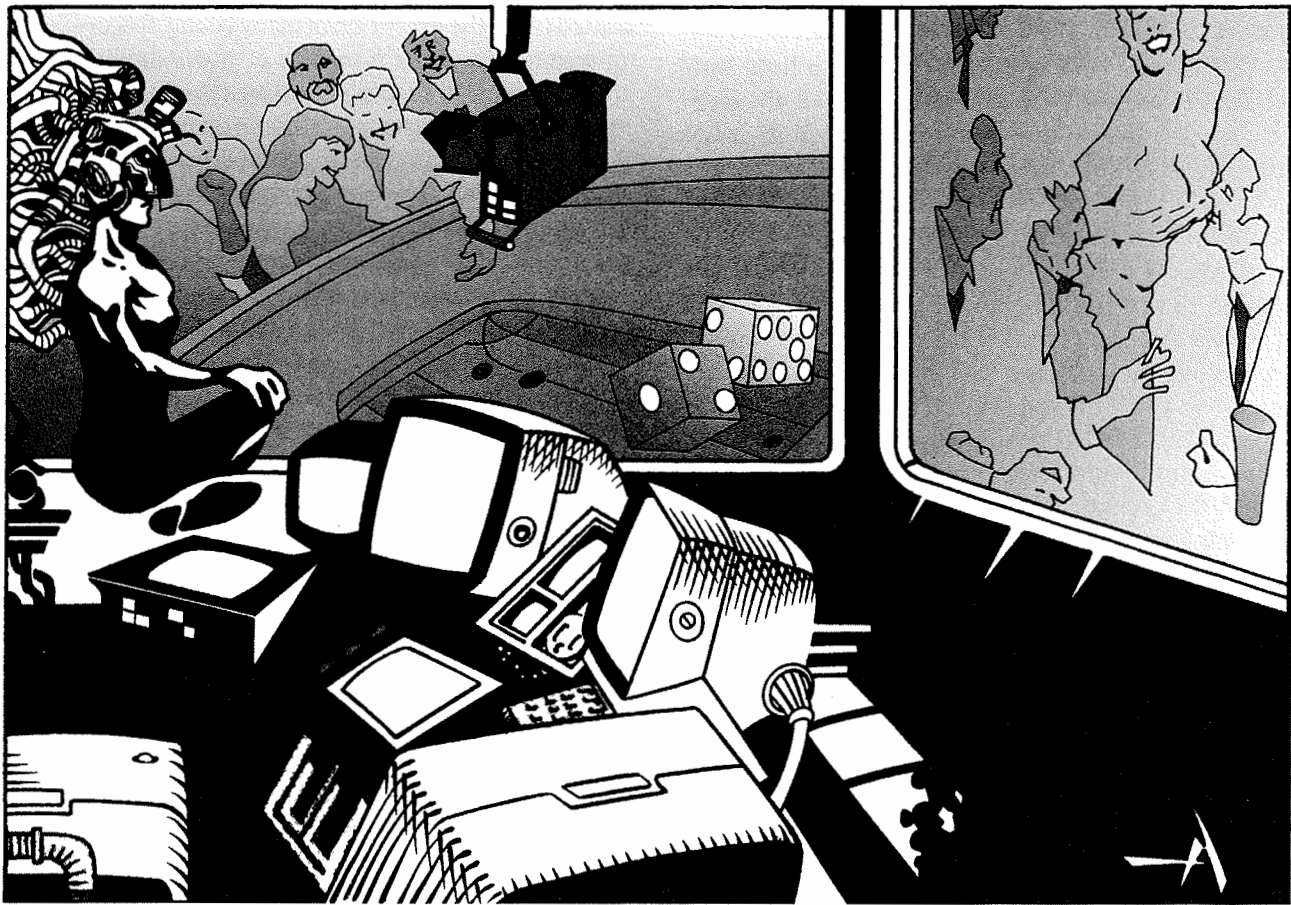
It is damn near impossible to scam a casino. Period. That said, if your players are the type to try an *Ocean's 11*-type heist, then you need to know what kind of security they'll be up against and how it works.

The key to a well-run, highly secure casino is the idea that everyone watches everyone else. Not only does this concept cut down on internal theft, it also keeps the casino and its employees safe and liability free. This "viewing circle" starts with the dealers who watch the players and keep their eyes peeled for card counters, cheats, players who cap their bets (put a low denomination check over a stack of much higher ones) and anything else that seems suspicious.

Every table and every dealer, in turn, is watched by a floor supervisor. She also watches players, keeping an eye out for those who appear to be working in groups to scam the dealer or a series of dealers. Her main job, however, is to keep an eye on the dealers — partly to be sure they're not on the take or pocketing the communal "tokens" (tips), and partly to protect them from angry, drunk, or overzealous players. Depending on how big or small a casino is, there may be one floor supervisor or there may be one per table. If a dealer has a problem, they can signal a floor supervisor to check it out. Most situations can be resolved by the floor supervisor. For all the others, the floor supervisor contacts her supervisor — the pit boss.

Pit bosses are there to look out for the floor supervisors and provide them with assistance and backup if a player has problems or questions. In particular, they aid floor supervisors in observing and rating players for comps, keep track of high-rollers and VIPs, direct shills to empty tables, and in general make sure the floor is running as smoothly as possible. They are also the most vital link in the chain of command between the floor and casino management. A pit boss has the power to remove any dealer, supervisor, or player from the casino floor and has a direct connection to central control. If there is a payout dispute, the pit boss is usually called in to resolve it and smooth over the situation.

Who watches the pit boss? The assistant shift manager does. The casino shift manager, in turn, watches him, and reports to the casino manager. This triad of casino management doesn't spend much time on the floor, but they do spend a lot of time reviewing surveillance tapes to decide whether a player is cheating or not. They are also the link that connects management to



security. Security regularly reports to them, and they relay problems via cell phone to security.

Security forces are comprised of uniformed guards who have regular patrols, undercover agents who position themselves at various places in the casinos and hotels, and the surveillance team in central control who operate the eye-in-the-sky system. It's easy to assume that casino security mostly concerns itself with cheaters, pickpockets, and the like. In actuality, the security personnel spend most of their time with "loss prevention"—that is, protecting the casino from lawsuits and lawsuit scams. When a cheater is discovered, her photo is captured from surveillance and the cheater is notified that she has been photographed and is asked to cash out and leave the casino. Then the photo is distributed to the rest of the major casinos on the Strip. The same goes for thieves and prostitutes.

Perhaps the most vital aspect of the security system is the eye-in-the-sky. The surveillance team at central control spends its shift watching hundreds of monitors that flash with video feeds from the casino floor. It's a daunting task. There is a camera above every single table game on the casino floor as well as cameras trained on the players' backs and others on the dealer's back. There are cameras over the slot machine banks. There

are cameras in the counting rooms, cameras in the cashier's cage. There are even cameras in the bars that monitor video poker. In all, the system is designed to keep an unblinking watch over the money, which is the lifeblood of the casino business.

And don't forget that, this being the dark, fantastic world, there will more than likely be supernatural security measures in place. The average Sleeper in charge of security thinks entropy is one of those fancy science terms he forgot to pay attention to in chemistry class. However, there are private agencies in town that work to ensure that the wheel of fortune spins on its own without any "help" from an Awakened player. Often, instant counterspells are enough to thwart most unscrupulous willworkers, but in other cases, it may be necessary to place a mage or two among regular security.

As a Storyteller, it is ultimately up to you how much or how little security your casino environment has. Your casino scenario may feature mages among security, or an Awakened dealer or two. Then again, it's not necessary to set your scene in a high-profile, glitzy casino on the Strip. Vegas has hundreds of hole-in-the-wall, low-bid casinos, some of which feature only slots, only Bingo, or even only Keno (don't ask us why).

THE INSIDE JOB

So suppose your chronicle involves a little inside work. Perhaps your players need to infiltrate the staff of a casino. Or maybe they want to approach their heist from the inside. In either case, the Storyteller will need to know a little bit about what happens to the money behind the scenes at the average casino.

Contrary to what you might think, there is no one specific time when money is transferred from the machines in a casino or from the cashier's cage to an armored car. In fact, casinos tend to vary the times they move money on a daily basis so as to prevent robbery. But when money is moved through the house, it's done at low traffic hours and as unobtrusively as possible — often on a plain, low-to-the-ground cart and in an equally plain metal box. Accompanying cart and box are usually two to four house security staff plus armed security personnel.

But before the money gets into the box, it has to be counted. Casino accounting is some of the most stringent in the world. It has to be in order to ensure fair gaming, fair odds, and a profit for the casino. So at the end of every shift, every check, token, voucher, and dollar is accounted for. This is done in the counting rooms, sometimes by the cashiers on duty but more often by personnel especially hired to count the money. Counting rooms are small, extremely well lit, and accommodate only a few counters at a time with security personnel. There is abundant video surveillance to monitor all actions. That said, numerous stories tell of counters embezzling large amounts of money out of the counting room over extended periods of time. This rarely happens at the big-name casinos, but it is possible at smaller venues that lack the funds to install high-tech surveillance systems.

Then again, with magic, all things are possible. A player skilled in Mind effects might be able to confuse security personnel long enough to take what she needs. Likewise, some forms of surveillance equipment can be disabled by well-timed Entropy effects. A Storyteller must determine the levels of internal security and magic involved based on the skills of the players and how much trouble he wants them to get into.

WHO'S REALLY IN CHARGE?

Las Vegas is a city in a constant state of change. At any moment, the current hot-ticket show or restaurant or hotel could be outsold and outdone by a new up and comer. The same holds true with the magical-political power structure. It would be easy to say that the Technocracy, more specifically the Syndicate, is in charge of making the sun rise and set in Vegas. Storytellers should remember, though, that: 1. the Ascension War is over as far as most Technocrats and Tradition mages are con-

cerned (with the exception of many young, Rogue Council-inspired hotshots from out of town slipping in to create havoc and slipping out again, leaving locals with the bill), and 2. politics work a little differently in Vegas. While it is true that certain members of the Syndicate have been behind the scenes engineering the land deals and capital ventures that led to the Vegas renaissance of the late '90s, it is also worth mentioning that an equal number of Tradition and former-Tradition mages have had and continue to have significant financial and political strongholds as well. Marketing and tourist relations are often handled by Tradition-friendly employees, with scientific and monetary functions run by Technocracy-friendly outlets, resulting in a balance of wonder and practicality that sustains the city on several fronts.

Or are things as balanced as they appear? Demographically speaking, Vegas is rather mage-heavy compared to other major cities in the U.S. and around the world. Storytellers may decide that the scales lean more towards the Tradition factions at the time their players arrive on the scene. Or that the Syndicate is in charge, or at least thinks it's in charge while others, possibly even Rogue Council sympathizers, pull the strings and keep the glamour going. One thing to keep in mind is that in most, if not all, cases Awakened individuals should be behind the scenes. Steve Wynn might not be an Awakened mage, but his personal assistant very well might be.

THE UNDERWORLD

Every city has one. From illegal drugs and prostitution to arms trade, money laundering, human traffic and organized crime, Storytellers who want to involve their players in the seedier side of Vegas life and culture have many options to choose from. A city like Las Vegas may do a great deal to keep its image clean, but beyond the sound bites and press releases touting a pristine, family-friendly city, there are always dangerous and unsavory elements lurking, especially in a place where so much money changes hands.

SEX AND DRUGS

Prostitution is illegal in Las Vegas, but that doesn't stop the ladies and gentlemen of the night from plying a very lucrative trade up and down the Strip. The skin trade runs the gamut: \$25 tricks, \$5,000 per night "escort" services, entertainers privately hired by casino hosts to pleasure high-profile VIPs. ... All of this is done in a constant cat-and-mouse game with the Las Vegas Police Department, which walks a fine line where most vices in Vegas are concerned.

If your players want to pay for a little action, they can usually hook up with a partner of their choosing in any hotel or casino bar. Hookers in Vegas don't have to



work for or with a pimp, so most of the working “bois” and girls are entrepreneurs and answerable only to themselves or their habit of choice (booze, drugs or gambling). The upswing is that these tricks come cheap. The downside is that your partner might not be clean. Also, most of the street walkers on the Strip are well known by casino management and undercover police, so being seen with them may result in criminal charges and a request to leave whatever hotel you’re staying in.

One rather unsettling fact of life for the “outlaw” prostitute is the extremely high possibility that she might be violently assaulted, gang raped or murdered. Serial killings of prostitutes and other underworld denizens always make for a juicy game hook, especially when the deaths have some kind of supernatural connection.

Where there is money and sex, illicit substances will naturally follow. As is true with most major cities, Las Vegas has a thriving drug trade that is just as diverse as the skin trade with the exception that drug use and trading by VIPs and other wealthy and influential people is often done well below the radar of casino management. In the 1970s and '80s, cocaine was the drug of choice for hookers, dealers, players and partygoers everywhere. In some casinos, employees would do lines in the employee lounge while management looked the other way. But the corporate revolution on the Strip brought mandatory drug testing, so drug use amongst casino personnel dropped dramatically. Even so, some employees keep contacts to local dealers and suppliers and use that information to exact large tips and even bribes from VIPs seeking a fix.

Who knows how many private clubs, casinos, and even homes house the secret drug culture in Las Vegas? Perhaps your players stumble upon one such den supplying a new designer drug with interesting effects upon the Awakened. Or maybe they run into a mage or two making double the money on “enhanced” goods.

ORGANIZED CRIME

You can't talk about Las Vegas without mentioning organized crime. The intensive FBI investigations of mob operations in the 1950s and '60s did much to flush most of the gangsters and crooks out of the casino and hotel business. By 1980, the city officials were proudly announcing that they had rid the city of organized crime, but in reality the criminal element was simply keeping a low profile until the government and the press decided to look elsewhere. The mob is still alive and well and living in Las Vegas; it's just smaller, deeply undercover and not nearly as influential as it was in the heady Golden Age of Vegas.

Keep in mind that when most people think of organized crime, they think of the Italian crime syndicate, La Cosa Nostra, or the Jewish criminal organizations. Nowa-

days, the movers and shakers in organized crime are from South American, Asian and Eastern European groups. Some are established — like the Yakuza. Some are upstarts. But most of them are not from the U.S.

The general rule is this: if there is some kind of money to be made, some way of side-winding tax structure or extorting cash out of people, the mafia will be there in some capacity. Does the mob still run casinos? Probably. Does organized crime control drug and prostitution rings? More than likely. And Awakening does not suddenly make you a “good guy.” Be assured that there are mages pulling the strings somewhere within the Vegas crime syndicate. Maybe your players are among them.

SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS

But that’s just the mundane underworld. What about the nice — and not so nice — denizens of the supernatural world who pass through Las Vegas every year? Well, to be quite honest, most just pass through and keep their heads down while they do it. Vampires and werewolves tend to have a healthy amount of dislike and distrust for mages, so avoidance is often the policy followed by both groups. There are, however, small groups who live and operate quietly within the city. Most notable are the pack of Garou who tend the Big Springs park and nature preserve within the city. Since the general populace is helpful and eager to maintain this wild and natural habitat as a jewel in the city’s crown, the Garou don’t have many adversaries or elements to defend against. Besides, they’ve been an established part of the supernatural subculture in town since its inception. Every once in a while there may be a report of a “monster” sighting or eyewitness accounts of a massive vicious dog in the local press, but for the most part, the Shifters keep to themselves as long as they’re left alone by everyone else.

Because Las Vegas is a stronghold of magical activity, the undead usually steer clear. This is partly because many find it hard to maintain the Masquerade with so many Enlightened eyes around to watch them. It is also

because it is extremely difficult for them to hunt and feed in the city. This is purposeful. Many of the measures used to root out Nephandic activity tend to catch Kindred as well. Word gets around and the vampires stay away, with some exceptions. (There is a Tremere chantry and a Giovanni associated with the Venitian, but they need only concern a Storyteller as little or as much as she wishes to incorporate them into a chronicle.)

Unfortunately, the Nephandi do not. Nor do Marauders. Both are causes for high alarm among the Awakened denizens of the city. In the wake of the Avatar Storm, the number of Marauders in the world has decreased dramatically. Still, one will occasionally find herself drawn to the energy and power of Las Vegas and end up wreaking havoc for a few days before she can be contained or temporarily stabilized. Case in point: word has it that the opening of the Luxor resort in 1993 coincided with the arrival of a seemingly ordinary tourist. All he did was walk through the atrium, play a few games and leave. But afterwards the Luxor suffered from a massive number of problems, from busted pipes that caused 20-story waterfalls inside the atrium, to a broken monorail, to guest rooms filled with nothing but lamps or televisions or chairs. Just his presence was enough to disrupt the flow of reality — imagine if he’d actually performed any sort of magical effect!

Nephandi are just as dangerous, but for different reasons. The relaxed attitude towards vice makes the denizens and visitors of Las Vegas easy targets for deep corruption, and the frenetic energy surrounding the city makes it a prime breeding ground for chaotic elements. What’s more, the forces of darkness don’t just walk around looking mysterious and spooky and wearing tee-shirts saying “I’m Evil! You Can Be Too. Ask Me How!” More often than not, the Fallen hide behind masks of beauty, purity and normalcy, making them difficult to find and weed out. Some cabals devote all their energies to just this purpose, while others are recruited to aid more experienced mages in “seek and destroy” missions.

TELLING STORIES



Las Vegas is far smaller than the metropolis of Los Angeles or Chicago, and much younger than the cities of Boston or New York. Nonetheless, in the century since its birth, the City of Sin has blazed a name for itself in neon light. Underworld danger, forbidden decadence and unbridled gaudiness have each played a part in placing Vegas onto the big screen and romancing

its way into our hearts. As a glittering Mecca of electric wonder and automated destiny, it is easy to cast Las Vegas as a haven for the Technocracy. Yet underneath the surface — not very far underneath, either — Vegas is the City of Sin, beckoning the twisted and the weak as though it were a beguiling Nephandi lure. Buried deeper in the sand lies an ancient wealth of wild energies tied to a lost age of wonder and calling across the desert to visionary pioneer and faded anachronism

alike. The World's Most Original City is a bejeweled stage with endless facets to present to your players.

This section offers general advice for Storytellers running **Mage: The Ascension** chronicles and specific suggestions for Storytellers telling stories set in Las Vegas. It includes a lexicon of special terminology common among those who haunt the City of Sin. You will also find rules for creating the Sleepers who form the vast majority of the Consensus, along with rules for specialized Knowledge Abilities. Of course no Storyteller chapter would be complete without an introductory story to acquaint your players with the setting. Most importantly, though, we hope that you will find whatever guidance you might need to help you enrapture your players and have a fun time doing it.

UNPREDICTABILITY

When you lift the curtain to reveal the stage of your chronicle to its players, be prepared to bring the city to life in their hands. One of the trickiest, but most useful, tools you can employ to accomplish this is *unpredictability*. Las Vegas is built upon the fortunes gained and lost at the hands of randomness and fickle luck, and it would be remiss not to inject strong elements of chance and the unexpected into the stories you tell. This book hopefully has thrown you some curve balls and given you lots of unanticipated background to get your players feeling as though they're gambling with their destinies. Go beyond the static snapshot of Vegas created herein, though. Life isn't static and neither should your chronicle be.

Believe it or not, this isn't very hard to accomplish; a lot of your work is done for you. Unless you and your players are all mind readers or know each other so well that you can finish each other's sentences, a lot of unpredictability is built into your game. Instead of throwing your hands up in despair when a player manages to surprise you, see if you can figure out how to incorporate her unexpected actions into the game as smoothly as possible. This isn't to say you should let her ruin the story for everybody; instead, it is a strong encouragement to allow each player to have as much impact as possible upon the chronicle without sacrificing the spirit of the game. As long as everyone real is having fun, and nobody real is being hurt, there is no wrong way for a story to unfold for fictional characters.

CARDS AND DICE

Using real randomness can create unpredictability. For a chronicle set in Las Vegas, it can also add a lot of relevant flavor if done suitably. Representing gambling with your 10-sided Storyteller dice is a bland way to go about it. Try bringing some six-sided dice, a deck of cards and poker chips to the game. If a character starts gambling, then simulate the event using your props. There is

nothing like a game of dice or cards except, well, a game of dice or cards. *Hoyle's Rules of Games* provides rules for nearly any game you may want to duplicate and is available in most bookstores or libraries. A number of Las Vegas-oriented websites also offer rules for various games, and any search engine should be useful for finding a good one. Certainly if you have access to a roulette wheel or used slot machine you should put it to use, but for most of us a deck of cards and a pair of six-siders should suffice.

Of course, mages are likely to be able to throw some reality-bending into the mix, and you should incorporate this into the side game. Think of clever ways to let the mage use her magic, but also to keep using the dice or cards you brought along. A mage using an Entropy effect designed to make it more likely that she roll well on craps might get three successes with the appropriate 10-sided dice. You might then let her roll the craps dice twice and pick the best result (one success for affecting a pattern outside her own, one for the second die and one for the extra luck). If a mage uses Matter to alter one of the cards in her hand to be the Ace of Spades, simply assume that card has become the ace and play the rest of the cards as dealt. Maybe she will really get screwed by Lady Luck and have the real ace show its face at the wrong time. Maybe one of the mages uses the Mind Sphere to convey an unmistakable impression in her opponents that she has an unbeatable hand. Look at the results of the magic roll and decide if it would make opponents fold or laugh and raise the bet. Most magic rolls can be simulated by changing the physical results to match the use of magic, but some rules for using the Storyteller system to simulate gambling are provided below (see *How to Gamble*).

A couple of words of warning are in order. This method works best for events truly random in nature, such as flipping over a blackjack hand or rolling dice. For professionals, however, there is a lot less luck to it than that, and games like poker are won or lost more by social skill at bluffing — basically, tricking your opponent into betting poorly — or maybe even outright cheating. Even blackjack can be played with better results if one does things normally discouraged in Vegas, like counting cards. The point is that if you are using props to make your story's gambling more realistic, then the use of real world cards and dice should keep the same level of randomness it would have in the game.

Games that involve actual skill should not be represented by pure chance; the skill, or lack thereof, of the character in question should come into play. If you are comfortable letting your players beat the World Championship Poker player just because you cannot keep a straight face, then go for it. If not, then step back into the Storyteller system and determine success or failure with appropriate game mechanics such as contested Manipu-

lation + Subterfuge rolls. Of course if your players are the types who stay in character even when they possess extraneous knowledge, then you can easily openly cheat or alter cards or dice or depend upon them to ignore your crappy poker face, while the cards or dice games go on uninterrupted. Such players are ideal for combining this method with the uses of magic described above.

Another concern is the danger of allowing the secondary game to disrupt your roleplaying game. If everyone truly enjoys a good game of cards or craps, then have at it. Grab some beer and pretzels, or whatever everyone's favorite poker food and beverage is, and take a break from **Mage: The Ascension** for a while. Presumably, though, most of your players are there to play **Mage**, and it is bad form to let a game of cards ruin their fun. If the presence of real-world cards and dice is diverting people from their characters instead of helping them get deeper into character, perhaps it is time to put them away. This can be a tough call to make, as the props might be excellent aids to the game at first and accidentally become distractions as mock gambling progresses. Watch for signs of this, and take the initiative to blend the games of chance back into the story while they are still exciting. If you miss your cue and let things get out of control, then bring everyone back into character, put the cards and dice away, and

learn to recognize stop signs next time. Don't let such an experience sour you to the value of props. Used appropriately, props add to the game in visual feel and realistic representation of the element of chance.

THE TAROT

Originally released in 1995 and recently reprinted, the **Mage Tarot Deck** is a useful tool for introducing elements of chance into the game while maintaining the spirit of the game. The deck also makes a great prop for any mystic-oriented mages you might present to players in your stories. Every card includes artwork specifically designed to interpret the classic Tarot deck, especially the popular Rider-Waite version, into its World of Darkness equivalent. A number of **Mage** volumes bear images from the **Mage Tarot**, so if you haven't seen the deck you can easily preview it by looking through your collection. This chapter presents a couple of suggestions for using the **Mage Tarot** to spice up your chronicle, and you are likely to invent even more methods on your own.

One method you might try is to let the Tarot deck directly influence play. At the beginning of each play session, draw a random card from the deck — all of them use **Mage: The Ascension** artwork and symbolism, so they should inspire you with suitable imagery. If the cards sparks an



idea complementing the story you are already telling, then keep the card to yourself until you introduce your notion to the game. If nothing comes to mind, place it face up on the table. Offer any player who incorporates the imagery of the card into the story a -1 bonus to any difficulty number they face during the scene in which the card is invoked.

Should you draw *The Chariot*, for example, you might envision a blimp that passes overhead somehow connected to a situation the characters face. Perhaps they attend a sports event where they are supposed to meet a contact during an illegal deal and are warned by a cryptically worded message from above. If instead you drew the *Strength* card, and couldn't readily conceive of any way to include it in the story, you might leave it on the table. Later in the session, the group might find themselves in trouble with security at the *Mirage*. A clever player might draw upon the image of the mortal contesting with a beast and reference the performances of *Siegfried and Roy*. Perhaps her character ducks into their show with her compatriots and manages to dodge pursuit, or maybe she taps into the *Resonance* of the tigers and uses vulgar magic to transform her hands into mighty claws. In either case, you should grant the player a bonus because she has added the element of the **Mage Tarot** to the story fairly.

If your players enjoy the challenge of integrating the imagery of the Tarot into your stories, you might consider making it a tradition; you can always draw a second card for your own use. Should you particularly enjoy the elements the Tarot adds to your game and what your players accomplish with them, you might take it further, always keeping one random draw face up and replacing it once it is used. Read the booklet that comes with the **Mage Tarot Deck**; you will find more suggestions for enhancing the game via the cards, including affecting character generation, introducing plots and subplots, unexpected developments, spirits and Effects, unpredictable elements, coincidental Effects and rites of passage following an Epiphany.

WORD STORITIS

Another creative way to add causal elements to a game is to choose some random words and put them to use. The best source is a large dictionary, but that can be bulky and a pain in the butt to carry to a friend's house for a weekly game of **Mage**. You can do just as well with the closest books at hand: your **Mage: The Ascension** rulebook and this book, which has the added benefit of topical text. Close your eyes, open the book to a random page and put your finger to it. Open your eyes and write down the word you pointed to (or the nearest substantial word, if you happened upon a word like "the" or "and"). It is up to you how many words you need.

For creating a quick description of some event, you may need only one or two words to get you started. If, for

example, you randomly choose "lead" and "Tapestry" from your **Mage** book, you might be stumped. Just when you're going to choose another word, you consider that radiation is an issue in areas near the Nevada Test Site. Perhaps the characters have just come across a damaged radiation suit in the supposedly abandoned warehouse in North Vegas, pointing towards a possible connection with the Technocracy faction from the Site.

The advantage of this method is its speed and flexibility. The Storyteller can easily just keep picking words until she gets an idea concrete enough to use. Some Storytellers we know have created entire chronicles simply upon the basis of a list of randomly chosen words and the ideas they inspire. For those whose chronicle is already up and running, or who already know what they want to run, the word storm method still can provide a wealth of inspiration on the fly. When your players track down some extra clue in the chronicle without warning, grabbing a few words quickly from your book should be enough to throw together an immediate figure with whom they may interact. If an opponent, or even a Paradox backlash, throws an unexpected occurrence at your players, you can craft its appearance from a handful of words. Plot twists and subplots may suggest themselves in the same way. Ultimately, you are tapping into the same forge of creativity you use every time you tell a story; the word storm is merely casting sparks into the raw tinder of inventiveness.

STORIES ARE NOT ROULETTE WHEELS

Unpredictability can keep a story fresh and exciting, but stories aren't just a collection of haphazard words, or computers using random generator routines would have replaced writers long ago. Take care that your game does not become complete chaos ruled by the whim of a draw of a card or a toss of a die. Consider these recommendations nothing more than a few more tools for your Storyteller chest, and use them with the same care you would any other device. Make sure that events have natural consequences and progress towards their logical conclusions. Even magic used with abandon reaps Paradox. Why would mundane efforts fare any better?

KEEPING IT REAL

Even when we are embroiled in fantasy games, a story seems more realistic if it follows as many of the conventions of the real world as possible. This is why we caution against too much unpredictability. In a fantasy set in the real world, it is most important to consider the value of being true to the planet upon which we all live. Luckily, this is pretty easy to accomplish, since lots of people who aren't playing roleplaying games are busy collecting your data for you.

GUESS WHAT I SAW TODAY?

If something interesting happens to you during the week, and you didn't get a chance to tell your friends about it, consider reflecting it in your game somehow. The baseball game you were unexpectedly invited to see with some friends who don't game is good fodder for your chronicle's setting. When character calls her bookie for some information, have him ask her to meet him on row six above the batting cage. Your recent immersion in a similar place will give you an incredible edge in conveying the feeling of the place to your players.

Plenty of writers take ideas from their own real lives, so don't feel bad about joining the crowd. There is no inspiration like life, after all, and it is difficult to make it sound good if you don't have any idea what you are trying to say. Got a teacher you don't like? Did you meet a truly odd guy on the street today? Perhaps your teacher can inspire your portrayal of a player's mentor. Maybe the crazy bum spouts the same dire warnings to your players' characters, except this time they come true. Almost anything you experience can provide the raw materials for a good story.

As with other tools, practice some moderation here. When you are all in the same class together, a mentor's borrowed annoying habits may just mark her as a clone of Mrs. Thompson rather than providing an irritating, but realistic feel to the mentor. Parrotting the words of an ill-shaven madman on 4th Street to the same audience who saw the real guy may invoke a sense of silliness that disturbs the setting rather than increasing it. Worse yet, if you mirror some embarrassing event in your life, you may regret sharing it once you see how your players react. Regardless, the advantage of adding less-known elements of your own experience to a chronicle is that it mimics life in a realistic way while adding a trove of material even the best writer cannot exceed.

THE CALENDAR METHOD

One cheap prop that can add realism to your chronicles is a calendar. Each day on most wall calendars has a square large enough for you to make short notes, and some calendars provide the phases of the moon and important holidays or historical events. If you have an old calendar, you can just run your chronicle "last year." It's easy to look up what the proper day of the week is for August 4, 2002, and a calendar makes one of the handiest bookkeeping tools for measuring chronicle time that you are likely to find. As players move through your stories, record brief notes about their characters' accomplishments on each appropriate day-square. Soon you will have a roadmap of their recent past to reference anytime you need to coordinate the activities of an antagonist or settle an argument about when something happened.

If you make a habit of running chronicles in the year prior to the current one, start writing down important newsworthy

events in a brief line or two on the appropriate day-square of your game calendar. You will be amazed how much realism it adds to your chronicle when six months later you can say with confidence, "Today the news reports flash floods throughout eastern Nevada," and be able to note to your players that you didn't make up that part. We are not suggesting that you have to run chronicles in times which have passed, but it is certain that lagging at least a week or two behind real world time will let you keep your World of Darkness current without contradicting the media and history books.

ON THIS DAY IN...

Whether your chronicle is set today, last week, a year ago, or during the gangster heyday of Vegas, you can benefit from the veritable media blitz that covers the world around us. Depending upon your desires, you can form a realistic vision of any era, year or precise date, usually even from the perspective of your chosen setting. The introduction to this book presented a number of resources particular to Las Vegas, but you can find many more with a minimal amount of effort. Researching real events works particularly well with the Calendar Method, but even a quickly scribbled note about a past happening can add flavor to your story.

A visit to your local library will give you access to decades of newspaper articles, sometimes back over a century ago. If your library offers the ability to print or photocopy such articles, you can offer your players suitable props they can keep. A paper handout does wonders for invoking the feel of reading a period article, and is likely to be read and reread by studious players. Libraries also offer useful references such as encyclopedias, which give broad visions of various times and subjects. Even if your library cannot help you, many periodicals offer back issues, and such magazines can provide a remarkable sense of the period uncluttered by knowledge of the future.

With the age of the Internet, increasing numbers of media sources maintain online archives. *CNN.com* is a content rich, exhaustive media site offering graphic and video material to supplement text. The Las Vegas Sun keeps archives of its own at *lasvegassun.com* and these are likely to be the most topical for your Fallen Tower chronicle. If you care about accuracy, be careful with information you get from the Internet. From Creationist websites that proclaim the Egyptian dynasties only existed for half of their historical period, in support of their notion that the world was created around December 25, 4000 B.C., to the satirical news of The Onion, the worldwide web is filled with jokes, lies and half-truths. Beware whose word you take as The One Truth. Of course, this should be common sense for the experienced Mage player.

THE CAST

One of the first challenges a Storyteller faces when creating a **Mage** setting is deciding just how many mages exist among the masses of Sleepers. White Wolf uses a rough rule of thumb of one mage per 150,000 people, though this should be readily broken in order to promote story.

Of course certain magical traditions don't recognize willworkers of a different bent as practicing "magic," and may even quote ratios as low as one in a million. Additionally, mages are often attracted to places that are important solely for reasons of mysticism or fate, and therefore may be distributed differently from humanity at large. A quiet city in some Midwestern state might host very few mages, while a single ancient Buddhist temple boasts a large cabal. Ultimately, the decision should be based upon how many mages the Storyteller feels she needs to run her chronicle.

Fallen Tower already presents you with an entire caste of mages, numbering about twice what the rule of thumb might suggest. Nevertheless, some Storytellers may wish to fuddle the numbers, and thus it doesn't hurt to know what is considered "normal." One particular theme of Las Vegas is the transient population, as greater than 25 times more people visit the city every year than reside in the entire metropolitan area of Clark County. Even if you don't alter the resident mage population, you can easily introduce all manner of out-of-town willworkers.

SLEEPERS

One of the most overlooked elements of many **Mage** games is the mortal whose mundane identity makes mages seem so special in comparison. A number of *World of Darkness* games introduce rules, often briefly, for creating special "player worthy" mundanes who rival their supernatural counterparts in talent and raw skill even if they have no equivalent magical powers. This has the unfortunate effect of raising the bar and creating the impression that the average mortal is aberrantly puissant. This section hopes to dispel that myth by presenting truly average individuals. You should probably not stick your players with this type of character, but it is worth noting that such people represent the vast majority of the *World of Darkness* populace.

Concept: One or two words summarizing the person's role in the world.

Nature: Chosen via normal rules, except that few Visionaries and Architects are flipping burgers.

Demeanor: Chosen via normal rules, though it is worth remembering that if a Visionary or Architect is flipping burgers it is in part because of how people perceive her.

Attributes: Normal people are quite average in raw Attributes. Distribute three points in each of the categories: Physical, Social and Mental.

Abilities: The typical American has Drive 1 and Academics 1. For rural cultures unlikely to drive substitute Survival 1, while citizens of inner city urban sprawls might have Streetwise 1 instead. Now assign three points to Abilities related to the person's job and two points to Abilities that serve more as hobbies. A true workaholic might spend his hobby points on job-related skills, while an indigent bum might have no skills of appreciable worth.

Backgrounds: Sleepers gain five Background points to spend on Traits. Normal people generally represent all of these as Resources, Allies and Contacts. Law Enforcement might buy Influence 1, and other professions might purchase similarly sensible Backgrounds.

Willpower: One point. A Sleeper may spend freebie points to raise this, but she begins with just one Willpower point. As presented by Storyteller games over the years, a huge proportion of humanity has just one or two Willpower.

Freebie Points: Normal Sleepers get 15 freebie points. Sure special characters often played by your players may get 21, but those are rare individuals. Spend freebies as normal, except that you cannot purchase any sort of mystical Trait (note that the character has no Arete). The pool of freebies gives the Storyteller the flexibility to buy a dot of Linguistics if the Sleeper happens to remember her language classes from high school, or perhaps to give her some Occult.

SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGES

Some types of knowledge are very specialized and have little bearing on anything outside of their narrow focus. Extensive information about the life of Elvis or exotic cuisine may help you get that unauthorized biography published or recognize a potentially deadly, improperly cooked puffer fish. Such wisdom is extremely useful in appropriate situations, but not likely to aid one in any other fashion. Each Specialized Knowledge follows the same general rules setup. The various Lores that appear in *World of Darkness* books are examples of Specialized Knowledges, but there are as many as there are topics that can be studied. Choose a fitting title for the Knowledge, preferably one that makes it as clear as possible to player and Storyteller alike just what the Trait covers. A character earns points in the Knowledge as any other Knowledge Ability, and earns proficiency according to her rank in the Knowledge. Here we present a template for creating typical Specialized Knowledges, and provide a couple of examples.

SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE TEMPLATE

It is best to give a brief description of the Knowledge, particularly noting any decisions your Storyteller makes regarding what the Knowledge includes.

- Student: You know most of the basics.
- College: You know enough to possibly make a career out of it.
- Masters: You are good at what you do.
- Doctorate: Your knowledge in this area is superb.
- Scholar: You are acknowledged as a master of the field.

Possessed by: The type of person who would typically study the knowledge.

Specialties: Even Specialized Knowledges have subcategories of increased specialty.

FINANCE

You are familiar with the ways of commerce, from currency exchanges to accounting. This Knowledge is invaluable in places like Las Vegas, where legal restrictions are exhaustive and bookkeeping is an art form.

- Student: You've taken a few accounting classes and know better than to gamble.
- College: You have experience as a bookkeeper.
- Masters: You'd make a fine IRS agent.
- Doctorate: Casino owners value your opinion.
- Scholar: You probably invented a new money scheme.

Possessed by: Bookies, Accountants, Drug Dealers, Professional Gamblers

Specialties: Accounting, Casinos, Laundering, Stock Market, Comp Systems

AREA KNOWLEDGE

You are familiar with the geography and residents of a particular area. Usually this is a city, but it could apply to large areas such as the Nellis Air Force ranges or less densely populated, homogeneous counties. When you choose your Area Knowledge record the region, as in Las Vegas Area Knowledge 2 or Boulder City Area Knowledge 1. A long-term resident might have less Area Knowledge than might be expected, as she simply doesn't explore much, while a conspiracy theorist obsessed with Area 51 might have diagrams of the area memorized despite never having visited it.

- Student: You've read a little or just moved to town.
- College: You've lived in the area a couple of years or so.
- Masters: You've been a resident for a decade, which is more than half of the residents of Vegas can say.
- Doctorate: You are a native and have lived here your whole life.
- Scholar: Your knowledge is uncanny. You could possibly make a living writing about your home.

Possessed by: Locals, Taxi Drivers, City Planners, Cops, Reporters

Specialties: History, Geography, Politics, Transportation, Customs, Celebrations

HOW TO GAMBLE

No, this section isn't going to tell you how to go to Vegas and win lots of cash — there are plenty of guides out that claim to be able to do that; it's going to attempt to advise you how to represent the vagaries and chance involved in gambling through the Storyteller system. Basically, gambling in Vegas breaks down into games that involve raw luck, games that can be manipulated by intellect and games that can be manipulated by social skills. The first thing you should find out is what your players plan to do, and then decide what is relevant.

If they are just going to play the slot machines for a while, then the chance of winning comes down to luck. Smart players will make sure to cash in as many comps as possible, but really smart players won't take this route at all. Of course, mages have an edge: they can turn the wheels to their liking if they have the magical talent to do so. Assume that any Effect requires at least two successes, one for the Effect to work at all and one for affecting a different pattern. Each additional success probably allows control over one of the wheels on the slot machine. With five or more successes, a mage could easily walk away with a decent winning. So why doesn't this happen every day? Simply put: security. Even mundane security will get suspicious if things go awry, and in many casinos some supernatural element may also be at work. Countermagic might target Effects, while machines and staff may be under malign influences.

Games like blackjack can have their odds of winning greatly altered by tricks like counting cards to make educated guesses as to when to bet high and when to bet low. Intelligence + Enigmas is one possible roll a Storyteller might employ, although sports betting events might instead rely upon Intelligence + Streetwise. In both cases, the Storyteller might take other factors into account by limiting the dice pool to the lesser of its number of dice or that of the character's Perception + Alertness pool. Of course Mind Effects can accomplish such feats with ease even with only one dot in the Sphere. Again, the real reason people don't succeed every day is security. Card counting is discouraged in Las Vegas, and in the World of Darkness that discouragement may take some rather bloody turns.

The final type of gambling involves playing directly against other people, and therefore can be influenced by social wiles. Card games like poker, particularly, revolve around convincing opponents to bet high or low at the wrong times. Bluffing is best resolved as a resisted Manipulation + Subterfuge versus Wits + Subterfuge roll with each

contestant using the opponent's Willpower as the target number. In games of more than two players it is probably best just to assume a difficulty of 6 for all such rolls. If a player decides to cheat, call for Dexterity + Streetwise versus Perception + Alertness to see if she pulls off her card-juggling. Cheaters are not long for Vegas, however, as more than one set of eyes — including the omnipresent glass eye above — watch most of what occurs. Of course, magic can bend these situations in unexpected directions as well. Forces may distract cameras while Entropy subtly adjusts the odds. This remains a risky proposition as casinos and

other players hate to lose, and security is there to make sure that doesn't happen except by chance.

Security will greatly depend upon the vision you carry as Storyteller. If Vegas is mostly controlled by mundanes, then it depends primarily upon the human eye enhanced by a dazzling array of cameras and tricks. On the other hand, a Vegas dominated by supernatural forces could be lethal to a mage who cheats with magic. Such a willworker may attract even more attention than a common cheat, and may come to rue that attention greatly. Rumors persist of mages who entered the wrong casinos and were never seen again.

WIN FREE STUFF!



There's no such thing as a free lunch.

— Anonymous

This introductory scenario is designed to bring together a group of potentially disparate mages and plunge them into the dangerous World of Darkness. Theoretically, it could be run in any city, or anywhere where greed resides in the human heart, but it is particularly fitting in a city built upon covetousness. Try to view the suggested

storyline as a rough map of events — mage characters are notorious for detecting plots before you have even thought of them and escaping from the most exciting of destinies before they realize that's where the fun was.

A GOLDEN TICKET

For the purposes of this story, it does not matter if the mages have yet encountered each other in the Storyteller's chronicle. Certainly an experienced cabal is going to find it far less challenging, but sometimes even the powerful can be taken in by the simplest of ruses.

Each character receives a letter, printed on a marigold sheet of paper and delivered via regular 1st Class U.S. Mail. The letter is addressed to "Resident," at the address where the mage stays, whether it is an apartment, house or even a hotel room.
Storytellers

Dear Lucky Resident,

You are the winner of a special invitation. The North Vegas Community Center would like to welcome you to attend the New Fremont District Celebration honoring the work of the Neighborhood Committee and their sponsors towards the Rejuvenation of old North Vegas. The gala event will take place on July 4th at the North Vegas Community Center, where you can join in the fun:

- Free Beer and Wine, courtesy of King Brewery and Dragon Valley Wines.
- Kids visit with GHW mascots, Gordon the Gecko and Gnash the Gator, and get free Lizard-Leap sports drinks and high energy Chaos Bars, a subsidiary of Endron International].
- Traditional Young and Smith hot dogs and hamburgers, brought to you by Herrick's Grocery (grills courtesy of End Run Convenience Stores, and shaker in old North Vegas.
- Special guest: The ravishing Bambi the Zombie Killer, from the popular Omni TV show by Aaron Spellman.
- Fourth of July fireworks presented by the Nevada Test Site Artillery Company.
- Raffles, slot machines, live blackjack dealers, toys, prizes and more...

Grills fire up at 4 p.m. Fireworks at 10. Don't Miss the Fun!

Sponsored by:

ENDRON



should, of course, adjust the letter's method of delivery to account for P.O. Boxes, characters who pick up their mail from friends and relatives, or whatever. You may also wish to replace some of the corporate sponsors listed below with real companies, whether to highlight your personal distaste for some real-life sleazy practices or merely to put players who might attach too much significance to World of Darkness company names more at ease. Don't forget to change the date, if necessary, to fit your chronicle—New Years Day works pretty well too, with a slant towards a new beginning.

MASTERING THE TICKET

Some players may employ any number of magical Effects in order to learn more about the event beforehand. Cautious characters might engage in good old-fashioned sleuthing, while others may simply show up at the appointed time. Storytellers may require Arete or Ability rolls as appropriate, though we offer a few suggestions. Area Knowledge or perhaps even Drive might be paired with Intelligence to find where the North Vegas Community Center is located or Computer in order to pull up Mapquest or some similar online travel service. Use of Investigation or Contacts may turn up mundane details of the upcoming event. Streetwise will suggest that the area is being kept clean of crime due to the impending family activities.

Discussing the New Fremont District Celebration with personnel of the Community Center turns up little that isn't already mentioned by the flier, unless the questioner expresses interest in investing. Potential investors are referred to Consolidex Worldwide, the monetary means behind the upcoming project. Consolidex is brokering stockholders in the NFD, as they affectionately call the New Fremont District project. Given the already-existing Strip casino investments in the NFD, it is immensely unlikely that any character will be able to gain anything resembling a significant share of the project, but this may vary according to your chronicle. A successful Finance or Law roll might suggest to an investigator that public companies have open records of stock purchases. Unfortunately, the list of contributors is thousands of people long, including nearly everyone of import in Vegas on at least some scale. Projects of neighborhood size in the gambling world are not cheap. A Finance roll should reveal that a sizable chunk of the Wall Street initials represent Lionheart Developments, a real-estate investment and development house.

Tracing the letter itself, through magic or incredibly lucky Investigation, doesn't reveal a great deal either. It is a sheet of marigold-yellow paper manufactured by Good House International and printed at Wayerholme Instant Printing (WHIP). The temp

agency that did the mailing got the list of winners from the Community Center. Should one pierce the mystery this far — almost certainly requiring magic — it turns out the winner list was composed by Lionheart Developments and delivered as an electronic file by a secretary in the Las Vegas offices who received it in turn via intra-corporate email from Winston Stephens (see **Chapter Three: Dynamic Personalities**). It is worth noting that many players may discover only part or none of the information above, but mages' abilities to see what cannot be seen must always be kept in mind.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

While plenty of ordinary people will show up to the NFD Celebration, have a great time at the expense of all the corporate advertisers and perhaps even invest in the upcoming project, that is not the purpose of the players' characters' visit. The Panopticon unit operating in the Vegas area, led by Major Houston, is using the event to set up a very special sting operation. Through extensive computer profiling of their databases they have chosen addresses theoretically connected with aberrant activities, even if in most cases they have not verified who lives there or whether the profile might be a false prediction. They gave these addresses to Winston Stephens, who, through Lionheart Developments, targeted them with invitations. This means a higher proportion than normal of those who attend the NFD event will likely fall into the category of "reality deviant."

Onsite, the North Vegas Community Center is equipped with improved security in preparation for the celebration, allowing the Panopticon units to scan those who enter the site. Those who ring the wrong bells will conveniently win a raffle, high-value slot machine or some other contest requiring them to claim the prize. Those who go to claim their prize meet the sting operation, who surround, arrest and confine them in an isolated back office, out of sight of the rest of the celebrants.

Panopticon has limited resources, however, and many Technocracy departments are as uncooperative as they can be without inviting the attention of Control. The sting operation is staffed in large part by the Clark County Sheriff's Office. Known criminals with records and warrants also fall prey to the sting — indeed, the Sleepers of the police present believe that everyone they are apprehending is a felon. Those with no deviant signs will be left with the appropriate authorities, detained according to their warrant. Mages, or other anomalous individuals, will be turned over to the "Bureau," which most policemen assume is the FBI. Major Houston will arrange for them to be delivered to holding areas where they will be destroyed or "reprogrammed." At least, that's The Plan.

POLICE OFFICER

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Brawl 2, Computer 1, Dodge 2, Drive 2, Firearms 2, Investigation 2, Law 1, Leadership 1, Melee 1, Specialized Knowledge: Police Procedure 3, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1, Technology 1

Willpower: 4

Equipment: Lt. Revolver, Lt. Pistol, Pump Shotgun, Billy Club, Handcuffs, Radio, Badge, Flashlight, Kevlar vest (3 armor protection, -2 to Dexterity dice pools).

LIEUTENANT MIKE GRANT

The police lieutenant on the scene, Detective Grant is excited by what he sees as a chance to attract the attention of one of the federal bodies — FBI, Military Intelligence, CIA — it doesn't really matter to him so long as it is more interesting than nabbing card cheats and bookie leg breakers. The lieutenant's eyes rarely miss a thing, but he does have a tendency to do things by the book. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, his record is nearly spotless. Except for that one time with that hooker... Houston hasn't lied to Grant, but he has certainly hinted that this could be the lieutenant's big chance.

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Computer 2, Dodge 1, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 1, Investigation 3, Law 2, Leadership 2, Melee 1, Specialized Knowledge Police Procedure 4, Stealth 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2, Technology 1

Willpower: 5



Equipment: Lt. Revolver, Lt. Pistol, Handcuffs, Radio, Badge, Flashlight, Kevlar Vest (3 armor protection, -2 to Dexterity dice pools).

CORPORALS LIZ SMITH AND DAVID HARRISON

Most of Major Houston's Border Corps unit was lost during the emergence of the Avatar Storm. A few members survived, however, and were grounded along with the Major. The corporals share Houston's vision of returning the Border Corps to its former glory by proving their value on Earth, if necessary. Both retain the mechanical enhancements that mark them as cyborgs. They normally conceal this beneath full riot gear, but those who encounter them in close combat are due to realize their strength is superhuman.

Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Awareness 1, Brawl 4, Computer 2, Dodge 1, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Intimidation 2, Melee 3, Technology 3

Willpower: 3

Resonance: (Static) Cyborg 1

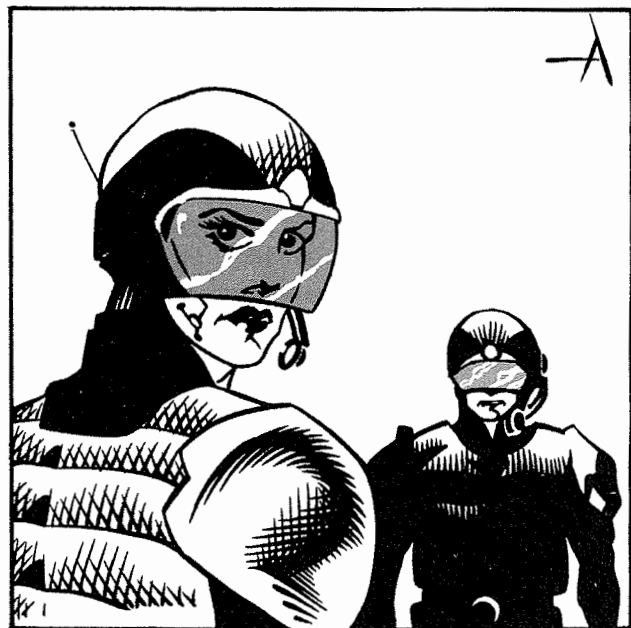
Paradox: 4 permanent points

Armor Rating: 2

Equipment: Internal radio, Infrared vision, Strength enhancement, Combat knife, X-5 Protector (semi-auto), assault rifle, full riot gear (5 more armor points, -4 to agility-based dice pools).

CLOSING THE TRAP

The total number of cops is intentionally vague. Sting operations are difficult to judge, sometimes receive



ing abundant manpower and at other times barely mustering two bored cops from their donut boxes. Of course this operation seems to have higher approval for assistance, so the locals are caught between hating to help the Feds but being afraid not to. If any of the characters are Middle Eastern in origin, some of the cops may enthusiastically assume they are somehow connected to Al Qaeda and overreact. Adjust the actual level of force your players encounter according to any earlier investigations they completed or magical warnings they might receive. It is, of course, possible that they may entirely manage to slip Houston's noose. Most of the characters are at least likely to be caught on camera, however, and that can cause them future problems.

FOLLOWING THE THREADS

Whatever path the players take through this scenario, you have begun your chronicle. Houston is unlikely to be killed, even if the players soundly defeat the armed police. He has seen a lot worse than a handful of deviant humans, after all. Chances are that Corporals Smith and Harrison are the types of foes that most mages will simply escape, but it is possible that a deadly Effect could wipe out either or both of them. Should this occur, Major Houston's estimation of the danger posed by the

deviants rises a few notches — that's not a good thing. Players would be well advised not to start World War III, as the Nevada Test Site unit entertaining the crowds probably has more than just fireworks on hand. If things get out of hand, Houston could probably arrange for the company to join in any riotously pitched battle.

The Storyteller and the players determine where things go after this. Perhaps your group will pursue leads to Winston Stephens and surprise him in his offices at Lionheart Developments or the Stratosphere Tower. Such investigations could spark other alliances or feuds as well, particularly if the players attract the attention of the resident Star Council conspiracist or the Virtual Adept, "The Green Panther." Storytellers who enjoy crossover chronicles might take advantage of the presence of so much Pentex goodness in order to introduce **Werewolf: The Apocalypse** elements to the game. **Vampire: The Masquerade** fans could focus on the Las Vegas chantry of the Tremere, which was mentioned in **San Francisco by Night**. Other mages may instead follow whatever mystic vision led them to Vegas in the first place, or perhaps investigate such oddities as the Luxor and its reputation for Rogue Council transmissions appearing in its vicinity.

METAPLOTS



Many **Mage** books introduce large, overarching story elements which provide a framework for Storytellers to clothe with their own details in order to tell an entertaining tale. Of course, this can impact your story as much or as little as you and your players wish — no one from **White Wolf** will be sending the secret Canon Enforcing Technique Ninjas to your house.

Nonetheless, stories take place within settings, and those settings are often part of greater settings with their own bigger stories. A spaghetti western tale of a shootout at the OK Corral focuses upon a single town, yet the themes of an American way of life from the past shape your expectations and provide a backdrop rich with its own myths and icons. To the plot of the legendary gunfight, the story of the West is a metaplot. The metaplots in **White Wolf's** books serve similar purposes.

The world continues to change around us, whether we notice it or not, and a metaplot introduces the same element of ongoing change to the supernatural and fictional characters who populate the shadows of the **World of Darkness**. Certainly the never-ending march of time influences people's life stories in the real world.

Even those who try to bury their heads in the sand eventually pop up for air only to discover the world has altered. "Wow, so explain this Internet thing again?" Events from halfway around the world can affect your surroundings suddenly and radically, as well: "The second tower of the World Trade Center has just fallen."

Unless the forces of Stasis have utterly overtaken your **World of Darkness**, it should be ever changing as well. If the old Masters are cut off from the world, then the Traditions are left in the control of their lessers. Should a godlike being appear, forcing the Technocracy to levy its most brutal weapons, reality may resonate with spiritual repercussions around the world. The worlds of fiction and reality are moved by stories larger than the ones we act out ourselves.

A metaplot also serves to unify the themes of your story with larger imagery, and thereby strengthen them. A tale of a single family facing the terrors of the Nazi regime in World War II is all the darker because one imagines that many other families must have suffered similar fates. The valiant men and women who fought their hijackers over a Pennsylvania sky become even more heroic when one knows what happened to the other planes seized on that September day. Playing a

proud Hermetic cabal is more poignant when one remembers the fall of Doissetep and mighty Porthos. The threat of Technocratic enemies seems more serious when one considers their long history of pogroms against mystic willworkers. The context in which your story takes place adds meaning above and beyond what is included directly in the narrative.

Various **Mage** metaplots throw shadows upon Las Vegas as well. Certainly, the City of Sin would seem to embody the devil-may-care attitude which dragged the War of Ascension to a halt in the first place. In recent times, however, the worldwide transmission of strange messages from the cryptic Rogue Council has stirred up the conflict again. A few people in Vegas seem to have received more than their share of Rogue Council correspondences. The metropolitan area also retains some very powerful conservative Technocrats who distrust the inaction of Control when it is so obvious to them that the War of Ascension has not eradicated all threats to mankind. They are happy to throw some support behind the Panopticon and its efforts to end Deviant terrorism.

THE ROGUE COUNCIL

Manifesto: Transmissions from the Rogue Council introduces a mysterious entity that reaches out to mages, namely the Rogue Council. The Rogue Council does not seem content to let the Ascension War end with a Technocratic victory and stultifying apathy. Time and again their transmissions give warning of the Union's actions, sending interested Tradition mages on sorties or preparing them against surprise moves. The *Manifesto* metaplot provides all kinds of tools and story ideas for Las Vegas. Of course, all of these ideas predicate with the assumption that you choose to utilize the Rogue Council in your chronicle, and a few may need adjustment according to the timetable during which you introduce them.

Why does the Rogue Council seem so interested in Vegas? Perhaps Malcolm Henry's suspicions are somewhat on track. Malcolm believes that the visions he received, upon which he based the designs for the Luxor, were a precognitive sign from the Rogue Council. If the Council saw the impending Avatar Storm, then they must have planned for the disaster. Maybe the shining light blazing from the pinnacle of the Luxor shines into spiritual space and provides the Rogue Council a means by which to retain contact with the mortal world (assuming they don't already reside in the mortal world). Perhaps that is why their transmissions somehow seem a bit more frequent around the casino. Malcolm pictures some Bubble of Reality Realm in the Umbra, inhabited by the ancient Masters of the old

Council, bound to the world by an umbilical cord forged by the blazing light of the pyramid.

Of course this guesswork on Malcolm's part could just as easily be utterly ridiculous egotism. If the Council is so powerful that even the few Masters who remain on Earth cannot track their transmissions and pierce the veil of their hidden identity, then what do they need with one overblown Hermetic brick mason? Conceivably Malcolm's visions were nothing more than signs from his own Avatar or even just self delusion. Maybe he saw some hint of the future Storm on the horizon and had a subconscious intimation of the possible use of a great work to pierce the darkening mass of the Gauntlet. Certainly he has been trying to use powerful magic to discover the Rogue Council, and it is possible that his search has become an obsession capable of convincing him it was his purpose all along. It would not be the first time that a mage's Quiet was so thoroughly persuasive. This could even go so far as to cause some of his hobgoblins to assume the form of transmissions from the Rogue Council, confusing himself and others even further.

The self-styled "Green Dragon" learns of the transmission of the Rogue Council fairly early due to her connections to so many sources of information. Unless you ascribe some truly heinous motives to the Council, however, it is unlikely that she ever is the recipient of such communication herself. As an advocate of the "Information must be free even if I have to hurt somebody to get it" school of thought, she might manage to gain temporary possession of a genuine message. Should this occur, her twisted desires likely will drive her to add false transmissions to the obnoxious stream of post mortem imagery, pornography and omnipresent online gambling advertisements she spews onto the Internet. Individuals attempting to track the Rogue Council might stumble across one of her false messages and accidentally find themselves tracking her hideous digital empire instead.

On the Technocracy side of the equation, the Rogue Council might stir up the lion's den. Major Houston already wants a strong policy against Deviants and readily finds at least a temporary home in Panopticon. Cryptic messages from hidden cells of antagonistic forces, followed by dangerous attacks upon the Union's resources, only bolster his efforts. To a degree, the Major was marginalized by the dimensional storm, which makes Border Corps travel ridiculously difficult and invasion by extradimensional entities seem an unlikely prospect. Houston has seen more than Control would like to admit, however, and believes that such judgments are hasty and ill advised. In his view humanity is in greater danger than ever. What if these new transmissions are the work of the same entities he has sought to subvert for so long? Perhaps

they are designed to weaken the Union so that invasion and colonization might follow. Plenty of Technocrats find Houston's theories insane, but more and more they find his methods necessary and effective.

General Martin lived through the entirety of the Cold War, and is all too familiar with long-term strife operating on a small and covert scale. If friends in "military intelligence" pass him information indicating a new threat of any serious nature, such as might be posed by an apparently omniscient organization with violent motives, he would move to point the entire Advanced Energy Commission at solving the problem. On the other hand, the general is already involved in so many Technocratic initiatives on some level or other that he might enter Rogue Council stories as the target of a transmission. Autocrats of the general's stature assuredly seem to attract the attention of the Council and those to whom they broadcast.

The Syndicate's reaction to the Rogue Council transmissions is difficult to predict. As arguably the most corrupt Convention of the Technocracy, their operations attract a lot of Rogue Council attention. Because so much of their willworking is tied into manipulating the masses, however, it is difficult to target them directly. Transmissions seem most often to be designed to cause damage to their assets. Syndicate mages are masters at turning the worst situations into their favor, however. Every economic failure only encourages some other economic success. Even mundane mortals can capture incredible power within the paradigm they espouse, and ruining one business only makes it an easy target for another. Of course, paranoid mages who attribute dark intentions to the Council point to this and propose that it proves the Council is corrupt as well. What other reason could there be for the Syndicate to remain the least touched despite so much apparent knowledge of their activities? Whatever the truth of the matter, Syndicate reactions seem mostly defensive and corrective. Winston Stephens and the other Syndicate mages in the Vegas area support rising initiatives such as Panopticon, and legally have trademarked the signature Sphinx symbol in case it ever proves useful for their purposes.

Dr. Holmes remains mostly unaware of the Rogue Council's emergence. Buried in her genetic tanks and cloning experiments, she is too busy for most politics. The rise of the Panopticon does catch her interest, however, as it promises a potential return to old Progenitor ways. Perhaps she will find that her life's work is accepted by Control now that it could be useful. Given that she operates under Technocracy auspices, but mostly independently from Control, it is all too possible that Rogue Council transmissions could severely damage her work, or possibly

even get her killed. Anti-abortion advocates would have a field day twisting the contents of her laboratory into pro-life commercials, while human rights organizations and religious groups would be absolutely outraged. Too controversial for public consumption, her work likely would disappear under Control censure rather than risk such exposure.

Offworld Void Engineers already have operatives searching for the source of the transmissions, thus far without any success. Their operations have little impact upon Las Vegas or the mages who live there. Of course, Storytellers with a strong interest in Area 51 and its stories might find that this could change quickly. Similarly, New World Order agents scour the world for the cryptic messages of the Rogue Council, but their efforts are largely focused around their bases of power in such places as Langley. Vegas seems to have more than its share of transmissions, though, and this could bring greater attention from the N.W.O. Additionally, if General Martin specifically requested help, the N.W.O. might answer.

THE AVATAR STORM

For all of its other effects, positive and negative, one of the largest accomplishments of the Avatar Storm metaplot is the grounding of **Mage**. One of the strengths of **Mage** was that one could explore other realms, but the ease with which one could do so was also a downfall of the game. Garou at least have a reason to return to Earth; they consider Gaia their mother and believe it is their duty to defend her. A mage could simply go wandering off without ever looking back. With the explosion of the Avatar Storm onto the scene the spirit world remains open to mages yet has become far more dangerous and mysterious. Mages can no longer traipse willy-nilly into the Umbra, and nowhere are they more at home than on Earth.

This, ironically, makes the wondrous even more appealing. Cities filled with the bizarre and unusual become interesting settings for the game. Hidden chantries, forgotten temples and dead magic intrigue mages as greatly as less earthbound things do. Vegas has all of this to offer and more. The city is a haven for the out-of-the-ordinary. Some have called it a Disneyland for adults. Buried in its past, the lost arts of the Anasazi and their wellspring of magic and life tantalize those interested in the arcane. Surrounded by desert, the city even could embody the relationship of the physical world to that of spirits. The comfort of civilization gives way to the dangers of a waterless land Spanish explorers once called the Journey of Death.

On the other hand, the increased danger of traversing the spiritual realms has increased study into safer methods of doing so. Operations at Area 51 might be involved in just such an experiment. The pinnacle of the Luxor also seems connected with some efforts to pierce the dangerous Gaunt-

let. Characters from elsewhere might come to Vegas precisely to join in one of these studies, or perhaps to try to steal the secrets of those who manage them.

THE SENDINGS

While the Avatar Storm has made travel into the Umbra more difficult, it also has caused aspects of the spirit realms to impinge upon the physical world. Mages trapped outside of the Gauntlet and Horizon continue to send things to Earth, and the transmissions of the Rogue Council are not alone in shaking up the status quo. Apparently most Sendings begin when an Avatar fragment with some vestige of consciousness intercepts a message that a mage has attempted to transmit through the Gauntlet via magic. The transmission pushes the shard through the Gauntlet and the two blend into some being with odd purpose, possibly forged in part by the mage's intended message but mostly created by the shard that the unpredictable flow of the Avatar Storm happens to cast in the way.

This is one aspect of metaplot that has been largely left up to Storyteller device. It is something that happens in the World of Darkness, and it happens with increasing frequency. It remains unclear just what the long-term effect of Sendings will be, but some dire consequences could result. What if one of the Sendings was the shattered soul of an ancient Nephandi of untold power? What might some outside mages do if they discover that their messages are taking such forms? Might this not presage the spilling of spiritual conflict into the physical world? What if the armies of Heaven and Hell array against each other with helpless mortals caught in the crossfire? What does it say about the Rogue Council's power that they do not accidentally create Sendings? Or do they?

Any of this could apply to Las Vegas just as easily. In a city whose nature encourages randomness, the unpredictable appearance of Sendings seems particularly appropriate. If the Rogue Council seems content to focus a bit more of their attention on transmissions to the City of Sin, what is to stop other mages from following suit? For that matter, what if the Rogue Council does sometimes screw up and create Sendings? If the Council has some reason for choosing Vegas, and this tendency isn't just a false rumor, then wouldn't any accidental Sendings they create appear here more often than elsewhere (assuming, of course, that their transmissions originate in the Umbra, and not on Earth)? On the other hand, what if the Anasazi were trapped in the Gauntlet when they disappeared? Perhaps Sendings in the Big Spring area might push them back into reality after millennia of being trapped. What about the Gauntlet surrounding nuclear test sites? Will the Nevada Test Site ultimately fall prey to twisted spirits, as some of its personnel must have fallen to radiation poisoning?

YOUR OWN METAPLOTS

If nothing else, we try to remind you time and again that the game you are running for your players is yours to run as you see fit. Provided everyone is having fun, and no one is being hurt, then there is no wrong approach. We have an interest in creating a setting which is interesting enough to captivate audiences, but resilient enough to survive years of publication. This ties our hands in ways that you have the luxury of ignoring when you run a tabletop game with your friends. In your personal games you can blow up the world, have it invaded by aliens, or even blatantly incorporate copyrighted elements that would have us hip-deep in lawsuits. Whether doing so is a plot or a metaplot depends upon your approach.

Remember that a metaplot is a plot larger than the one in which you are involved. Thus you might run a chronicle set in Las Vegas wherein the characters discover that Area 51 really does have a trove of alien vessels. Your entire story might consist of the characters stealing an alien vessel and being pursued by the Technocracy as they struggle to learn the truth about what they have grabbed. It might end with them escaping pursuit, discovering a method of destroying the craft and doing so. On a higher level, the world might be in the process of a generations-long effort to manipulate humanity on the part of an alien race. As a Storyteller, you might decide upon the motives and actions of the aliens. Only as little or as much of this as interests your players would actually come to the surface, however. In fact it is entirely possible that your players might *not* steal the alien craft when presented with the chance and instead focus upon exposing the military-industrial complex they feel is crushing the spirit of the nation.

One advantage to this is that you could revisit your metaplot in another game. Perhaps the characters succeed in destroying the craft but perish in the process of doing so. You might begin a story set a few years later when brash young pilots of Nellis are armed with new weapons to use against their alien invaders. The old chronicle is completely finished, with even the characters having died, but the metaplot gives you a larger framework upon which to base other related stories. Obviously those new weapons are based upon the discovery of your players' previous characters, and this realization will only make the sacrifices of the prior story that much more meaningful.

Meanwhile, imagine you find yourself needing to run a short game for a few friends that you know will ultimately be a one-shot. You gather together your players and give each character an intrepid Tradition investigator. That evening a shooting star streaks from the sky and seems to strike the mountainside only a few miles away.

If any of your players are part of your other stories, the obvious parallels with their own part of the metaplot will probably excite them. Perhaps finally they will get a glimpse of the aliens hinted at elsewhere. Maybe you have the investigators instead find a crashed shuttle and a lone pilot dead at the helm. Even if the players are aware of the elements of the metaplot found in their other stories, their characters might not be. Perhaps they are UFO enthusiasts, and the strange weapons on this government vessel hint to them of greater things.

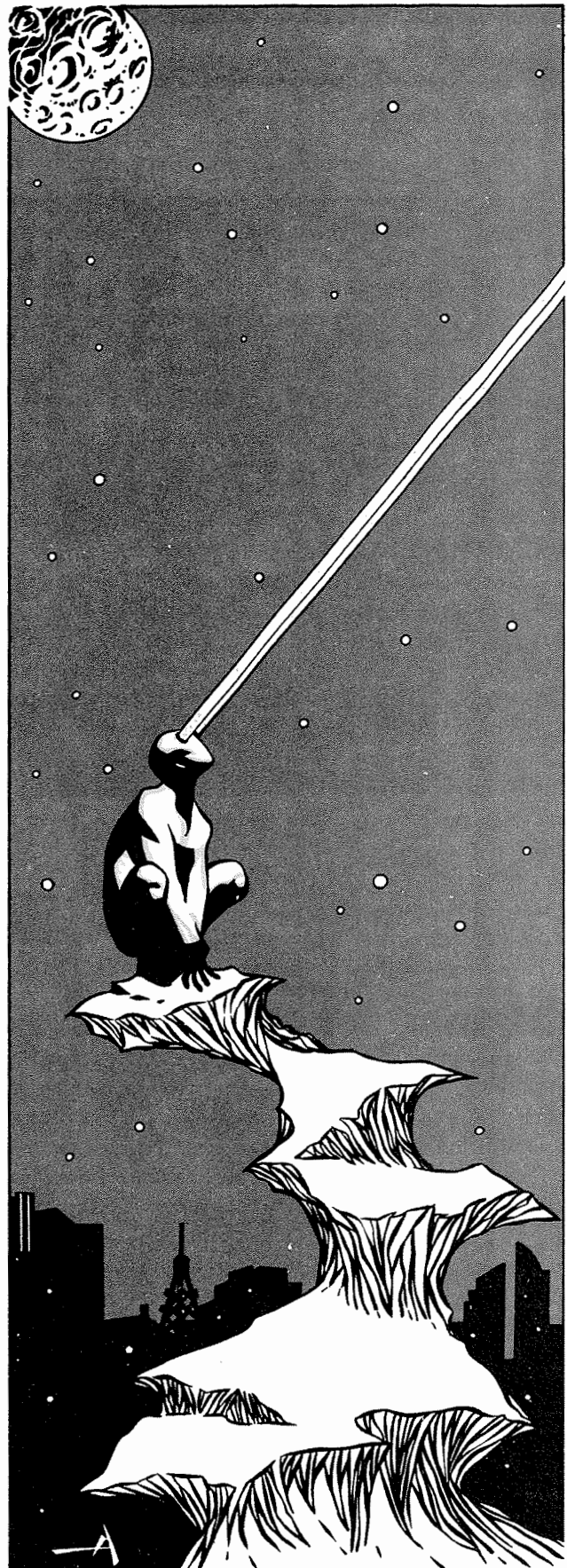
The point is that your metaplot has both strengthened the elements of your individual stories and ensured that change comes as the metaplot advances. Players may delight in discovering aspects of your metaplot from different angles. As whatever conflict humanity and your aliens have going progresses, you have new story elements that could impact your chronicles should the players interact with them or should you wish to invoke them. Even if your players stray far from any part of your metaplot, you can always embroil them in it again when the aliens finally land. When they've overcome the invasion they might even return to their previous activities with renewed vigor. There is nothing like an event of catastrophic magnitude to make one reexamine one's priorities or to realize the importance of seizing the day.

MORE STORIES

Many ideas will not be all-encompassing enough to form a metaplot. This is not a bad thing. Ultimately, no matter how much metaplots interest you, you eventually must tell the stories that compose your actual chronicle. Most story ideas can be played out in a few hours or so, like a good book or movie. A few stories might take longer, perhaps forming a trilogy or an even longer epic. This chapter already presented a sample story to get you and your troupe started. Most likely lots of other ideas have come to mind already, perhaps as a result of running the introductory story. This section offers even more story ideas, ready made for Las Vegas and *Mage: The Ascension*.

THE BIG SPRING

The Anasazi, and the Paiutes after them, were drawn to the area because of the powerful wellspring of life and magic which flowed from its center. It dimmed, however, in the increasingly static nature of reality, and European and American explorers found only the artesian springs feeding the oasis. Mormon mystics sensed something here beneath the surface but could not discover it before the Paiutes drove them away. Over time, the Big Spring's influence has become diffused throughout the city. It is likely one of the sources of the seemingly magical draw that Las



Vegas has, attracting tourists and new inhabitants alike with muted promises of relief from the desert of the ordinary. Old Paiute stories attribute the fading Big Spring to the disappearance of the Anasazi, and it is certainly possible that powerful magic simply hides the source of the Quintessential pool.

A Storyteller can use this as one way of introducing a powerful node into her game. Hint to the players about the possible existence of the original Big Spring, and suggest that is more than just a bubbling stream of water. Inspire them with a Paiute wise woman or perhaps have them meet the haunted Dreamspeaker who seeks to dig beneath the surface of his white heritage to some ancient Avatar he believe lies within. Of course, it doesn't have to be that way at all. You could just as easily have a bunch of Technocrats drill for water and underground resources to build their new Construct. Whatever the result, you should be prepared for the players either to discover or fail to discover what would probably turn out to be the most powerful node in Las Vegas. This could prove as much a curse as a blessing, since the cabal probably would find itself contesting with other factions for its very survival, let alone control over the node.

AREA 51

Paranoia and the unexplained are hallmarks of the World of Darkness. Probably no other aspect of the metropolitan area is more representative of those themes than Area 51. Area 51 can be put to use in many ways, depending upon your plans. Interested characters might spy upon the place, seeking the secrets of the local Technocracy. This might lead to contact with the Star Council, which only furthers the chain of fascination and potential conflict with the Union.

The primary thing you have to decide as a Storyteller is what you are going to allow players to discover about the

location. If you decide that Area 51 really does contain alien technology, then you need to decide if the players will ever be able to determine this. Should you instead resolve that Area 51 is really just a secret testing ground for the Technocracy, you must decide whether you want players to discover that fact. In order to ensure that the characters do not pierce the secrets of Area 51, you have to play up the difficulty of breaching security, and the ever-increasing danger of hanging around after doing so. To allow for limited knowledge of the real occurrences there, you might allow the characters to escape the base with artifacts of technology. This is essentially what the Star Council did. Of course, just because players score an unfathomable device doesn't mean it has to be alien.

ITTY OWN CASINO

If your players really love the atmosphere of the Strip, and are possessed of the means, you just might try your hand at letting them create the next new house for Lady Luck. Modern casinos are stupendously expensive to build and maintain, so you have to decide exactly what you want the characters to be capable of doing. If they pulled down the most ridiculous score ever last week, then maybe you can convince them to invest with others in a new resort casino. Should they possess all of the know-how and goods to deliver, then let them make a go of it. The advantages to this include making the players feel like they are part of the setting, giving them a stake in the future of the setting and providing them with a strong potential for a chantry. The disadvantages include the unrealistic nature of individuals or even small groups owning casinos in the modern corporate age, the ease with which large public chantries are discovered and turned into a liability, and the increased strain upon the suspension of belief caused by introducing a fictional structure of that size into the physical world.

APPENDIX: INFINITE THIRD WISHES

Three wishes, to be exact, and ixnay on the wishing for more wishes. That's it, three. Uno, dos, tres — no substitutions, exchanges, or refunds.

— The Genie of the Lamp, Disney's *Aladdin*



An old story tells of a person who gets three wishes and uses the third one to wish for three more wishes. Mages gain incredible power over the world when they open their eyes to the nature of reality and, like the infinite wish-pursuer,

endlessly push the boundaries of this ability. Vegas is a treasure trove of legerdemain, tricks and fantasies — a number of which are revealed for the first time here. Wise magicians will mind the wrath of Paradox, regarding the genie in the bottle with equal parts desire and discretion.

ROTES

The nine Spheres offer an infinite array of possibilities, limited only by the imagination and worldview of the mage using them. This section presents a number of specific uses of Sphere magic, many of them inspired by the special “mythology” of Las Vegas.

CAPICHE? [MIND ••]

Bugsy Siegel opened the Flamingo casino in Vegas in 1946, and was the victim of a gangland assassination at the orders of his bosses only six months later. Since that time, the image of the Mafia has been indelibly engraved in the hearts and minds of everyone who walks the city’s glittering streets. Corporate America has not erased decades of glamorized murder or the stereotypes of the swaggering Mafioso. Mages using this rote speak in a clichéd Italian mobster voice and convey the idea so strongly that it intimidates potential foes or victims. Targets usually treat the mage with respect born of fear even if they have no logical reason to believe the mage is with the Mob or that the Mafia bears them any ill will. Syndicate operatives especially favor this rote.

System: This rote grants a bonus of -1 difficulty per success gained on the Arete roll towards all uses of Intimidation or any other action which might benefit from the target thinking the mage is a dangerous criminal. As usual, the total modifier cannot exceed -3, though additional successes may counteract penalties from other sources. This rote is coincidental.

COMP ME [ENTROPY ••• OR MIND ••]

From the moment you walk through its doors until the moment you leave, the goal of every casino is to milk you for every last cent you have. Toward this purpose, casino designers employ tricks of light, design, alcohol and sexual innuendo. To a certain degree, however, the gimmick works too well – after awhile the waitresses just assume that if you are there, you are gambling – even if you are not. A thrifty or desperate mage can score any number of small comps just by hanging around the right spot, carrying on friendly conversation with others in the casino.

System: If the mage uses Entropy, then the rote works by aligning the mage towards the calculated system of comps that the particular casino uses. If the mage uses the Mind Sphere, then she simply gives an impression to the casino personnel that she is gambling and they perform the rest. Each success earns the mage one small comp which she might otherwise not have

gained. Oftentimes this is just a free drink, ticket for a free meal, admission to a low-priced attraction or a token to “get you started.” The Entropy version of **Comp Me** tends to get one slightly better comps than the lower power Mind rote, because the mage is manipulating the system as a whole rather than one or more cogs in that system. This rote is coincidental, and low-key enough that security is extremely unlikely to detect it, much less prevent it.

NEON-MAIL [FORCES ••, LIFE •, TIME ••••]

Whether looking out your hotel window at the shimmering streetlights of the city, admiring the bedazzling neon of the Strip or staring at the electronic marvel of the Fremont Street Experience, a thousand sparkling signs assault the senses. But what if one of those messages really was left for you personally? Certain reality hackers among the Virtual Adepts thrill in the idea of leaving communiqués woven into the brilliance of the City of Lights.

System: The mage leaves a message for another person to appear only when that person passes within close proximity of the neon sign in question. At that moment, the sign’s power changes flow briefly to present its stored missive for the right audience. If the mage also employs Correspondence •••, then she may instead set the message to appear anywhere in Las Vegas should the intended recipient enter the metropolitan area or if the target already lies in the city. Successes for period of time and distance must still be gained as normal. This rote is coincidental, if suspiciously weird. The neon sign must be able to form the message normally or the mage must also employ Matter ••• in order to alter its shape. A separate coincidence would be required in this case – perhaps the maintenance guy changes the brand of bulbs or one of them melts?

NOBODY DIES IN VEGAS [CORRESPONDENCE ••, ENTROPY ••••]

A legend among the Vegas Mob tells of two young men who were released from jail on parole, only to rob one of the Mafia’s casinos. The big bosses had given notice that no one was to cause any trouble in the city, in order to keep from attracting legal attention to their activities. Eager to simultaneously honor the bosses’ demands and to retrieve the casino’s losses, the gunmen chasing the two young thugs followed their car all the way to the California state line. The moment the two passed into the Golden State, they were killed and the stolen cash was recovered. Even today various factions



in Las Vegas, supernatural and mundane alike, seek to keep all bad things quiet and unseen. Certain mages on the run have learned to divert efforts to destroy them as they seek to flee the City of Sin — at least until they manage to escape the area.

System: This rote only works as long as the affected individuals are actively engaged in leaving Las Vegas. It effectively wards the recipient against attempts to kill him as he tries to leave the area. Each success forces a +1 penalty to all target numbers directly related to keeping him from escaping Vegas alive, with the normal limit of +3 maximum. Successes may also be applied to duration, distance and number of protected people. In any case the rote ends once the shielded escapees reach whatever particular line is important to their pursuers. For the Clark County sheriff's department this may be the county line, while some old-school Mafiosi may apply the protection to the entire state simply because the Black Book is generated by state concerns over crime. This rote is coincidental, as it plays as much on the limitations of the pursuers as it does upon happenstance.

LUCK BE A LADY TONIGHT [ENTROPY •, SPIRIT ••]

Luck is often personified as a fickle, ephemeral lady. Mages with experience in the spirit world may attempt to summon one of the incorporeal incarnations of luck, whether they bring her as Lady Luck, Dame Fortune or any number of other cultural embodiments of beneficent chance.

System: Essentially, this rote operates similarly to a Spirit Call, except that the mage uses Entropy senses to focus only upon a spirit that is inclined to bring him luck. Successes may be spent towards the power of the spirit, how long she is willing to help the mage and the ease with which she may use her abilities across the Gauntlet. All of the spirit's Charms will be of a sort whose effects might be coincidentally connected with good luck.

I KNOW YØUR CØUSIN [CØRRESPØDENCE •••, LIFE •, MIND ••]

The locals who live in Las Vegas night in and night out have a reputation for being "juiced in" with the system. A minor slot machine attendant just might be first cousin to the county commissioner. Those mages with the time and savoir-faire to invest get to know as many useful locals as possible. Those without that luxury sometimes try to fake it, and it is amazing what you can get someone to do if he thinks you are buddies with his cousin. Pretending friendship with a relative

can open doors, at least briefly, and a smooth talker may just keep them open later.

System: This rote lets the mage examine a Life Pattern, search for the nearest related Life Pattern and garner some very basic facts the first Pattern knows about its relative. At least three successes are required — one for the Effect, one for the base target and one for the second target — with additional successes increasing the amount or reliability of the basic information. In general, assume a familiar name at three successes and one minor fact per additional success. For example, the mage may glance at Maria, a waitress at the Orleans, score five successes on the Arete roll and sense that her brother Juan works as a beat cop in North Vegas.

WELL, IT IS VEGAS [MIND •••]

After one walks around Vegas for awhile, it is easy to become desensitized to a good bit of the weirdness which goes on there. To a certain degree this makes it easy for people who might normally stick out to hide in plain sight. Even odd events begin to blur into the Resonance of the place, and become a part of the architecture. What is one more face in a sea of tourists?

System: Each success provides one point of temporary Arcane for one single target for a scene. This rote is coincidental, but the constant flow of impulses suggesting that all is as it should be, and that nothing is out of place, counts as an active mental attack and can be countered as such. The use of this rote is restricted to places seen as unusual by Sleepers — Carnival, Mardi Gras, Las Vegas, etc. — as it depends upon an expectation of oddity.

HOLES IN THE DESERT [MATTER •]

It's in the desert where lots of the town's problems are solved. Lots of holes in the desert. Yeah. And a lot of problems are buried in these holes.

— Nicky Santoro in *Casino*.

From the times ancient Native American tribes desperately searched for water, the desert has kept its secrets hidden from mankind. In times of sin, mankind has added to secrets of the desert. From hidden sources of water to hydrate missionaries dying of thirst, to telltale indications of concealed corpses, a skilled Matter mage can ply the secrets of the desert from beneath her sands.

System: This rote allows a mage to examine and sense something “different” beneath an area of sand. Two successes are required, with additional successes

reducing the difficulty of making sense of what lies revealed. With a successful Perception + Survival roll, she may discover a buried body, hidden source of water, etc. Of course, she cannot find anything if nothing special is to be found, and sometimes what she finds may be a completely unexpected — perhaps even unpleasant — surprise. Storytellers should determine what, if anything, the mage might find as fits the needs of the story and its logical progression.

WONDERS

From the nuclear devices of the Technocracy to the lucky charms of Tradition mages hoping to strike it rich, the creations of magic are as rare and coveted as the mages who create them. Some are incredibly deadly artifacts, carefully stored in ultra-secure installations, while others are relatively mild charms that barely attract notice.

NUCLEAR BOMB [GADGET ••••••••••]

Like all Gadgets, a nuclear bomb is a one-shot Invention. The technology to create these devices was stabilized by the Manhattan Project and advanced into greater stages of development during Cold War testing of hydrogen bombs. Iteration X, and by extension the rest of the Technocracy, has created the ultimate weapon accepted by the Consensus. Well, perhaps “accepted” is not the right word. Nowadays these terrible things are kept hidden in places like Nellis Air Force Base, hopefully safe from those who would steal their power.

In rules terms, a nuclear bomb requires Forces 5, Matter 3 and Prime 2, combined with an unhealthy dose of Science or Specialized Knowledge related to atomic weapons. It also requires a suitable supply of adequate Tass, in this case in the form of plutonium, heavy hydrogen and/or Uranium 235. Because nuclear weapons are Gadgets, Sleeper technicians suitably educated in their operation — including highly trained bomber pilots — can activate them. It should suffice for story purposes to say that the explosion of nuclear bomb will destroy an entire city and everyone in it, but some players may demand an actual system. In that case assume that a nuclear blast causes *at least* 10 Health levels of *aggravated, unsoakable* damage like one the mightiest of Paradox storms. Only the most miraculous magic is likely to give a victim even a smidgen of a chance of escape.

Note: Even though this Gadget is rated by points, it cannot be bought with Background points without Storyteller permission. Assume that anyone who does

have a nuclear bomb is under active surveillance by someone, whether it be the government or the Technocracy. Any indication that the bomb-owner might actually use it or be incapable of keeping it away from others is enough to bring in squads of agents to seize the device and bring the owner up on charges ensured to keep him locked away long enough to be forgotten by the outside world.

RESONANCE: TUNING TO THE UNIVERSE

We are all products of our personal interaction with our surroundings, gaining large degrees of our thoughts, desires and ideas from the people and places we encounter and the ways we choose to deal with them. Each of us changes as we alter the world around us, and mages are no different. As a mage tunes her will toward transforming Creation, so Creation's transformation reflects upon her. In game terms this is represented by Resonance Traits that quantify aspects of inner being, focusing or refracting every emanation of a mage's will.

Mage: The **Ascension** rules already discuss the fact that personal Resonance can aid or hamper individual Effects and that it leaves its signature upon the works of a mage. Due to the focused nature of the main rulebook, this is not expounded upon, and little difference between one level of Resonance and another exists. This section gives more complete rules for Resonance Traits, their effect upon magic and their impact upon magical awareness.

All Resonance is divided between the three elements of the Metaphysic Trinity: Dynamism, Stasis and Entropy. As described in the main book, Dynamic traits characterize motion, change and new ideas; Entropic traits reflect destruction, decay or renewal; and Static traits embody definition and construction. The specific subcategories of the tripartite forces of reality are as varied as the universe is large. Indeed, nearly any word or concept can encapsulate an aspect of the mage — remember that this is a description of her personality as much as it is of the way she does magic. A mage might be Rigid, Wild, Poisonous or anything else imaginable that characterizes her spirit and her works. Record her Resonance(s) on her character sheet along with the type and rating, as in (Dynamic) Wild 2, (Entropic) Poisonous 3 or (Static) Rigid 1.

Nearly everything in Creation bears some Resonance, and thus even a beginning mage starts with a single point of Resonance. As she expands her horizons, however, she is likely to harmonize more strongly

with certain aspects of the universe, possibly even contradictory ones. It is perfectly normal for a mage to be in tune with more than one component of the Trinity. Like a fascinating recipe, human beings are flavored with numerous, sometimes oddly juxtaposed spices. Sometimes experience will strengthen the attunement, while other times it will introduce new influences.

Some Storytellers may wish simply to allow mages to gain or lose Resonance points according to story events and player wishes. In that case, add or subtract Resonance points when you and your players feel it is fitting to do so. For those who desire a system we present the following rules:

A point of Resonance may be purchased under appropriate circumstances at the same cost as a point of Background Trait, i.e. new rating x 3. Technically you cannot get rid of Resonance with experience, though certain high-level Effects may be able to do so. Functionally, however, gaining a directly-opposed Resonance rating cancels an equal degree of Resonance. Thus, if Victor possessed (Entropic) Violent 3 and gained (Static) Peaceful 1, he would emerge with (Entropic) Violent 2 for a cost of 3 experience points x 1 point of Peaceful Resonance, or a total of 3 experience points. If Victor spent his time engaging in incredibly violent pursuits he might instead raise his Violent Resonance for a cost of 3 experience x 4 points of Violent Resonance, or a total of 12 experience points.

Regardless of experience points gained, a mage cannot alter her Resonance without appropriate story actions or events, usually involving magic, and she can never use experience to rid herself of all Resonance. Barring some stupendously powerful Prime/Mind Effect, she must always have at least one type of Resonance at a rating of one. Provided they are not directly opposing Resonances, a mage may gain more than one Resonance. The Celestial Chorister Naya might be both (Dynamic) Wrathful 1 and (Static) Protective 1.

Creating magical Effects that work with one's Resonance strengthens the Effect, while working against one's Resonance weakens the magic. Each point of Resonance *appropriate* to the Effect being created grants a -1 difficulty to the target number when rolling Arete for an Effect. This bonus may not exceed -3 total adjustment to the roll, though additional points may apply to negative adjustments. Thus if Naya sought to inspire anger in a foe using a Mind Effect, and possessed a nearly uncontrollable (Dynamic) Wrathful 5 rating, she would normally gain a -3 difficulty. If she was distracted and would normally

suffer a +1 difficulty, the additional points of rating would counteract that, but she will still only gain a total -3 difficulty.

Each point of Resonance *opposing* to the Effect being created penalizes the mage with a +1 difficulty to the target number when rolling Arete for an Effect. Thus if Naya tried to instill a peaceful feeling among fellow Choristers using a Mind rote, she would suffer a +3 penalty to the target number. Even if she spent a point or two of Quintessence, she could not overcome the -3 penalty assigned by (Dynamic) Wrathful 5 Resonance. Sometimes Effects will neither be *appropriate* nor *opposing* the Resonance of the mage.

When a mage has more than one Resonance that do not directly oppose one another, they may work in conjunction or opposition, according to the circumstances. If Naya's Resonance is (Dynamic) Wrathful 1 and (Static) Protective 1, and she seeks to protect a friend, she will gain -1 target number. If she tries to inspire anger in a friend in order to aid that friend, she might gain both Resonance bonuses for a -2 difficulty. If she attacked a ward in anger, she might gain no bonus, as the Wrathful and Protective instincts balance out. If she tried to use magic to make peace with an enemy, the Protective Resonance would not apply, and the Wrathful Resonance would cause problems for her, resulting in a +1 penalty to the difficulty. In any case the total modification to the Arete roll may not exceed +/-3.

Mage: The Ascension notes that each dot in a Resonance Trait indicates a certain level of Resonance appearing in the mage's magic or personal aura. This can be detected with a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty of 10 minus the Resonance rating) upon any Effect or aura being examined. If a mage has more than one Resonance, each separate Resonance is detected with a separate roll. The blend of detected Resonance grants a picture, more or less complete depending upon results, of the mage who created the Effect. Note that this means the more different types of Resonance a mage possesses, the more likely an investigator is going to find traces of her Resonance in an Effect. While Major Houston may only sense that his quarry is Mercurial and Prepared, this time, it stands to reason that just because he didn't see her as Volcanic doesn't mean he won't assume she is the same person he once sensed as Mercurial, Prepared and Volcanic. If one examines the aura of a mage, it is possible to sense her Resonance in future works of magic; if one examines an Effect, it is possible to match its Resonance with the aura of its creator should one encounter her in the future.

Resonance does not merely affect the magical works of a mage, for its echoes appear in nearly everything she does. As such, Resonance can impact social interaction as well as mystical results. While mundanes do not perceive Resonance in magical terms, it nonetheless affects one's appearance and mannerisms in ways that normal people are not accustomed. A Sleeper may not know precisely what it is he feels, but he may still sense that something is "wrong" about the mage. To represent this, take the mage's highest applicable Resonance and apply a +1 penalty to the difficulty of all social dice pool rolls involving those who are discomfited by her supernatural presence. If Naya is attempting to convince an innocent homeless girl to stay in the church for her own good, then the poor girl is likely to be frightened by her (Dynamic) Wrathful Resonance and just might run away. Acolytes, mages, free thinkers and madmen may not be disturbed by the weird feelings engendered by Resonance and Storytellers can always rule that a particular Resonance has no effect. Sometimes the nature of a Resonance will be inoffensive to certain people — sadomasochists are not likely to be disturbed by (Entropic) Perverted. If a mage has multiple Resonance Traits, and the highest one does not apply towards upsetting a person, then apply the highest relevant Resonance instead.

Resourceful mages realize that even Resonance is subject to manipulation, whether to avoid its effects or alter its appearance. Of course the ability to use one's Spheres to manipulate or conceal Resonance requires that the mage understand Resonance, which may require Occult, Cosmology or Specialized Knowledge according to the Storyteller's desire. With proper know-how, Mind •• Effects can readily overcome the emotional penalties Resonance causes in social situations, usually with a single success required per +1 penalty the Resonance invokes. Correspondence Effects may be able to confuse Resonance if a mage can conjoin or co-locate the Pattern in question. Spirit magic might strengthen or weaken Resonance by targeting the spiritual Essence of a Pattern. Virtually any change can alter inherent Resonance at least slightly. Most such changes should be restricted to deflecting attention from them or reflecting true changes to the nature of a Pattern.

Prime Effects can shape or channel Resonance directly, the amount dependent on the power of the willworker. Prime •• can channel Resonance into a Force or Matter Pattern, temporarily strengthening or creating new Resonance. Prime ••• can accomplish the same for Life Patterns, or transfer the Resonance of

a static Pattern to another target (although Correspondence Effects may trace this trail). Prime •••• can transfer the Resonance of a Life Pattern to another target, expel Resonance from a Matter or Forces Pattern without transferring it to a new Pattern or permanently alter the Resonance of a static pattern. Prime ••••• can expel Resonance from a Life Pattern without transferring it to a new Pattern or permanently alter the Resonance of a static pattern.

Transferring Resonance to another Pattern rather than expelling it into the primal pool generally creates some manner of new Resonance sympathetic with the

corresponding target. For example, if the (Dynamic) Energizing Resonance of a coffee cup were transferred to a book, the coffee cup might gain a reflection of the book's (Static) Knowledge Resonance, and perhaps just exude a sense that it was the perfect cup from which to drink while reading. A target whose Resonance is completely expelled, i.e. is left with no remaining dots in Resonance Traits, usually gains a new Resonance Trait of one dot. If nothing suitable suggests itself this might naturally give rise to such Resonance as (Entropic) Empty, (Dynamic) Fluctuating or (Static) Untouched.

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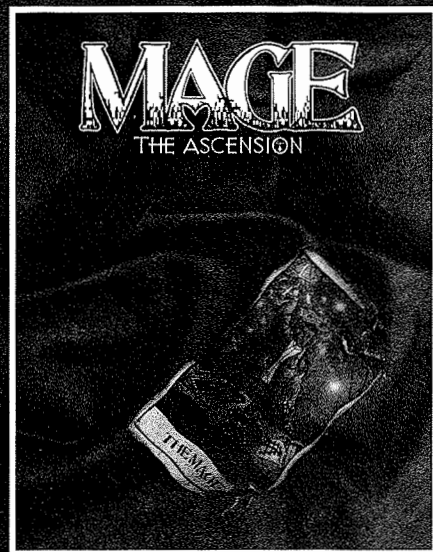
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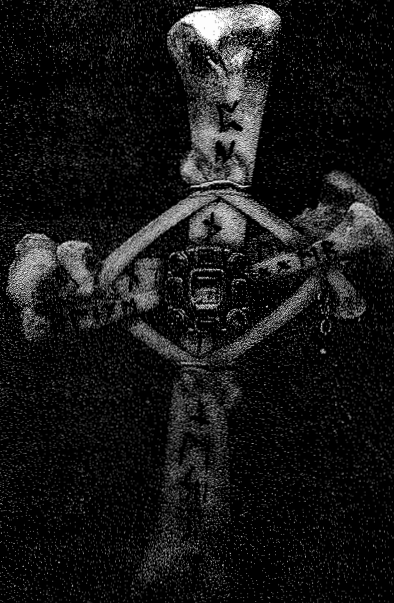
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