

Primed by Cortex

MAGE

The Ascension



A guide to Cortex Prime system conversion

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Mage: The Ascension Conversion

This is a tabletop roleplaying game inspired by rules originally published as CORTEX LITE, that was designed as a “generic” tabletop RPG to be used in any setting.

Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex is compatible with *Cortex Prime* roleplaying game system.

Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex is an adaptation of Mage: The Ascension, a classic World of Darkness game about mages living in the shadows of a world akin to ours.

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What is Mage?

Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex is a tabletop roleplaying game of urban fantasy, gothic punk, ambition, freedom, power and shifting realities built on rules inspired by *Cortex Prime*. The simple yet extremely powerful and encompassing rules will allow you to experience a familiar world of *Mage* with new and exciting rules that are closer to modern narrative games.

In a tabletop roleplaying game such as this one, players each take a role of a character or multiple. **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex** characters exist in a world much like ours, but darker, painted in gothic tones and punk sounds. The shadows are darker, the urban decay stronger, and the inequalities highlighted. Mages, vampires, demons, werewolves and countless occult creatures inhabit the shadows. They walk among mortals and pretend to be them, all while navigating their own complex worlds of intrigue, politics, secret wars and mysteries.

Who Are You?

You are a mage, a person who can reshape reality through sheer force of will. In a moment of clarity you Awakened to your potential and the mutable nature of reality, and such you are able to change the very world with your belief and action.

And you are not the only one. The world is filled with mages like you. They walk among mortals and monsters, waging the age-old secret war over reality. Mystic mages of Crafts and Traditions combat the march of technology stewarded by the Technocracy and their vision of global progress, as reality is defined by the collective belief of humanity.

But, as you can see by the very device you're reading this on, Technocracy has been winning, and in their success calcified reality and human belief more and more, forcing every mage into the shadows, lest they be rendered apart by the opposing force of human disbelief for performing the wonders of magick and hypertechnology in clear view.

You are one of those extraordinary people, who will you be in this world of mystery and strife?

How to play Mage

This section is inspired by and remixes some of the player-facing rules from [CORTEX LITE](#) and [MOONLITE](#).

PCs & ST

As in many tabletop role-playing games, one player takes on the role of the game moderator, called Storyteller, or ST in Mage, rather than playing their own character. The ST frames scenes, portrays supporting characters (called STCs, or Storyteller Characters), controls the opposition (including rolling dice), ends scenes, and maintains a special ongoing pool of dice called the peril pool.













The characters portrayed by everybody else are called player characters, or PCs.

Rolling Dice

During play, everybody contributes to the story, but at some point you break out dice, introducing just enough randomness so no one knows what will happen until events unfold during play.






Traits & Dice

Each character has a number of traits, which are things – qualities, abilities, skills, useful items, or magick – that can help them accomplish their goals.

Each trait is rated with one of five die sizes, each represented in this text with a symbol: a 4-sided die or , a 6-sided die or , an 8-sided die or , a 10-sided die or , or a 12-sided die or . Each trait in a set is rated with a die size: , , , , or . Generally, larger die sizes make a trait more effective, so  is better than .





Trait Sets

Traits are organized into trait sets.

Examples of trait sets used in **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex** are roles (**SCHOLAR**, **SCOUNDREL**, **SCOUT**, **SOLDIER**, and **SPEAKER**) and assets (items or other factors that provide an advantage, such as **ORNATE REVOLVER** or **PRIVATE LIBRARY**). One example trait set for a character might be the roles **SCHOLAR** , **SCOUNDREL** , **SCOUT** , **SOLDIER** , and **SPEAKER** .



When you want your character to do something, if there's nothing getting in your way, you just do it. If there is opposition (such as an opponent, difficult circumstances, a harsh environment, or a time limit), you roll the dice for certain traits to figure out if you succeed or fail.

Your Dice Pool

When you roll, you pick the most relevant trait from each set and roll the die for each of those traits, all together in one pool of dice. (An example dice pool might be **SCHOLAR** , **PHYSICS** , **FORCES** , and **CHAIN LIGHTNING**  to strike an enemy down with the force of a conjured lightning.)

Your Total

After rolling, you add two of the die results together for your total. The total is often, but not always, the two highest results.

So if my highest rolls were a 6 on a  and a 6 on a , I'd probably decide to add the two together for a total of 12.

Your Effect Die

After choosing die results for your total, you pick one of the other dice you rolled to be your effect die. This choice doesn't affect whether you succeed or fail. It's somewhat like rolling for damage in the original system is separate from your attack roll.

If I rolled **6 6 8 10** for my dice pool, and used the results I rolled on the **6** and the **10** for my total, I'd use one of the remaining **8** as my effect die.

Opposition

When you roll, another player (often the Storyteller, ST) builds their own dice pool and rolls it. You compare your roll's total to theirs, and the higher roll succeeds.

If I roll and get a total of 12 and the opposition gets a 8, I win. The player who rolls first sets the bar for how difficult the roll should be, so that player wins ties.

Success

If you win, the size of your effect die (not the number it rolled) determines how big of an effect your success had. You might say, "My effect die is **8**."

For example, if you roll to hit someone with a weapon, your total determines whether you hit (like comparing an attack roll to armour class in the world's most popular RPG), and your effect die would be how much damage you inflict. Your total tells you whether the story goes your way; your effect die tells you how far it goes.

An Example of Play

Lydia, a fashionista Hermetic mage of small height and large personality, is going home late in the evening after shopping for fabric, but a suspicious man is following her. You describe Lydia grabbing a burning spider amulet on her neck, recalling Pattern classifications, and whispering a perceptive spell to read the man's aura.

The ST asks you for a dice roll to see if she succeeds. You roll her traits **SCOUT 6**, **ALERTNESS 8**, **SPIDER IN THE WEB 8**, and **PRIME 6**, getting 4 and 7 on **8**s, 3 and 2 on **6**s.

You pick 4 and 7 to add together for a total of 11. You use one of the remaining **6**s as your effect die.

The man's total against her is 10, and since 11 is higher, Lydia wins. She gets to keep that **8** effect as her read in the man. Her eyes fall upon the man, the spell pierces a strange film concealing him, and Lydia sees the bright, yet pale reddish-pink aura of a vampire on the hunt, she's in trouble.

The Shape of Mage

If that explanation all made sense, then you know how to play **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex**. Everything else in the system fits into, bolts onto, or adds a twist to this single mechanic. The rest of this section breaks down more advanced rules that build on those fundamentals.

Session Zero and Safety Tools

Playing a tabletop RPG can become a bad experience if everyone involved isn't on the same page about the topics and themes they'll be exploring in play. The best way to align those expectations is usually having a formal process, making sure everyone has a chance to be heard and set appropriate boundaries. That process can be a part of a "Session Zero", a conversation before actual play begins that can also provide a chance to make characters together, discuss the game, build anticipation, and decide what kind of content should or shouldn't be a part of the game.

You should also use appropriate safety tools, such as [Lines and Veils](#), the [X-Card](#) by [John Stavropoulos](#) or Script Change by [Beau Jäger Sheldon](#). Script Change is especially recommended, because the framework it provides can improve the experience of playing a tabletop RPG even when content concerns aren't an issue. What's important is choosing the tools that work for you and your group.

Sessions, Scenes, & Beats

Games are played in sessions. A session is just however long you and your group gather to play at a time, whether in-person or online.

Each session is divided into units of story and action called scenes, just like a play, film, or TV show.

Player actions take place in units of time called beats. A beat is simply how long it takes to complete one action or one piece of a larger action (including both the die roll to do something and the roll opposing it).

Tests

The most basic kind of die roll is a test. You say you want to do something, and if it requires a roll, but it isn't directly against another significant character (or PC), the ST rolls peril pool against you. (Peril pool will be further explained in the Storyteller chapter.)

Action Order

Normally, a player can just roll a test or describe their character's actions whenever it makes sense, as part of the game's ongoing conversation. When it's helpful to organize things a bit more, the ST can move things into action order.

- ☞ When the game is in action order, the scene splits into *rounds*. A round is nothing more or less than the amount of time it takes for every participant in a scene to take one beat's worth of action (often called a *turn*).
- ☞ Usually, the ST chooses one player to go first. After a player takes a beat, they choose who goes next. The ST and any STCs active in the scene get to take their own beats as well. Once everyone has taken a beat to do what they want to do, the round ends.
- ☞ Whoever goes last in a round chooses who goes first in the next round, which can be *themselves*!

Plot Points

This game uses a special currency called plot points (abbreviated **PP**), which you can spend to affect the story. You'll likely earn and spend plot points all the time. Every player gets at least one **PP** at the start of each session.

The most important uses of plot points include:

- ☞ You can spend a **PP** to instantly create a **6** asset.
- ☞ When you add up die results for your total, you can spend one **PP** to add in the result from one additional die, increasing your total.
- ☞ You can spend a **PP** to make an asset useful to a whole group of people instead of just one.
- ☞ When an asset would go away at the end of a scene or session, you can spend a **PP** to keep it, starting the next scene or session with the asset still in play.

Unless specified otherwise, you can spend plot points at any time, even when it isn't your beat or turn.

Any unspent plot points are lost at the end of a session, so it's best not to hoard them.

The ST doesn't have plot points, but they can influence the story in a similar way by using the dice in their peril pool.

Hitches

When you roll 1 on a die, you can't count that die towards your total or use it for your effect die.

A die that rolls a 1 is called a hitch. When you roll a hitch, the ST can grant you a plot point to add a die to their peril pool. The more hitches you roll, the larger the die.

If every die in a pool hitches it's called a botch, and it means ST can use the hitches without paying you a plot point.

When the ST rolls a hitch, it's called an opportunity. When the ST rolls an opportunity, you can spend a **PP** to step up an existing asset or step down a complication.

ST Plot Points

When an ST activates a hitch, or when a PC gains a **PP** from using *Hinder* or a Limit, those plot points come from an infinite pile of plot points no one at the table needs to worry about monitoring or controlling. When players activate a ST opportunity, these **PP** go back to that pile.

However, when the ST wants to spend plot points to help a STC, they instead spend dice from their peril pool.

Extra Effects

When you want to achieve multiple outcomes from a single roll (including affecting more than one target), you can do so by spending plot points to keep extra effect dice beyond the first.

For each **PP** spent, you can choose one extra die from your roll to become an effect die. You can't choose hitches or dice that are already effect dice or part of your total. If you run out of dice to choose from, you can't keep more effect dice.

Each effect die must do enact a different effect. For example if you are fighting a duo of Technocratic automata in an Umbral realm, you can use two effect dice to assign a **STEPPING SIDEWAYS** complication to each automaton, or to assign both **STEPPING SIDEWAYS** and a **SHORT-CIRCUITING** complication to the same automaton, but you can't use extra effect dice to assign **STEPPING SIDEWAYS** to the same automaton more than once with the same roll.

Also, if you assign effect dice to multiple targets that each have their own dice to roll, each target gets their own opposition roll against you. Only those you beat take the effect.

When you step up a **12** effect die, you gain an extra **6** effect die for that roll.

Effect Dice

When you succeed on a roll, your effect die usually becomes an asset (a new temporary trait that benefits someone) or a complication (a new temporary trait that makes things harder for someone).

When an asset or complication is created, it gains a name to go with its die rating, such as **BOUND** 10, **CAREFUL PLAN** 12, **CHAIN LIGHTNING SPELL** 6, **HIDDEN** 6, **INVIGORATED** 10, or **RUNNING LOW ON MONEY** 4. The player who creates an asset or complication gets to name and describe it.

Assets and complications aren't added to every roll; like other traits, they only apply when it makes sense in the story for the particular action described. The default assumption is that assets and complications go away when a scene ends.

Most rolls create some kind of complication or asset, but there are a couple other things you can do.

You might simply roll to change your situation, such as by opening a locked door. In this case, your effect die just measures your degree of success: a 4 might be getting the door open just a crack, while a 12 busts it wide open.

You might also roll to step down or end a complication; this is called recovery, and the rules for it are explained later.

Heroic Success

When you succeed on a roll, if your total beats the opposing roll by 5 or more, you've scored a heroic success. This means that you not only achieve what you set out to do, but surpass your own expectations in doing so. For every 5 by which you beat the opposing roll, your effect die steps up by one size.

Comparing Effect Dice

Even when you fail a roll against someone, your effect die still matters. If your roll fails, but your effect die is larger than the opposition's effect die, the opposition's effect die steps down.

There's Always an Effect

Every roll always has a minimum of one 4 effect die. If stepping down dice, removing dice due to hitches, or any other situation would prevent a roll from having an effect die, give that roll one 4 effect die before resolving it.

Complications

A complication is a temporary trait that makes things harder for you, so you don't roll it yourself. Instead, your opposition can roll it against you, and if someone else has a complication, you can add it to your dice pool when rolling against them.

Here's a sample list of complications that you might inflict (or suffer) during play: **POISONED**, **ELECTROCUTED**, **ON FIRE**, **OUT OF MONEY**, **HEXED TO MISFORTUNE**, **BOUND AND GAGGED**.

No 4 Complications

Unlike other traits that run from 4 to 12, 4 complications do not exist in **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex**. When you take a new complication, if it would be 4 or smaller, it becomes a 6. When an existing complication would step down to less than 6, it just goes away.

Taken Out

If a complication on any character would step up to a die size larger than 12, the complication stays at 12, but that character is taken out.

When you are taken out, you are unable to influence the story – one way or another, you've been overwhelmed and can no longer take actions. When someone gets banished into the Umbra, is blown away by a tornado, knocked out by a brigand, or is petrified by magic, they've been taken out. Being taken out usually only lasts until the end of the scene.

Stepping Up Complications

An important rule of complications is that an existing one can be stepped up by further actions that inflict the same complication. So, if you already have a **ON FIRE** 6 complication, and someone adds fuel to the blaze or fires a phosphorous round at you, that complication could step up to 8. Each time another roll worsens your complication, its effect die steps it up. If the effect die is larger than the complication's rating, the complication steps up to that effect die's size.

When naming a complication, it is best to use a name that leaves room for things to get worse – it might get stepped up, after all. Instead of naming a complication **PARALYSED**, it makes more sense to call it **GOING STIFF** or **MUSCLE SPASMS**. So if a spell that would turn a character to stone inflicts a complication rather than taking the character out, the complication might just be called **TURNING TO STONE**, as the character's body slowly petrifies, their muscles stiffen, skin goes hard and brittle and their limbs become heavy and slow.

Complications can also be renamed when circumstances change. If a character already trapped in a net is then pushed into quicksand, their complication might go from **TANGLED UP** 8 to **RESTRAINED** 10, changing the name to include all the problems limiting their ability to move and escape.

Stress

The most common forms of complications are called stress. These are the kinds of consequences that befall characters all the time. While they work just like complications in all other respects, they have their own rules for when they go away.

Stress vs. Complications

When something happens that makes things harder for a character, but it isn't covered by one of the stress types, represent it with a free-form complication instead, such as **TANGLED**, **GRAPPLED**, **BOUND BY SPELL**, **ELECTROSHOCKED**, **BLINDED**, **FADING INTO UMBRA**, **TURNING INTO A LAWN CHAIR**, etc.

Failure & Stress

When you fail a test, you take 6 stress. The opposition chooses the type of stress. Perhaps a character feels **DEMORALISED** by their lack of success, **DRAINED** by the wasted effort, or **ENTHRALLED** by an interesting problem they can't seem to solve yet.

Types of Stress

Five kinds of stress are used in **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex**: **DAMAGED** stress, **DEMORALISED** stress, **DRAINED** stress, **ENRAGED** stress, and **ENTHRALLED** stress. Each type of stress represents a different kind of situation, as follows:

DAMAGED stress is physical, bodily harm, like getting punched in the eye, cut by a blade, poisoned by an assassin, burned by flame, etc.

DEMORALISED stress is fear, insecurity, discouragement, worry, disillusionment, or any other mental state that makes you feel like you might be better off quitting.

DRAINED stress is lack of energy, fatigue or burnout for Sleepers, but for mages it is also depletion of their Avatar of Quintessence, the force of creation they can use to bolster their reality-altering magick.

ENTHRALLED stress is when you are fascinated, tempted, distracted, charmed, smitten, mind-controlled, or just caught up in your own thoughts.

ENRAGED stress is anger, wrath, and aggression.

Assets

An asset is a temporary trait that grants an advantage. When you create an asset, you choose whether it is for you or for another character. Usually, only the character you choose can use it.

Sometimes, an asset becomes permanent, making it an ongoing advantage that a character uses all the time. Such assets are called signature assets.

Multiple Assets

A default rule for assets is that, unlike other types of traits, more than one asset can be added to the same dice pool, as long as each asset is being applied to the activity for which the player is rolling.

Assets are possibly the most basic trait in the game, but there are a lot of ways this versatile trait can feature in your fantasy game.

Creating Assets

You can create an asset with a test. Your effect die becomes the rating of the asset, which you may use for the rest of the scene.

Here's some assets that you might create during play: **CONJURED THUNDER**, **COVERED BY TERRAIN**, **SUGGESTIVE APPEARANCE**, **EXPANSIVE RECONNAISSANCE**.

Shutting Down Assets

Whether it is disarming the garou's knave, quashing the bloodlust of an angry mob, or unweaving a ward of your opponent, you may want to remove the assets of characters giving you trouble. To do so, you roll against that character, and they get to include the asset in their dice pool opposing you.

On a success, you either:

- ☞ shut down the asset if your effect die is larger than the asset
- ☞ or step down the asset if your effect die is equal or lower

When you step down an asset in this way or make it unavailable, it remains so until the end of the scene. Any player may do this by inflicting a complication larger than the asset's rating. You can do it all in one go, or by starting a low-level complication like **LOOSENED GRIP** and stepping it up with later rolls. When you step down an asset in this way or make it unavailable, it remains stepped down or shut down until the end of the scene. If the asset would've gone away at the end of the scene, that happens normally.

Recovery

Complications and stress can be downright crippling. Getting rid of complications or stress is called recovery.

Downtime

During a scene when characters have a chance to recover – by resting or some other form of self-care and recovery – all stress usually dice step down. However, mages have the *Avatar Reserve* Limit, which means they can only step down their **DRAINED** stress using SFX.

Expiring Complications

Complications go away at the end of a scene or when they are no longer narratively appropriate.

Seizing an Opportunity

When the ST rolls an opportunity, you can spend a **PP** to step down a complication or stress.

Recovery Rolls

Other characters can try to help you recover. (Generally, you can't recover your own stress unless you have an SFX that allows it.)

To do so, the helping character rolls a test against a difficulty of **4** or peril, per ST's choice, plus the complication or stress die that they are trying to help you with.

On a success, they either step down your complication or stress, if their effect die is equal or smaller to its die, or remove the complication or stress entirely, if their effect die is larger.

On most failures, nothing happens. If they fail with one or more hitches, your complication or stress steps up and the ST gives both of you a **PP**.

Fresh Start

At the start of a new session, all complications and stresses are removed – unless the last session ended in a cliffhanger and the new session picks up right where you left off. (If that's the case, players keep their **PP** as well.)

SFX & Dice Tricks

Your character gains SFX, special effects that give you added influence over the story. These reflect your character's extraordinary abilities or their powerful role in the narrative. Many SFX require you to spend plot points to activate them. Other SFX allow you to impose a disadvantage on your character in order to earn **PP** or another reward. For example, the *Hinder* SFX lets you earn a **PP** by rolling a smaller die.

Using an SFX is always a choice; you are never compelled to activate your character's SFX, unless that SFX is a Limit. A Limit is an SFX which can be activated by the ST.

Doubling Dice

Sometimes, the rules tell you to double a die in your pool. When you double a die, you add another die of the same size to the pool before you roll.

One Roll

Unless the text of the SFX itself or another rule says otherwise, when you step up, step down, or double a trait using an SFX, you only do so for a single roll.

Reroll

Some SFX allow a reroll of some or all of the dice in your pool after you first roll them. You can't use SFX to reroll the same die roll more than once, though other players might use SFX to reroll it.

Usually, SFX of this type specify how many dice are rerolled. If an SFX says to reroll all the dice, or if it doesn't specify, reroll every die rolled as part of that dice pool.

Stepping Up & Stepping Down

The rules sometimes tell you to step up a die, changing it from a die of one size to one of the next larger size, (such as changing **4** to **6** or **8** to **10**) or to step down a die (the reverse, such as **12** to **10**).

When you step up a **12** in your dice pool, you keep the **12**, but add an extra **6** to your pool as well. When you step down a **4** in your pool, you remove that die entirely.

Stepping Down Assets

When an SFX allows you step down an asset for some benefit, that asset remains so indefinitely unless the SFX says otherwise. It can still be stepped up by normal means (such as activating an opportunity). If an asset is stepped down below **4**, it is eliminated. Signature assets are restored to their full value at the end of the scene.

Stepping Down Stress or Complications

When an SFX lets you step down a stress or complication, it remains stepped down indefinitely, as if with a successful recovery roll, unless the SFX says otherwise. (So if an SFX lets you step down someone's **DAMAGED**, for example, you have applied healing to their injury.)

Using Your Own Complications

Some SFX let you add your own complication or stress to your dice pool for a roll. When you do so, the opposition doesn't get to roll that complication or stress against you – you're already using it to your own advantage, so in that moment it isn't a disadvantage for you.

The Peril Pool

During play, the ST maintains their own special, ongoing pool of dice that represents the overall ebb and flow of trouble and danger across the entire adventure. This is the peril pool, and when a player rolls a test, the ST usually rolls the peril pool to oppose them. Dice in the peril pool are called peril dice.

At the opening of a new adventure, the ST establishes the peril pool as a matched pair of two dice. It usually starts each session at **6 6**, but it can be **4 4** or higher depending on the stakes of the story.

Whenever a player roll a hitch, if the ST wants to take advantage of it, the ST gives that player a **PP**, then adds **6** to the peril pool. If the player rolled multiple hitches, the ST can step up the new **6** peril die once for each additional hitch beyond the first (**4** for two hitches, **10** for three hitches, or **12** for four).

Also, whenever the rules say the ST would gain a **PP** (such as by activating a Limit for a STC), they gain a **6** peril die instead.

Whenever the ST would add a new die to the peril pool, they can instead choose to step up an existing peril die.

When the ST adds a peril die, they may also describe something that has happened in the scene to make life more complicated for one or more player characters.

The ST can also “spend” peril dice from the peril pool, removing them from the peril pool to activate certain special rules during play (as described in the ST section). For example, the ST can spend peril dice as if they were plot points for STCs, which is the main way peril dice are spent.

Paradox

During play, every character also maintains their own special challenge pool that represents the force of consensual reality fighting back against the enlightened will of the mage. This is their Paradox pool.

When Paradox grows ST either steps up one of Paradox dice or adds a **6** to Paradox – two if the pool was empty. A character grows their Paradox in multiple ways:

- ☞ Whenever they use vulgar magick, Paradox grows once and the player gains a **PP**.
- ☞ Whenever they use vulgar magick in front of Sleeper witnesses, Paradox grows twice and the player gains 2 **PP**s.
- ☞ Whenever they roll a hitch using magick, the Storyteller may grow Paradox as per peril rules, paying for it as normal.
- ☞ Special circumstances: Certain special circumstances like encounters with Mad Ones may grow Paradox in unusual ways as well.

Paradox gets to roll against the character (as described in the ST section for Challenges) if their Paradox grew. If Paradox succeeds, they get to inflict a complication, representing the form Backlash takes, be it Quiet, Burn, a Paradox flaw or spirit.

If a PC accumulates enough Paradox, then the ST may spend from the peril pool to put them in a Paradox realm.

The PC can reduce Paradox like any challenge, taking an action on their turn to steel themselves before the might of reality hitting them. Success results in a Paradox flaw that has a relatively harmless effect.

Conditions

Characters may find themselves experiencing all kinds of conditions: getting turned into a lawn chair, using magick to turn invisible, having a pursuer shoot out one of your tires, gaining increased confidence from an inspiring speech, and the like. In **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex**, these kinds of conditions are modelled with assets, complications, and stress.

Spellcasting Conditions

As a default, hitches on rolls to use magick almost always inflict Paradox on the caster.

Sometimes mages use Quintessence to make their magicks blaze with reality, brilliance, and power when imposing their Will over the world. **DRAINED** stress describes their Avatar's reserves dwindling.

Hitches might occasionally result in other conditions, as the ST determines. Channelling hitched lightning might shock you as well, for instance, and inflict **DAMAGED**, and a hitched prophecy might fill one with dread, inflicting **DEMORALISED** instead.

Botches can grow Paradox immensely, but they can also be opportunities for mistargeted, uncontrolled magickal effects going terribly awry.

Other complications can interfere with performing magick, depending on the mage's instruments. A mage relying on voice and vocalisations who is **SILENCED** or **GAGGED**, one who uses movement and gestures but has their fingers **BOUND**, or one who writes the code to reality but had **ELECTRONICS TAKEN AWAY** has those complications rolled against their in tests to perform magickal effects. Equivalent complications might afflict mages with different practices. A player might also *Hinder* a distinction to recognize the limitations of their training – and pick up a sweet **PP** for their trouble.

Tactical Conditions

A simple test can inflict complications such as **SURROUNDED**, **OUTFLANKED**, or **EXPOSED**, or create assets like **COVERING FIRE**, **IN POSITION**, or **GOT THE DROP ON YOU**. If an asset applies to multiple characters, spend a **PP** to let everybody in the group use it.

A feint can inflict a complication to the tune of **DISTRACTED** or **UNBALANCED**, which can then be leveraged in a later roll to inflict more lasting **DAMAGED**.

Disarming an opponent can also work as a complication. If the item is represented by an asset die, inflicting a complication of a higher die size makes the asset inaccessible until the complication is recovered.

Morale Conditions

Intimidation both on and off the battlefield is nearly handled by inflicting **DEMORALISED** stress. That stress, in turn, can be rolled into other actions seeking to inflict **DAMAGED** or other conditions. It can even be added to dice pools to scare opponents into quitting the battlefield altogether.

The trade-off is that, in most situations, **DEMORALISED** stress is likely easier to recover than “more serious” conditions like **DAMAGED**, which might require skilled help, specialized tools, or magick. Any character can offer encouragement to any other character as an action intended to recover **DEMORALISED** stress. Characters can even attempt to psych themselves up and recover their own stress.

Magical Conditions

A whole raft of magical conditions can simply be flashy ways of inflicting basic stress. A fascination charm inflicts **ENTHRALLED**. A Prime effect draining your pattern of energy inflicts **DRAINED**. And of course fireballs inflict **DAMAGED**.

Sometimes you might want something a little more tailored to your circumstances, in which complications come into play. **ON FIRE** is a perennial favourite. **BLINDED**, **POISONED**, **BOUND INTO CONCRETE**, or even **CHILLED** work great, as well. Cursing a man to have a donkey's head, if we want to get all Shakespearean, can also just be expressed as a complication.

Mages may also spend a **PP** to keep an extra effect die. This way you can inflict a standard stress like **DAMAGED** as well as a flashy complication like **ON FIRE**.

Some magical conditions, such as turning someone into a lawn chair, can get tricky. Here the intent is not to complicate their later actions, but to remove the character from the scene entirely. Such a complication may need to be rephrased as an active but unfinished process, like **BECOMING A LAWN CHAIR**.

Stealth Conditions

Characters sneaking past guards or into rooms without being noticed is usually resolved with a simple test. However if the player intends to leverage that "stealthed" status in later actions, they might spend a **PP** to gain the asset **STEALTHED** or **IN THE SHADOWS**.

Alternately, a character might take action to distract sentries or other opponents. Their intent may be to strike while distracted or shepherd less-stealthy characters past. Such a distraction can also be handled with a test, this time inflicting **ENTHRALLED** stress, to represent the target's attention being focused elsewhere, or a temporary complication representing a specific distraction, such as **BURNING POLICE CAR** **◆**. Both the surprise attack and other characters' stealth attempts may then add the complication into their die pool.

Both assets and complications are eliminated whenever they are no longer relevant. When a **STEALTHED** character reveals themselves, the asset goes away. When the sentries are no longer distracted, the complication goes away.

The classic Rogue tactic of striking from the shadows can combine both a **STEALTHED** asset and a distracting complication, which is one of the reasons this tactic is so popular and effective.

Wealth Conditions

The love of money is the root of all evil, but we live in a society where people must spend to survive. ST can freely offer characters an asset to represent wealth gained an adventure:

FAT WALLET [4], **STOLEN CREDIT CARD** [4], **BRIEFCASE FULL OF CASH** [10]. Alternately, players may search a location and create an asset to represent something valuable they find.

Shopping is as simple as creating an asset with a test. Wealth assets can be added to these rolls, and on a success might be renamed (**SLIMMED DOWN WALLET**), stepped down, or eliminated, depending on circumstance.

Like any other temporary asset, wealth assets only last for one session. A windfall is likely to be used immediately for something relevant to the plot.

If a wealth is stored away or saved up, it doesn't disappear, but either it's no longer relevant to the immediate story and therefore is no longer worth a die, or the character should spend the 5 XP required to gain it as a signature asset, representing more permanent wealth or a useful purchase they intend to carry with them on their adventures.

How to Be a Great Player

As a **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex** player, part of your job is to respond to the challenges the GM lays down as well as interact with fellow player characters. The game works best when you go hard: describe your actions with cinematic energy. Instead of "I strike the zombie with lightning", you can draw your oaken wand inscribed with sacred name of Baraquiel, the angel of lightning and speak the Latin incantation of *Creo Fulmen* to put the dead back to rest, slap the gun out of the vampire's hand, or any number of other options. There's no increased risk to your character when you get creative, so let your imagination run wild.

One enthusiastically descriptive player is entertaining, but the good stuff is when the whole table starts riffing off each other's antics. Keep an eye out for opportunities to interact and open yourself up to others piling on to your fun. Be vocal: say "I need to shake this **DEMORALISED** stress!" or "I'm gonna pin them in place with a complication, so you can finish them off!" The game works better – both tactically and narratively – if everybody is a part of everybody else's stories.

There's literally no limit on what any of you can describe except the nature of the story itself, which means the tone and mood of the game is entirely in your hands. This is a collaborative effort; it's not the sole responsibility of any one player to decide what is or is not too silly, or too dark, or too outlandish. Talk about the kind of action, drama, and comedy you want to see in the game. If things start drifting in a direction that's not fun for you, speak up so you can all stay on the same page.

Characters & Traits

Your character is a protagonist in the story you tell in the game, as well as your primary means of interacting with both the world and the rules. Their traits and die ratings help you figure out who your character is and what they can do.

A **4** trait is underdeveloped or problematic, a **6** is healthy and reliable, a **8** is excellent and noteworthy, a **10** is extraordinary and powerful, and a **12** is world-class, the absolute pinnacle of your potential and capabilities.

Character Creation

To create your neophyte mage character, you populate six trait sets – distinctions, attributes, roles, specialties, signature assets, and Spheres – and assign a die rating to each trait in those sets.

For traits like roles, when making a new character, you are given an array of die ratings for each set – such as **10**, **8**, **6**, **6**, **4** – and you assign one of these ratings to each trait in the set. So a character's roles might be **SCHOLAR 6**, **SCOUNDREL 4**, **SCOUT 10**, **SOLDIER 8**, and **SPEAKER 6**.

When distributing these ratings, it is usually easiest to choose which of the traits is most significant, the one the character will rely on most and for which they would likely be most well-known to others. Assign the largest die rating to that one. Then choose their second best trait, one they are still really great with and can rely on, even if it isn't the most important one, and assign the second largest die rating to it. Then keep assigning in order from best to worst.

Faction & Focus

When creating a character, choose one Faction, which grants you SFX and Limits to unlock when growing your character. Choosing a Faction should be your first decision because it defines many things about your character. The playable factions detailed in this document are: the Council of Nine Mystic Traditions and the Technocratic Union. Details on each appear in the Factions section. If you aren't affiliated with any Faction you are known as an Orphan, an unaffiliated mage.

Once you choose a Faction, you should also define your focus, which describes the way you understand the reality and how you enforce your Awakened Will upon the world. Focus has three parts making it up:

- ☞ A model for understanding how the world works. That's your paradigm.
- ☞ A system or multiple systems that allow to apply the paradigm in the real world. That's your practice.
- ☞ A number of tools, techniques and processes that prepare an act of magick in accordance with your practice, normally seven of them. Those are your instruments.

Later in the book examples of foci will be given, but those are not exhaustive, so you should feel free to define your focus yourself.

Distinctions

Much of your character is defined by three distinctions, words or brief phrases describing core aspects of their identity. Each distinction is rated **◆**. While attributes and roles describe what your character is good at, distinctions summarize who your character is.

Another difference between distinctions and some trait sets is that you name your distinctions, instead of assigning ratings to predefined traits.

☞ **BACKGROUND** is your first distinction, it includes some description of the character's identity in the mortal world along with a personality trait or some other idiosyncrasy. Most mages started life as normal humans, so this distinction often defines who the PC was before they joined the society of mages, but some may have a magickal upbringing, though that's rare. Examples might include **DAZZLING SEAMSTRESS**, **BRILLIANT OVERTHINKER GRADUATE**, **PESSIMISTIC RADIO TECHNICIAN**, **TRANSFORMED TREE**, or **BURNT OUR CHILD STAR**.

☞ **FACTION** distinction includes the faction of mages you belong to, as well as your role in it. Some examples are **CHRONICLER OF A CELESTIAL CHORUS CHANTRY**, **HOUSE BONISAGUS YOUNGEST MEMBER**, **A PROMISING NWO OPERATIVE**, or **HOUSE VERDITIUS WONDERCRAFTER**.

☞ **DRIVE** distinction sums up a belief, focus, motivation, calling, paradigm, or mission that is central to your character. Some examples include **MUST PROTECT MY FAMILY IN SECRET**, **ACHIEVE PERFECTION IN ALL I AM**, **KEEP THE WHEEL OF DHARMA SPINNING**, or **FIND OUT ABOUT MY SISTER'S DISAPPEARANCE**.

Together, your three distinctions should sum up your overall character concept. If your character were the protagonist of a book, movie, or video game, and you were describing them to a friend, your distinctions would feature prominently. Distinctions spell out how your character is different from others, and they impact every action you take.

Hindering Distinctions

Every distinction benefits from the Hinder SFX, your character's first SFX. Hinder

Hinder: Roll this distinction as a **▼** to earn a **PP**.

Hinder is best used in situations where a distinction would actually make things harder for the character instead of easier (such as an **AWKWARD TEEN** trying to intimidate someone), or when no distinction really applies to what you're trying to do ("I'm a **DOCTOR**, not an engineer!").


Since Hinder earns you a **PP**, which can be spent to include extra dice in your total, this allows you to accept a temporary disadvantage now in order to succeed more spectacularly later on.

Changing Distinctions

Distinctions aren't necessarily permanent features of your character forever. Characters often evolve during play. These changes can be expressed through distinctions as well. See Spending XP later for rules to rewrite your distinctions.

Character Creation: Distinctions

Define your character by picking three distinctions, as follows:

Each of your distinctions is rated .

For more inspiration when creating distinctions, including lists and optional die rolls, see Appendix A: Distinction Builder.

Attributes

Another of your character's three major trait sets is your attributes, they represent the inherent characteristics your character possesses, there are six and for any situation there is at least one attribute that applies:

- ☞ **AGILITY** includes manual dexterity, swiftness, deftness, reflexes, balance, and hand-eye coordination.
- ☞ **ALERTNESS** includes perception, intuition, attention, sensory acuity, and overall awareness of your environment.
- ☞ **BRAINS** includes intellect, reasoning, memory, scholarship, and aptitude for learning.
- ☞ **BRAWN** includes physical strength, constitution, raw muscle, stamina, endurance, athleticism, and general health.
- ☞ **CHARISMA** includes presence, bearing, persuasiveness, social graces, force of personality, and personal magnetism.
- ☞ **COMPOSURE** includes willpower, self-control, tenacity, discipline, determination, resolve, and the ability to keep your emotions hidden or in-check.

Character Creation: Attributes

Assign the either of the following die rating arrays to your six attributes, in any order:

- ☞      
- ☞      
- ☞ or      

Roles

Your character has five roles. While attributes represent your inherent qualities, each role trait represents a thematic grouping of experience, training, and skill.

Your largest rated role usually corresponds to how you best contribute to a group, whereas for smaller rated roles, you're often better off relying on more proficient allies. Among the roles one can be used in any situation:

- ☞ **SCHOLAR** represents academic knowledge, including education, lore, the sciences, deduction, and research.
- ☞ **SCOUNDREL** sums up your knack for trickery, crime, spying, sleight of hand, defeating security measures like traps or alarms.
- ☞ **SCOUT** covers activities related to exploration, perception, and survival, such as tracking, navigation, animal handling, climbing, and simply noticing things.
- ☞ **SOLDIER** defines skill and experience when it comes to wielding weapons, enduring hardship, providing security, and fighting in general.
- ☞ **SPEAKER** includes communication, group dynamics, leadership, empathy, and various forms of self-expression, such as oratory, performance, and art.

Sometimes multiple roles might apply. Sneak up on a poacher with **SCOUT** or **SCOUNDREL**? Give battlefield orders with **SOLDIER** or **SPEAKER**? In those cases, choose the one your character prefers.

Character Creation: Roles

Assign the following die ratings to your five roles, in any order: 10, 8, 6, 4, 2.

Specialities

Specialities are narrow skills that supplement the broad areas of expertise defined by your roles. Whenever a specialty applies, you roll it in addition to the appropriate role.

For example, you might use **SOLDIER** to display your general prowess with a weapon, but you might also have a specialty that you add when using certain types of weapons, such as **FIREARMS** 6 or **WEAPONRY** 8. When you follow a trail through a dense forest, your dice pool might not only include **SCOUT** but also an extra die for your **NATURE** 6 specialty.

Specialities are free-form traits you create yourself. Specialities should never be as broad as roles; as a general rule, a specialty should apply to about a third as many situations as a basic role would (or less).

Though specialties are like more focused versions of roles, there are no limits on what role you must use to include a specialty that suits your action. Returning to the above example, if you show off your skill with a knife to intimidate someone into answering your questions, your pool might include both your **SPEAKER** role and an **ATHLETICS** or **WEAPONRY** specialty.

Character Creation: Specialities

The faction you belong to adds a one or more specialties rated at 6 to your character.

Next you can choose add either two or three specialties to a new character. If you choose two, one is rated at 8 and the other is a 6 if you choose three, all three are rated at 6.

You can add a 6 to the bonus specialty to step it up to 8.

Magick

Magick is represented by ten spheres, acknowledged, even if begrudgingly and by different names, by all factions in the Awakened world.

Whenever you are creating a magickal effect you roll an appropriate Sphere.

If your effect requires multiple Spheres you must have all of them at the appropriate ranks, but you only roll one Sphere of your choice from those required.

- ☞ **CORRESPONDENCE** the element of connection between apparently different things.
- ☞ **DEATH** the ending of things, absence, inevitable destruction, and decay.
- ☞ **FATE** the principle of chance, destiny and possibility.
- ☞ **FORCES** the understanding of elemental energies.
- ☞ **LIFE** the mysteries of life and death.
- ☞ **MATTER** the principles behind supposedly “inanimate” objects.
- ☞ **MIND** the potentials of consciousness.
- ☞ **PRIME** an understanding of the Primal Energy within all things.
- ☞ **SPIRIT** comprehension of Otherworldly forces and inhabitants.
- ☞ **TIME** the strange workings of chronological forces and perceptions.

While those names are the ones understood by Traditions as the lingua franca of magic, every Faction has their own terminology and understanding for them, so you may feel free to rename the Spheres on your character sheet, so long as the rules themselves are maintained.

Techniques

Magick is divided into Techniques by mages, each Technique describes broad kinds of effects a Mage can produce. You unlock more Techniques as your Sphere rating increases:

Initiate 6

- ☞ **Compelling** - subtle and minor influence of targets that could have occurred naturally.
- ☞ **Unveiling** - uncovering information about a target of magick.

Apprentice 8

- ☞ **Ruling** - control of effect targets without altering their properties and abilities.
- ☞ **Shielding** - protection against a particular phenomenon under the Sphere's purview.
- ☞ **Veiling** - concealing a target from detection, at well as concealing something else against a particular phenomenon under the Sphere's purview.

Disciple 10

- ☞ **Fraying** - degrading Sphere's phenomena or using the Sphere to directly damage a target.
- ☞ **Perfecting** - strengthening, improving, healing and enhancing targets.
- ☞ **Weaving** - alteration of nearly any property of a phenomenon without transforming it into something completely different.

Adept 12

- ☞ **Patterning** - transforming a target into anything else within the Sphere or another Sphere with a combined Patterning effect.
- ☞ **Unraveling** - significantly damaging and degrading Sphere's phenomena or inflicting severe damage using the Sphere.

Master 12 12

- ☞ **Making** - weaving phenomena out of pure Quintessence by combining Patterning Techniques of Prime and another Sphere.
- ☞ **Unmaking** - reducing a target to nothing by combining Unravelling Techniques of Prime and another Sphere.

Spending Quintessence

With the weight of Paradox growing stronger as they pull on threads of reality, and side-effects of a spell gone awry any use of magick can take a toll on a mage, but sometimes you may chose to exert yourself further, expending some of your reserve of Quintessence to make your workings blaze with truth and power of creation. You can do so with **Avatar Reserve** SFX that every mage benefits from.

Avatar Reserve: Gain a **PP**, then take **DRAINED** 6 at the end of the current beat. You can never recover **DRAINED** stress except via SFX.

Recovering Quintessence

There are other, more specialised ways of regaining Quintessence, but every mage benefits from **Channel Quintessence** SFX.

Channel Quintessence: In a scene with a free source of quintessence, channel it to step down your **DRAINED**, then shut down this SFX. Activate an opportunity to recover.

Character Creation: Magick

The faction you belong to gives you a Sphere rated at 6. This is your affinity Sphere, the Sphere you feel most connected to and understanding of.

In addition you choose to add either two or three Sphere ratings to your new character. If you choose two, one is rated at 8 and the other is 6 if you choose three, all three are rated at 6.

You can add a 6 to the affinity Sphere to step it up to 8.

Signature Assets

Signature assets are assets that have become permanent traits for a character, playing an ongoing and essential part in their story. Usually, they cover anything that gives you an advantage but isn't covered by your other trait sets.

Note that your signature assets do not include all of your character's gear or other advantages. When something is an asset, it just means that it's so important to your character's story that you gain an extra die when using it.

Most signature assets break down into one of five categories: things, creatures, places, people, and edges. Example signature assets for each category are listed below.

- ☞ **Things** are the most common form of signature asset, including items or equipment that you own, carry, or have access to. Examples include **MAGIC CARPET**, **1971 DODGE CHALLENGER**, **ENCHANTED DAGGER**, **MY FAMILY'S HEIRLOOM SWORD**, **DIVINING ROD**, **CHAINSAW**, etc.
- ☞ **Creatures** include pets, mounts, animal companions, familiars, and the like. Examples include **RACEHORSE**, **WELL-TRAINED CAT**, **MY CAT SNOWBALL**, **RAVEN FAMILIAR**, **SEMI-DOMESTICATED WOLF**, etc.
- ☞ **Places** represent advantages gained from being in or having knowledge of a certain location. Examples include **SEASIDE HIDEOUT**, **PRIVATE LIBRARY**, **SPECIAL FORCES BAR**, **UMBRAN DEMESNE**, **HIDDEN GLADE**, **PANIC ROOM**, **BASEMENT SANCTUM**, **PENTHOUSE**, **UNCLE'S ARMY SURPLUS STORE**, etc.

- ☞ **People** are minor STCs who can be relied upon to help you, at least occasionally. Examples include **MY APPRENTICE**, **HIRED BODYGUARD**, **BLACKMAILED SENATOR**, **MASTER MAGE MENTOR**, **FENCE WHO DOESN'T ASK QUESTIONS**, **MOB INFORMANT**, **WITCH BOYFRIEND**, **PSYCHIC LITTLE SISTER**, etc.
- ☞ **Edges** are supernatural capabilities you can access via your magickal powers, such as psychic powers, exceptional senses, frequently-used spells, sacred rituals, or more powerful versions of the magickal powers available to every Awakened. Examples include **MIND READING**, **LOCATOR SPELL**, **TELEKINESIS**, **CHAIN LIGHTNING ROTE**, **RITUAL OF FLAME IMMUNITY**, **LEVITATION**, **FOR CONJURATION**, **VORPAL CLAWS**, **FOX TRANSFORMATION**, etc. Anything that you and your ST agree suits your mage is fair game.

Character Creation: Signature Assets

The faction you belong to adds a signature asset to your character.

Additionally you choose to add either two or three of these additional signature assets to your new character. If you choose two, one is rated at **4** and the other is **6** if you choose three, all three are rated at **6**.

You can add a **6** to the signature asset gained from the Faction to step it up to **8**.

SFX

Each character has a handful of SFX, reflecting special capabilities associated with their Faction & Focus distinction as well as their Awakened nature. Whenever you gain an SFX or Limit that isn't specific to your Faction, you can rename it to better suit your character.

Non-stress complications named in SFX (such as **OVER-INDULGED** or **ON FIRE**) are mere suggestions and can always be swapped for something more creative or appropriate to the moment.

Some SFX are tagged as **(Gear)**. These generally require you to have the equipment described in the SFX in order to use some or all of the options that SFX offers.

Character Creation: SFX

Your character begins play with *Avatar Reserve* and *Channel Quintessence*, in addition to *Hinder*.

Limits

A Limit is a special type of SFX that imposes a disadvantage on your character in order to earn them **PP** or another reward.

Every PC has at least one Limit.

ST Activation

Unlike normal SFX, Limits can be activated by the ST as well as the player. Even when the ST does so, you still make all the choices and earn all the rewards listed for that Limit. For example, the *We've Got History* Limit lets you earn a **PP** by revealing that a STC was formerly your friend, ally, or lover. If the ST activates the Limit, you still decide whether the STC in question was your friend, or your ally, or your lover, and you still earn the **PP**. The Limit says you also take **6 DEMORALISED** or **ENTHRALLED** stress, but it is you who decides which of those two stresses you take, not the ST.

Reveals

Some Limits allow you to reveal information about the scene or setting. When you do so, your character explains a fact about the story that is true, a fact you create just like the ST would. Just as the ST might have a STC say “These thugs all have tattoos from the Cult of the Crimson Covenant”, which establishes a truth about the world for everyone at the table, you have your character say something similar. Either way, the revelation changes the story, editing the narrative of your current scene to make the information you revealed true.

In the fiction of the game, what your character reveals is based on their existing knowledge or current observations. As a player at the table, however, you actually get to invent these new details for your character to share, creating new information that changes the story.

Some GMs and players prefer not to use these kinds of Limits. If your group doesn't want them, you can ignore Limits that call for player reveals.

All the Limits that explicitly require a player reveal are marked with an asterisk (*).

Limits List

All the Hard Work (Limit): When you expend exhausting effort to solve someone else's problem, take **DRAINED** 6 to earn a PP. If you actually receive fair compensation for it, gain another PP.

Ammunition (Limit): Earn a PP and step down an asset for a ranged weapon, representing a need to conserve ammunition. Whenever the GM activates a hitch on a roll you make with the stepped down asset, they can choose to shut down the asset instead of giving you a complication. Whether the asset is stepped down or shut down, recover it when you refresh your ammo supply.

Bleeding Heart (Limit): When you expose yourself to danger by showing compassion, earn a PP and take a **MISTRUSTED** 6 complication.

Bound by Tradition (Limit): When you pay deference to an ancient, exalted, or royal being, or when you detract from your larger goals by adhering to tradition, take **ENTHRALLED** 6 to earn a PP.

Code of Conduct (Limit): When you take an action that violates the honourable code of behaviour you have pledged to live by, earn a PP and take **DEMORALISED** 6.

Compulsive Secrecy (Limit): When you keep a secret even though doing so is detrimental to your larger goals, take a related 6 complication to earn a PP.

Conspicuous (Limit): When your actions or your flamboyant use of supernatural powers attract unwanted attention, take **EXPOSED** 6 complication to earn a PP.

Country Mouse (Limit): When in an urban area, take a related 6 complication or **DEMORALISED** 6 to earn a PP.

Curiosity (Limit): Take a 6 complication related to indulging your curiosity in a dangerous situation to earn a PP.

Dark Omens (Limit): Earn a PP by revealing how the current situation is more dangerous than it seems and/or how a past tragedy is on the verge of repeating itself. You then take DEMORALISED 6 or ENTHRALLED 6.

Deeply Flawed (Limit): When you use *Hinder* on a roll, after the roll is resolved, you can step up one existing stress you have to earn a PP.

Dig Too Deep (Limit): When you've started something and it's probably a bad idea to keep working at it, but you stick with it anyway, take a STUBBORN 6 complication to earn a PP.

Distressingly Familiar (Limit): Reveal a detrimental detail about a situation, location, creature, or faction that you've encountered before to earn a PP, then take a related 6 complication.

Eager for Attention (Limit): When you perform for an audience or show off in front of strangers, take ENTHRALLED 6 to earn a PP.

Easy Way Out (Limit): When you are tempted to give into fear, desire, social pressure, or the instinct to acquire more power, take DEMORALISED 6 or ENTHRALLED 6 to earn a PP.

Encumbered (Limit): When your body armour or other heavy gear interferes with your movement, gain a related complication at 6 to earn a PP.

Guilty Conscience (Limit): When you act against your own sense of morality, take DEMORALISED 6 (if you feel bad about it) or add 6 to the peril pool (if you don't), then earn a PP.

Hair-Trigger Temper (Limit): When you perceive someone as having deceived, insulted, or goaded you, take ENTHRALLED 6 or an ENRAGED 6 complication to earn a PP.

Hard on My Gear (Limit): Shut down a signature asset to earn a PP. To restore it, succeed on a special test against the ST.

Head in the Clouds (Limit): When you are distracted by a torrent of information provided by your magic, research, or supernatural insights, take ENTHRALLED 6 to earn a PP.

Hoarder (Limit): When you could trade or spend money to make things easier, but you refuse, take a POSSESSIVE 6 complication to earn a PP.

I'll Guard the Henhouse (Limit): When you play up the air of danger that surrounds you, take a MISTRUSTED 6 complication to earn a PP.

It Can't Be This Easy (Limit): Earn a PP by revealing why an opponent must have already anticipated your current course of action and/or why your seeming moment of victory is only temporary. You then take DEMORALISED 6 or ENTHRALLED 6.

Misunderstood (Limit): When you feel the burden of others' assumptions about you, take DEMORALISED 6 or a MISTRUSTED 6 complication to earn a PP.

Need for Control (Limit): When someone you expected to comply disobeys your direct order, take DEMORALISED 6 or ENRAGED 6 stress to earn a PP.

No Angel (Limit): Earn a **PP** by revealing how a past misdeed has come back to haunt you in the current scene, or that you must now separate from the group to deal with the fallout from a bad choice you made. You then take **DEMORALISED 6** or **ENTHRALLED 6** stress.

Not Safe Yet (Limit): Earn a **PP** by revealing why you and your allies cannot yet escape or stop and rest, and/or that you've become aware of someone following or watching you. You then take **DEMORALISED 6** or **ENTHRALLED 6** stress.

Outrage (Limit): When you loudly condemn someone who has broken your culture's traditions or disrespected you, earn a **PP** and take a **ENRAGED 6**.

Perfectionist (Limit): When you fail at something, take **DEMORALISED 6** or **ENTHRALLED 6** stress to earn a **PP**. (This is in addition to any stress you take from a failed dice roll.)

Rebellious Instincts (Limit): When you indulge in an act of rebellion detrimental to your larger goals, take a related **6** complication or **ENRAGED 6** to earn a **PP**.

Righteous Urgency (Limit): Earn a **PP** when you reveal how a situation is likely to harm vulnerable people, how you must address an affront to your beliefs, or why you feel compelled to help someone who deserves punishment. You then take your choice of **DEMORALISED 6**, **ENTHRALLED 6**, or **ENRAGED 6**.

Sacred Ground (Limit): Whenever you enter a space sacred to your culture or belief system, take **ENTHRALLED 6** to earn a **PP**.

Seeing Beyond Mundane Reality (Limit): When you attempt to focus all your attention on something, take **ENTHRALLED 6** representing distracting visions or skewed perceptions to earn a **PP**.

Seeing Red (Limit): When anger prompts you to focus all your attention on a single object or person, take **ENTHRALLED 6** to step down all your other complications and stresses.

Shady Backstory (Limit): Earn a **PP** by revealing that a **STC** or group knows a dangerous secret, or that they are after you for a past crime or perceived betrayal. You then take **DEMORALISED 6** or **ENTHRALLED 6**.

Split Allegiances (Limit): Choose a second faction in addition to your existing one. You don't gain the faction's bonus signature asset or specialities, but you can choose from its faction **SFX** when gaining new **SFX**. When you are torn between your two allegiances, take a related **6** complication to earn a **PP**.

Sworn Enemy (Limit): Earn a **PP** by revealing that a misdeed committed by a **STC** or faction now urgently requires you to bring them to justice, take vengeance on them, or save someone they endangered. You then take **ENTHRALLED 6** or an **ENRAGED 6**.

The Road Goes Ever On (Limit): When your homesickness threatens to overwhelm you, or you complain about your lack of creature comforts, take **DEMORALISED 6** to earn a **PP**.

Underdeveloped Powers (Limit): When your dice pool includes a **Sphere**, remove the largest die from your pool to earn a **PP**.

Unwanted Attention (Limit): When you arrive somewhere new, earn a **PP** and gain a **6** complication related to someone you hadn't met before already deciding they hate you, they want to use you, or they have unreciprocated affection towards you. Instead of just going away at the end of the scene, the complication automatically goes away at the end of the session.

Wanderlust (Limit): When your urge to go experience new places threatens to overwhelm you, take **ENTHRALLED 6** to earn a **PP**.

We've Got History (Limit): After a new STC is introduced, you can earn a **PP** by revealing that the STC was once your friend, ally, or lover, until you parted on very bad terms. You then take **DEMORALISED 6** or **ENTHRALLED 6**.

Weapon Focus (Limit): Whenever you are unarmed or have a complication that impairs your use of a weapon, shut down a related (Gear) SFX to earn a **PP**. Recover at the start of the next scene.

Working On It (Limit): Earn a **PP** by revealing that you can't complete an urgent task because you are missing something crucial that's difficult to obtain or because you need much more time than is currently feasible. Then take **DEMORALISED 6** or **ENTHRALLED 6**.

Character Creation: Limits

You choose and gain one Limit from those listed above.

Milestones

As you play, your character can gain Experience Points (XP), which can be used to change or augment your traits. You earn XP using milestones, lists of actions or events that advance your character's story and give them a chance to grow.

A character has two milestones at a time. A milestone usually has three levels, each of which provides a different amount of XP and can be tapped for XP at certain times:

- ☞ A **1 XP** level that you can hit once per beat;
- ☞ A **3 XP** level that you can hit once per scene;
- ☞ And a **10 XP** level that you can hit once per session.

Once XP is gained, it can be spent between sessions to change or improve your traits, gain new traits, or unlock other benefits. After you complete the 10 XP level, you remove that milestone and replace it, starting a brand new milestone.

(Theoretically, you could choose to send your character on a new version of the same journey by starting the same milestone over again, if you feel it captures an aspect of your character that you'd like to explore more deeply, but it's usually more interesting to move on to a new one.)

Character Creation: Milestones

All new characters start play with two milestones. Unless you and your ST agree on alternate milestones, you start with the default *Goal-Driven* and *Levelling Up* milestones listed below.

Milestone: Goal-Driven

- ☞ **1 XP** when you act to either affirm or conceal your commitment to a goal.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you recruit a new ally in pursuit of a goal or you betray or abandon allies to attain that goal.
- ☞ **10 XP** when defeating a challenge with at least one trait at **12** moves you closer to fulfilling a drive-related goal, or when you finally abandon a goal you've made sacrifices to pursue.

Milestone: Levelling Up

- ☞ **1 XP** when you earn a **PP** from an SFX or Limit (such as *Hinder*).
- ☞ **3 XP** when you help someone else recover from stress or you succeed on a roll to create an asset for an ally.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you recover from stress of **12** or larger, or when an asset you created for someone else helps defeat a challenge that has at least one trait at **12**.

Bonus Enhancement

Once your other traits are determined, the rules grant you one final bonus, an enhancement to make sure your character is as close as possible to your vision for them.

Character Creation: Bonus Enhancement

After all traits, SFX, and Milestones are set, choose just one of the following added bonus enhancements, then adjust your character accordingly:

- ☞ Add a new **6** specialty
- ☞ Add a new **6** signature asset
- ☞ Add a new **6** Sphere
- ☞ Upgrade a **6** specialty of your choice to **9**
- ☞ Upgrade a **6** signature asset of your choice to **9**
- ☞ Upgrade a **6** Sphere of your choice to **9**
- ☞ Choose and gain one of the SFX listed in Appendix B: SFX List.

Orphan Bonus

If you do are an Orphan, you can take a Bonus Enhancement twice, instead of just once, but you are have no Faction SFX.

Completing Your Character

Once you have determined and recorded your distinctions, attributes, roles, specialities, signature assets, SFX, Limits, and milestones, you have all the mechanical elements of your character in place. If you haven't already, you need to choose your character's name and pronouns. Once this is done, your character is complete!

Factions

Choose one of the factions described in the following pages to define your character's alliances and their place among their fellow mages. A faction grants your character a signature asset, one or more specialties, and access to a list of faction SFX that your character can acquire more easily than general SFX.

Though a faction does not grant a free SFX, during character creation you can use the bonus enhancement all PCs receive to gain one of your faction SFX.

Traditions

The Council of Nine Mystic Traditions seek a return to the days of High Magick or a new dawn of mystic potential. Bitter enemies of the Technocracy, they appear to have been losing the battle for reality.

Akashayana/Akashic Brotherhood

Harmony is found in the flow of What Is. To attune one's self to that flow is so simple that it can take lifetimes to master. It is, perhaps, the lot of man to strive against that flow; certainly, the modern world is filled with distractions from such purposes. And so, the Akashayana, commonly known as the Akashic Brotherhood, seek harmony in a world filled with chaos.

Deeply misunderstood among the Council as "peaceful warriors", devotees of the Akashayana Sangha ("Order of the Vehicle of Akasha") strengthen their bodies to cultivate their minds – and, by extension, the Sphere of Mind – in their pursuit of harmony. And yet, harmony often demands conflict. Just as the strings of an instrument must be struck before they can vibrate harmoniously, so too has the Brotherhood endured millennia of war. In the process, the Akashayana refined Do ("the Way", pronounced doe), the primal martial art from which all others descend.

Do, however, is more than mere war techniques. Encompassing a range of spiritual practices from tea ceremonies to Tantric union, Do focuses a person's essence, form, and intentions. Through relentless training, the student (or Akashi) develops the concentration he needs in order to discern the essential dissatisfaction of Samsara, the perpetual cycle or flow of existence. A Harmonious Brother (an honorific used regardless of the mage's gender) strives to help all beings realize samadhi (enlightenment, Ascension) and liberate each Bodhicitta (Avatar) from the cycle of rebirth.

Despite some misperceptions, the Akashayana did not originate in China. In a Time Before Time, humanity's world was a single Mount Meru; there, the Meru'ai people lived in harmony. It's been said that the Celestines Dragon, Tiger, and Phoenix taught the Meru'ai the disciplines that would become Do. Eventually, however, the imperfections of this world sundered Mount Meru from its celestial foundations, scattering the Meru'ai throughout the mountainous region later called Tibet. From there, they supposedly brought their language and ways to India, Nepal, China, and points east. Those origins have followed them wherever they go.

Over the millennia, countless teachers – notably Gautama Buddha, “the Awakened One” – have incorporated elements of Do into Buddhism, Taoism, Shinto, hatha yoga, and folk medicine. Akashi helped build Shaolin Temple and Angkor Wat; they overthrew tyrants, and their monasteries reached across Asia from Nepal to the Ryukyu Islands. In modern times, echoes of their teachings have spread worldwide.

Today, any mindful Brother can relive this entire history to better understand the cycle of continual remanifestation. The shunyata (primal emptiness) that underlies all things holds karmic traces of all past thoughts and actions. This imprint has several names – Merumandala, Akashakarma, the Universal Consciousness, shared memory, and more; modern Brothers, though, call it the Akashic Record. A quiet mind, freed of ego, can sense the Record, in which all consciousness joins in a single stream. Once immersed in Akashic mindspace, a seeker's awareness helps him parse the collective memories of Akashayana throughout history.

That history includes awful times: the Himalayan Wars against the early Chakravanti; conquests and revolutions; the sect's murderous rivalries with the Wu Lung, Dalou-laoshi, and rival Akashic groups; the Boxer Rebellion and its opium- trade beginnings; Mongol invasions and Kamikaze Wars; the Screaming Ghost Purge and Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward. Akashics have trained samurai and disemboweled themselves for honor; they've raised katars with the Rajput, stormed the Forbidden City, starved in Pol Pot's Killing Fields, and turned to ash at Hiroshima. The outer calm of an Akashic masks deep pains and passions from every age and every conflict, and the dreadful karma from those times lingers even now.

Several constants link all Akashi, regardless of culture: discipline, which the study of Do demands; empathy, nurtured by connection with the Akashic Record; fitness, honed by the pursuit of Do; respect, sharpened by intense apprenticeships; and focus, without which one cannot attain even the most limited understanding of Do. Across the globe, they share the same terminology even when divided into different groups. The popularity of martial arts culture has brought many initiates to the Akashic Path; sadly, the modern world's various distractions make this a difficult Path for all but the most dedicated aspirants.

Today, the Akashayana face a bizarre challenge: their ancient enemies, the Wu Lung, seem to have chosen the Akashic way. Although the Brotherhood remains wary about this alliance, the Tradition's compassionate ethic encourages the Akashayana to give their old rivals a chance. To cope with that decision, though, some folks say today's Akashics will need what their Tradition has seldom prized and rarely cultivated: imagination.

Organization

The Brotherhood is essentially led by the Kannagara, monastic ascetics of the Phoenix Robe sect. Today, however, lots of power resides with the Shi-Ren ("Benevolent Aristocracy"), a faction of politically active traditionalists who want to expand Akashic influence in world affairs. Tradition mages in the West most often encounter warriors of the Vajrapani (derisively called "Warring Fists") and the eclectic iconoclasts of the Li-Hai, who seek enlightenment through heroic experience.

Initiation

At temples, ashrams, and dojos across the world, Sifus (Masters) and Sihings (Adepts) accept disciples who display open minds and serious purpose. Each teacher typically teaches only one pupil at a time. Akashic doctrine maintains that every person must find his or her way to enlightenment; as a result, Akashayana receive very little guidance or encouragement. Many frustrated pupils give up on this Path; those who persist, however, cultivate impeccable fitness of mind, heart, and body.

Focus

"Magick" is actually self-perfection and cosmic harmony. To master such Arts in the proper Way (Do), a person must expand awareness in all things, clarify thoughts, focus the body, and subdue emotional confusion. Asian alchemy, craftwork, faith, yoga, social dominion, and martial arts training allow a Brother to channel life energy (*chi*) toward astounding feats of physical, mental, and energetic achievement. As a result, common paradigms include *Bring Back the Golden Age*, *Everything's an Illusion*, *It's All Good*, and occasionally *Might is Right*.

Bonus Asset

Choose a person who helped you significantly along the path of enlightenment, then gain that person as an asset rated **6**.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **AWARENESS 6**, **ESOTERICA 6**, **MARTIAL ARTS 6**, **MEDITATION 6**. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

Pursuers of harmony between mind, body and soul, the Akashayana hone their physical forms to perfections, so that an even greater, ever-sharp mind can sprout from this vessel.

Gain **MIND 6**, or **LIFE 6** as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction SFX

Celestial Chorus

Heretics and idealists from the world's monotheistic creeds, the embattled Celestial Chorus heeds the voice of the Divine. All living beings, conjured and animated by the One – by whatever name that One is known – can join that Song and shape Creation. Defying their varied orthodoxies, Choristers teach that the Song has many harmonies. A person of faith can hear it and approach the One through different creeds. And for their tolerance, the Singers have endured a bloodied history of martyrdom.

Chorister liturgies tell of unity and division, triumph and heartbreak. The oldest plainsongs recount the First Age, the Shattering, when the One's pure unity was broken, and the First Singers, mortal heroes of boundless faith, who confronted and subdued the broken spirits of flawed entities. Pentatonic chants resurrected from Egypt's 18th Dynasty recall the blind priest Mentu- hetep, who brought Pharaoh Amenhotep IV to the worship of the Sun god, Aton. The Pharaoh's city, Akhetaten; his new name, Ikhnaton; his fellow worshippers, the Sacred Congregation, of disparate lands yet living in harmony – of all these things and more the Chorus sings. Then their chant becomes a dirge: jealous priests of the old faith destroyed Ikhnaton's city and tried to wipe him from history. The Congregation dispersed across the Middle East.

And then, a rising melody, its counterpoint low and dark: For 16 centuries, diverse and fractious groups of Congregants grew in strength. First came Mithraic mystery cultists, guarded by Roman shields; later, after the Christ's Ascension, a sect called the Messianic Voices. To suppress corruption in the nascent Roman Church, Messianic mage Claudius Dediticius founded his Knights of Archangel Gabriel, Messenger of God. He could not have imagined that the Gabrielites would eventually become the Cabal of Pure Thought, forerunners of the Technocracy's New World Order.

Discordant notes herald the War Song: through simony and indulgences, king-making and cruelty, the Cabal amassed temporal power. Its rigid ways and rampant abuses, such as the barbarous Albigensian Crusade, drove away "heretical" magi. During the Western Schism, these Antinomians fostered new movements: Waldensians, Hussites, and the Heresy of the Free Spirit. They reached out to like-minded spirits in Isma'ili Islam and the Bektashi Order; to the Majestic Kings of the Zoroastrians; even to the Hindu nationalist scholar-warriors, the Vishnudharadhara ("Vishnu's Sword"). Such ecumenism was heretical, but Antinomians knelt to no Earthly authority, whether Church or State. And for this, they were hunted. The flames of the Inquisition burned hot. Meanwhile, in wars of words among themselves and of magick against Hermetics and the witch-folk, the Congregants faltered... if never in devotion, then certainly in progress.

A new harmony: Valoran, a French bishop hiding from the Inquisition, reunited the Messianic Voices and made peace with the Pagans. In 1461, with their gravest breaches healed, Congregants from every monotheistic faith presented a unified face to the Council of Nine as the Chœur Céleste.

Slow descending chords: as the Order of Reason rose, the new Chorus declined through persecution, massacres, and intolerance. To divide and conquer, the Cabal – and later the NWO and Syndicate – fostered centuries of culture war among the western faiths. And though fundamentalism strengthens the Chorus' paradigm (many Sleepers still believe in miracles), it also destroys the message of divine unity.

Even so, Choristers still preach that message. More to the point, they live it. Among the Traditions, the Chorus is perhaps the most compassionate... and it certainly speaks loudest, as a whole, for the welfare of the Masses. Although certain members can be fanatical, not even the primitivist Singers are religious fundamentalists in the way Sleepers understand that term. To hear more than the simplest notes of the Song – and then survive within the Council – a Chorister must transcend dogma and embrace faith. With regards to stickier theological nuances (the gender of Divinity, the limits of tolerance, the roles of Christ and the Prophet in the Divine plan, that sort of thing), modern Choristers deliberately avoid taking an official stance. There's plenty of tension in the ranks as a result, but at least no one's getting burned alive over it anymore!

It's not all peace and love, of course. Old wounds linger between this group and its companions. Out of necessity and faith, the Chorus still wrangles with this tricky alliance, debating where and when to draw lines with "friends" who practice loathsome Arts. Still, the Tradition's visionaries present the Council with proof of what united tolerance can bring. "We Sing in harmony", they insist, "and so might we all".

Organization

Hierarchical since the Roman Republic, the Chorus is led by its Curia, a 17-member synod of Chancellors and associated finance officers, tribunes, notaries, and liturgical commissioners. The most respected (or best connected) Chancellor holds the ceremonial position of Pontifex Maximus. Each Chancellor commands a territorial staff of Exarchs, sometimes called bishops. Exarchs supervise local leaders called Presbyters (priests or elders), who present this Tradition's human face.

Initiation

Presbyters seek recruits through social outreach in church organizations. Some worshippers spontaneously Awaken through powerful religious experiences, particularly those involving music. Each new apprentice, or Catechumen, undertakes rigorous instruction from an experienced mage called a Præcept. Like many forms of religious training, this instruction involves matters of doctrine, personal discipline, and – obviously – lots of singing lessons.

Focus

The Arts flow not from personal achievement or intent but from faith, unity, and harmony with the Divine Will. Singing – especially many voices joined in harmony – provides this Tradition's oldest and most important instrument. Chorister magick tends to manifest in light, fire, warmth, harmonic vibrations, and sublime music. *Faith* and *High Ritual* form the core of Celestial Chorus practices, so the group's paradigms include *Creation is Divine and Alive*, *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos*, and, of course, *It's All Good – Have Faith*.

Bonus Asset

Choose one object or place that is instrumental to your faith, and gain that as an asset rated at **6**.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **CEREMONY 6**, **EMPATHY 6**, **MUSIC 6**, **THEOLOGY 6**. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

A symphony of many in the worship of the resplendent and fractured One, the Celestial Chorus use their songs to bring forth divine Creation, commune with beings beyond or channel the heavenly wrath itself through light and lightning.

Gain **PRIME 6**, **FORCES 6**, or **SPIRIT 6** as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction SFX

Choristers have *Abjure the Unholy*, *Acolyte Militant*, *Aura of Faith*, *Blessed Orator*, and *Divine Providence* from Appendix B: SFX List as their Faction SFX.

Cult of Ecstasy/Sahajiya

Consciousness is both a playground and a trap. Infinite in possibility yet limited by necessity, the human mind is the seat of everything real... at least as far as human beings are concerned, anyway. And so, the Ecstatic Tradition expands reality by expanding consciousness. If you rearrange perceptions, they believe, you also rearrange potential.

To members of this “cult”, magick flows from altered consciousness. A mind unfettered is a mind released from limitations and thus capable of anything. Because consciousness depends upon limitations in order to function, though, a mage must be able to slide in and out of an open state. Thus, Ecstatics have crazy eyes and eccentric manners that seem compelling yet frightening.

Despite their image as snugly hippie-kids, Ecstatics can be the scariest mages around. For starters, they’re intense and unpredictable. Many are not, as the saying goes, good with boundaries, and they tend to say and do inappropriate things, like kissing enemies and laughing at pain. They’re reckless by normal standards and often pull stunts that unAwakened folks could not survive. Passion is a sacrament they indulge to exciting and often uncomfortable extremes. “Extreme”, in fact, is a good way to sum these mages up. They are, by definition, ex: outside, beyond, no longer a part of what has come before or after.

Often linked with the 1960s – perhaps the high point of this group’s influence – ecstasy is among the oldest Paths on Earth. Primal humans, according to Cult lore, ate psychedelic mushrooms and thus opened the conflux between spirit, animal, and homo sapiens. Even now, Ecstatics see themselves as living gateways between flesh, spirit, and imagination, bound to all three and transcending each; in honour of their ancestors, many employentheogens – drugs that “open the god within” – not as vices but as tools of sacred illumination.

Since those origins, Ecstatic mages have lived beyond the bounds of respectability, devotees of a left-hand path that embraces sex, drugs, music, dance, pain, pleasure, risk, and even death in the name of divine madness. Seers and shamans, rake-hells and prophets, these mages run with Sleepers who aren’t afraid to go beyond. And yet, largely thanks to their reliance on extremity, Council Ecstatics have powerful ethics. The Code of Ananda – the Cult’s commandments – forbids these mages from forcing their Path on unwilling partners. “Passions”, the Code declares, “are the seat of the Self, and if they bleed, so too does the Soul”.

More than their esoteric peers, Ecstatics enjoy the company of unAwakened folks. Challenging Sleepers to shake off that sleep, these mages favour art, music, and bohemian and neotribal subcultures – environments where they can reward courage and inspire creativity. For a while, especially during its psychedelic heyday, this Tradition wore its “cult” moniker with pride. Recently, though, many Ecstatics have begun to feel limited by that flippant name. Cults have deluded, sinister implications in the popular imagination, so the group starts to favour its old title, Sahajiya (sa- HA-gee-AH, or “the Naturals”), as the new millennium dawns.

Organization

Informal and nomadic, this Tradition's loose structure reflects its focus on individual transcendence. It has several subjects but few leaders as such. Cultists tend to congregate at festivals, raves, concerts, and other tribal gatherings, mingling with “sleepwalkers” who tread the line between Sleeper culture and full Awakening. For the most part, this group favours influence over organization. Each Ecstatic is encouraged to follow his or her own Path, so long as that Path doesn't violate the sacred nature of other people. The only rigid element in the Sahajiya Path is the Code of Ananda and its emphasis on compassionate respect. Everything else is negotiable.

Initiation

Five Steps to Ecstasy: 1: Surrender your fear; 2: Focus your intentions; 3: Open yourself; 4: Attune yourself; 5: Repeat Step 1. To help a new Ecstatic into Step 1, a mentor challenges that person to leap beyond his fears and then use his intentions to fly instead of fall. Diksham – the mentor/ student covenant – provides a safe space for the initiate to learn magick and control. Often, mentors and students become lovers, opening a channel of intimacy and trust that goes beyond mere sex. That's not a rule, though, and compulsion is considered the worst sin an Ecstatic can commit.

After initiation and initial training, a mentor often pulls away from her student, trusting him to find his own way. She'll provide advice or secondary helpers, but she refuses to become a crutch. In order to grow along this Path, a mage must shape his own triumphs and mistakes.

Focus

“Get out of your own way” sums up the Ecstatic paradigm. To touch the Lakashim (“Divine Pulse”), a person must blow open the doors of inhibition and fear. Magick is the communion between a focused mind and the Lakashim – a dance of possibilities directed by crazy wisdom. To perform it, an Ecstatic guides Ojas (life force) energy with conscious but flexible intentions. Ideally, a mage operates in a flux state in which neither time nor inhibitions block the life force – aware of what she's doing and yet open enough to do anything.

The Cult's infamous substances and simulations are meant to blow open mental doors and blast away obstacles to Enlightenment. That's the theory, anyway. In reality, those same tools can become obstacles in their own right. Smart Ecstasies, then, keep shifting their tools around to avoid stagnation and dependence on "the same old shit". Crazy wisdom is the core of this group's many practices, which include everything from gutter magick, yoga, and martial arts to cybernetic hypertechnology. And so, paradigms include *Creation's Divine and Alive*, *Everything is Chaos*, *It's All Good*, and quite often *Everything's an Illusion*.

Bonus Asset

Choose a place that helps you to unshackle yourself from the earthly drudgery, and gain that as an asset rated at **6**.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **ARTISTRY** **6**, **AWARENESS** **6**, **EMPATHY** **6**, **PHARMACEUTICALS** **6**. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

Breaking through the illusions of human perception, the Sahajiya use the spectrum of sensory experience to exist beyond time itself, merging and diffusing their consciousness with the whole world, their bodies becoming a canvas for the artistry unimaginable to the common folk.

Gain **TIME** **6**, **LIFE** **6**, or **MIND** **6** as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction 5FX

Dreamspeakers/Kha'vadi

Earth has a voice. Not many folks can still hear it. Long ago, all people listened to that voice – the beat of Life and the song of Spirit. Pride, however, has driven wedges between our world and the spirit realm. It takes strength and vision to hold on to that primal connection in spite of all the distractions of modern life... even more so when that modern world has tried everything in its power to break you. And yet, this Tradition and its people refuse to be broken.

Endurance is perhaps the best word to summarize the Society of Dreams. Its vision has endured. Its people have endured. The Tradition itself has endured ignorance, slavery, division, oppression, betrayal, marginalization, stereotyping, and a simplistic view from outsiders that has likewise endured long past all reasonable expectations. Aside from the group's staunch allies in the Verbena and Ecstatic Traditions (and often including them as well), the Council's view of the Dreamers has remained paternalistic and patronizing for over 500 years. And yet, they endure.

It's appropriate that this Tradition had not one founder but two. Naioba and Star-of-Eagles both heard the call of their spirits in very different lands, yet they transcended their differences to fall in love with one another. The sacred marriage between these female and male devotees inspired a diverse confederation of African, Native American, and Asian visionaries, for while that marriage was a ritual, the love involved was real. Although their romance ended with Naioba's assassination by a Vision-Mocker, that love, with its many symbolic ties, still holds the group together.

With few exceptions, the Kha'vadi ("those whose vision shapes the world") come from indigenous cultures or their technological descendants. Some embrace modern fashions and technologies, whereas others favour their ancestral ways. Though the Tradition holds a handful of European, Oceanic, and Asiatic spirit-workers, the vast majority of the group hails from Africa or the Americas. Often referred to by the Siberian word shaman, they're more properly thought of as medicine-people: folks who use natural healing gifts rather than selfish magick. Instead of bending reality to their will, the Kha'vadi work with reality... not the twisted reality of the Technocratic world but the deeper reality of the World Spirit in its many forms.

Thanks in part to its healer nature, this Tradition gets stereotyped as a bunch of bongo-beating throwbacks. That impression is absurd. Kha'vadi are spirit warriors fighting to save a sick world from itself. Especially in recent years, the Dreamers have become more militant than they've been for centuries. Groups like the Red Spear and the Ghost Wheel Society defy the Tradition's "stoic savage" image, with a newer faction, the Akinkanju ("Unbroken") even lobbying to toss out the Council's "slave-name" and replace it with a self-determined title. This age, after all, is a nightmare, and the 'Speakers have had enough of it. Some wounds need to be cleansed with fire.

These days, a new vista offers fresh hope: the Internet – a global connection network with its own spiritual aspect. Computer-minded Kha'vadi realize that the Digital Web has a consciousness... and by extension, a soul. The practical tools of social media allow Dreamspeakers from across the world to meet up and reconstruct their roots, and the spiritual side of the Digital Web nurtures a growing technoshamanic movement whose possibilities and repercussions reach further than anyone, even the 'Speakers themselves, can imagine...

Organization

Although the shamanic Path tends to be solitary, medicine-people can be quite social. And so, this Tradition combines a respect for autonomy with the supportive network of a tribe. For centuries, many Dreamspeakers preferred to wander their own roads; in recent years, however, the group has returned to the community-centred focus of many pre-imperial cultures. Separation, after all, has been a liability. With stronger bonds between them, the 'Speakers share a greater voice.

In previous ages, Dreamspeakers met in distant corners of the spirit world – even forming Realms where the Old Ways remained untouched. Recently, however, the Unbroken Folk have turned their focus to the material world, meeting in both rural and urban settings, often gathering at powwows, hip-hop shows, block parties, and neotribal festivals. Social media groups, too, provide meeting grounds for the new breed of Dreamspeakers. In all cases, the previous solitude has shifted toward a more social focus.

Even so, Kha'vadi remain distinctly informal. Elders are respected by their younger peers, but youthful vigour feeds the future and earns its own sort of respect. The long-winded titles favoured by the Council sound stupid to the average 'Speaker. Deeds and wisdom speak louder than laws.

Initiation

Like his Tradition, a Dreamspeaker survives apparent death. Part of his initiation involves ritual (sometimes literal) demise; that passing brings the shaman into the spirit realm, where he faces trials and challenges. Assuming he survives that ordeal, the kaimi ("initiate") becomes a so-cha ("disciple") and returns to the mortal world with fresh insight and greater vision.

Focus

Medicine, not magick, is the essence of Dreamspeaker Arts. An avatar is Howahkan: the mysterious voice that speaks to those who are ready to hear it. Sorcery is an egotistical and ultimately destructive Path that leads people away from the Good Road of harmony with the World Spirit. To reach past the illusions of mortal life, one must listen to Creation's heartbeat, face death, and remain open to the voice through which all life speaks.

Practice-wise, 'Speakers favor medicine-work, craftwork, shamanism, crazy wisdom, and faith. A few pursue cybernetics, yoga, Voudoun, and witchcraft, but their companions often shun them. Common paradigms include *A World of Gods and Monsters*, *Creation's Divine and Alive*, *Bring Back the Golden Age*, and sometimes *Might is Right*.

Bonus Asset

Choose an item that a spirit companion of yours elected to inhabit making it a Fetish, and gain that as an asset rated at 6.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **ETIQUETTE** 6, **HERBALISM** 6, **MYSTICISM** 6, **TECHNOLOGY** 6. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

The bearers of enduring wisdom from ages past, the Kha'vadi hear the voice of the Earth through spiritual lamentation, communing with it to shape the animal, the stone and even the energy bringing modern technology alive in all their permutations.

Gain **SPIRIT** 6, **FORCES** 6, **LIFE** 6, or **MATTER** 6 as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction SFX

Dreamspeakers have *Dimensional Vagabond*, *Embolden the Spirits*, *One of Their Own*, *Quell The Spirits*, and *Storied History* from Appendix B: SFX List as their Faction SFX

Euthanatoi/Chakravanti

Death is not an end but simply part of a larger cycle. Life picks up where death leaves off, and death finishes what life begins, bringing it back around for another go at things. Sometimes, a life becomes toxic to everything nearby. At that point, death becomes a blessing... a blessing the Euthanatos Tradition is ready to bestow.

The Euthanatos... or, more correctly, Euthanatoi... see themselves as keepers of the Wheel. That's a problematic duty, with fear and corruption its perpetual companions. The will to live is strong, and so the "good death" mages often find themselves cast in the murderer's role. Even the kindest of them – the ones who become medical professionals, priests, grief counselors, and so forth – spend most of their time around death and its complex passions. Each member of the group has himself died and been reborn. In a literal sense, the Euthanatoi carry a bit of death everywhere they go.

The group's name itself has been problematic. Aside from the mangled Greek in its common form, that "good death" title has defined the Tradition in murderous terms. Many Thanatoics prefer the old name, Chakravanti, or "people of the Wheel". As the Council moves toward its new form, the pressure to return to that name – or to choose another, Niyamavanti, "people of our Rule", that lacks the baggage of those old names – increases. After all, if individuals can reincarnate themselves, why shouldn't the Tradition based around reincarnation do the same?

Reincarnation forms a vital part of this Tradition. These mages don't just believe in it – they know from personal experience that reincarnation exists. Rooted in a fusion of reincarnationist creeds from India, Greece, Africa, Tibet, and elsewhere, the group keeps the Great Wheel spinning. In the old days, this was easier. People lived, they died, they joined the Wheel and returned to live new lives. But between the spread of one-life creeds, materialist atheism, resuscitation techniques, titanic wars, and the sheer number of living and dying people, the Great Cycle has been jammed. Abominations like vampires and other undead things have multiplied. The material and spiritual realms have been packed with ghosts of many kinds, and although the Avatar Storm might have offered a housecleaning of sorts, the Wheel has required... shall we say, more direct forms of maintenance. And so, reincarnationists have, all too often, been forced to become killers. Even so, life, not death, is the true heart of this Tradition. Above all things, the Wheel must be maintained.

Organization

Like their Verbena and Ecstatic allies, the Chakravanti pursue a sometimes sinister Path that other mages often fear and rarely understand. Yet among the Traditions, this group is perhaps the most ethical. Their awful responsibility demands no less. The group's strict code – the Dharmachakra, or “Eight-Spoked Wheel of the Law” – emphasizes the Cycle (Samsara); unity of all things (Advaita); acceptance of mortality (Kala); responsible guardianship (Pravitra); self-control (Dama); compassion (Daya); avoidance of temptation (Tapas); and the personal experience of death and rebirth (Punarjanman). Although the group itself lacks rigid hierarchies, all members of this Tradition are expected to know and follow this code, on pain of final death and removal from the Wheel.

This strict code requires strong bonds between mentors and initiates. As a result, although the death-Tradition contains many different sects, the relationship between a teacher (Acarya) and her student (Chatra) is essential. The Chatra swears a Vrata (“life-oath”) to both his mentor and to the Tradition as a whole. Breaking that oath disgraces not only the student but the teacher as well... and compels the Acarya to hunt her student down for punishment.

Initiation

Each Thanatoic mage undergoes the Diksha: a ritualized physical death. Returning from the Shadowlands, that person undergoes a long apprenticeship that includes memorizing the Niyama and learning the many arts of healing, fate, and murder. Such apprenticeships can last for years and typically involve quests, tests, and challenges in which the student confronts the awful implications of his Path. Without that awareness, after all, a “death-mage” is exactly what people think he is: a monster who's everything this Tradition has sworn to destroy.

Focus

As masters of life, death, Fate, and Fortune, the Euthanatoi view magick as an extension of the Cycle. By turning the Wheel, these mages control probability as well as the forces of mortality. That turning focuses on the cyclical nature of existence, and so a Chakravat uses practices and instruments like crazy wisdom, faith, High Ritual, medicine-work, reality hacking, martial arts, shamanism, and occasionally Voudoun to direct those energies toward the desired end. Yoga has an essential place in this Tradition's Arts. *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos* might be the group's most common paradigm; others include *Everything's an Illusion*, *Creation's Divine and Alive*, and even, believe it or not, *It's All Good – Have Faith*.

Bonus Asset

Choose a weapon or any other tool of choice you use to carry out your morbid responsibilities, and gain that as an asset rated at **6**.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **ESOTERICA** [6], **FIREARMS** [6], **MEDICINE** [6], **SUBTERFUGE** [6]. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

Guardians of the Wheel of Dharma, the Chakravanti take on the grim duties of its enforcers, taking ownership over domains of death and life, making sure nothing strays from its destined path.

Gain **DEATH** [6], **LIFE** [6], or **FATE** [6] as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction SFX

Hollow Ones

Dark romantics laughing in the face of ruin.

Bonus Asset

Choose an object taken from an established magickal practice that you use in your Willworking, and gain that as an asset rated at [6].

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **ARTISTRY** [6], **OCCULTISM** [6], **STREETWISE** [6], **SUBTERFUGE** [6]. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

Revelling in the absurd condition of humanity in the Universe, the Hollow Ones spit in the face of tradition and established order, embracing and directing the chaos of existence, in all of it's morbidity and explosive nature.

Gain **FATE** [6], **DEATH** [6] or **FORCES** [6] as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction SFX

Order of Hermes

Just as Solomon bound spirits to his bidding, as Merlin raised a stable boy to kingship, as John Dee named Elizabeth's realm an Empire and then anchored it in time and space at Greenwich, so too do the Houses of Hermes turn the hidden wheels of the world. Their Arts are the most refined, their knowledge the most exhaustive, their Wills the most dedicated to excellence. In many minds (most especially their own), the Order of Hermes defines the word mage.

As the largest and most organized Tradition, the Order of Hermes has influenced – they would say “defined” – the Western experience of magick. Hermetics command a huge range of secrets and wards. Their wealth is vast, their Wonders potent, their libraries breathtaking. The Order boasts the greatest number of Chantries, Masters, and Archmages. Its achievements include the first codification of magickal study, the formulation of the Spheres, and, indeed, the formation of the Traditions themselves.

Still, the Order has faced setbacks and catastrophes: the loss of both its greatest Chantry, Doissetep, and its leading Master, Porthos Fitz-Empress; the extermination (some say “self- destruction”) of its most powerful luminaries; the devastation of priceless archives. Yet the reaction from other Traditions appears to be a collective sigh of relief. Why?

Because Hermetic wizards are, to a one (and to a fault), meticulous, pedantic, majestic, and haughty. The Preface to the venerable Hornbook – a thick volume presented to each new apprentice – captures this attitude in one paragraph: “What mage in any rival Tradition, of whatever skill, can boast the comprehensive knowledge of our least Adept? What other mage can offer any shred of theory to support his magick? The aboriginal shaman with his drums and rattle gives over his body to a spirit he knows not. The cleric with his song begs like a child for the favor of deities. The Ecstatic with his vice burns like a meteor and vanishes, and the witch with her blood-rites aspires only to procreate. Even the Akashic with his meditation and exercise seeks passive contentment in false belief. Meanwhile, the Hermetic with firm Will commands, “Do!” And it is done”.

This bombast reveals the Order's obnoxious confidence; the average Hermetic can back it up, too. Among the Traditions, only the Verbena and Dreamspeakers have as violent a history with the hated Technocracy. It's no accident that the Craftmasons (themselves formed from a renegade Hermetic sect) chose to initiate hostilities by blowing up one Hermetic citadel and to stage the Convention of the White Tower in another. Nor is it an accident that Master Baldric LaSalle chose to host the Mistrudge Tribunal – the first step toward the Grand Convocation – in the ruins of that first attack. An Ecstatic might have provided the inspiration, and the Verbena might have secured new allies, but the Order of Hermes forged the foundation upon which the Traditions have been built.

Even rival Traditions accept the Order's vast and spectacular history. In ancient Egypt, two auspicious precursors invented the alphabet. Archmagus Solomon bound many spirits that still serve the Order today. Pythagoras founded the cult of Hermes in Greece. The Corpus Hermeticum, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus ("Thrice-Great Hermes"), forms the basis of the modern Tradition. Even Sleepers recall a few Hermetics from those storied times: Merlin. Paracelsus. Saint-Germain. Cagliostro. From Gandalf to Crowley to Potter, the popular acceptance of magick has arisen from Hermetic archetypes. In the new millennium, the group enjoys more popular acceptance than ever before. The Masses might not pursue the Hermetic Arts, but in a subconscious sort of belief, they accept the Order's ways as the face of Western wizardry.

And so, though their various setbacks have cost the Order dearly, Hermetic mages greet this age with renewed vitality. The loss of the Archmages, the destruction of Doissetep, the war against vampires, the purge of corrupt House Janissary... they're all like the collapsing Tarot Tower: the shattering of bondage that compels transformation. This age's Hermetics are rolling up their sleeves and remaking the Order from its foundations while keeping those foundations – confidence, knowledge, excellence, and Will – intact. Guided by a vision of the City of Pymander – the ideal of global Ascension under Mystic Will – Hermetics remain committed to perfection. Given their high purpose, they can accept no less.

Organization

The Order is rigidly hierarchical, disciplinarian, and regulated. The Code of Hermes and its Peripheral Corrigenda dictate behavior, protocol, rules for certamen challenges, and the proper inscriptions for Chantry doorways. Thirteen Houses still exist as factions in the Order's endless, brutal infighting. Some Houses predate the Norman Conquest (Bonisagus, Flambeau, Quaesitor, Tytalus, Verditius, and the catch-all Ex Miscellanea); others are newer, even quite recent (Fortunae, Hong Lei, Ngoma, Shaea, Skopos, Solificati, and Xaos).

Initiation

Recruited from academia, esoteric religious orders, science, or the military, a student must survive a punishing apprenticeship under an unforgiving mentor (a mater or pater). The Order recognizes nine Degrees of mystic advancement: Neophyte, Zelator, Practicus, Initiate, Initiate Exemptus, Adept, Adept Major, Magister Scholae, and Magister Mundi. The training aims to provoke, by the conclusion of the Third Degree, a gradual Awakening more akin to a process than to a single jolting moment.

Focus

A Hermetic mage commands nothing less than the keys to the universe. And so, these consummate scholars master ancient and arcane rituals through constant study and intense practice. Tapping elemental currents through incantations, signs, seals, paraphernalia, and secret languages, the Hermetics are – by necessity – secretive and suspicious. They command tremendous power, after all, and their rivals lurk everywhere.

Alchemy, dominion, and High Ritual form core practices within the Order's ranks. No Hermetic mage lacks such training. Certain Hermetics add chaos magick, the Art of Desire, hypertech, craftwork, weird science, yoga, and occasional malficia to that core, pursuing such paradigms as *A Mechanistic Cosmos*, *Divine Order and Earthly Chaos*, *Might is Right*, *Tech Holds All Answers* and, naturally, *Bring Back the Golden Age*.

Bonus Asset

Choose an effect that can be produced by any Initiate Practice that you have learned as a part of your training, and gain that as an asset rated at 6.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **ACADEMICS** 6, **ETIQUETTE** 6, **RITUAL** 6, **SCIENCE** 6. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

Excellence and knowledge made manifest, the Houses of the Order each wield great expertise in their fields of mystic art, though none shirk from the awe-inspiring displays of elemental prowess.

Gain **FORCES** 6 or any other Sphere appropriate for your House as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction SFX

Hermetics have *Conjured Elemental*, *Prepared Caster*, *Rote Memorization*, *Erudite Researcher (Gear)*, and *Rods, Staves, & Wands (Gear)* from Appendix B: SFX List as their Faction SFX.

Society of Ether/Sons of Ether

The only thing holding humanity back from achieving its yearned-for Utopia is the smallness of its imagination. So long as individuals allow society and its rulers to dictate the size and extent of their dreams, mundane boredom and all its attendant suffering shall persist. Even the magickal imaginations of most of the Nine Traditions are hampered by what was allowed them in times past by the Powers That Be, whether those powers were shamans, pharaohs, or priests. Only the future is free of these chains, unset and as yet undreamt of. Only the truly bold can make the future real in the present, and the Etherites are nothing if not bold!

A society of radical technomantic dreamers, the original Sons of Ether proved unfit for the confined and suffocating paradigm of the Technocracy. Although they adopted their current name at the turn of the 20th century, these Enlightened Scientists are both sons and daughters of their rallying theory: that of Ether, that subtle substance that lies behind the guise of all phenomena in the universe. Long criticized as a boys' club due to its early Victorian customs, the Etherites have progressed over the years. Although hardliners still insist upon propriety, the term Society of Ether has largely replaced the shopworn masculinity of the group's original name.

The Etherites trace their lineage back to ancient Troy, although few outside the Tradition accept this claim. Their foundation of natural philosophy was reputedly established among the pre-Socratic thinkers of Greece and the Mediterranean, recorded in a book titled (by its Islamic translators) the Kitab-al- Alacir, or Book of Ether. As the first Inspired (that is, Awakened) attempt at a systemic natural philosophy, the Kitab is revered by Etherites, many of whom Awakened when reading it.

From a loose intellectual tradition practiced by disparate individuals, the group finally gained a societal foundation with the establishment of Hermetic House Golo in Medieval Italy. This eventually became the Natural Philosophers Guild, and then, in the Victorian Era, the Electrodyne Engineers, whose fascination with the novel power of electricity promised to liberate the common man from physical and metaphysical darkness. Such idealism remains the heart of this Tradition. The Technocracy could not crush it. World wars could not purge it. Neither skepticism nor failure nor claims that Etherites are all mad and reckless can prevent these luminaries from bringing their magnificent Science to the world.

Yes, by the standards of most people (even those lunatics with whom they share company), most Etherites are eccentric. Bizarre. Perhaps even mad. But such madness is the flare of a nova encased by an all too human shell. In a world determined to be small, the Society of Ether breeds heroes. If those heroes demolish labs, companions, even... um, cities... upon occasion, such casualties are the cost of true Enlightenment. And the world is improved thereby. Is not the current age proof of this? Flying machines! Recording technology! People no longer die by the thousands from plagues or starvation! (Well, perhaps except in those lands without much Science... a pity, that.) And so, despite its costs and obstacles, the Sons and Daughters of Ether remain dedicated to the advancement of wondrous Science!

In the 21st century, this Tradition has come into its own. The influence of science fiction – especially its Etherian offshoot, steampunk – in popular culture allows them to stand proudly at the forefront of human endeavors. Among all Traditions, only the Virtual Adepts (and sometimes the Akashayana) enjoy similar allowances from Paradox. Modern reality favors this weird Science, and although Etherites occasionally overreach themselves and suffer the Paradox Effect anyway, the Society of Ether manages to get away with... well, “murder” is such an ugly term. Let us say, instead, magnificence.

As far as their fellow Traditions are concerned, most Etherites seem like selfish egotists, pushing paradigms wherein individuals can excel while leaving the Masses behind. Only the Etherites (so they insist) seek to bestow the benefits of Awakened Science on everyone. “All, or none!” is their creed. As a result, they strive for recognition – not only from their Enlightened peers but from the Masses most of all. Such acceptance, they know, reflects the striving human spirit – a spirit that looks toward Tomorrow and the many marvelous Things to Come.

Organization

Etherites, despite their boisterous talk about society, are often fractious and competitive. Fellowship exists as an avenue for seeking praise; criticism merely prods you to go back to the lab and do better next time. Although many Etherites bury themselves in research for weeks on end with very little companionship, they eventually seek the company of their peers, no matter how obsessive their work becomes.

Initiation

Prospective Etherites tend to be selected by true Scientists, based on some sign or evidence of latent genius. These prospective initiates receive a test designed to force them to confront the implications of their ideas. Most often, the would-be Scientist is left to discover a copy of the Kitab-al-Alacir, whose concepts often serve to Awaken the spark of bigger, brighter accomplishments to come.

Focus

Science! Or, more accurately, an imaginative grasp of natural principles channeled through established physical and energetic technologies. Earthier than their Virtual Adept colleagues, these technomancers prefer to employ Science that can be seen, held, demonstrated, and confirmed even by the eyes of fools. To that end, Etherite Science is showy, romantic, and gracefully futuristic, even if that future looks more like classic science fiction than like mundane science fact.

As a practice, an Etherite may use anything that seems to work. Most Scientists, however, favor gloriously esoteric variations on alchemy, craftwork, cybernetics, hypertech, reality hacking, and, of course, weird science. Paradigms focus largely around concepts like *A Mechanistic Cosmos*, *Everything is Data*, *Might is Right*, and *Everything's an Illusion*, but they usually boil down to *Tech Holds All the Answers*.

Bonus Asset

Choose a place where you conduct your research and create your marvellous devices safe from Consensus infringement, and gain that as an asset rated at 6.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **ACADEMICS** 6, **COSMOLOGY** 6, **CRAFT** 6, **TECHNOLOGY** 6. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

A volatile mixture of misunderstood visionaries and inventors, the Society is famous for its marvellous artifices that wield impossible energies and treat conservation of mass as a suggestion.

Gain **MATTER 6**, **FORCES 6**, or **PRIME 6** as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction SFX

Etherites have *Trust Me, I'm an Engineer*, *It's Gonna Blow, How It's Made, Auxiliary Operational Mode (Gear)*, and *We Need More Funding* from Appendix B: SFX List as their Faction SFX.

Verbena

Life is shit and piss and blood. Pain and pleasure are inevitable birthrights. Our spirits are not some transcendent separate thing but are instead the raw vitality of Life itself. Drawing from among the oldest mystic understandings, the Verbena Tradition views life as a wondrous, implacable cycle – a dance of elements in which a mage calls tunes but cannot herself resist the dance. This view scares the living hell out of most folks, and that's just how many Verbena like it. If you can't hang with the truth, they figure, just get the fuck out of the way!

Like the herb for which they're named, the Verbena (or, more correctly, Verbenae) excel at healing, divination, and purgation. No other Tradition understands Life magicks the way they do. Masters of shape-changing, animal affinities, plant craft, and weather work, Verbenae stay close to Nature in her truest forms... and some of those forms can be bloody indeed. Although it's rare, the Verbenae have been known to practice animal and human sacrifice. More often, they carve runes in their own skins, endure hideous ordeals, subject themselves to painful deprivations, and perform other acts of self-sacrifice in order to avoid harming other beings. Every Verbena grove has a World Tree, the living symbol of Creation as a whole. These trees have been stained red by the rituals performed in those groves; the darker the red, the more powerful the grove.

Although the Tradition itself formed in the 1400s, Verbenae roots run far deeper. Like many mystic societies, these mages trace their origins to primal humanity's beginnings... and in their case, they're probably correct. The primordial Wyck, they say, embodied the first fusions of spirit, mind, and flesh. Essentially gods, they soon guided the first human beings toward wisdom and magick. The Old Ways, say these traditionalists, are the inheritance left by those entities, and the Verbenae – and perhaps the Dreamspeakers – are its truest heirs.

These Old Ways are, by most standards, harsh. Blood, sex, passion in its rawest forms – these are the tools most Verbenae prefer. Cold iron, worked wood, fires kindled with your bare hands, natural clothing, organic foods... the simpler it is, the more powerful its effects. Although some Verbenae make concessions to the modern world – cars, guns, perhaps a favorite TV show or two – this Tradition, by and large, remains stubbornly archaic. And though they can be compassionate in their way, Verbenae have no time or patience for weakness. To them, the comforts of a technological world breed sickness and laziness. d“Until you spend a month”, they’ll tell you, d“in the wild with nothing but the clothes on your back... or better yet, without them... you don’t know jack shit about reality”.

Organization

Covens – often numbering 13, nine, seven, or three – make up this group’s foundation. Solitary Verbenae exist, but most members of this Tradition prefer to work in groups. Women probably outnumber men overall, and they’re granted more respect here than in most other groups. Many female mages gravitate toward this Tradition for that reason. Two leaders (taking priest and priestess roles although both might be male, female, or transgender) govern the larger covens, with a single witch in charge of three-person groups. Covens tend to favor older members over younger ones, and old-school covens can be quite autocratic. Although disputes often get resolved through votes, those votes might involve ordeals, tests, or combat.

This Tradition respects strong bloodlines. And so, whenever possible, Verbenae covens follow family lineage. Each coven has a grove, though that grove might be a garden in the leader’s back yard. Large meetings occur eight times a year, during the two equinoxes, the two solstices, and on Imbolc (Feb. 2), Beltane (May 1), Lammas (Aug. 1), and Samhain (Oct. 31). Plenty of Verbenae also gather at Christmas (Dec. 25) and on July 1, especially as shifts of climate and culture blur the distinction between Nature’s seasonal cycles.

Initiation

Verbena newcomers undergo a ritual death and rebirth. An intense period of study, testing, and meditation climaxes in a distressing ordeal – sometimes illusionary, often real. If and when the coven members are satisfied with the initiate's trustworthiness and dedication, they call the elements as witnesses. As they were during the Burning Times, most Verbenae remain loyal unto death.

Focus

Verbena Arts concentrate on doing a lot with very little. Their tools are practical as well as symbolic, with uses that reach back to antiquity. "Pagan" in every sense of that word, these magicks hold deep ties to Nature. Shape-changing, transformation, healing and injury, divination, purification, growth and withering, natural cycles, and the tricky ways of Fate are witch-folk specialties.

To all Verbenae, *Creation's Divine and Alive*. Because Creation, life, and divinity aren't particularly nice, other common Verbena paradigms include *A World of Gods and Monsters*, *Might is Right*, *Bring Back the Golden Age*, and *Everything is Chaos*. Witchcraft is the group's core practice, with certain individuals favoring Voudoun, dominion, weird science, chaos magick, yoga, martial arts, High Ritual, cybernetics, the Art of Desire, craftwork, medicine-work, and even organic hypertechnology.

Bonus Asset

Choose an animal that is inhabited by a spirit with whom you are bound with in a familiar connection, and gain that as an asset rated at **6**.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialties from **ANIMAL KEN** **6**, **BRAWL** **6**, **HERBALISM** **6**, **SURVIVAL** **6**. Gain them as bonus specialties.

Affinity Sphere

Adherents of the Old Ways and primal Life made manifest, the Verbenae are in sacred connection with nature, drawing power and favour from living beings and primordial terror of the elements.

Gain **LIFE** **6** or **FORCES** **6** as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction SFX

Virtual Adepts/Mercurial Elite

What is real? When you see something, touch something, know something, is it real, or is it simply a collection of signals, bits of information, pieces of data that come together in your mind and make you think “This is real”? To the Virtual Adepts, everything – buildings, tools, plants, animals, people – can be represented as information. Figure out the code behind something, the Adepts claim, and you can figure out how to manipulate that thing, how to change it, improve it, or delete it. Since information is abstract, you don’t even need to touch the thing you want to change. If you know it, you can adjust it just by changing the code. And you can change the code from anywhere.

The youngest Tradition began as a Technocratic Convention that was alienated by its former allies. Too radical for their peers, these Difference Engineers questioned too much and aspired too far. And for their presumption, they were punished; Alan Turing, an elite mathematician and cryptographer, was disgraced and destroyed. His death created a martyr, and that martyrdom – combined with other persecutions – led to the Engineers’ defection and their rebirth as the Virtual Adepts.

That Technocratic past left a stigma that many mages remain unwilling to ignore. In return, most Adepts scorn the primitive methods of the other Traditions. Humanity, the Adepts believe, should not be subjected to limiting philosophies like religion, government, or nature. Instead, the Adepts strive toward a technological singularity in which humanity’s limitations get dumped as people remake themselves into something better, brighter, and post-human. Why focus on getting back to nature or praying to absentee gods, after all, when you can change the world – and yourself – so that you no longer need nature and can become a god?

As their moniker implies, Virtual Adepts spend lots of time in a virtual world. If you can interact with other people or even control objects of the real world from your online telepresence, then why bother with the dismal reality of a leaky apartment building and a body made of limited, mortal meat? Even in this banal Meatspace, however, Virtual Adepts surround themselves with computers, monitors, digital notepads, smart phones, and all the latest technological toys. The most elite among them, though, have learned to manipulate reality without tech... a feat that highlights the group’s command of the God Code inside Creation.

For all their futuristic acumen, these Adepts still consider themselves mages in the classic sense. Their Arts remake reality through vision, technique, and Will. A modern Adept might not call what she does magick (though many of them do), but she regards herself as a child of Mercury, the Trickster/Messenger God in the Machine. Like the Adepts, Mercury is everywhere at once, undermining assumptions with the audacity of his Arts. Especially in this era, when technology is both a road to freedom and an instrument of oppression, the world needs audacious tricksters. And so, the Adepts of the 21st century are growing far less virtual and far more real.

Organization

Merit-respecting anarchists, Adepts avoid standard organization and loathe conventional hierarchies. In the '90s, they based respect on eliteness: a form of peer recognition won through attitude and accomplishment. Though the tradition has matured and diversified since then, an Adept's personal achievements – rather than titles or seniority – still mean everything in this group's esteem. Cleverness, wit, technological creativity, and an astute sense of sociological reform mean more than a snappy handle or a keen online icon. There's a special reverence for Adepts who tear down oppressive social structures... and a vituperative loathing for ones who support such structures in Meatspace or the online world.

Initiation

Virtual Adepts have a socially brutal initiation process. The idea of physical deprivation, master-apprentice challenges, or meditative spirit quests strikes them as absurd. Instead, Adepts typically give their aspirants and initiates cryptic missions to sabotage authoritarian structures, steal classified data, and create amusing pranks that undermine corrupt bastards and expose pompous windbags. At some critical juncture, the initiate gets left to fend for herself; a suitably imaginative (and hopefully stylish) resolution to the problem earns the accolades of peers and a place among the Adepts. In short, then, most Adepts enter the group through the grand Internet tradition of trolling.

Focus

Everything is Data. Thus, in this *Mechanistic Cosmos*, every tool or practice an Adept employs focuses on shaping, altering, manipulating, gathering, storing, collating, influencing, or destroying information. Such tools range from the obvious computer gear (generations ahead of conventionally available tech), clouds, holograms, implants, nanotech, energy drinks, and sense-altering stimuli to the understated chic of dark hoodies, manga-influenced haircuts, fashionable androgyny, and provocative masks. All Adepts, however, keep the implements of their technomagick handy. For many Adepts, computers are a more important part of one's identity than any attire or accessory. An Adept's personal devices are almost always the most heavily customized and stylized elements of that Adept's ensemble.

Perhaps the most accomplished reality hackers alive, this Mercurian Elite also employs various forms of cybernetics, hypertech, weird science, martial arts, chaos magick, gutter magick, and sometimes shamanism, Voudoun, crazy wisdom, or witchcraft with a technological flair.

Bonus Asset

Choose an informational system that you have access to and use for reality hacking, and gain that as an asset rated at **6**.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **COMPUTER 6**, **ENIGMAS 6**, **STREETWISE 6**, **TECHNOLOGY 6**. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

Anarchist visionaries cracking the code to reality, Virtual Adepts disregard facades of space and natural order, going into the informational backdoors of reality to erase any degree of separation between objects and their motive energies.

Gain **CORRESPONDENCE 6** or **FORCES 6** as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction SFX

Technocracy

The Technocratic Union enforces global order under their Enlightened guidance and protection. Dedicated to wiping out Reality Deviants, they've spent over 500 years at war with the mystic Traditions.

Iteration X

Humans are weak, but technology makes us strong. Over generations, scientists have augmented humans with state-of-the-art tech, improving bodies and minds. Mass media disseminate news about these new inventions in order to uplift the Consensus; the greatest innovators of such enhancements, though, perfect their creations in absolute secrecy. Under the aegis of the “Clockwork Convention”, elite Technocrats create hypertechnical devices in secluded laboratories and then deploy them to the Front Lines of an improved reality. Through many iterations of such progress, Enlightened visionaries develop integrated masterworks to surpass mere humanity, striving to meet their greatest challenge: artificial intelligences that can replace the flawed human mind. These Enlightened Scientists seek cybernetic perfection; with each generation, their creations improve. The state of the art is the current incarnation of Iteration X.

Refined over millennia from visionary artisans to posthuman mechanistics, Iteration X commands the most impressive firepower and most disciplined military capacities in the Union. Its military operatives boast weaponry as integral parts of their bodies, from energy-packed blasters to kinetic chain guns. Various enhancements make these agents faster and stronger than their all-too-human rivals. Meanwhile, clones conditioned in laboratories and trained as Kamrads bolster their ranks. Such operatives pride themselves on efficiency, each individual working as a part of a much larger machine.

Despite the Convention’s military rep, not all Iterators are soldiers. This Convention also specializes in innovation, hyperefficiency, mass production, and statistical prediction. Some of the group’s most visionary work is virtual, not physical, relying upon elaborate simulations and organic/mechanical integration technologies. Enlightened analysts simulate endless variations of events to predict outbreaks of anomalous phenomena, supernatural deviance, and other chaotic disruptions before they occur. Some operatives refine diverse skill sets, coordinating various operations through interconnected thought processes. Others appear perfectly mundane but are anything but that when you get beneath their skins.

The Convention’s most dangerous agents and weapons remain too advanced for Earthly Consensus; developed in remote facilities (off world, whenever possible), these armatures are shipped in from labs and factories filled with sublime hypertechnical. In the old days, the machine-realm called Autocthonía represented a near-mythic reflection of sublime perfection. New-millennium Iterators seem less dogmatic about cybernetic refinement – perhaps because Autocthonía fell victim to a Dimensional Anomaly, or maybe just because “Borging out” doesn’t seem quite as cool as it used to be. Even so, certain Iterators believe full Empowerment is possible only within such realms. When humanity Ascends, they believe, all of reality will be recast in mechanistic perfection.

Organization

Iterators employ chains of command that dictate missions with mathematical precision. Ideally, the operatives and their Convention work as parts of a larger machine, setting aside autonomy and ego. Both agents and supervisors are expected to perform to their utmost ability, sacrificing themselves, when necessary, for the greater good.

Among the lower ranks, Socially Conditioned Iterators work exclusively with one another, refining their teamwork and proving their value. Successful agents gradually achieve free will, greater trust, upgrades, enhancements, and cross-Convention assignments that reward efficient flexibility. Experienced Iterators learn to critique and question their superiors but also to wait until the right moment to do so. For most Iterators, gray areas are unacceptable; instead, each action becomes a binary choice, swiftly evaluated as either success or failure.

Repeated failures condemn an Iterator to serve time as part of a mindless machine. The lowest-ranking operatives are little more than tools, and a powerful cyborg who cannot manage his resources must temporarily surrender his autonomy to more efficient external management.

Initiation

Sophisticated calculations (that is, Time-based Procedures) help Iteration X recruiters find likely personnel before those people reach Enlightenment. Soldiers, scientists, mathematicians, philosophers, and even people with profound physical handicaps all provide suitable personnel, so long as they can accept an essential role in a greater whole. Previously Awakened recruits are rare, but they can be Socially Conditioned to accept assimilation. Once a potential initiate has been removed from the distracting imperfections of the Masses, a complex process of indoctrination, surgery, and enhancement shapes each Iterator into an effective and often Enlightened operative. Failed experiments, meanwhile, get deconstructed into Kamrads and Ciphers, creating an army of obedient workers and soldiers who act in unison toward programmed goals.

Focus

The core of Iteration X science comes from the synergy between organic, mechanical, social, mathematical, and psychological elements. And so, cybernetics, craftwork and hypertechnology forge the foundation of this group's practices. Innovative Iterators employ martial arts, social dominion, hypereconomics, and reality hacking – after all, even perfection must be flexible! A few even hold a demi-religious faith in the ultimate potential of The Machine; these days, though, they don't often discuss that out loud.

A Mechanistic Cosmos presents the obvious paradigm for Iteration X. Clearly, *Tech Holds All Answers*. Math- inclined members of this Convention assure their comrades that *Everything is Data*. This group has no use for “fuzzy” paradigms, so the Sphere of Dimensional Science is an extremely rare discipline among its ranks.

Bonus Asset

Choose one hypertechn Device that you created or integrated into your body, and gain that as an asset rated at 6.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **CRAFT** 6, **CYBERNETICS** 6, **SCIENCE** 6, **TECHNOLOGY** 6. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

Operating beyond the bleeding edge of technology, Iterators shackle the material world, the forces that animate it, as well as the flow of causality itself.

Gain **FORCES** 6, **MATTER** 6 or **TIME** 6 as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction SFX

New World Order

Knowledge grants power, and true knowledge should be restricted to those with the appropriate respect for the power it contains. As masters of information and indoctrination, the agents of the New World Order alter data to enforce their vision of a perfect world. Masses, as these Technocrats understand, remain safest when they're kept blissfully, ignorantly asleep. Humanity prospers best in a world where deviance is hidden, science is predictable, and controlled technology empowers those people who have the training to handle it.

The group's now-infamous name comes from the philosophies of 18th-century idealists. Proposing a global state in which random elements such as primitive societies, art, magic, and even religion were abolished in favor of benevolently imposed order, these heretical masters began disseminating the concept through secret lodges and assorted allies across the world. During Queen Victoria's reign, this group consolidated its power within the existing Cabal of Pure Thought. Moving that group from a religious foundation to a secular one, the idealists purged their superstitionist peers through campaigns of truth reform and rhetorical intrigue. Reason replaced religion as the paragon of their newly ordered world. Joining forces with Inspector Rathbone's Skeleton Keys, those idealists forged their metaphorical Ivory Tower with London at its center and Victorious Britannia its figurehead. By the time American conspiracist Robert Welch began spreading the term among the Masses in the early 1970s, the New World Order was many decades old.

The bedrock of this group involves control of information... and thus, of possibilities. To this end, the Convention employs a three-pronged strategy: eliminate dissent and Reality Deviance, consolidate information and Enlightenment, and propagate the image of a safely governed world. Using all three elements to reinforce one another, the Order strives to bring chaos to heel. It's a titanic labor, to be sure, and one in which open conflict remains undesirable. Therefore, the NWO prefers covert action to overt action. Beneath a cover of secrets and misdirection, the rampant elements of deviant reality can be taken down, erased, and revised to fit a more productive truth.

Information provides the cornerstone of NWO operations. And so, the Order employs advanced surveillance, field agents, and data-tracking processes to collect and assimilate intelligence throughout the world. Meanwhile, those field-agent teams also hunt down deviant elements for elimination or recruitment. Captured RDs get subjected to intense Social Conditioning sessions – refinements of the same Conditioning that errant members of the Technocracy undergo in order to bring them back into line. By the end of that programming, those Deviants either join the Union as productive citizens or else become will- broken ragdolls in the Order's hands. Either way, they no longer threaten the Consensus.

Organization

Reflecting that three-pronged strategy, the NWO employs three primary Methodologies to implement its goals. The Operative group sends agents – typically the Black Suits, though it employs less obvious agents too – into the field to address threats and collect intelligence. The Ivory Tower handles administration and implementation throughout the entire Technocracy and also disseminates controlled truths through Sleeper academia. Meanwhile, the Watchers collect information, simultaneously circulating messages of control and complacency among the Masses so as to minimize chaos and dissent. All three agencies report to upper-echelon supervisors, who direct operations from safe distance.

Meanwhile, two other Methodologies – Q Division and the Feed – provide support for the other operations. Technically a cross-Convention imperative, Q Division provides the field gear for Technocratic agents (NWO and otherwise), and the Feed assesses and guides the growing power of the Internet and its many social technologies. Within all NWO divisions, an ascending order of seniority (Black Suits/ Gray Suits/ White Suits) reflects what the Order calls the “purification of genius” and the formality of control.

Initiation

By reviewing standardized academic and vocational tests, scanning databases, and coordinating covert surveillance efforts, the Ivory Tower selects potential recruits. Generally, a new recruit dies to his oldlife and enters a newlife as a NWO trainee. Other recruits get converted from among the Union's enemies, by way of the Order's sophisticated Social Conditioning techniques.

Because these tactics can be very resource-intensive, the NWO bolsters its ranks with clones: unEnlightened constructs trained to act in unison, empowered with a telepathic hive mind, and chemically altered to disintegrate upon death. As a matter of course, the NWO subjects its agents to varying degrees of indoctrination and social conditioning, depending on individual performance and their roles out there in the field.

Focus

In *A World of Gods and Monsters*, *Might is Right* and *Tech Holds All Answers*. Social dominion and the command of consciousness – that is, the influence, harnessing, programming, and reprogramming of the homo sapiens mind – provides the cornerstone of this New World Order’s techniques. To that end, psychic training, information manipulation, perceptual conditioning, and symbolic connections (like a man wearing a formal black suit and carrying a badge) provide the essential tools for NWO Procedures. Physical media constitute the second level of manipulation, with the third and most brutal level – force – channeled through guns, armor, gadgets, hypertech vehicles, advanced weaponry, and the martial arts training all operatives receive. Paranoia, however, is the Order’s strongest weapon. If people believe you can do something, after all, their belief tilts reality in your favor before you even begin to act.

Bonus Asset

Choose one item that represents (or confirms, I’m unsure) your legal authority, and gain that as an asset rated at **6**.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **ENIGMAS 6**, **LAW 6**, **MANIPULATION 6**, **MELEE 6**. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

The men behind the men, the NWO are the shepherds of humanity, who control both the masses, as well as the connections between them.

Gain **MIND 6** or **CORRESPONDENCE 6** as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction SFX

Progenitors

Gods do not create and destroy life. Scientific laws do. With an understanding of such laws, then, nothing separates a man from a god. In fact, given the errant nature of gods, a dedicated scientist can improve on the decidedly unintelligent designs of natural selection and thus become greater than the capricious divinities of legend. The Progenitors – those Technocrats working toward beginnings – understand that the only things standing between flawed evolution and a new, improved strain of organic life are the understanding of organic principles and the willingness to reshape them to one's own design.

Originating in the esoteric and often forbidden mysteries of life and death, this Convention retains the scary allure of its witchy forebears. From bloody-handed midwives and dirty-fingered herbalists to the hunters and domesticators of nature's rough beasts, the Progenitors share their beginnings with the mystic Verbenae. But whereas the earthy Pagans kept their craft wrist-deep in entrails, the embalmers and physicians of the classical era studied the workings of mortality and the methods of transcending it. Medicine came first, followed by the manipulation of living organisms: adaptation, mutation, artificial limbs and organs, chemical enhancements... the possibilities seemed limited only by technology and fear.

But fear's a powerful force. Despite their many victories and cures, these physicians remained pariahs among the terrified cattle they sought to save. Even when the healer Hippocrates established his Cosian Circle in ancient Greece, mortal terror haunted the practitioners of those fearsome arts. The descendants of that Circle joined the Order of Reason during the medieval era, but not even their tireless work to cure that age's plagues could save some Cosians from flames and censure. Is it any wonder, then, that Progenitors tend to hold a chip on their collective shoulders?

When Darwin's work popularized what the Cosians already knew – that life is organic adaptation, not divine providence – the Cosians adapted as well. Shedding their classical trappings in favor of Victorian formalism and the budding scientific method, these small-p progenitors continued to push the boundaries of healing and mutation. The First and Second World Wars gave them plenty of material to work with, and though some of those experiments were... shall we say, unethical... the data gained from 20th-century conflicts vaulted the Progenitors to the horizons of organic potential.

These days, a Progenitor enjoys clean facilities and bleeding -edge technologies developed far outside Earth's invasive ecosystems. Healing, cloning, genetic manipulation, viral evolution, chemical consciousness, biological mutation, animal crossbreeding, accelerated and controlled evolution, compound synthesis... their list of projects and accomplishments makes Iteration X look dull. Despite their reputation – even within the Union – as “Frankensteinians”, these visionaries retain the courage and imagination of their ancestors, bravely shaping new worlds from primal materials and fresh technologies.

Organization

Throughout its various Methodologies (Pharmacopoeists, Genegineers, FACADE Engineers, and the cross-disciplinary Damage Control), this Convention follows an academic hierarchy. UnEnlightened facilitators (janitors, lab assistants, receptionists) provide support for the ascending ranks of Students, Research Associates, Primary Investigators, Research Directors, and the mysterious Administrators. A ruthless but unEnlightened contingent of field and street operatives (backed up by the Conventions' considerably more capable collection of clones, constructs, Victors, biomodified agents, and bestial projects) provides muscle when needed. The most versatile Progenitor agents learn techniques and Procedures from all of these disciplines, developing formidable arsenals of scientific knowledge.

Advancement through those ranks demands constant study, research, and innovation. Students must pass many tests, eventually providing and defending a thesis that demonstrates her mastery of Enlightened Science. Success means promotion to progressively higher levels, levels at which the various scientists contend for grants and resources. Investigators spend copious amounts of time working with teams of other agents to prove their loyalty and usefulness to the Technocracy. As one would expect, if they can't publish successful results for the Union, they might perish for their failure.

Initiation

This Convention prefers to find potential recruits before they Awaken. Working with the Ivory Tower, Progenitor supervisors analyze standardized tests and search databases to find clever scholars with budding potential. (Recruiting Progenitors after their Awakening is more difficult... but the Union offers answers for troubled minds.) Promising recruits get tagged before medical school, sponsored with scholarships, and offered a chance for something more. If a recruit accepts, she receives training above and beyond what the Masses can offer; if she refuses, then the entire episode gets wiped from her mind and she just has a bad quarter, defined only by hazy recollections and a lingering feeling that she missed something grand. In the worst cases, the student ODs on recreational drugs or suffers stress-based suicide. The Progenitors hate to waste good material, but life isn't always fair.

Focus

The intricate enigmas and potential of organic life provide the foundation of Progenitor techniques. Upon that framework, an individual Progenitor can build a wide variety of innovations. Although specific applications must be scientifically defensible (even if extremely loosely so), the Progenitors employ a dizzying variety of theories and Procedures. That said, those weird science techniques typically demand the presence of a well-stocked lab and intricate, often time-consuming, labor. Any tool that a healer, scientist, or naturalist would use can yield miraculous results in the skillful hands of a trained Technocrat, but the Progenitors usually need time and space to work their miracles.

To certain evolutionists, *Might is Right*, paradigm-wise. Most Progenitors, however, favor the agnostic Gaia-hypothesis approach to *Creation's Divine and Alive*. Cybernetics blend in with a hypertechnology approach to medicine-work, and the Convention's eclectic methods often seem like weird science by the standards of other Conventions.

Bonus Asset

Choose one biological modification that assists your experiments, which you developed during training, and gain that as an asset rated at 6.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **ACADEMICS** 6, **MEDICINE** 6, **PHARMACEUTICALS** 6, **SCIENCE** 6. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

The guiding hand of evolution, Progenitors shape life itself and bring forth creatures that never existed before.

Gain **LIFE** 6 or **PRIME** 6 as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction SFX

Syndicate

Money is power – not only because of what it can buy but because the very idea of money defines what people are worth. Words like “value”, “wealth”, and yes, “worth” reflect the influence money holds in human society. We define ourselves and view others in ways often based on fiscal ability. Notions of class and style depend upon the things that money can buy. And so, in many ways, the Syndicate is the most powerful group on Earth today.

You wouldn't know it to hear the scuttlebutt. After all, popular misconception links the word “syndicate” with the lowlifes of organized crime. A common image of Syndicate operatives depicts them as gangsters – dangerous, certainly, but no match for true Enlightenment. And although there's some truth to that impression (illegal goods, after all, are profitable), it's a carefully maintained camouflage that cloaks the true scope and power of this Convention. On the few occasions when a Tradition mage crosses paths with an obvious Syndicate rep, bullets are sure to be exchanged. What that pitiful sorcerer never understands, though, is that the gun-toting bully is as close to the halls of influence as most spell-slinging weirdoes ever get. The real power, meanwhile, rests comfortably in executive offices high above the fray.

In many ways, the Syndicate has always run the Technocracy. Where else, after all, would the Craftsmen have gotten the funds to build their cannons? How else could the Explorators have constructed their ships? Artisans and priests and knights all need money in order to purchase the tools and toys of which they're all so proud. And since the earliest days, that money has come from the vaults of the High Guild. In return, the Guildsmen extracted taxes, tithes, and plunder at the same time that they set the agendas... and, quite often, the very realities... that governed the other Conventions. Though the Guild seldom got its own hands dirty, its operatives and funds spread the group's influence across the human world.

Stripped of its gangland connotations, the word syndicate refers to "those who bring things together". When the Order of Reason transformed itself in the 1800s, the High Guild (whose name, guild, refers to payment in gold) assumed that word as its name. While other Technocrats experimented in labs, chased Reality Deviants, or pushed the boundaries of science into the 20th century, the Syndicate brought them all together through the power of wealth. Bankers, tradesman, politicians, and the occasional criminal tied the world into a single profitable enterprise, linked by global commerce, diplomacy, and media. From the international shipping companies of the imperial age to the pervasive corporations of today's world, the Syndicate has literally banked on human progress. And so, although most of the Ascension War has pitted Black Suits and HIT Marks against desperate superstitionists, the Syndicate has consolidated the world into a handful of associated corporations... most of which it controls.

This sounds sinister... and yet, without trade and money, culture as we know it would be impossible. Language and mathematics evolved through trade; technologies spread through commerce; regulated monetary systems helped civilizations expand and prosper. Even Jesus understood the importance of "rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's". Money and its attendant benefits are the rewards earned by hard work and imaginative enterprise. It stands to reason, then, that the people who understand those systems best should be the ones who benefit from it most.

Organization

Organized like a corporation (or perhaps it's the other way around...), the Syndicate descends in a top- down pyramid. At the apex sits a CEO and 10 Vice Presidents of Operations (VPOs) who head the Board; from there, the various Chairmen (or Vision Men) answer to the Board, supervising each Construct and Symposium. Managers answer to these Chairmen, and Associates (or Magic Men) answer to the Managers. Those Associates comprise the lowest rank of unEnlightened Syndicate ops, with Providers (a.k.a. Our Friends or simply Staples) rounding out the lowest duties and handling most of the busywork at the bottom of that pyramid.

Initiation

Talent, hard work, industrious imagination, and a gift for playing hardball mean everything in this Convention. Recruits often come from offices or business schools where scouts watch for rising stars... especially ones who are deeply in debt, incredibly skillful, or both. After a series of interviews, the would-be recruit is tested, employed as a Provider, and groomed for ruthless acumen and personal responsibility. If and when a prospective Associate reveals that she controls money rather than letting money control her, she receives a promotion to the head division. There, she begins to learn the secrets of desire and the means to manipulate reality's bottom line.

Focus

Ars Cupiditae, the Art of Desire, provides the heart of Syndicate methodology. Refined by the High Guild during the medieval period, this portfolio of techniques focuses on self-mastery and social psychology. Essentially, the practitioner disciplines his own body and mind, refines relationship techniques, and establishes a kingdom around himself that he gradually expands into an empire of subtle but compelling influence.

Except in the most desperate circumstances, a Syndicate rep never resorts to vulgar Procedures; even then, those Adjustments employ high-tech weapons, martial arts, or other stylishly technological methods. Most often, a Syndicate Associate manipulates people and systems with subtle yet effective nudges – phone calls, bribes, handshakes, perfumes, seductions, power lunches, PowerPoint presentations, hypereconomics, social domination, and so on – that get other people to pull the trigger while the Associate tallies up the profits. *Might is Right* in the Syndicate world; without it, civilization as we know it is on a *One-Way Trip to Oblivion*.

Bonus Asset

Choose a business that you have appropriated as a Primal Venture, and gain that as an asset rated at **6**.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **FINANCES 6**, **LAW 6**, **LEADERSHIP 6**, **SUBTERFUGE 6**. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

Money makes the world go around and the Syndicate are the money, finding value in everything that exists and had never existed, pulling the strings of weaker men, and exploiting the chaos of hypereconomics.

Gain **ENTROPY 6**, **MIND 6**, or **PRIME 6** as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction 5FX

Void Engineers

The cosmos are vast and dangerous. Like the savage frontiers of old, the many dimensions must be tamed, catalogued, and assimilated into a safely controlled cosmos. At worst, they should be sealed away so that the monsters on the other side cannot disrupt the Consensus... which they have a nasty tendency to do whenever they get the chance. That void must be engineered – not merely tolerated, but transformed. And since the Renaissance, this Convention has understood that goal and worked to shape chaos into stability.

In the tenuous balance between humanity and the Void, this Convention maintains a careful (and sometimes unsuccessful) foothold. Originally founded as two separate groups – the Celestial Masters and the Explorators (a.k.a. the Void Seekers) – the Convention discovered that the promise of Heaven Above was a lie; instead, a trackless Void stretched off into infinity, ripe with horrors that made the hells of Dutch painters look insignificant. As Explorators mapped out the mysteries of the human world, Celestial Masters began exploring that Void. In the late 1800s, the groups merged into a single faction. Its duty: to chart the mysteries and keep them from polluting the Earth.

On one hand, the Engineers pursue an imperial agenda of conquest and sterilization; on the other, they're not wrong about the threats they confront. No Technocracy Convention has nearly as much hands-on experience with the unspeakably counterrational Otherworlds and their equally ineffable hosts. The brain-twisting expertise of this Convention has allowed the Technocracy to shut down Nazi invocations, Marauder reality storms, and Reality Deviant strongholds. The Technocracy owes its Horizon Constructs, ectoplasmic disruptors, machine realms, and sentinel satellites to these Engineers, whose Border Corps Division steps in where cyborgs fear to tread. Most of all, perhaps, the Union owes its supply of Quintessential energies to this convention. And so although the Wanderers (an old name that still applies) might be the loosest cannon on the Technocratic gunship, they're a damn powerful force, politically and otherwise.

The Void Engineers hold one goal above and beyond all others: defend humanity against everything beyond the Gauntlet. To that end, high-tech laboratories maintain barriers against unauthorized crossings; heavily armed marines seek and destroy anything that crosses that line. Alien incursions, mystical spirits, astral entities, and ghostly apparitions all pose threats to the safety of the human race, but the Void Engineers possess the tools and talent to oppose them all. And although most Technocrats hate to admit this, legions of extradimensional entities already hide throughout the human world, entrenched on the Front Lines of the battle for reality. Void Engineers track them down, using specialized training to hunt exotic prey.

To tip the balance between order and chaos, Void Engineers prefer to know their foes. They lead expeditions to extradimensional realms to study impossible creatures in their unnatural habitats. For the sake of survival, they'll recruit Technocrats from other Conventions to assist them, but Void Engineers insist on leading the way. Research provides a common goal, of course. When the fate of the world's at stake, however, a preemptive strike can buy a little more time for humanity.

Given these alien environments and pursuits, it's not surprising that Engineers seem kind of odd. All too often, operatives return from off-world assignments as hollow-eyed malcontents in need of social processing. Indeed, the Wanderers have their own sanity division, the Descartes Institute of Mental Health, where Earthbound Social Processing is broken and replaced with a more suitable mentality. Despite their longstanding image as freewheeling space hippies or hammerheaded star-grunts, this Convention boasts many of the Union's most dedicated and accomplished members. Each Engineer, regardless of her post, is a scientist; all other duties remain secondary.

Organization

Especially in the wake of the Dimensional Anomaly, Void Engineer groups follow military-style ranks: Technicians, Marines, and Cadets form the lowest echelon, graduating upward to become Enforcers (who guard the borders), Explorers (who chart new territory), Investigators (who pursue scientific inquiries), or Researchers (who develop new tech). Higher-ranking personnel within these levels assume command of individual units. At the highest level, a series of Coordinators handles the logistical and administrative responsibilities, overseeing the Convention as a whole. (Note: In an Avatar Storm metaplot, this Convention changes drastically; see Convention Book: Void Engineers for details.)

Initiation

Recruiting personnel from among top-level researchers, tech geeks with an eye for unconventional applications of science, and folks who feel disappointed by science program cutbacks, the Engineers bring their Cadets off-world to specially designed training and research facilities. From that point onward, a Cadet is considered initiated whether or not she ever achieves Enlightenment – she's seen too much to ever be considered mundane again.

Focus

As every Engineer knows, only Tech Holds All Answers in A World of Gods and Monsters. Without imposed order, Everything is Chaos. And so, hypertechnology melds with cybernetics, craftwork, cosmic reality hacking, and a formalized type of weird science.

Mind-bending quantum physics, and the machines created to channel those physics, form the core of Wanderer beliefs. To that end, they adapt alien technologies and sanitized versions of ancient spiritual Arts, incorporated through reconciliation theories that bind those ideas and energies to scientific methods. In the Realms beyond Earth's limited reality sphere, Void Engineer technologies have all the subtlety of a big-budget science-fiction film. Blasters slide out of holsters, power-armor suits become essential, and titanic Universal craft (that is, spaceships) are the order of the day.

Bonus Asset

Choose a Device that shields you from a particular hazardous environment and assists in employing Enlightened procedures, and gain that as an asset rated at **6**.

Bonus Specialities

Choose three specialities from **COSMOLOGY 6**, **FIREARMS 6**, **SURVIVAL 6**, **TECHNOLOGY 6**. Gain them as bonus specialities.

Affinity Sphere

Brave explorers of the worlds beyond, Void Engineers are charting the expanses of dimensions real and not, and wielding the firepower to defend from threats without and within.

Gain **SPIRIT 6**, **CORRESPONDENCE 6**, or **FORCES 6** as an Affinity Sphere.

Faction SFX

Magick

Evolving Characters

During play, your character will change. Some changes will be temporary; others will last the rest of your character's career.

Changing Milestones

By default, once you hit the 10 XP level of a milestone, the entire milestone is closed; after the session ends, the closed milestone is replaced with a new one. (In some cases, the ST may allow this "replacement" to just be a fresh copy of the milestone.)

New milestones can be created in collaboration by the player and ST, or chosen from those listed in Appendix C: Sample Milestones.

Spending XP

Once experience points are earned via Milestones, they can then be spent for the benefit of your character. **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex** uses the following table for the most common uses of Experience Points:

Spend 1 XP to:

- ☞ Start the next game session with one extra **PP**. (You can't start a game session with more than 5 **PP**s.)

Spend 3 XP to do one of the following:

- ☞ Replace an existing distinction with a new one.
- ☞ Add or replace a Limit.
- ☞ Add a new **▼** specialty or signature asset
- ☞ Upgrade an existing specialty or signature asset from **▼** to **■**.

Spend 5 XP to do one of the following:

- ☞ Add a new **■** specialty.
- ☞ Convert a temporary asset into a **■** signature asset.
- ☞ Replace an existing SFX with a new one.

Spend 10 XP to do one of the following:

- ☞ Upgrade a **▼** role to **■**.
- ☞ Add a new signature asset rated at **■**.
- ☞ Upgrade an existing **■** specialty or signature asset to **◆**.
- ☞ Add a new Sphere rated at **■**.

Spend 15 XP to do one of the following:

- ☞ Upgrade a **■** role to **◆**.
- ☞ Upgrade an existing **◆** specialty or signature asset to **10**.
- ☞ Add a new SFX.
- ☞ Upgrade a **■** Sphere to **◆**.

Spend 20 XP to do one of the following:

- ☞ Upgrade a **◆** role to **10**.
- ☞ Upgrade an existing **10** specialty or signature asset to **12**.
- ☞ Upgrade a **◆** Sphere to **10**.

Spend 25 XP to:

- ☞ Upgrade a **10** role to **12**.
- ☞ Upgrade a **10** Sphere to **12**.

Spend 30 XP to:

- ☞ Add a new SFX from a Faction you are not a part of.

ST Rules

There's more to STing a game than learning the rules, but assuming you've got a handle on the basics, there are a few extra rules the ST needs to know in order to run **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex** games.

Scene Framing

Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex gives players a lot of power over their characters and what happens to them. The ST isn't an omnipotent narrator, just another player with specialized responsibilities, portraying the world and the creatures in it rather than one special character of their own. However, one major power the ST possesses is that they are the one who frames scenes.

To frame a new scene, the ST makes decisions based on the story so far. They determine where it happens, who is present, and what is already happening when the PCs arrive.

While you might have a rough plan, avoid all expectations as to how a scene might end or what the player will choose to do. Include elements you think will spur the PCs into action, but the goal isn't to move players along a predetermined track; play to find out what happens.

Scene Distinctions

Each scene can be framed with up to three scene distinctions, special traits that any character in the scene can include in their rolls (if a character has distinctions of their own, their player chooses whether to use a scene distinction or one of their character distinctions for each roll). Scene distinctions are rated at **◆**, and can be used to earn plot points with *Hinder*.

As a special rule, a character can include both a personal distinction and a scene distinction in the same roll, as long as one of the two distinctions is *Hindered*.

Scale

Sometimes, a creature or other part of the story differs from the player characters in power or size so dramatically that it commands an innate advantage (or disadvantage, if it is smaller or weaker). When necessary, an extra trait known as scale is assigned.

Scale ranges from **▼** to **12**. Most mages, Night Folk and humans, as well as most humans and animals, have a scale of **6**. Master mages and elder Night Folk have a scale of **8**. A creature with a higher scale isn't just larger or more powerful – it is *many times* larger or more powerful. In the film version of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the heroes' long fight against the cave troll is a desperate one, because of the creature's massive superiority of scale (**8** compared to the Fellowship members' **6**). In the later film in the series, *The Return of the King*, the Witch-King of Angmar is also of greater scale – not because of his size, but because his level of power is beyond mortal ken.

When a character or other part of the story rolls against a PC of a different scale, the one with the greater scale includes their scale die in their dice pool. In addition, when you are the one with the greater scale, after you roll, you keep three dice to add together for your total, instead of just two. Obviously, this is a very powerful advantage.

A **▼** scale is likely never going to be rolled (since there is no lower rating), but it exists to represent creatures with a level of power or size far beneath the scale of normal humans. A small child or animal, or a similarly smaller and/or weaker creature, would have a **▼** scale. As a result, a PC would add a **6** scale die to its rolls against such a creature, though in general the ST shouldn't bother having a PC make such a roll.

Spending Peril Dice

The ST can remove dice from the peril pool, “spending” them for a number of uses during play, including:

As plot points: The ST can spend a die to obtain the same benefits for their STCs that a player gets for spending **PP** for their PC.

To add dice to a roll: Before a die roll is made, the ST can remove one or more peril dice from their pool, then add those die to the roll.

For surprise entrances: To introduce a new STC to a scene mid-conflict, the ST can spend a peril die equal to the new STC’s highest trait.

For sudden changes: The ST can add a new scene distinction mid-scene by spending a **8** or higher.

To interrupt the action order: When a player would take a turn, the ST can have a STC or challenge take their turn first by spending a peril die. This only works if the die spent is equal to or larger than the **SCOUT** trait of the character the ST is interrupting.

To split the PC group: The ST can spend a **10** or larger peril die to announce a sudden event that divides the party (such as a sudden building collapse, a huge crack opening in the street, a massive car crash, etc.)

To immediately end the current scene with dramatic twist The ST has the power to end scenes. However, if they want to end the scene in a cliffhanger or defeat for the PCs, or in a similarly dramatic fashion that the PCs might otherwise try to prevent, the ST can do so by spending **12 12**.

Storyteller Characters (STCs)

To help you make sure you don’t do more work than necessary when creating STCs, the rules divide them into different types depending on the role you expect them to fulfil in the story.

Storyteller Characters

Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex

presents a world where mortals live in relative peace, but the secret world of the mages and Night Folk is full of conflict and dangerous rivalries. During a session, some STCs are meant to be challenging opposition, but others are bit parts and recurring secondary characters, so there are different ways of creating STCs.

STCs are split into three different types depending on the role you expect them to fulfil in the story: Extras, Analog STCs, and Challenge Pools.

Extras can be created as needed during play. Analog STCs and Challenge Pools work best for recurring characters who harry the player characters across multiple adventures. These may start as Extras or as Boss challenge pools; you can switch their type between sessions, and even use them as an Analog STC for a few adventures and then turn them into a Boss for a final showdown.

Extras

An extra is a nameless character in a scene who has just one trait describing their role in the story, like **BORED COP** 10 or **SUSPICIOUS NEIGHBOUR** 6. This trait is added to other dice pools (such as the peril pool) rather than rolled on its own. When extras take a complication or stress larger than their trait die, they are taken out. Most extras are invented during play rather than created in advance.

Analog STCs

These are created much the same way you'd make a player character, although they can be simplified from that format. For example, instead of defining every trait in a trait set, they might only have the traits they are likely to use. Analog STCs may have whatever number of SFX or Limits seem appropriate (though generally not more than the ST can easily keep track of). They are taken out with stress or complications in the same way as a PC.

As Challenge Pools

A challenge pool is something the PCs have to deal with, and not only can it represent a STC, but also a hazard, dilemma, crisis, or anything else that could be an obstacle to the characters' progress. Challenge pools are the basic building blocks of **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex** adventures, and they are described in their own section.

Upgrading STCs

If a STC's importance grows beyond initial expectations, you can always switch their type between sessions as the developing story requires. You can even convert a STC into a challenge pool or vice-versa.

STCs and Dice Pools

When a PC rolls a test where a STC might interfere with or oppose that roll, the ST can add one or more STC traits to the peril pool before rolling. If a PC acts directly against an analog STC or challenge pool, the ST usually builds a dice pool based on traits just as a PC would and rolls that as opposition, instead of rolling the peril pool.

Challenge Pools

A challenge pool represents a complex and difficult situation that requires sustained effort to overcome, rather than any single action. It can represent any crisis or series of obstacles the PCs face: a forest fire, breaking into a vault, escaping police pursuit, dispelling complex magical wards, rescuing people from a collapsing structure, steering a raft down rocky rapids, negotiating the various rivalries and agendas at a social event, etc. Powerful foes or groups of enemies can also be represented by challenge pools.

Challenge pools are the basic structure around which **Mage: The Ascension Primed by Cortex** adventures are built. A handful of challenge pools (including bunch of mobs, and one or two bosses, as described in this section) is all you need to tell a compelling story that lasts for an entire session.

The core of every challenge is a pool of dice that the players will step down and remove as they address the situation. This is its Challenge trait. The challenge remains a driving element of the story until the last die is removed from its pool.

Opposing The Challenge Pool

Player characters can use their action to reduce the challenge pool. When they do so, the entire challenge pool is rolled as a reaction against them. Usually, a PC tries to reduce the challenge pool by inflicting some kind of complication or stress on it.

However, challenge pools don't actually gain complications or stress, nor do they gain assets. Whenever a PC would inflict stress or a complication on a challenge pool, the player instead compares their effect die to a challenge pool die of their choice. If the complication or stress is bigger than that die, that die leaves the pool. If it isn't, the chosen die steps down. Similarly, whenever a challenge pool would gain an asset, that asset immediately converts into a new challenge die instead. When the last challenge die is removed, the challenge is defeated.

Trying to reduce a challenge pool is risky, however. Failing a roll to do so inflicts stress on the PC, just as failing a test would, but instead of a **6**, the ST can choose to inflict the challenge pool's effect die as stress.

Also, when a player hitches against a challenge pool, instead of giving the player a **PP**, the ST may spend a die from the pool's challenge trait to turn the hitched die into a complication on the PC.

Challenge Pool Actions

The PCs face challenge pools in action order, and once every PC has had a turn, the challenge pool gets a turn as well. Usually, it rolls to inflict stress or create a complication, but it can also roll to create an asset for itself (which becomes a new challenge die).

Instead of rolling, the challenge can use its turn to step up its smallest die or grant the ST a **PP**. The ST narrates how the challenge escalates or worsens, and then play moves on.

Finally, the ST can use the pool's turn to spend a die from the challenge trait and move a PC's complication to the challenge pool to replace it. The PC no longer has the complication, but the problem they were dealing with is now everybody's problem! (Obviously, the optimal use of this move by the ST would be replacing a smaller die with a larger one.)

STCs Vs Challenges?

If a challenge pool works against a STC, or vice-versa, or if STCs work against each other, the ST has two choices. They can let a PC roll determine the outcome, or they can simply decide what happens. GMs never roll dice against themselves.

Building Challenges

The ST creates the challenge pool by choosing three to six dice of the same size, from **6** to **12**. Die size describes difficulty, while the number of dice roughly determines how long the challenge will last.

A **6 6 6** challenge pool will probably be quick and easy, while a pool of **12 12 12 12 12 12** is likely to be long and difficult.

If you wish, you can also give a challenge pool other traits or SFX, just like a STC, but that isn't necessary if you'd rather keep things simple for yourself during play.

Mobs

A mob is a challenge pool variant representing a group of opposing characters or creatures: a pack of werewolves, a gang of thugs, anti-government terrorists, rioting cops, summoned demons, etc. A mob's challenge pool is called its Mob Dice and this trait sometimes gets a colourful name.

Instead of stepping down its dice, mobs take complications like STCs. When a complication steps up past the Mob Trait's die size, the mob loses a die from that trait and the complication is eliminated. When Mob Trait loses its last die, it is taken out.

A mob also has signature assets in addition to its mob dice (like those of a minor STC), which it can add to its rolls. Mobs can also have SFX, and most have at least one SFX like *All-Out Attack*, *Area Spell*, or *Impossible to Ignore* that allow the mob to target multiple characters on its action.

Bosses

A boss is a variation that represents one STC meant to challenge multiple PCs at once. A boss works exactly like a mob except that instead of a Mob Dice trait, it has Boss Dice trait.

Organization

An organization works much like a mob, but it is a much larger group operating on a level beyond what any single individual (even a mage) can do. Secret societies, military forces, spy networks, organized crime, oligarch families, corporations, covert rebellions, insidious cults, police forces, and occult conspiracies are examples of organizations. An organization possesses a scale trait of 8 or higher, giving it a powerful advantage when acting against the PCs. An organization has an Org Dice trait just like a mob has a Mob Dice trait.

Levelling Challenges

Tailoring dice ratings is more art than science. A challenge pool with fewer dice takes less time than a challenge pool with more. A challenge pool of larger dice will take more time still and will also require the PCs to tap more resources and push harder to bring down those dice. Larger ratings of signature assets, which rarely change, make the challenge harder still.

Additionally, the player characters may have traits and SFX that make them more effective against specific threats. A ghost-hunting exorcist is going to defeat a mob of poltergeists much faster than they would an equally-rated mob of well-armed mercenaries on the hunt, whereas a veteran Flambeau wizard armed with his amulets and wand will have a much easier time dispatching the mercenaries.

The best way to crack this chestnut is play. Throw a 6 6 6 6 6 mob at the players, followed by a 8 8 8 8 challenge, and then a 10 10 10 boss. Jot down notes as to how quickly they go down. Iterate for the next adventure. You will very shortly develop a good sense, not only of how long and difficult any given encounter will play out, but how well it fits into your friends' expectations of play and attention spans.

Sample STCs and Challenge Pools

These are some example enemies, allies, and challenges that you can use in your games. STCs and Challenge Pools can also be a useful shortcut to creating an adventure. Come up with a handful of these, figure out a situation that weaves them together and makes life tough for the PCs, and you pretty much have what you need to run a game session.

The dice in each challenge's main trait (like its mob trait or boss trait) are just a suggestion, which you should feel empowered to change. Part of the ST's job is deciding what die ratings to assign to challenge pools in order to best tailor the challenge to PCs.

Militia Leader's Bunker (Challenge Pool)

Hideout for incendiary insurgents and inconsistent ideologies.

POOL: **FORTIFIED COMPOUND** 10 10 10

TOO MANY GUNS 6

SPECIAL FORCES REJECTS 4

All-Out Attack: Spend a PP to target multiple opponents when you roll to inflict **DAMAGED**. For each additional target, add 6 and keep an extra effect die.

Spirits of Winter (Mob)

They're coming.

MOB TRAIT: **HUNGRY GHOSTS** 8 8 8

LIFE-STEALING CHILL 6

INVISIBLE UNTIL THEY STRIKE 6

Overwhelming Tenacity: When you roll to inflict **DRAINED**, spend a PP to affect multiple targets. For each additional target, add 6 and keep an extra effect die.

Corrupt Federal Agent (Boss)

They love other people's secrets.

BOSS TRAIT: **NOSY INVESTIGATOR**

6 6 6 6

PERSISTENCE 6

KNOWS EVERYONE 8

FORGED WARRANTS 10

This Just Got Real: When you roll to inflict **DEMORALISED**, spend a PP to affect multiple targets. For each additional target, add 6 and keep an extra effect die.

Off-the-Grid Vampire (STC)

Bloodsucking nocturnal marauder.

Shadow Roles: **SPEAKER** 8, **SOLDIER** 10

ILLUSION 10

UNDERGROUND LAIR 6

UNQUESTIONING BLOOD CULTISTS 8

OVERGROWN CLAWS AND FANGS 8

CENTURIES-OLD UNDEAD 8

Claws & Fangs: Reveal your natural weapons to add 6 to your pool and step up any stress inflicted.

Eternal Hunger (Limit): Each day at sunset, step down all stress except **DRAINED**, then take **DRAINED** 6 unless you've slumbered since the last sunset.

Relentless Thirst: Each time you inflict **DRAINED** stress on a living human or Night Folk, apply the same effect die as recovery to your own **DRAINED** stress. When you increase a creature's **DRAINED** to 12 or larger, it takes **DAMAGED** 12 as well.

Undead Might: Take **DRAINED** 6 to step down your **DAMAGED**, to gain a PP, or to step up **SOLDIER** until the scene ends. You can never recover **DRAINED** stress except via SFX.

Vampiric Weaknesses (Limit): Step down your roles whenever the sun is up. When you take **DRAINED** stress from sunlight, stakes, fire, or faith, step up that stress, gain a PP, and shut down ***Undead Fortitude*** until you sleep continuously for at least eight hours.

Appendix A: Distinction Builder

For help in building distinctions, this appendix presents five tables and the guidelines for using them. The tables are the Descriptor Table, the Noun Table, the Catchphrase Table, the Tradition Table, and the Convention Table. Use the tables however you want, whether as lists to pick from or as random tables you pull from by rolling dice. You can choose or roll a descriptor from the Descriptor Table, and then add it to a noun. You can also choose or roll a noun from the Noun Table, and then add a descriptor to it. Or if you really need inspiration you can do both (this is especially useful for your background distinction).

To use abt table, choose any entry on the table, or you can roll randomly. If you are rolling for descriptor or noun, first roll a 12 and find the row for the resulting number. Then roll a 4, and find the column for that result. Your random descriptor or noun is where the row meets the column. If you are rolling for a catchphrase roll a 8 for the row and a 4, for the result column. For a random Tradition roll a 10, and a 6 for a Technocratic Convention.

Descriptor Table

DESCRIPTOR	1	2	3	4
1	AFFABLE	ARROGANT	BLUNT	BOOKISH
2	BROODING	CHARMING	CONFLICTED	CREATIVE
3	DASHING	DEFIANT	DUTIFUL	EARNEST
4	ECCENTRIC	FAITHFUL	FEARLESS	GENIUS
5	GENTLE	GRIM	ICY	INSECURE
6	LOGICAL	LONELY	LOYAL	MAVERICK
7	MISFIT	NAÏVE	NURTURING	OPTIMIST
8	PACIFIST	PASSIONATE	PESSIMIST	QUIET
9	QUIRKY	RECKLESS	RUDE	RUTHLESS
10	SARCASTIC	SHADY	STUBBORN	TENACIOUS
11	THOUGHTFUL	TIMID	VENGEFUL	VETERAN
12	WEIRD	WISE	YOUNG	ZEALOUS

Noun Table

NOUN	1	2	3	4
1	ARTIST	ASSASSIN	ATHLETE	BELIEVER
2	BODYGUARD	COMRADE	CRAFTER	CRIMINAL
3	DECEIVER	DETECTIVE	DIPLOMAT	EXPATRIATE
4	EXPERT	EXTROVERT	FREAK	FUGITIVE
5	GAMBLER	GUARD	HEIR	HISTORIAN
6	HUNTER	IMPOSTER	INTROVERT	INVENTOR
7	KID	LEADER	LONER	MEDIATOR
8	MERCENARY	NURSE	OCCULTIST	OUTSIDER
9	PARENT	PERFORMER	PHYSICIAN	REBEL
10	REFUGEE	ROMANTIC	SMUGGLER	SPY
11	STUDENT	TEACHER	THIEF	TRAVELLER
12	VAGABOND	VIGILANTE	VISIONARY	WARRIOR

Catchphrase Table

CATCHPHRASE	1	2	3	4
1	ACT FIRST, ASK QUESTIONS LATER.	ACTUALLY, THAT'S A FUNNY STORY...	COME AT ME!	COULDN'T STOP NOW IF I TRIED.
2	I HAVE A CUNNING PLAN.	I PLAY TO WIN.	I SAW THIS COMING.	I'M THE BEST THERE EVER WAS.
3	IT'S ALMOST TOO EASY...	I'VE SEEN THIS BEFORE.	LEAD FROM THE FRONT.	NEVER GIVE UP.
4	NEVER TELL ME THE ODDS.	NO ONE'S GETTING PAID ENOUGH FOR THIS	NOBODY ASKED FOR THAT.	SACRIFICES MUST BE MADE.
5	SOMEONE HAD TO DO IT.	SOMETHING DOESN'T FEEL RIGHT	STOP, OR BE STOPPED.	PERHAPS THERE'S A SIMPLER WAY...
6	THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY.	THINGS CAN ALWAYS GET WORSE.	THIS IS OUR DESTINY.	TIME TO RAGE!
7	VICTORY COMES AT PRICE.	WE DIDN'T GET DRESSED UP FOR NOTHING.	WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS.	WE HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS.
8	WELL, ISN'T THIS IRONIC?	WE'RE BETTER THAN THIS.	WE'VE GOT THIS.	YOU HAVEN'T THOUGHT THIS THROUGH.

Tradition Table

TRADITION	NAME
1	AKASHAYANA/AKASHIC BROTHERHOOD
2	CELESTIAL CHORUS
3	CULT OF ECSTASY/SAHAJIYA
4	DREAMSPEAKERS/KHA'VADI
5	EUTHANATOI/CHAKRAVANTI
6	ORDER OF HERMES
7	SOCIETY OF ETHER/SONS OF ETHER
8	VERBENA
9	VIRTUAL ADEPTS
10	REROLL

Convention Table

CONVENTION	NAME
1	ITERATION X
2	NEW WORLD ORDER
3	PROGENITORS
4	SYNDICATE
5	VOID ENGINEERS
6	REROLL

Appendix B: General SFX

In addition to SFX associated with their faction, players can choose and gain any of the following SFX for their characters.

SFX List

A Thousand Faces (Gear): Double **SCOUNDREL** or **SPEAKER** on a roll to create a disguise asset for yourself. Also, you can spend a **PP** to step up a disguise asset you already created.

Abjure the Unholy: When you roll to avoid complications or stress inflicted by demons, devils, or undead, add **6** and step up your effect die.

Acolyte Militant: When you succeed on a roll to inflict stress on fiends, undead, or enemies of your faith, spend a **PP** to step up that stress.

Acrobat: When you climb, flip, or jump for tactical advantage as part of your action, add **6** and step up your effect die.

Aggressive Sorcery: Take **DRAINED 6** to step up when rolling to control elemental forces or to inflict complications with magic. If your roll succeeds, step up your effect die.

Alchemist's Lore: Take **DRAINED 6** to step up when rolling to magically alter the form or physical properties of creatures or objects. If your roll succeeds, step up your effect die.

All-Out Attack: Spend a **PP** to target multiple opponents when you roll to inflict **DAMAGED**. For each additional target, add a **6** and keep an extra effect die.

Anointed Weapon: Take **DRAINED 6** to infuse holy energy into a weapon you hold, creating a **9** asset.

Arcane Cunning: When you roll to avoid a magical complication, spend a **PP** to step up **SCHOLAR** or **SCOUNDREL** and step up your effect die.

Armour Expert (Gear): When your roll to avoid fails, if that roll included an armour asset, step down the stress you take, then step down the asset until it is repaired.

Aura of Faith: When an ally within your reach takes **DEMORALISED** from fear or doubt, either of you can spend a **PP** to step down the stress the ally takes. If this steps it down below **6**, they take no stress at all.

Auxiliary Operational Mode (Gear): Step down the highest die in your pool to step up an effect die when someone is attempting to unweave or counterspell the magick enacted using your gadgets and devices.

Away From It All: When you first enter a wild space, spend a **PP** to step down your **DEMORALISED**, or **ENRAGED**.

Balm: When you recover non-**DAMAGED** stress, spend a **PP** to apply the recovery to more than one character. For each additional target, add **6** and keep an extra effect die.

Barroom Brawler (Gear): When your roll to inflict includes an improvised weapon asset you created during the current scene, add **6** and step up your effect die.

Better Under Pressure: Spend a **PP** to add your **DEMORALISED** or **ENRAGED** to your roll to create an asset. If the action succeeds, step down the stress you used.

Blessed Orator: When you roll to preach to a crowd, spend a **PP** to add a **6** to your pool for every audience member beyond the first. Assign an effect die to each listener as an asset for them or as **DEMORALISED**.

Bottle Up Your Feelings: Take a **EMOTIONLESS** [6] complication to create a **BOTTLED EMOTIONS** [8] asset: a magical bottle holding your emotions. While you have it, take **EMOTIONLESS** [6] at the start of each scene, but whenever you would take **DEMORALISED** or **ENRAGED**, step up **EMOTIONLESS** instead. You can end the asset voluntarily by drinking the bottle, otherwise when the asset ends, the bottle explodes. If **EMOTIONLESS** would step up past [12], end the asset instead. When the bottle asset ends, any **EMOTIONLESS** complication you have turns into **DEMORALISED**.

Brace and Aim (Gear): If you haven't moved yet during your turn, spend a [PP] to give yourself a [8] asset related to aiming with a ranged weapon. Remove this asset if you move more than two paces during a single beat.

Building Momentum: When you succeed on a roll to inflict stress or complication, spend a [PP] to gain or step up the asset **MOMENTUM** [6]. If you fail any roll or make a recovery roll, eliminate the asset.

Burglar: If you are about to be discovered somewhere you're not supposed to be, you may spend a [PP] to gain a [8] asset to conceal you.

Burst of Strength: Spend a [PP] or take **ENRAGED** [6] to step up or on a roll related to feats of physical strength, raw muscle, or sheer physical might.

Catch 'Em Flat-Footed: When you roll to inflict stress on a target who hasn't yet taken a turn this scene, add [8] and step up your effect die.

Cerebral: Spend a [PP] or take **ENTHRALLED** [6] to step up on a roll related to intellect, reasoning, memory, or aptitude for learning.

Chalice Lighter: When you light a flame to meditate on a named conflict, spend a [PP] to gain a [8] asset related to understanding the questions you believe are central to that conflict.

Charismatic: Spend a [PP] or take **ENTHRALLED** [6] to step up **SPEAKER** on a roll related to presence, social graces, leadership, or personal magnetism.

Chimerical Image: Spend a [PP] to double on a roll to create a magical illusion.

Cleanse: When you roll to recover another character's compaction (including stress), take **DRAINED** [6] to step up your effect die. You may do this more than once on a single roll.

Close the Distance (Gear): When you switch from ranged combat to close combat or back, step down the largest die in your pool for that roll to earn a [PP].

Combat Veteran: When your roll to inflict **DAMAGED** or **DEMORALISED** during a battle includes **SOLDIER**, step down the largest die in your pool to add [8]. If your roll succeeds, step up your effect die.

Con Artist: When you roll to deceive someone or maintain an existing deception, add [6] and step up your effect die.

Conjured Elemental: Spend a [PP] to create a [8] asset, representing an elemental creature summoned to aid you until the end of the scene or you banish it.

Connections in Low Places: Spend a [PP] to reveal a personal connection — shared childhood, marriage relation, worked the same crew, or the like — to a person of little social standing, gaining a [8] asset related to that person.

Creature Lore: When your roll related to discerning information about or detecting non-humanoid creatures includes **SCOUT**, add **6** and step up your effect die.

Deadeye (Gear): When you roll to inflict **DAMAGED** with a ranged weapon, if your roll includes an asset you created relating to aiming, step up your effect die.

Detect Weakness: When you succeed on a roll to inflict **DAMAGED**, spend a **PP** to step up your effect die.

Dextrous Agility: Spend a **PP** or take **ENTHRALLED 6** to step up **SCOUT**, **SCOUNDREL**, or **SOLDIER** on a roll related to swiftness, deftness, balance, or hand-eye coordination.

Dimensional Magic: Take **DRAINED 6** to step up **SPIRIT** or **CORRESPONDENCE** when rolling to summon and control something from elsewhere, or to use teleportation or portals. If your roll succeeds, step up your effect die.

Dimensional Vagabond: When stepping sideways spend a **PP** to double **SPIRIT** in your pool.

Dirty Fighter: Immediately before or after rolling against a foe, spend a **PP** to stoop to dishonourable tactics and inflict a **6** complication like **SAND IN EYES** or **SUCKER PUNCH** on that opponent.

Distracting Presence: When you roll to inflict **ENTHRALLED** by distracting someone, add **6** and step up your effect die.

Divine Providence: When the ST rolls an opportunity, take **ENTHRALLED 6** to earn a **PP**. You can immediately spend it to activate that opportunity.

Dual Wield (Gear): When you wield a weapon in each hand on a roll to inflict stress, step down the pool's largest die to keep an extra effect die.

Eldritch Obfuscation: Take **DRAINED 6** to step **MIND** up when rolling to manipulate others' senses with a supernatural effect. If your roll succeeds, step up your effect die.

Elusive Dodge: Step up **SCOUNDREL** or **SCOUT** on your roll to avoid a complication or stress that affects an entire area.

Embolden the Spirits: When using magick step up a die in your pool but 1s and 2s count as hitches as inhabitants of the other side get rowdy and unrestrained from your magick.

Empathic Practice: Step up **SPEAKER** on a roll to create an asset related to trust, reading people, or reassurance.

Envenomed Weapon (Gear): When you succeed on a roll to inflict **DAMAGED** with a weapon while you have a poison-related asset, if your total is an even number, keep an additional effect die as a complication against the same foe.

Erudite Researcher (Gear): When you spend an hour or more with good sources (a library, a meticulous ledger, accurate maps, informed and cooperative experts, etc.) add **6** and step up your effect die on rolls to create research-based assets.

Evading: When you roll to create an asset or recover stress, spend a **PP** to keep and step up a second effect die as an asset for yourself related to avoiding physical harm. This asset immediately ends if you roll to inflict stress or complications, but while you have it, if an SFX would allow someone to inflict stress on you by spending a **PP**, you ignore that stress.

Every Move You Make: While you are observing a person or situation without haste or interruption, spend a **PP** to double your **SCOUT** for one roll.

Expend Willpower: When exert extraordinary effort to succeed, take **DEMORALISED** **6** to gain a **PP** or add a third die to your total on a roll.

Expert Healer: When you roll to help an ally recover **DAMAGED** or **DEMORALISED**, add **6** and step up your effect die.

Exploit Weakness: Spend a **PP** to double your target's stress die in your roll to inflict stress on them.

Fence: When you reveal that you've found a buyer for stolen goods or a seller of necessary (but probably stolen) goods, gain them as a **◆** asset as well as the complication **DISREPUTABLE** **6**.

First Strike: When you roll to inflict stress on a foe, if it's the first time you've rolled to inflict stress on that foe this scene, step up your effect die.

Flanking: While you and an ally are both within reach of the same foe, but not within each other's reach, you both add **6** to your rolls to attack that foe.

Flash of Insight: When you fail a test to obtain information, you may spend a **PP** or take **ENTHRALLED** **6** to obtain that information by other means.

Focused Stillness (Gear): If you haven't moved yet during your turn when you roll to use a ranged weapon that you're wielding with two hands, you can step up one asset in your pool and step up any stress you inflict.

Glade Keeper: When you take a complication while defending a wild or sacred place from encroachment or corruption, you can either step up that complication to earn a **PP** or spend a **PP** to immediately step it down.

Greater Divination: Take **DRAINED** **6** to step up a Sphere when rolling to gain information or reveal knowledge with magic. If your roll succeeds, step up your effect die.

Guards & Wards: Take **DRAINED** **6** to step up when rolling to cast protective magic or to dispel or exorcize supernatural influences. If your roll succeeds, step up your effect die.

Have a Little Faith: When you would take **DEMORALISED** stress, spend a **PP** to step down the stress you take. If this steps the stress down below **6**, you take no stress at all.

Healing Touch: Roll to create an asset related to healing magic, which lasts until the session ends or until it steps down below **6**. Step down the asset to step down the or of one creature you touch.

Heist Planner: Immediately after you create an asset, spend a **PP** to step up that asset by narrating a flashback to when and how you prepared for this contingency.

Hell on Wheels: Double or on a roll to manoeuvre a vehicle or mount, or to outrun someone or avoid falling. If the roll succeeds, step up your effect die. Also, while you are mounted or in a vehicle, if an SFX would allow someone to inflict stress on you by spending a **PP**, you ignore that stress.

Heroic Agility: When you roll to avoid stress and fail, if the opposition's total didn't beat yours by five or more, spend a **PP** to step down the opposition's effect die.

High Stamina: Spend a **PP** or take **ENTHRALLED** **6** to step up **SCOUT** or **SOLDIER** on a roll related to constitution, toughness, endurance, or general health.

Hinder: Roll **4** instead of **8** for a distinction to earn a **PP**.

How It's Made: Spend a **PP** either when modifying an existing tool or jury-rigging a new one for an effect not normally possible using it to gain a **8** asset related to the effect.

Hunting the Dark: When you roll to inflict a complication or stress on the undead or a creature of shadow, add **6** and step up your effect die.

Impossible to Ignore: Spend a **PP** to target multiple opponents when you roll to inflict **ENTHRALLED**. For each additional target, add **6** and keep an extra effect die.

In Harm's Way: When another character near you takes stress, you can step down the stress they would take, then take **6** stress of the same type yourself.

Inquisitive: When you fail a roll to obtain information, spend a **PP** to reroll all your dice.

Inspiring Leadership: Add a **6** and step up your effect die when you roll **SPEAKER** to create assets for allies.

It's Gonna Blow: Double your Sphere when overloading, boosting or otherwise pushing the limits of one of the gadgets and tools that you use. Grow Paradox once immediately.

Juke: When you fail a roll to evade harm, spend a **PP** to reroll all your dice.

Keen Intellect: Add a **6** and step up your effect die when you roll **SCHOLAR** to create an asset related to recalling or researching information.

Lifesaving Asset: While you have a magical asset that is a physical object, when you would take **DAMAGED**, you can sacrifice the asset instead of taking the stress.

Maintaining Composure: Spend a **PP** or take **ENTHRALLED** **6** to step up **SPEAKER** or **SOLDIER** on a roll related to tenacity, resolve, staying calm, reassuring someone, or keeping emotions in check.

Manipulative Instincts: Spend a **PP** or take **ENTHRALLED** **6** to step up **SPEAKER** or **SCOUNDREL** on a roll related to reading people, manipulating emotions, or influencing someone's actions.

Master Plan: Spend a **PP** to add a die to your pool equal to the largest complication anyone has in the scene. After the roll fails or succeeds, step down that complication.

Misdirection: When you use **SCOUNDREL** on a roll related to escape, deception, or stealth, step down the largest die in your pool to add **8**. If your roll succeeds, step up your effect die.

Natural Leader: When someone besides you rolls an asset you created in their pool, spend a **PP** to double that asset. If that roll succeeds, and step up its effect die.

Network: While in a populated settlement, spend a **PP** to create **8** asset in the form of a **STC** who provides free room and board for you and your allies. As long as you don't overstay your welcome or cause trouble, the **STC** will even help hide your presence.

One of Their Own: Spend a **PP** to create a **8** asset representing a friendly local spirit willing to aid you for a time.

Opportune Attack (Gear): When a foe willingly moves out of your reach without teleporting, spend a **PP** to inflict **DAMAGED 6** on that creature if you have a melee weapon in hand.

Outmanoeuvre: When your roll to inflict **DAMAGED** or **DRAINED** while outdoors includes **SCOUT**, step down the largest die in your pool to add **◆**. If your roll succeeds, step up your effect die.

Palm It (Gear): When you roll to hide a one-handed weapon or make a sneak attack with it, step up and double the smallest die in your pool if you aren't wearing armour or using a shield.

Paramedic Training: Step up or double **SCHOLAR** in your dice pool when helping others recover **DAMAGED**. You can also spend a **PP** to step down your own or a nearby character's **trait** [Damaged].

Patient Healer: When you take your time to help someone, you may reroll one die that rolls a hitch on your rolls to recover their stress.

Peacemaker: If you have **DAMAGED** inflicted by another character in the scene when you roll to de-escalate a conflict, double **SPEAKER** in your dice pool. If the roll still fails, take **DEMORALISED 6**.

Perceptive: Spend a **PP** or take **ENTHRALLED 6** to double your role on a roll related to alertness, intuition, sensory acuity, or overall awareness of your environment.

Poison Expert (Gear): Spend a **PP** to coat an appropriate weapon in poison, creating a **◆** asset, or to double your largest die on a roll to detect, identify, treat, or brew poison.

Position of Privilege: While in a populated settlement, spend a **PP** to create a **◆** asset who is an attendant or guide, seeing to basic needs and logistics while you're in the area.

Prayer of Knowledge: Spend a **PP** to gain a **◆** specialty you don't already possess until the end of the scene.

Prepared Caster: Double a Sphere on a roll that includes a magical asset you rolled to create in a previous scene. After the roll is resolved, either spend a **PP** or step down the asset.

Pretty Good With a Staff (Gear): When you attack with a hafted weapon, step up the smallest die in your pool. On a success, keep an extra effect die as a complication on the target related to battlefield positioning.

Primeval Sense: Spend a **PP** to create a **◆** asset related to wilderness awareness. While you have this asset, you know if there are any unnatural or otherworldly creatures within a mile of you, and can sense their general direction. If you're within a mile of a settlement, all you can sense is the settlement, and your asset is shut down.

Quell The Spirits: When dealing and negotiating with spirits take **ENTHRALLED 6** to reroll a die in your roll.

Quick Wits: Spend a **PP** or take **ENTHRALLED 6** to step up **SCHOLAR**, **SCOUNDREL**, or **SCOUT** on a roll related to reflexes, reaction time, thinking fast, or puzzling out enigmas.

Reassuring Comrade: Step up or double **SPEAKER** in your dice pool when helping others recover **DEMORALISED**. You can also spend a **PP** to step down your own or a nearby character's **trait** [Demoralised].

Reckless Gambit: When you roll dice, add a die to your pool equal to the largest stress or complication anyone has in the scene. Take a complication at **6** if the roll succeeds, or **◆** if it fails.

Reliable Memory: Spend a **PP** to reroll a dice pool focused on memory or recall that included **SCHOLAR**.

Reliable Specialty: When you fail a roll that included a specialty of **8** or larger, spend a **PP** to reroll all your dice. Afterwards, shut down this SFX until the end of the scene.

Righteous Condemnation: When you criticize someone for improper, cruel, or unfaithful actions, you may spend a **PP** to step down your **DEMORALISED**.

Rods, Staves, & Wands (Gear): When your roll using magic to inflict stress or a complication includes an asset that is a rod, staff, or wand, add **6** and step up your effect die.

Rote Memorization: When your roll includes an asset representing a rote, add **6** and step up your effect die.

Seasoned Sailor: When you roll to swim, to create an asset related to your career at sea, or to inflict a complication or stress on a sea creature, add **6** and step up your effect die.

Sharpened Senses: When you take a complication related to stealth, deception, or illusion, you can immediately spend a **PP** to step down that complication.

Skill Focus: When your pool includes a specialty, you can replace two dice of equal size with one die one step larger.

Storied History: When interacting with spirits spend a **PP** to introduce a details about the entity you're interacting with, whether it be past dealings, past connections, forgotten oath, etc represented by a **8** asset.

Stormshroud: When using weather (natural or summoned) to hide your presence or that of your allies, step up your effect die.

Striking Appearance: Spend a **PP** or take **DEMORALISED 6** to step up **SPEAKER** on a roll leveraging either your physical beauty or distinctive unattractiveness.

Student of Necromancy: Take **DRAINED 6** to step up **DEATH** when rolling to create or affect undead. If your roll succeeds, step up your effect die.

Sudden Yet Inevitable: When someone betrays you or deceives you, or you betray or deceive someone, spend a **PP** to create a **8** asset related to having planned for it.

Take the Heat: When an ally fails a roll to avoid **DEMORALISED**, or a complication, spend a **PP** to let them reroll all their dice. If the roll still fails, take an [Exposed **6**] complication to step down the stress or complication the ally takes.

Touché: When you acknowledge an opponent's success against you, step down the complication their roll inflicts and take **DEMORALISED 6**.

Tough: When you would take **DAMAGED**, spend a **PP** to step down the stress you take. If this steps the stress down below **6**, you take no stress at all.

Trust Me, I'm an Engineer: When using magick spend a **PP** to turn a vulgar effect into a coincidental one if you are being observed by uneducated Sleepers, then shut down this SFX. Activate an opportunity to recover.

Two-Weapon Defence (Gear): When a foe within reach rolls to inflict stress on you while you are wielding a melee weapon in each hand, spend a **PP** to create a **8** asset related to your defence.

Undaunted Determination: Step up or double **SCOUT** for one roll. If the roll fails, take **DRAINED** stress equal to the largest die in your pool.

Unobtrusive: Spend a **PP** to double your distinction on a roll while you are pretending to be a mundane animal.

Versatile Grip (Gear): When you roll to use a weapon that can be wielded one-handed or two-handed, if you wield it with two hands, you can double your attribute. If you fail, step up the stress you take from failing.

Vicious Contempt: When you roll to inflict **DEMORALISED** with mockery or contempt, add **6** and step up your effect die.

Vigilant Eye: Spend a **PP** to double **SCOUT** in a pool related to following a trail, aiming at a distant target, or spotting something far off.

Vigilantism: When you roll to inflict a complication or stress on someone you caught committing a serious crime, or whom you know to be part of criminal organization or unlawful conspiracy, add **6** and step up your effect die.

Vulgar Display of Power: When you roll to use in a particularly flashy or impossible way, grow Paradox to double and step up your effect die.

War Magic: When you succeed on a roll to inflict **DAMAGED** using a magical asset, keep a second effect die as a complication or another form of stress against the same foe.

Watch the World Burn: Step up the largest doom die, then add a die of equal size to your pool and step up your effect die. Succeed or fail, you take **ENTHRALLED 6**.

We Need More Funding: Consume an asset representing wealth improving the material conditions of your experiments or making relevant persons more pliable to double a die when performing a ritual.

What's the Worst That Can Happen: When you roll to create an asset for a desperate or dubious plan of action, explain to another character what the worst-case failure scenario looks like to step up your largest die and step up your effect die. Add a die to the peril pool equal to your effect die.

Wicked Feint: When you succeed on a roll to inflict **ENTHRALLED**, keep a second effect die as **DAMAGED** against the same foe.

Wild Wisdom: Spend a **PP** to reveal information about a wild landscape or creature and create a related a **6** asset.

Appendix C: Example Milestones

These are milestones you can use for characters during play, or as examples to help you create your own.

Aggressive

- ☞ **1 XP** when you are the one who starts a conflict or you take charge in the midst of one.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you teach an ally to make them more formidable in the kinds of conflicts you consider your expertise.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you take over leadership of your group in a time of danger or leave your current group to join a more aggressive one.

Bad Influence

- ☞ **1 XP** when you try to convince an ally to commit or cover up an unlawful or antisocial act.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you try to convince someone to accept their own past misdeeds, true nature, or current infamy.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you decide to change your ways for good, or when you commit a transgression too egregious for your allies to forgive.

Cipher

- ☞ **1 XP** when you decline to reveal information about yourself but still betray stray details or clues.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you explain your motivation for an unexpected choice or action.

- ☞ **10 XP** when you finally reveal major details about your identity, background, or motivations in the face of a challenge with at least one **12** trait, hoping the revealed knowledge will help overcome it.

Comrade

- ☞ **1 XP** when you create an asset for a friend or ally who doesn't already have an asset from you.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you expose yourself to danger as part of a roll to create an asset to help someone or a roll to recover a stress or complication for an ally or STC.
- ☞ **10 XP** when an asset you earned XP for helps defeat a challenge with at least one **12** trait, or when you abandon comrades in a moment of need to pursue your own agenda.

Disruptor

- ☞ **1 XP** when you publicly disrespect an authority figure.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you undermine or outright attack an authority figure or one of their representatives.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you destroy the credibility or power of an authority figure who has at least one **12** trait or when you accept their authority.

Empathetic

- ☞ **1 XP** when you create an asset for an ally without them having to ask.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you succeed on a roll to create an asset for an ally in a situation where it is dangerous to do so.

- ☞ **10 XP** when an asset you earned XP for helps defeat a challenge that had at least one **12** trait, or when failing against such a challenge prompts you to leave the group and learn how to be practical or self-reliant.

Goal-Driven

- ☞ **1 XP** when you act to either affirm or conceal your commitment to a goal.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you recruit a new ally in pursuit of a goal or you betray or abandon allies to attain that goal.
- ☞ **10 XP** when defeating a challenge with at least one trait at **12** moves you closer to fulfilling a drive-related goal, or when you finally abandon a goal you've sacrificed to pursue.

Glory Hound

- ☞ **1 XP** when you take out an opponent after you dramatically declared them your target.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you attempt a reckless but glorious deed, or when you abstain from such a deed out of caution.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you assume leadership responsibilities due to your impressive deeds, or stand alone against a foe with at least one **12** trait.

Hiding In The Shadows

- ☞ **1 XP** when you take action to stay out of the spotlight.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you leave the shadows to accomplish something important.

- ☞ **10 XP** when you step into the spotlight in front of a large group in order to accomplish something important, or when you try to leave your group to survive alone.

Intuitive

- ☞ **1 XP** when you share insights based on looking at the big picture or create an asset based on perceiving deeper connections.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you succeed on a roll to create an asset based on spontaneously changing plans in the moment or doing something surprising.
- ☞ **10 XP** when an asset you earned XP for helps defeat a challenge with at least one **12** trait, or when failing against such a challenge prompts you to ask for guidance on how to be more logical or methodical.

Levelling Up

- ☞ **1 XP** when you earn a **PP** from an SFX or Limit (such as Hinder).
- ☞ **3 XP** when you help someone else recover from stress or you succeed on a roll to create an asset for an ally.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you recover from stress of **12** or larger, or when an asset you created for someone else helps defeat a challenge that has at least one trait at **12**.

Lone Wolf

- ☞ **1 XP** when you leave your allies to face a dangerous or hated enemy, or when you create an asset that requires taking time alone.

- ☞ **3 XP** when your actions prompt criticism or dismay in your allies, or when you issue a threat that risks alienating an ally.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you finally take out someone you've been hunting on your own that has at least one **12** trait, or when you give up your chance at doing so to achieve something greater.

Looking For Redemption

- ☞ **1 XP** when you point out someone else's wrongdoing or express regret for your own.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you refuse to grant leniency, or when you choose not to punish a wrongdoer.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you announce that you feel you have finally paid for your crimes, or when you announce your final acceptance of the fact that you never will.

Loose Cannon

- ☞ **1 XP** when you take reckless action without consulting anyone else.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you dismiss or diminish the fallout of your own actions.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you risk your life without calculation or planning and the risk either succeeds in bettering the lives of many or costs you deeply (or both).

Mending Fences

- ☞ **1 XP** when a long-time friend, family member, or loved one rejects you in some way, or when you try to get them to let you back into their life.

- ☞ **3 XP** when you try to get closer to someone you care about by taking on a new role or obligation.

- ☞ **10 XP** when you are stressed out while trying to protect or be closer to the person you care about, or when you destroy any progress you've made by stressing them out.

Mercenary

- ☞ **1 XP** when you seek payment.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you act callously to benefit yourself or when you receive payment for services rendered.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you betray a friend or ally for a big payout, or when you agree to do so but then refuse at the last moment.

Methodical

- ☞ **1 XP** when you create an asset based on planning ahead or attention to detail.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you succeed on a roll to create an asset based on noticing a flaw or using deductive reasoning.
- ☞ **10 XP** when an asset you earned XP for helps defeat a challenge that had at least one **12** trait, or when failing against such a challenge prompts you to follow the example of someone who is more flexible, intuitive, or spontaneous.

Natural Leader

- ☞ **1 XP** when you give orders to allies (whether or not they listen).
- ☞ **3 XP** when you create an asset based on working together or talking people into things.

- ☞ **10 XP** when your group officially recognizes you as their leader, when a rival claims a leadership role you believe should've been yours, or when you announce your realization that you're not the leader your group needs.

Obscure Knowledge

- ☞ **1 XP** when you share an insight based on your knowledge of academic subjects or niche trivia.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you express an embarrassing amount of excitement over encountering a thing or person you've learned a lot about.
- ☞ **10 XP** when your obscure knowledge saves a teammate from disaster, or when you quit the team because your contributions aren't appreciated.

Ongoing Drama

- ☞ **1 XP** when you could end a conflict by revealing a secret, but choose not to, or when your deeply held belief causes conflict with another PC.
- ☞ **3 XP** when your refusal to act against your belief or reveal a secret causes your group problems or conflict.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you reveal one of your secrets publicly, or when your belief or unrevealed secret causes you or another PC to be taken out.

Proving Yourself

- ☞ **1 XP** when you talk to a more experienced ally about your insecurities or about the difficult challenges you've already overcome.

- ☞ **3 XP** when a more experienced ally grants you an asset, or when you turn down a more experienced ally's offer of help.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you take an instrumental role in your group's defeat of a much more powerful enemy, or when you are stressed out while acting recklessly to try to defeat such an enemy.

Religious Believer

- ☞ **1 XP** when you take action in concordance with the dictates of your faith.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you refuse a temptation to transgress the rules of your faith.
- ☞ **10 XP** when the pursuit of your faith prompts you to confront a challenge with at least one **12** trait, or you refuse the challenge and abandon such a pursuit.

Schemer

- ☞ **1 XP** when you keep or reveal a secret.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you first use an asset you created before the current scene.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you complete a complicated plan to accomplish a great deed, or abandon the plan in favour of improvisation.

Seeking Justice

- ☞ **1 XP** when you declare a crime has been committed or pledge to help someone find justice.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you declare you are taking charge of an investigation or successfully track down a wrong-doer.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you leave behind a larger duty to focus on your current obligations, or vice-versa.

Unworthy?

- ☞ **1 XP** when you or an ally vocally question whether you belong in a group.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you dramatically succeed or fail in a situation where your allies depend on you, or when you inflict a non-injurious complication or stress on an ally who doubts you.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you are faced with the decision: step up and decide that you are worthy to be a part of the group, or leave the group because you believe you're unworthy.

Valiant

- ☞ **1 XP** when you declare that your actions forward your cause.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you create an asset representing dedication to your cause, either for yourself or others.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you abandon your grand cause to focus on more immediate needs

Wholesome

- ☞ **1 XP** when you promise to help someone or you unexpectedly aid someone who thought all hope was lost.
- ☞ **3 XP** when you take **◆** or greater stress trying to fulfil your promise to help someone.
- ☞ **10 XP** when you confront a challenge with at least one **12** trait as part of fulfilling a promise, or when you inform someone that your attempt to help them has proven too difficult for you.

We are mages, people with the power to change the world.

Reality is ours to command and bend.

Not all of us know what to do with our powers.
Even fewer can ever realise the extent of our might.

Those that do are Heroes, Gods, Monsters and Tyrants.

In our world blessed few Awaken. Add even fewer do so without
consequences and in peace.

And so reality is up for grabs. Where do you stand?

And will you Fall... or Ascend?

PRIMED BY CORTEX

MAGE

THE ASCENSION