

MORGAN COLLINS PRESENTS

# *Lines in the Sand*



BY INVITATION ONLY

# So It Begins

For an Amberite of royal blood, Amber was never a city on a hill as much as circles in the sand.

The children of Oberon drew patterns in the beaches, chalked upon them in the gardens and their instruction papers. Before memory could fully serve its collective masters, a burden of destiny boiled in their blood. A destiny that would cause such blood to boil over.

As they grew into formative years, the city in the sky became a playground. Rebma a dark and magical place that washed away a sibling who wasn't too careful. The instructors took more understanding and less forgiveness from the details. Art became power. Appearance became power.

For some, if not all, the life of a child of Oberon was to learn the meaning of power, and where it resided. Even as children they understood enemies were closer more often than not, and that the tide of disruption which led to their new kingdom of Amber generated no small amount of ill will.

But, let's face it - children will be children.

The children of Oberon studied, and understood the worries of a world away from their own were held back by forces beyond their control. They would come into privilege and potency and responsibility and they would rule alongside their father and civilize the savagery of all that surrounded Amber.

The beginnings of the wonders of true understanding, true power, true danger, true love, true meaning. These have all become to come to the cusp of children, a man who leaves no mothers behind, and all of the rumors of such. Oberon rules, in all ways. He understood. He taught. The promise of the pattern and all that it held were in some ways understood, and in other ways something his children could not begin to comprehend.

Amid the rigor and the laughter and the danger was ritual - a ritual upon all others being the evening dinner. Like the sun, it was something to schedule by, around, for - a grand table of heavy, miserable dark woods marked with errant knives and misled wills. Perhaps the one time where Oberon would allow the granite edge of being king to wear down to Father. Where informal lessons imparted true understanding

and where the closest hope to a family the royals could have. They were not old enough to truly understand what an absent father could do, when their mothers were only remembered by portraits and statues in the great hall. Memories of a gone age only recent years ago.

That dinner led to debate, arguments, adoration and gifts. The competition between the royals themselves in their studies and the nobility they were sometimes interspersed with gone - the threats of an endless ocean if one swam too far eroded away, scolding for broken legs on a cliff too steep for scaling. For that dinner, Oberon was Father, and circles in the sand surrounded a city on a hill.

There were enemies, but there was a father who embodied invulnerability. There were opponents not of blood, but the blood stood above all else. There was Amber, but there was the promise of shadows.

Every evening, Oberon would sit down for dinner with his children, his legacy, and be Father instead of king.

One evening, Oberon did not arrive for Dinner.

## *Quick and Dirty Timeline*

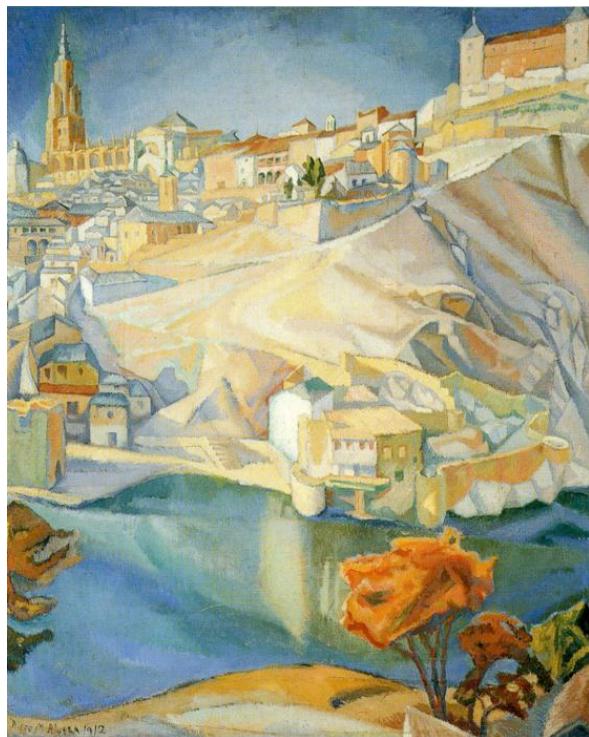
**The Time Before** - Before the creation of Amber and the drawing of the pattern. The very creation of the pattern has made memory of this time impossible to most, and unreliable to the rest.

**The Founding** - The moment of the Pattern's creation, when all of reality changed. For much of it, the change was unnoticeable for what was now retroactively had always been. But the past was not paved over so easily as that.

**The Golden War** - Oberon's war of conquest and unification where he established Amber's domain over shadow and cemented the alliance of the Great Houses. Its exact duration depends on where you stand, but was at least a century.

**The Great Peace** - the past 50 years since Oberon has declared victory and focused on stabilizing his realm.

# The Nature of Amber



## *Amber is not what it will be.*

Arden is still wildly untamed, and travel from that forest into the shadows is a wildly dangerous feat. Even in the brightest of the day the skies are almost dark as the ocean and clouded, remnants of the tools of creation. Rebma sits on the bottom of an unrelenting ocean, a mirror kingdom that reflects upon Amber as much as Amber reflects upon her. Tir is a fortress of the night, though she seems stronger and stronger as Amber solidifies - during a full moon, people can hear the sounds of the dream city from the land and ocean below.

## *Kolvir's stone never cools.*

The joke among the people, settlers from the shadows, is that the force of building the city still echoes within the mountain. The city spreads from the palace, the foundations still showing along the edges of cliffs. Older buildings are torn, small churches making way for half-constructed cathedrals. The grand staircase has only recently been completed.

## *Amber is never at peace.*

The power of magic, shadow and everything in between echos in every songbird's note and in every dream, and out of reach to all but most dedicated or the most mad.

## *Amber never sleeps.*

Caravans travel to supply the city, from the shadow paths laid by Oberon and lost older siblings. The dangers of the shadow seas are still too great for all but the most daring, lucky, or criminal ships to regularly try passage for a means other than Arden. The houses of Amber and their nobility are truly no more than extended branches of kingdoms far away - an outpost at the center of reality to set expectations and communications, to coordinate the strength of the military that Oberon wrought from nothing and the creatures of Order that stalk the shadows in the name of the Unicorn.

## *Amber is not alone.*

Every child in Amber has heard echoes in their mind or in their thoughts. To be a child of Oberon can be to be talked to by the very earth under foot. The distant voices of those long gone, the voices of those who might never have been or could some day be. Dreams of melting faces and darkness filled with lightning and burning red eyes. The soothing voices of those gone, lost. For each child, it is different. But each child knows of it, and can see it in others, though it is not always talked about.

# The Golden War and the Houses of the Golden Circle

The founding of Amber displaced many ancient powers that warred unendingly in the Chaos of reality. No one was aware before the creation of Amber what the nomad Oberon and the mad magician Dworkin intended - no armies massed to stop the men and the Unicorn that guided them.

Chaos was a primordial force, a raw, unending engine of creation and destruction. From this, forces of reality strong enough to do so suspended themselves into thought, coherent intelligence. They pooled upon islands of raw reality, shapes of coal in which to turn into creations of their own desires. Some of these intelligences grouped together, pooling their resources and their experiences to structure themselves. Others were consumed, to be gathered and assimilated into greater parts of a whole, like a serpent coiled in the darkness. These beings, these thoughts, centered around objects in the Chaos, some as large as continents, some as small as a series of unending blocks.

The day that the pattern was created, structureless thoughts woke up one day to find themselves in the shape of man and woman, tree and fruit. Their islands of creation and destruction were suddenly static, alien, and unchanging.

This reflected in different ways - Ygg, the giant tree at the center of reality, was frozen into a nation of intelligences that had memories, pasts, and histories that had not existed before the creation of Amber. The collective phantasms that had warred endlessly, seeking to tear reality apart over and over again, found themselves in stasis as beings they had not seen before, at the edge of a sprawling abyss that spilled monsters without relief. Beings that had sought discourse and understanding amongst themselves found their new bodies inhabiting a series of nation states with a history that they could remember, but not fully understand.

Their powers, originating from islands of reality in the islands of Chaos, had survived, and it was learned how to harness such power in order to craft the shadows, bend them. It was slow, agonizing, tedious work, but it could be done. They grew to begin to push

at the edges of shadow, and see that in some small ways it could still be adjusted to their will, reframed as if from a lens if not created from scratch. The newly formed men and women of the shadows that later would be known as the Golden Circle crafted what was around them, sought to establish strength as dangers from the shadows, and each other, became apparent.

Eight coherent or otherwise aligned intelligences grew to rule the reality that had spawned from the day that the pattern was created, though none knew that was the catalyst of creation. Immeasurable time went on with these beings adapting, but not knowing. They extended their own empires throughout the shadows, crafting outlines and memories of what had been before into the shadows that they inhabited.

It was only when Oberon came as a conqueror of these shadows that they began to understand the catalyst of the change.

No power stood for long against the shadow craft that the royal family of the kingdom of Amber controlled - their mastery of the new reality was absolute. Countless legions were laid to waste by the ancient powers, and countless more overwhelmed. It did not matter - Amber's force was insurmountable. During the end, assassinations were outright attempted, and the royal family broke any who challenged their might - the pattern burned in them as much as in the shadows.

That war of conquest occurred fifty years ago. Now, the second set of Oberon's family is growing into age - the time when they will take to the pattern, utilize their training and bloodright, and turn Amber's founding into a truly golden age.



## *The Houses of the Golden Circle*

### *Chantris - The Grinning Blade*

House Chantris is an army of soldiers who sided with Oberon in the wake of the great change because of the belief that Amber was a magnificently losing side. They grew to become the bulwark against the great Abyss where Amber's dominion fades and true shadow begins.

### *Feldane - The Endless Voice*

Feldane is a house of scholars and diplomats that grew into existence after the change. A headpiece of a coalition of lesser powers, its greatness and power is hamstrung by its own nature of debate. Their shadow holdings are hard to fathom, and most trade, shadow paths and traffic pass through their borders.

### *Karm - The Overflowing Hand*

Karm's power is a legacy of the time before. Summoners and binders, their power is not in their numbers or holdings, but their knowledge and magic. They would have stood against Oberon had they not been betrayed, and his war became their tool for revenge. Since then, they've been a precarious ally, content to keep themselves, indifferent to their reputation of mystery and suspicion.

## *Mandrake - The Tree of Life*

There's no real way to say what Yggdrassil, the world tree, meant in the time before the change. Legends that remain say that worlds hung from its branches - whether that's true or not, it was clearly a place of power, and Mandrake were its keepers. Today, the tree still lives, full of power and mystery, and Mandrake taps that power for unending wood and potent healing magics. Their alliance to Amber is strong and deep, but always shadowed by the simple truth that Mandrake serves Ygg first and Amber second.

## *The Lost Houses*

They're lost.

**Chanicut** - The disgorging darkness

**Helgram** - The self-devouring serpent

**Hendrake** - The mouth that swallows all

**Sawall** - The Center of What Never Was

## *Wives and Children*

### *Milesia of the Void*

Milesia is the first known wife of Oberon, and predates the founding of Amber (as does her death). She bore Oberon's first known sons, Osric and Finndo, whose tombs reside upon Amber, near the staircase of Tir-na Nog'th.

### *Carla of the island of Amber*

Carla was a war leader from the people who inhabited the island of Amber before the founding. She was not his wife by any formal measure, but the children of that union - the boy, Fion and his sister Fenia - were raised by both for them for a time. Carla died (some say was murdered) in the days leading up to the founding.

Fion and Fenia are both still alive, and have grown up steeped in the lore of the founding and the ways of war, and were Oberon's right and left fist over the course of the Golden War. Fion has married and has two children of his own.

### *Ran of Ygg*

Ran is a captain of Ygg's navies, and while she is not married in Amber, they are recognized as husband and wife by Mandrake tradition. There has always been speculation as to whether this has been a political arrangement (to better cement ties to Mandrake) or a simple matter of Oberons' weakness for the striking, sometimes terrifying, sea captain.

There are three children of this union, Aric, Crosby and Jordis.

### *Ophelia of Feldane*

The nature of Feldane meant that conquering it by force would make it useless as an ally, so Oberon turned to Diplomacy, and took a wife of Feldane to cement the house's alliance. Ophelia is in every way a proper queen, having been born and raised in the eternal scrum of Feldane politics. She is kind and gracious, but also adamant in her perspective that she is the only legitimate wife of Oberon, and that this legitimacy passes to her children.

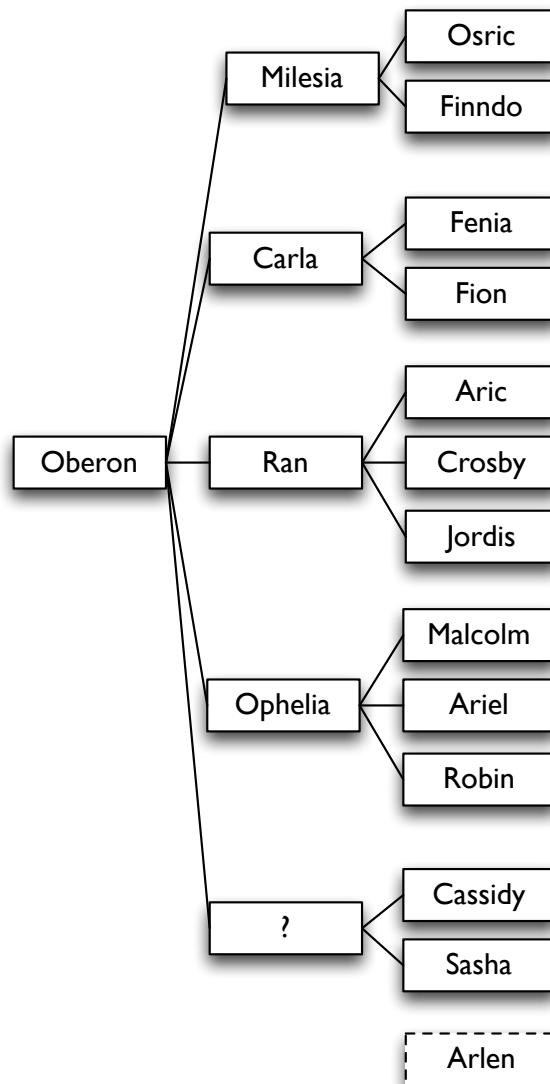
She has also given birth to three children, Malcolm, Ariel and Robin.

### *The Bastards*

Oberon sired two known bastards, Cassidy and Sasha, during the war. It's assumed there were others, but these are the ones he has returned to court. They are not formally recognized, but they have been given title and treatment in accordance with their bloodline.

### *The Hostage*

Arlen is technically Oberon's ward, and he is treated with honor befitting a prince. But it is also known that he is kept to guarantee good behavior on the part of one of Oberon's less reliable allies.



# Power

## *The Nature of Power*

Power has a place in the universe of Amber that exceeds symbolism. Beings of fancy and wonder, the nobles of the Golden Circle, even the children of Amber are draw power from something external to themselves, in addition to innate promise and potential. The Supernatural will always be tied to a fundamental nature of reality.

Power can be broken down into three core rules:

**Something you embody:** This is the most innate power that one can have. An Amberite is, by blood, stronger, faster, and more resilient than those around them. They do not age to death, they do not die of disease. If an injury does not outright kill them, they will recover fully from it. The remnants of the Chaos before Amber drew strength from the lack of any permanence in themselves or the world around them. The noble houses each embody a law of nature that has existed since before their blood finished forming.

**Something you control:** A tradition across the boundaries of reality, even the weakest body can find influence to strengthen their capabilities. The Pattern is the apex of power, controlled by the blood of Amber - yet there are other sources out there, more than could be comprehended in the infinite nature of shadow. Supremacy does not weaken the ability or the capability of the enemy.

**Something you create:** Trumps, pattern items, legacies of the old world. Power can be imbued, constructed, and leveraged to impact the world and those who inhabit it. This sort of power is almost always the most dangerous as well, as it is the only one that can easily be taken away and used in manners not originally conceived or intended.

## *The Nature of Chaos*

Chaos is a cancer.

Chaos still echoes and ebbs through reality, impacting all things on some level. It is why mortality exists in the people of the shadow world. It is why the shadows are not static, like Amber herself.

It affects the the people of Amber in some ways subtle, some not so. Wolfmen roam Arden, and there have been cases of assassins who have learned to master the shape of their bodies, turning from boy to beast in mere seconds.

People have grown mad, claiming vortexes and dark nothingness consuming loved ones, of assailants shrinking into nothingness and a dark outline collapsing in flame.

For the children of Amber, Chaos iis at best an incoherent dream that seeks to wake up. Chaos has to be resisted, or its changes will begin to push and envelop. Amber may have wiped Chaos away, but the memory remains.

Chaos is personal, and it whispers to you.

# Chargen Notes

## *Wives and Children*

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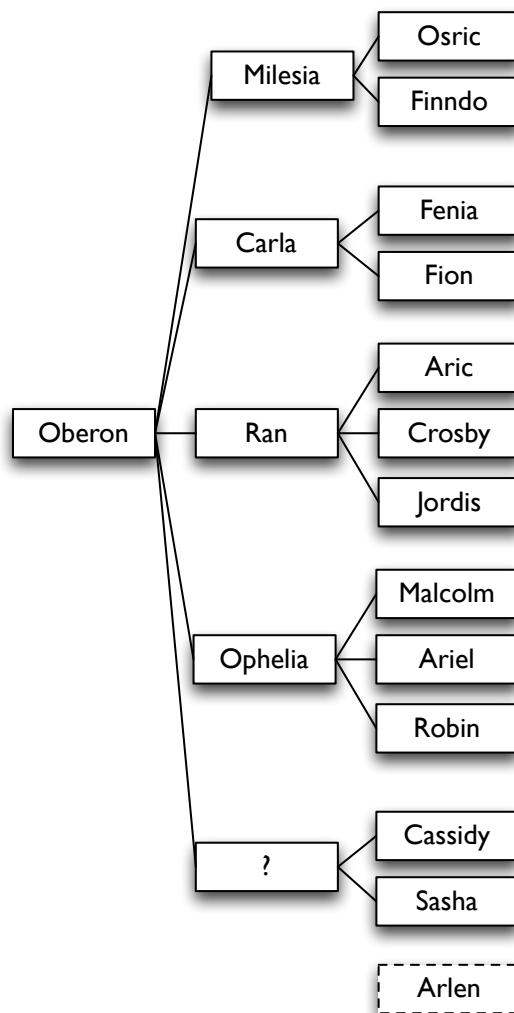
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## *These things may be true*

### *Fenia*

- ◆ Fenia is Fion's twin. Older by eight minutes, something Fenia has been known to playfully hold over her brother's head.
- ◆ It was Fenia who was responsible for the most decisive victory of the Golden War.
- ◆ Fenia still has close ties to the handmaids of her youth, many of whom occupy positions of note.
- ◆ Fenia's reflection knows her best.

### *Fion*

- ◆ Fenia was the right-fist of Oberon; Fion was the left.
- ◆ Fion once bet he could drink an entire keg of Saungale red in a night. His loss was magnificent.
- ◆ Fion always knows where his children are, particularly when he doesn't want to.

### *Aric*

- ◆ Aric got no easy ride in his mother's navies. He had to work his way up from cabin boy. And work his way up he did.
- ◆ Aric returned to Amber once with all of his crew missing. Only Ran, and perhaps Oberon, know what happened on that fateful voyage.
- ◆ Aric knows better than to tie knots upon the kingstone
- ◆ Aric could not leave, even if he wanted to.

### *Crosby*

- ◆ Crosby sees Arden as related to Ygg -- perhaps as its upper branches, so to speak -- and spends much time there.
- ◆ Crosby has been rumored by those traveling through Arden into the golden circle to guard the virtuous, in the form of a raven or bull. Shrines to seek Crosby's blessing are scattered across the trails, for those needing luck and wanting to give up offering.
- ◆ Crosby killed a man in Ronceville and doesn't want to talk about it.
- ◆ Crosby sometimes forgets the way home.

### *Jordis*

- ◆ Jordis has no head for sailing, but is full inheritor to Ran's terrifying/striking leadership side. The cult of personality is strong in this one. Too strong?
- ◆ Jordis once drew blood in a duel with a Chantris over an affair with said Chantris' wife. Chantris and Jordis do not get along.
- ◆ Jordis still owes the Dragon King money.
- ◆ Jordis will not think twice.

### *Malcolm*

- ◆ Malcolm is House Feldane's favorite son. Much machinery is in place to ensure this, even when his behavior is ... less than exemplary.
- ◆ Malcom once lost a finger during a celebration of Amber's victory in the golden war.
- ◆ Malcolm may have a child, but neither he nor the mother is certain.
- ◆ Malcolm once mocked the monster in his wardrobe.

### *Ariel*

- ◆ Ariel was married off to cement an alliance. The union is distant at best. This suits all parties involved.
- ◆ Ariel can hear the ghosts in Tir any night the city materializes.
- ◆ Ariel still has half the teeth of a rude admiral. In a box.
- ◆ Ariel can be completely silent.

### *Robin*

- ◆ Robin has learned by Ariel's example, and is thoroughly unmarriagable, by design. House Feldane has been quick to adapt to the unique opportunities this presents.
- ◆ Robin is the best chess player in the family. This infuriates Fenia to no end, though the open secret is that Fenia is absolutely terrible at the game.
- ◆ Robin has no idea how a mule made it into the bell tower of Kitterly's School For Wayward Youth.
- ◆ Robin denies everything, unless the truth's implausible.

### *Cassidy*

- ◆ Outwardly, Cassidy is the least dangerous of Oberon's get. Outwardly. Cassidy is a great student of secrets.
- ◆ Cassidy once accidentally set fire to the western wing of the palace just as it was going under construction.
- ◆ Cassidy's mother presses their good fortune hard.
- ◆ Cassidy can value only a handful of things.

### *Sasha*

- ◆ Sasha is said to have Karm blood. That's the rumor. What's more factual but less known is the secret police force that reports directly to Sasha. But do they work for Karm's ends, or the Crown's?
- ◆ Sasha has been forbidden by Oberon from walking the pattern until she proves herself ready for the responsibility.
- ◆ Sasha was covered in soot and burns the morning after Squatter's Row went up in flames, but has not spoken of it.
- ◆ Sasha enjoys talking about the weather.

### *Arlen*

- ◆ Arlen has a lock of hair from each other prince and princess, pressed in a green leather book
- ◆ Arlen collects keys.

# Chargen

## Skills

Bump or Drop a Skill - You get 4 bumps and 1 drop, and you can pick them up front or 1 per phase. the rules are as follows:

- ◆ All skills start with a +3 bonus (because Amberites are badass). A bump increases that to +6. A double bump increases it to +9. A Drop drops it to +0.
- ◆ A skill may not be bumped and dropped
- ◆ Only one skill may be double bumped.

### Skill List

- ▶ Athlete
- ▶ Diplomat
- ▶ Observer
- ▶ Leader
- ▶ Mystic
- ▶ Scholar
- ▶ Soldier
- ▶ Thief
- ▶ Traveller

**Athlete** covers most physical activities like running, jumping and climbing. Hopefully it's pretty straightforward. If no other physical role is appropriate to a task, use athlete.

**Diplomat** covers most social interaction, from making friends to lying to impressing the opposite sex. It does NOT cover the perception of the same (that's under this auspices of Observer).

**Observers** keep track of what's going on. They rely on keen eyes, keen ears and the sharp intellect to separate the wheat from the chafe.

**Leader** covers all the interactions with people that do not depend on them liking you, but on you following anyway. This is the skill for large scale

social interactions, be they leading a group or playing politics.

A good leader understands how power structures work, can give good orders and find loopholes in those he receives. He understands the law and perhaps most important to an agent, he understands paperwork. He knows how to motivate and inspire when needed.

**Mystics** have same familiarity with magic, though this doesn't have to mean the character is a magi. This measures a general comfort level with magical events and tools, and it's used for operating magical equipment (such as trump). *Mystic is, by itself, a less useful role than any other, but it has the most potent benefits, since it is the role used for most powers.*

**Scholars** know things. Simple as that. While there are many situations where the application of this trait is obvious, this also has the advantage of being the fallback trait to roll when no other trait seems appropriate. Scholar can be used to make declarations as appropriate, or to allow the agent to get answers without research.

**Soldier** covers violence of any stripe - guns, fists, sharp sticks and so on. It's pretty simple

**Thief** covers activities of stealth, deception and (of course) theft.

**Traveller** measure how far and while the character has traveled in shadow. It covers both capability with shadow travel (such as with pattern) and also the character's breadth of experience in shadow.

## *Benefits*

### *Athlete*

*Mobility* - The character can do crazy parkour/Jackie Chan type stuff, allowing them to move full tilt in environments a normal person would have to slow down for.

*Brute* (Requires Athletics++) - The character is strong as hell and can perform a burst of strength to do things like break ropes or bust down a door.

### *Diplomat*

*Subtle Inquiry* - You can tell the GM you want the answer to a specific question before you enter conversation with an NPC. Provided you converse with them for a reasonable time, you subtly steer the conversation in such a way that you get the answer you'd have gotten if you'd asked.

*Plant Seed* - After a few minutes of conversation, you can plant an idea in someone through subtle language and cues. This isn't mind control or hypnotism, it just plants an idea the way that a song gets stuck in your head. It's not a big thing, but it can be a good way to help someone have a brilliant idea.

*Gambler* - In any game of chance where there are other players, the character may roll Diplomat rather than luck (which is a 0).

*Dangerous Grace* - In any social situation where there are rules of behavior, you can force someone into a Faux Pas, or prevent such a faux pas from someone (including yourself).

### *Observer*

*Cold Read* - Upon entering a scene, the observer may ask one of the following questions and get a good faith answer:

- ▶ Who is the most dangerous person in the room?
- ▶ Who is the most important person in the room?

- ▶ Who is watching me?
- ▶ Where is the fastest exit?

*Faces Are an Open Book* - Any time they make a roll against another person regarding deception (such as whether or not someone is lying) the player will be told what the opposition rolled after the fact.

*Elementary* - When the character finds a piece of information, he may ask for one additional piece of information he can extrapolate from it (such as the weight of the person who left footprints) over and above what his roll may merit.

A World Class Observer may choose two elite benefits, or he may choose a single benefit (Cold Read or Elementary) and ask two questions.

### *Leader*

*A Little Bit of Law* - The leader is actually a lawyer, and has the education and paperwork to prove it, and is familiar enough with international law to fake it in any country where he can speak the language. The exact benefits of this vary from country to country, but even in those with few protections for lawyers, knowledge of the law can be handy.

*SOP* - The leader knows the rules and regulations of any organization large enough to have rules. That means he can identify them on sight and make declarations regarding how they are supposed to respond in specific situations. For example "Ok, those are Hercule Security guards - that means 4 man teams, 1/2 hour patrol intervals and a mandatory lunch break of not less than 45 minutes"

*The Man* - The leader is a person of importance, if not prominence. He might own a large share of a major corporation or be royalty from someplace where that matters, but whatever the case, he moves in the circles with the movers and shakers.

## *Mystic*

*Fortune Teller* - You can make a mystic roll to try to divine the future. You can use this to try to get a vague answer from the GM or to create an aspect for the prediction which hangs around until it's used.

*Trump Artist* - You can draw the trumps. This conveys no particular facility with their use.

## *Scholar*

*Linguist* - The agent is the master of a number of different (and unspecified languages). In practice it means that the character can speak any language that comes up in play (or, if it's very exotic, can decipher and learn it quickly).

*Great Mind* - The scholar can choose some academic field. Within that field he is a published, respected figure, the sort that gives speeches and writes book. He can use one of his aspects for free when rolling scholar within that sphere, and when dealing with other scholars within the same circle he can use the Scholar in lieu of Diplomat.

*Pattern Recognition* - Given time to study the paperwork around a situation (which is to say, the kind of situation that would have paperwork to research) the character can extract one aspect associated with the situation.

## *Soldier*

*Heavy Weapons* - The agent can use larger weapons, from rocket launchers to tanks. Technological complexity is no barrier to them.

*Martial Arts* - The character's skill with unarmed combat is such that they do not grant superiority (see the notes on combat, below) when fighting hand to hand, no matter what the opponent is armed with, and they gain superiority against other unarmed opponents who are not similarly trained.

*Tactician* - The agent can use soldier in lieu of Observer when someone is trying to kill you.

## *Traveller*

*Deep Tech* - The traveller has been to worlds with very sophisticated technology, and has the knack for using new devices, tools, concepts and weapons without penalty.

*Stronghold* - The traveller has a place of their own deep enough in shadow to avoid family squabbles, where their resources and capabilities run deep.

## *Thief*

*Fast Hands* - The agent can perform feats of legerdemain while in the middle of the most distracting of circumstances, such as in the middle of a fight or chase.

*Face in a Crowd* - The thief can sneak in plain sight provided there are people for him to mingle among.