Mind's Eye Theatre™
LAWS
of
ASCENSION

Live-Action Rules for Playing Mages

MAGE
THE ASCENSION

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LAWS
of
ASCENSION

NINE KEYS TO THE UNIVERSE

Mages warred for millennia to create new vistas, build a better world or determine the future of humanity. Now their struggles focus on the most important goal of all — achieving their own destinies. Traditionalists, the keepers of spiritual ways, struggle to preserve the guttering spark of magic, while the Technocracy enfolds the world in its scientific web. Every one of these elusive visionaries has the potential to surpass ordinary human limits and Ascend to a new understanding of the cosmos. But that enlightenment comes only to those who can survive and overcome their failings.

AND ALL IN YOUR HANDS

Finally, the definitive guide to live-action Mage. Nine Traditions, nine Spheres and all of the Abilities, Attributes and storytelling ideas you can handle! Everything from the Tellurian to the Technocracy, with all the material you need to begin your own quest for Ascension.

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BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS: A MAGICAL TALE

Never one to miss the obvious, Florence perked up and said, "He's here!" She fidgeted with nervous energy, first adjusting the goggles seated atop her head, then toying with one of the many small tools on her work belt. David simply waited. He seemed to be good at that. He exuded a simple confidence by remaining completely still and unruffled.

Passersby ignored the eclectic pair. Florence resembled nothing so much as a mechanic, carrying a set of tools and gadgets, but nobody ever questioned a greasy auto mechanic who just happened to be loitering about during the lunch hour. David attracted even less attention. He was well groomed, and he lacked any unusual clothes or accoutrements. He wore a simple set of easily relaxed pants and a shirt that wouldn't stand out anywhere in the world. Waiting at the corner of the street near a pay phone, they appeared to be a couple of friends waiting for an acquaintance before lunch. Nothing at all singled out the two magicians from the rest of humanity.

Tiernan arrived from around the corner, his long hair and long coat tails drifting behind him. As was his wont, he moved casually in black slacks and a soft white shirt, wearing only a few subtle pieces of jewelry as a concession to the Celtic magic and heritage that he claimed. He stopped a couple of paces from David and Florence and crushed a slim, black cigarette under his boot. David wrinkled his nose at the odor of cloves that still clung to Tiernan and said, "You really shouldn't defile your body like that."

With a smooth glance to Florence first, Tiernan turned to David. "I didn't come here to get lectured as soon as I arrived. And tobacco's holy anyway. Ask any shaman." Tiernan's I-don't-care-what-you-think attitude, rivaled David's command of patience.

"All right, boys, let's not get into a row before we even get started," Florence soothed. Her rolling accent cut through the tension. David stood down, and Florence could see that he'd been quite tightly wound despite his patience. He

exhaled, and his muscles softened like rivers turning tame after a series of rapids. Taking his cue from Florence, Tiernan decided not to press the issue. *Those Akashics have always had short tempers and a brutal left hook*, he thought wryly. *No sense pushing his buttons just yet.*

"What's the agenda?" David asked Florence casually.

"Well, like I said before, matters have gotten quite... strange, recently. Dead rising from their graves. Ghostly lights in the church towers. Children spotting fey shapes among the trees of the park and weird email messages without senders cropping up all over the town's computer providers. You know, the usual supernatural activity. Just lots of it, all at once."

Tiernan sneered but smoothed the expression over before the others noticed. "It's nothing that any of us haven't seen before. I'm not some wet-behind-the-ears Apprentice who's awed by the sight of a faerie ring, you know. I've been doing this for—"

"We know," David cut him off quietly. "The better part of a millennium. After all, you bring it up all the time."

Tiernan glowered for a moment then said, "Fine. So we have some of the usual unusual going on. So what?"

Florence wagged her finger like a lecturing professor. "The fact that these things are happening all at once is what's so odd. And of course the fact that levels of etheric power — pardon, Quintessential energy — have spiked noticeably almost everywhere in the city, combined with that odd woman you yourself spotted at that club you frequent... it's a little too much to be simple. Something is going on."

"But the question is, what?" Tiernan murmured.

"As always," David interjected. "But we can at least think of possibilities."

"Such as?"

David shrugged. "A planetary alignment. A probability storm. A release or cancellation of a long-term enchantment. A drop in Technocratic suppression. Sunspots. Any number of things."

Tiernan re-appraised David, then nodded once. "All right. Any number of things. Your problem is twofold then. One, why should I care? And assuming I did, how would we know what to look for?"

Florence spoke up this time. She fidgeted with her goggles again as she replied, "You should care because this impacts the supernatural world that you claim to be so in touch with. Remember, if children are seeing faeries in the trees, that's something that most Verbena should find quite exciting."

Tiernan looked about ready to gag. "Because we're Gaelic-lilting faerie friends?" he sneered. "Faeries aren't all nice and pretty cartoon characters, Florence. They get as ugly as nature does. And if faeries are getting so close to children that children can see them, that doesn't excite me at all. It's disturbing."

"Of course," David said smoothly. "All the more reason for us to get involved before these matters get out of control. As much as you may like having the supernatural at your beck and call, it's too dangerous when it's just loose in the world."

"Besides, it's a chance to learn something," Florence added. "And, if you care, it's a chance to show up some other mages out there. Getting things done attracts notice. We may not be in the Order of Hermes, and we may not have to worry about their cutthroat politics, but even you must concede that the more we know and the more we take matters into our hands, the more credibility we'll gain with our fellows. You know what that means — more offers to swap information, more chances to get involved in policy, more chances to show up your rivals or just another good kick for your ego to say you've done something important. This is a fascinating opportunity any way you look at it."

Tiernan mused at David's rather blunt observation and Florence's comments, then gave a short bark of laughter. "The stick and the carrot — good cop bad cop. I see why you two work together." Florence and David glanced at one another, then David just shrugged again. "All right," Tiernan said, "Let's say I'm in."

"Good," Florence chirped. "I figure we should check out these various manifestations around the city for true signs of paranormal activity. I can track them with my etheric sensors; I'm sure you both have your own methods."

David nodded once, and Tiernan produced a length of dark red cord from his coat pocket. "Oh yes," Tiernan said, twisting the cord between his fingers. "We have our ways. I'm sure I'll stumble across something. Shall we meet back together here in, say, four hours?"
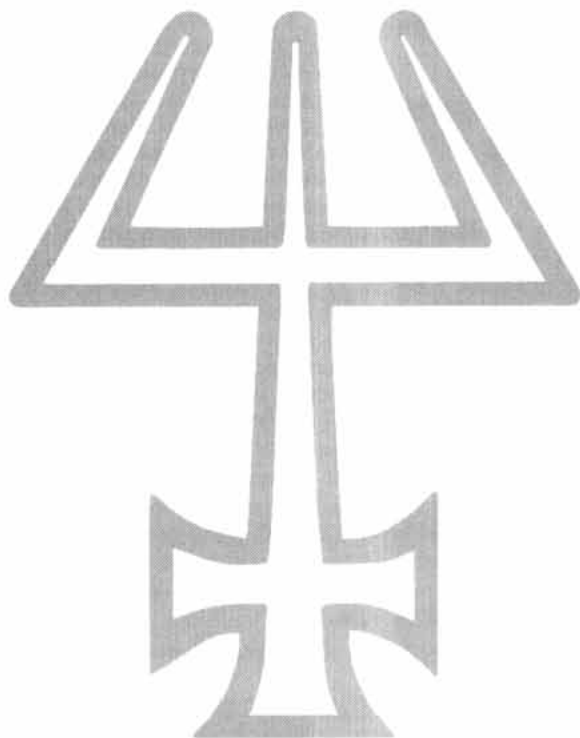
"Four hours," David agreed. "Let's get started."

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CHAPTER ONE:
INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

We have been telling each other stories since the earliest days in which cavemen acted out the tales of their hunts around their fires. We painted cave walls, pressed reeds into soft clay tablets, inked papyrus and vellum, performed plays, illuminated manuscripts, printed books, filmed movies, scripted radio and television shows and programmed computers. Now, one of the newest methods of storytelling is actually a return to the oldest form. Live-action roleplaying (LARP), which grew out of the tabletop roleplaying games of the '70s, is just the kind of participatory tale telling that we can still recognize among cultures around the globe. It relies on character and story just like the myths of our most ancient cultures, the same emphasis that led to the creation of what we call storytelling games.

WHAT IS MIND'S EYE THEATRE?

This game is probably different from any game you have played before. In many ways, live-action roleplaying is not really a game at all. **Laws of Ascension** is more concerned with stories than it is with winning, rules, game boards or dice. This game has more in common with childhood games of adventure than with card games or *Monopoly*-type board games. This book contains all the information you need in order to go forth into worlds of imagination. You create the action, and you choose your own paths. We have a name for this style of game. We call it **Mind's Eye Theatre**.

Think about sitting around a fire telling ghost stories or reading tales of King Arthur on a rainy night or just swapping fanciful ideas with a few friends. Live-action role-playing works much the same way. You and some friends gather to act out a tale, almost like you're participating in improvisational theater. You have no stage and no script, but your director (the Storyteller) gives everyone a setting and helps to define the roles. Some assistants (the Narrators) help set

the stage, work up the special effects or take on the roles of other important characters who impact the story but who aren't necessarily central to it. Each participant in the drama has a specific persona. Everyone participates by acting within the character-role they've set for themselves, and the story unfolds through their drives, ambitions, failings and flaws.

In **Mind's Eye Theatre**, you can explore unlimited worlds. In **Laws of Ascension**, you discover the fading majesty of the mages' world, where willworkers of all kinds struggle to keep magic alive in the face of a world that simply doesn't care for it anymore. The driven souls struggle to bring enlightenment to a population that clings desperately to mediocrity. The battle for reality can take place anywhere, anytime, be it in dank back alleys, posh skyscrapers, the savage wilderness, unexplored worlds or even within a mage's own mind. As the mystics say, once you step onto the path, you can't turn back. No matter where it takes you.

CHARACTERS

When you play **Laws of Ascension**, you take on the persona of a mage, a modern mystic with the power to bend reality to her will and change the world around her in amazing ways. Your character can be anyone from any walk of life. The only limits on your character concept are your imagination and a few flexible rules. You create a character, then act out the pursuit of her goals throughout the course of a story. You decide what your character does and says. You decide what risks to accept or decline.

During the game, you speak as your character: Unless you're talking to a Narrator or Storyteller, whatever you say is what your character says. Because most of what a **Mind's Eye Theatre** player perceives depends on the characters around him, players must be vivid and expressive. The characters direct the plot, but the events of the game guide and develop the characters at the same time, helping them to achieve the story's goals. As a player in a storytelling game, you have a responsibility beyond simply portraying your character. You need to consider the story as a whole and your role in making sure that other players enjoy the game. Together, you weave a tale that's entertaining for everyone.

Creating a character for **Laws of Ascension** is rather straightforward, although you should work with a Storyteller to flesh out your mage. Magicians are flexible, dynamic people, so naturally you should make sure that your mage fits into the game. You need to do only a few things to define a basic character, and once you've done so, you can play the game. If you take a little time with a Storyteller, you can define a lot of your mage's mystic potential and options in advance, which allows you more freedom during the game itself.

Your character should be more than just a series of Traits and numbers, though. Rather, she should be a living, breathing personality with a past, motives, drives, likes, dislikes — everything you want to see from a character in a movie or a novel. You also need to take the time to figure out who your character is as well as what she is before you start playing. While certain details and personality traits will come out while you're playing her, you'll want to have the basics in place already.

Characters are the heart and soul of a story. Without them, all the patient efforts of the Storyteller are for naught. Appreciate the Storyteller's efforts by following the rules and taking an active part in the game.

MAGE: THE ASCENSION

The basic premise of **Laws of Ascension** derives from the tabletop roleplaying game **Mage: The Ascension**. It is not necessary to read or play **Mage** in order to play **Laws of Ascension**, but the world of **Mage** incorporates many useful source materials that can be adapted easily for **Laws of Ascension** games.

NARRATORS

In **Laws of Ascension** and other **Mind's Eye Theatre** games, Narrators are the people who help the Storyteller present adventures. Narrators are the impartial judges who describe scenes and events that are difficult or dangerous to act out. They adjudicate rules and play the roles of antagonists occasionally. Generally, enlisting the aid of one Narrator for every five or 10 players makes for a good ratio. Narrators usually play characters of their own as well, so that they can guide the action directly instead of just trying to tinker with it from the outside. The best number of Narrators for your game usually depends how experienced your players are at live-action roleplaying.

Your **Laws of Ascension** troupe may employ Narrators who oversee certain specific areas of the game. These Narrators — such as the Paradox Judge or the Avatar Guide — serve a dedicated function, taking care of potential difficulties with one specific aspect of the rules. Chapter Six: Storytelling describes some of these specialized Narrator responsibilities in greater detail.

STORYTELLER

Every game of **Laws of Ascension** that you play must have a Storyteller to serve as the ultimate authority and final judge. The Storyteller creates the basic elements of the plot and makes sure that the story unfolds well, in addition to doing everything the Narrators do. Storytelling is a demanding job, but it is also a very rewarding one.

The Storyteller makes certain that the story has content, interesting hooks and a narrative flow. A Storyteller should not just sit back and dictate the plot, though. Characters who don't have free will are no fun to play. Instead, a Storyteller creates the framework elements of the plot, then turns players loose to see what happens.

During the game, the Storyteller must be watchful and ready to create new elements to make sure that the story works out well. He is also responsible for ensuring that all of the players have something to do and that everyone is abiding by the rules. Although performing all of these tasks simultaneously can be exhausting, the sense of accomplishment you get from creating a successful story makes the whole process worthwhile.

See Chapter Six for detailed information about the role of the Storyteller and how to set up your own games.

PROPS

Props include any item that helps define your character or the action of the story. Props often help define the tools and beliefs that give mages their power. Each magician relies on special practices and items to enact her mystic will, and you can use props to simulate many of these foci. Have fun and employ any props that you
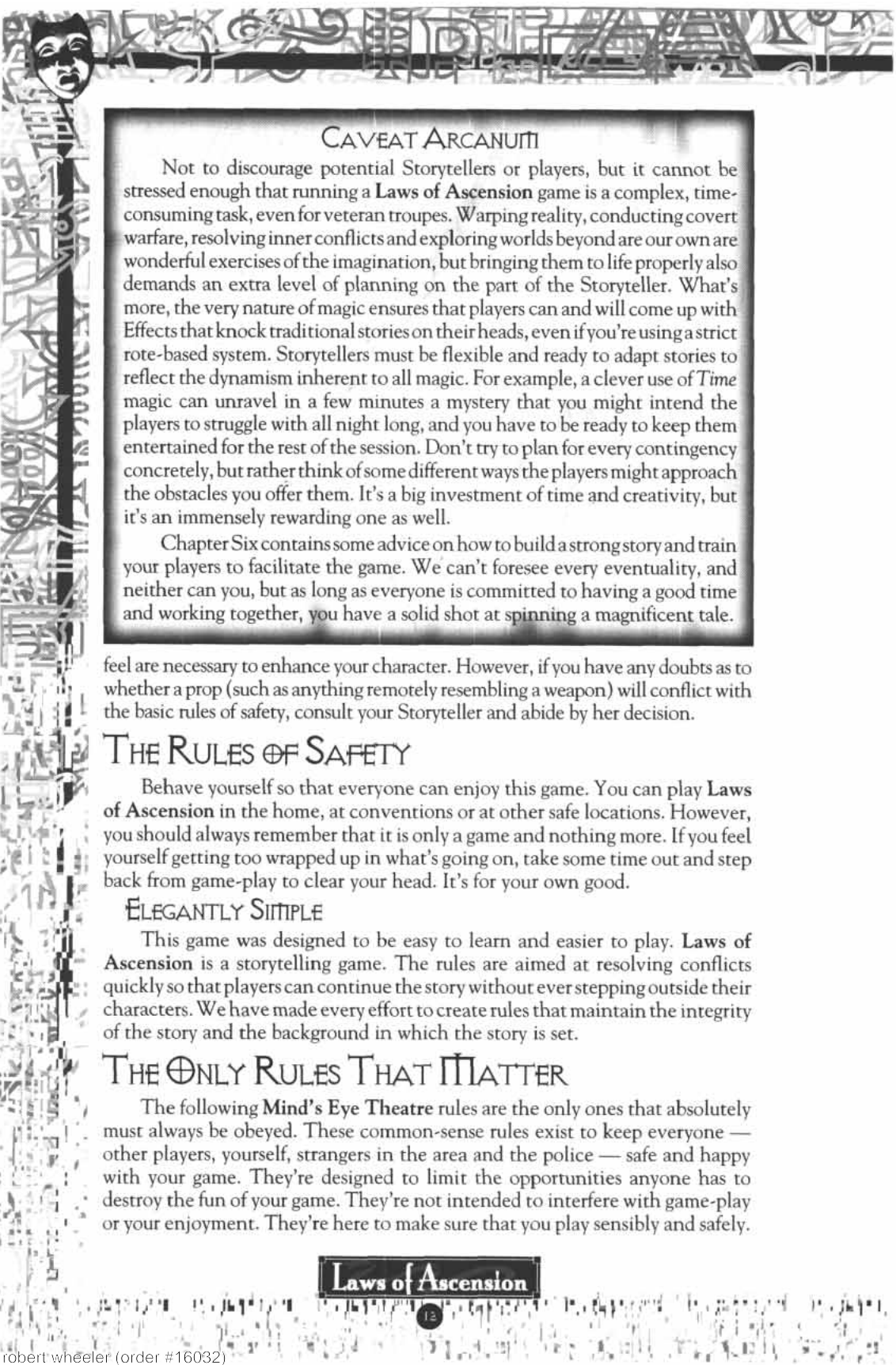
CAVEAT ARCANUM

Not to discourage potential Storytellers or players, but it cannot be stressed enough that running a **Laws of Ascension** game is a complex, time-consuming task, even for veteran troupes. Warping reality, conducting covert warfare, resolving inner conflicts and exploring worlds beyond are our own are wonderful exercises of the imagination, but bringing them to life properly also demands an extra level of planning on the part of the Storyteller. What's more, the very nature of magic ensures that players can and will come up with Effects that knock traditional stories on their heads, even if you're using a strict rote-based system. Storytellers must be flexible and ready to adapt stories to reflect the dynamism inherent to all magic. For example, a clever use of *Time* magic can unravel in a few minutes a mystery that you might intend the players to struggle with all night long, and you have to be ready to keep them entertained for the rest of the session. Don't try to plan for every contingency concretely, but rather think of some different ways the players might approach the obstacles you offer them. It's a big investment of time and creativity, but it's an immensely rewarding one as well.

Chapter Six contains some advice on how to build a strong story and train your players to facilitate the game. We can't foresee every eventuality, and neither can you, but as long as everyone is committed to having a good time and working together, you have a solid shot at spinning a magnificent tale.

feel are necessary to enhance your character. However, if you have any doubts as to whether a prop (such as anything remotely resembling a weapon) will conflict with the basic rules of safety, consult your Storyteller and abide by her decision.

THE RULES OF SAFETY

Behave yourself so that everyone can enjoy this game. You can play **Laws of Ascension** in the home, at conventions or at other safe locations. However, you should always remember that it is only a game and nothing more. If you feel yourself getting too wrapped up in what's going on, take some time out and step back from game-play to clear your head. It's for your own good.

ELEGANTLY SIMPLE

This game was designed to be easy to learn and easier to play. **Laws of Ascension** is a storytelling game. The rules are aimed at resolving conflicts quickly so that players can continue the story without ever stepping outside their characters. We have made every effort to create rules that maintain the integrity of the story and the background in which the story is set.

THE ONLY RULES THAT MATTER

The following **Mind's Eye Theatre** rules are the only ones that absolutely must always be obeyed. These common-sense rules exist to keep everyone — other players, yourself, strangers in the area and the police — safe and happy with your game. They're designed to limit the opportunities anyone has to destroy the fun of your game. They're not intended to interfere with game-play or your enjoyment. They're here to make sure that you play sensibly and safely.

It's Only a Game

This rule is the most important one by far. If a character is killed, if a plot falls apart or if a rival wins the day, it's still only a game. If you take things too seriously, you'll spoil not only your fun but everyone else's around you as well. For that matter, so what if tragedies befall your character? Remember, the hero may not always win, but that doesn't mean the story isn't entertaining. You can relish the setbacks as well as the victories.

Leave the game behind when it ends. Playing **Laws of Ascension** is a lot of fun. Spending time talking about the game is great. However, calling the person who plays the Chantry head at 4:13 AM on Sunday to discuss an idea your character has for a new rote is another matter entirely. Keep a little perspective.

No Touching

Never actually have physical contact with other players, no matter how careful you are or how innocent you believe the gesture is. Accidents can happen, intentions can be misinterpreted, and someone might get hurt. Rely on the rules to cover physical logistics.

No Stunts

Never climb, jump, run, leap or swing from anything during a game. Keep the real-world action in your action-packed game low-key. If you can imagine that you're a staff-twirling mystic who can bend reality on a whim, you can imagine that you're leaping over fences and running from pursuers as well. Avoid attracting the attention of people who aren't playing, and use your imagination to its fullest.

No Weapons

Fake or real weapons of any sort are absolutely forbidden. Even obviously silly toy weapons are not allowed, just for safety's sake. Such props give other people the wrong impression about what you're doing, and they could *conceivably* be mistaken for the real thing in the dark. Use item cards to represent weapons instead, no matter how cool you think it would be to wear a model of your Etherite's new Antimatter Discombobulater Ray Gun on your belt.

No Drugs or Drinking

This rule is a real no-brainer. Drugs and alcohol do not inspire peak performance at any activity. They hamper your ability to think and react quickly, and at the very least, they screw up your roleplaying ability. Players impaired by drugs or alcohol are a danger to other players and to the game as a whole. Nothing is wrong with playing a character who's drunk or stoned, but actually bringing illicit substances and paraphernalia to a game is in bad taste at best and illegal at worst. Don't do it.

Be Mindful of Others

Remember, not everyone you see, or who sees you, is playing the game. A game can be unnerving or even frightening to passersby. Be considerate of nonplayers in your vicinity, and make sure that your game-play actions are not going to alarm anyone if you are in a public area. Trying to explain to a policeman that you didn't really conduct a Satanic ritual on your friend — your wizard just performed the rite of Gilgul on his shaman — is often an exercise in futility.

THE RULES ARE FLEXIBLE

In addition to the standard set of basic rules, **Laws of Ascension** includes a number of optional rules that are intended to facilitate more evocative gameplay, cut down on the need for differing house rules and otherwise help customize the complicated world of magic for individual troupes. However, you should feel free to ignore or adjust any of the rules in this book if doing so will make your game better. We at White Wolf call this tenet the Golden Rule. If some rule included in this book doesn't work for your troupe, change it. If your troupe finds a way to handle the Avatar Storm that works better for you than the one in this book, go for it. The idea is to have fun. Just be consistent and stand by your decision. Nobody likes rules that change every week.

HAVE FUN

The object of **Laws of Ascension** is not to win or make sure that your mage is the last one standing at the end of the chronicle. In fact, this game has no rules for winning. The goal is to tell great stories about fascinating characters in a world of wondrous magic. In **Laws of Ascension**, it's not about how the game ends, it's about the journey and what happens along the way.

OPTIONAL RULES

This book presents quite a few optional rules to help you portray more accurately the complex worlds and powers that mages are heir to, as well as to accommodate the needs of each **Laws of Ascension** troupe. For example, when it comes to covering the incredible diversity of results that can be generated by magical Effects alone, rules have to be designed that will work for large groups of people who know each other casually or not at all. Those same rules can be overly restrictive, though, when you apply them to smaller troupes in which the players know each other fairly well. However, building rules that assume that all the players know each other and that a Narrator will spring to hand immediately whenever one is needed is just a logistical nightmare when you try to apply those rules to a larger setting. Relying on rules designed for one scale of game to apply to every scale of game only encourages the creation of reams of house rules. While house rules might be helpful to the game in question, they all but force players to relearn the system every time they try out a new game. Faced with such a daunting obstacle, what's a helpful game company to do?

As it turns out, the answer lies somewhere in between. The majority of this book gives Storytellers a baseline system that will allow them to run **Laws of Ascension** games with any number of players, even if they have no prior gaming experience with each other or just in general. These foundational rules are somewhat more restrictive, by necessity. In large games, players need clear, concrete ways to adjudicate power conflicts fairly without having to call on Narrators at every turn or rely solely on the judgment of other people they don't know very well. Although a bit of True Magic's flexibility must be sacrificed in the process of constructing such rules (necessarily if most unfortunately), **Laws of Ascension** still works just fine without any optional rules.

However, the optional rules included throughout this book allow you to add extra layers of complexity and flexibility that aren't feasible in larger games. They also help portray the true fluidity of the **Mage: The Ascension** tabletop experience. If you have enough Narrators to allow players to make up new Effects on the fly without stopping play every five minutes, by all means, institute that rule. If

your players know each other well enough that they trust the others to make fair decisions on which Effects are vulgar or coincidental, let them. In this manner, the optional rules not only help build games that reflect the true power of magic more closely, but they encourage a higher level of player trust and overall cooperation as well. Just make sure to tell players which of the optional rules are in effect.

Ultimately, the optional rules are universal house rules. Consider them your official suggestions and shortcuts on how to custom-fit games to the troupes playing them in a way that will still remain consistent with other **Laws of Ascension** games. Use them or pass them up, as you will. This system allows you to come to the table with a player and tell him immediately what rules you do and don't use, instead of having pages and pages of customized rules for your game. In this way, players changing from game to game already have an idea of what to expect, and Storytellers can experiment with different styles of play until they find one suitable to their troupes.

THE FINAL WORD ON OPTIONAL RULES
Unless otherwise notified by the Storyteller, players should assume that *no* optional rules are in effect. Period. End of story.

THE WORLD OF DARKNESS

At face value, the World of Darkness is not terribly different from our own world. Cities bustle with traffic, and the wilderness teems with life. The same movies play in the theaters, the same magazines hit the coffee tables, and the same shows blather inanely on the television screen. Yet just beneath this veneer roils an atmosphere of fear, despair and violence that's far more pervasive than any that exists in our own world. The World of Darkness isn't just our world with white face paint and black clothing. It's our world through the darkest looking glass of the soul. Monsters aren't just rejects from our dimly remembered childhood or lurid B-grade movies. They're all too real, and they wait in the shadows for fresh prey.

The term Gothic-Punk describes the emotional scope of the World of Darkness. The Gothic aspect is that of the looming, oppressive shadow that permeates life. Buildings here aren't just skyscrapers full of offices and apartments, they're imperious monoliths that tower indifferently above the frantic, brutish masses. Social divisions are nearly insurmountable. The rich live in fantastic decadence and indulge every manner of debauched whim, while the poor work themselves to death and scrabble to find enough food to eat. The pain of living and the ruthlessness it takes to succeed forge people into callous lumps of iron, and looking out for number one is the whole of existence.

In turn, many citizens of the World of Darkness have adopted the Punk ethic in order to give their lives meaning. Rebellion is commonplace on different levels of society, but many people pit themselves against the system for so long that they lose track of what it was that inspired them to action in the first place. Crime is endemic and violent, and everyone learns to look the other way if they know what's good for them. Language is rougher, art descends to any depth to get its point across, and technology advances to provide it all without needing to leave the comfort of one's house.

This is the world that mages call home.

The Mages

Since the time of legends, humanity's bright stars have been innovators, protectors, mystics and saints. Some are the scientists who chart new frontiers and make life safer and easier for everyone. Others are madmen and visionaries who push the boundaries of convention. Be they warlocks, witches, sorcerers, sages, Sufis, sensei or bards, mages have always populated the pages of history and fantasy. In the World of Darkness, mages have had all these roles and more, and they continue to have them in the modern day. While some might contend that magicians are all demon-worshippers or crazed mystics, the real mages have an awareness that transcends everyday thought. Each mage is human, true, but he is a human touched by destiny and Awakened to a wider world.

A great many half-truths and falsehoods surround the myths of mages. Some are based in history, some were once true but are true no longer. Others were simply paranoid folk tales from the start. The following list lays some of the most common misconceptions about the workers of magic to rest.

- **Mages must use formulae to cast their spells.** False. Although mages can and do rely on certain rituals to perform magic, most devise their spells from their own experiences. With the right knowledge, mages can even create spells on the spot for specific needs.

- **Mages pass on magical abilities in their own families.** False. Mages Awaken to the power of magic regardless of genetic heritage. However, some mages inherit unique characteristics through family curses or boons.

- **Mages consort with demons and infernal powers to gain their magic.** False… usually. A mage's power stems from the belief, will and enlightenment within. However, a belief in the power of the infernal can lead a mage to work his magic through the auspices of demons and other corrupt spirits.

- **Mages cannot be hurt by mortal weapons.** False. Just as mages are human, they can be hurt and killed like any other human. However, they can use their magic to defend themselves.

- **Anything a mage does comes back upon her.** True, although not as people often think. While a mage's spells do not come back directly to affect the mage threefold or seven times, a mage's spells almost always have some sort of side effect. Subtle side effects that derive from emotional intent or desire are called Resonance. Blatant side effects resulting from powerful magic used carelessly are called Paradox Backlashes.

- **A mage can hurl lightning and fire, cause earthquakes and fly through the air.** True. With the right knowledge, a mage can create all kinds of unnatural phenomena. However, doing so is very difficult and dangerous in the modern age, and not all mages are skilled in all areas of magic.

- **Mages cannot perform magic in a church or against someone protected by the cross.** False. Magic works regardless of the influence of religion. Indeed, some mages perform their miracles as expressions of their belief. However, a rare few individuals — and not necessarily only mages — can draw upon the strength of their true and abiding faith to turn magic aside.

- **Pushing a nail into a mage's footprint or shadow injures him. The presence of a mage makes horses sweat and curdles milk.** False. These ideas are nothing more than old wives' tales. Of course, if a mage believes this sort of thing enough, it may well become true for him.

• **Magic and technology are mutually exclusive.** False. Reliance on technology and science is just another form of belief, so it works as well as a faith in magic. In fact, many mages use advanced technological foci to perform their Effects.

• **Mages seek power and enlightenment.** True. The quest for magic is ultimately a journey of internal exploration. Those who survive learn and grow more powerful. Eventually, mages hope to surpass the limits of this universe and achieve a higher state of being through the process called Ascension.

The Awakening

The process that sets a mage apart from the average person is called the Awakening. For some mages, the Awakening is a gradual process that leads ultimately to a new level of awareness. For others, it's the result of some horrible trauma or shock. Once a human Awakens, though, there's no turning back. That person is a mage, and with the Awakening comes the realization that the individual can change the world, for better or for worse. How the new mage acts upon this knowledge depends on the individual.

During the Awakening, a prospective mage may experience sudden visions, dreams, hysterical emotion or surges of magical power. Strange phenomena may surround the neophyte as his magical power rages unchecked, reshaping the world according to his desire. Some mages describe meeting spirits, speaking to angels or even seeing the true form of their souls. Others are tormented by demons or visions from the past. A few have no unusual experiences other than a sudden change of paradigm.

Still, the mage eventually settles into his power, and he must learn to channel it, lest he be consumed by it. All that the Awakening does is show the new mage that he can change the world; it does not show him the practices that make such changes possible. Some mages go insane from the force of the experience. Others try to deny their newfound abilities, only to find themselves thrust into strange circumstances beyond their control. Many mages discover their destiny or evidence of past lives and deeds as a result of Awakening.

Ultimately, the mage comes to recognize that not only can he reshape the universe, he can recast himself. The exploration of magic is a process of change. With enough enlightenment and skill, the mage can become something more and better than human through a mythical process called Ascension. However, that road is long, trying and treacherous for a newly Awakened magician living in these desperate times.

The Traditions

Gone are the days of wizards who hurled fire and battled dragons. Lost are the mystics who saw through the veil of time and death. Only shadows of those powerful magicians exist today, and they band together in a group called the Traditions.

The Traditions formed during the early Renaissance as a body of mystics who gathered from around the world. A new reliance on science and reason had shaken the very foundations of magic. Mythical creatures were becoming extinct, and magical energy was growing scarce. In the face of this desperate situation, nine of the largest groups of magicians came together and pledged to stand for the practice of magic. Today, the Traditions uphold secret magical techniques and spread their wisdom to the select few who will listen.

The Traditions claim all manner of mysticism and unconventional practice as their bailiwick, although their membership can be exclusionary. Mages who are not trained in their techniques are shunned and sometimes
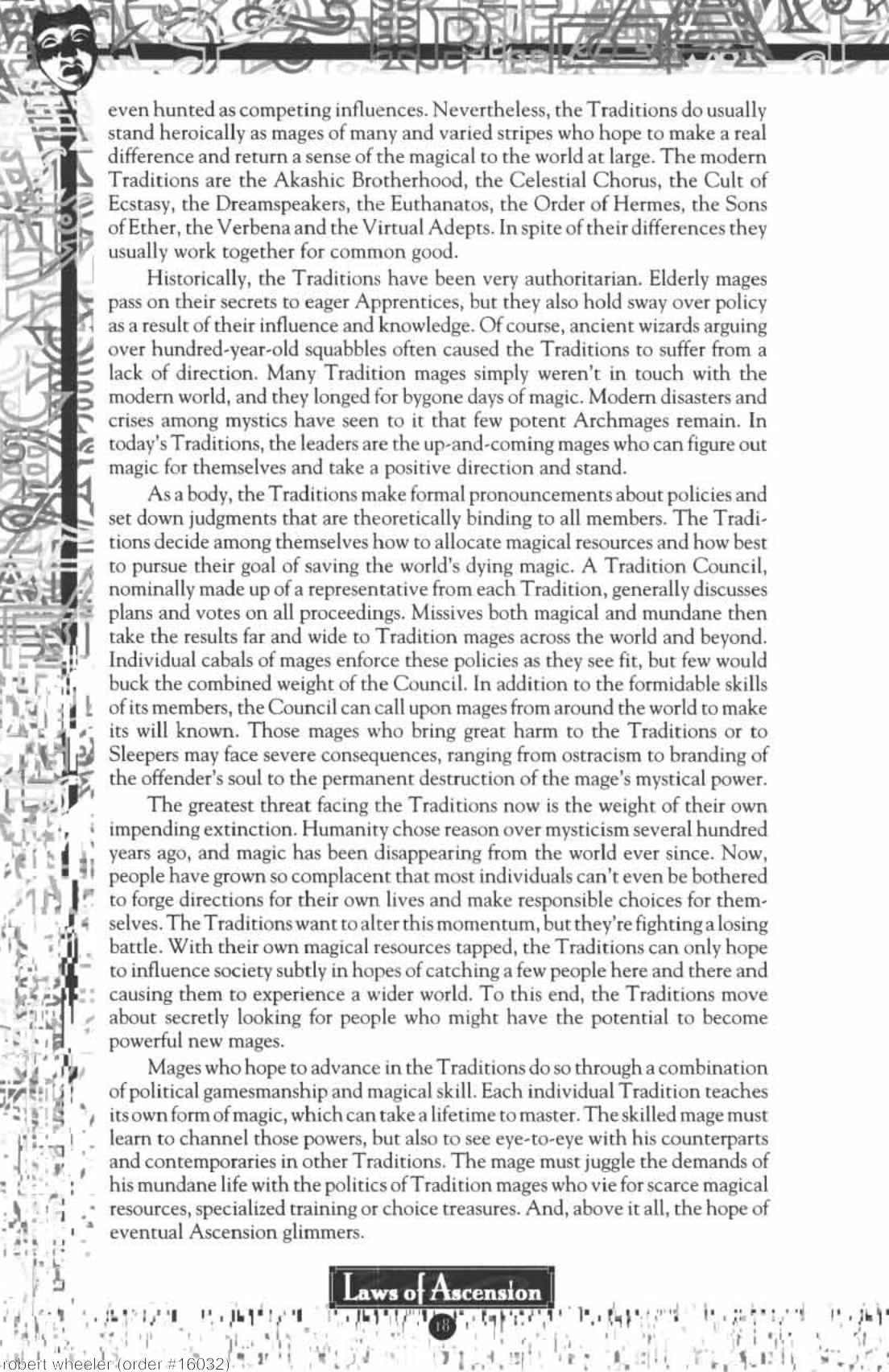
even hunted as competing influences. Nevertheless, the Traditions do usually stand heroically as mages of many and varied stripes who hope to make a real difference and return a sense of the magical to the world at large. The modern Traditions are the Akashic Brotherhood, the Celestial Chorus, the Cult of Ecstasy, the Dreamspeakers, the Euthanatos, the Order of Hermes, the Sons of Ether, the Verbena and the Virtual Adepts. In spite of their differences they usually work together for common good.

Historically, the Traditions have been very authoritarian. Elderly mages pass on their secrets to eager Apprentices, but they also hold sway over policy as a result of their influence and knowledge. Of course, ancient wizards arguing over hundred-year-old squabbles often caused the Traditions to suffer from a lack of direction. Many Tradition mages simply weren't in touch with the modern world, and they longed for bygone days of magic. Modern disasters and crises among mystics have seen to it that few potent Archmages remain. In today's Traditions, the leaders are the up-and-coming mages who can figure out magic for themselves and take a positive direction and stand.

As a body, the Traditions make formal pronouncements about policies and set down judgments that are theoretically binding to all members. The Traditions decide among themselves how to allocate magical resources and how best to pursue their goal of saving the world's dying magic. A Tradition Council, nominally made up of a representative from each Tradition, generally discusses plans and votes on all proceedings. Missives both magical and mundane then take the results far and wide to Tradition mages across the world and beyond. Individual cabals of mages enforce these policies as they see fit, but few would buck the combined weight of the Council. In addition to the formidable skills of its members, the Council can call upon mages from around the world to make its will known. Those mages who bring great harm to the Traditions or to Sleepers may face severe consequences, ranging from ostracism to branding of the offender's soul to the permanent destruction of the mage's mystical power.

The greatest threat facing the Traditions now is the weight of their own impending extinction. Humanity chose reason over mysticism several hundred years ago, and magic has been disappearing from the world ever since. Now, people have grown so complacent that most individuals can't even be bothered to forge directions for their own lives and make responsible choices for themselves. The Traditions want to alter this momentum, but they're fighting a losing battle. With their own magical resources tapped, the Traditions can only hope to influence society subtly in hopes of catching a few people here and there and causing them to experience a wider world. To this end, the Traditions move about secretly looking for people who might have the potential to become powerful new mages.

Mages who hope to advance in the Traditions do so through a combination of political gamesmanship and magical skill. Each individual Tradition teaches its own form of magic, which can take a lifetime to master. The skilled mage must learn to channel those powers, but also to see eye-to-eye with his counterparts and contemporaries in other Traditions. The mage must juggle the demands of his mundane life with the politics of Tradition mages who vie for scarce magical resources, specialized training or choice treasures. And, above it all, the hope of eventual Ascension glimmers.

THE TECHNOCRACY

The Technocracy is the chief adversary of the Traditions and (some would say) the architect of the modern world. This collection of mage-scientists hails also from the Renaissance, but the order itself has a decidedly different inception. Visionaries who dreamt of a safe, stable, classifiable world came together at a great convocation to draft articles of their own secret society, an organization that would promote and disseminate the most sublime rational insights ever achieved. Few realized that this vaunted science and technology was just as visionary and world-changing as magic. Indeed, every Enlightened scientist of the Technocracy was and is a mage whose belief empowers his phenomenal science.

Throughout the Renaissance, the nascent Order of Reason hunted down and exterminated supernatural threats to humanity and helped to build an orderly society upon principles that anyone could learn and use. The way this Order-turned-Technocracy turned out, though, is far from the original intent. The modern Technocracy influences and infiltrates high technology institutions and government organizations all over the world, in hopes of quashing the unexplainable, providing the simple sustenance of life to the common man and eventually seeking a world of complete order.

The Technocracy exerts a hidden but pervasive influence on many levels of humanity. Technocratic inventions are disseminated throughout the world to become accepted as normal. The Technocracy's greatest strength is the universal usefulness of its inventions to the common man, which guarantees the support of average people. Various groups in the organization watch over humanity and make adjustments to affect economics, scientific development and social progress. They weed out undesirable traits and encourage useful qualities in specimens from among the Masses, although the definition of such traits depends on who within the Technocracy asks.

For the better part of several centuries, the Technocracy turned its resources toward wiping out mages, and Technocrat agents are still deadly enemies today. The scientists consider unclassifiable magic a danger to humanity, and they work to subvert or even kill Traditionalists. However, the Technocracy also spends an inordinate amount of time and resources policing the world. Technocrats have a plan to reshape the world for the better, but doing so means involving themselves in politics, social and religious movements, global economies and other high-investment projects. Considering all these responsibilities, the Technocracy has its hands full enough. Throw in a world that's far stranger than the scientists want to admit, and it's clear that the Technocracy just can't do everything it wants. Still, this daunting load has not yet broken the Technocracy's back. Some Technocrats are real heroes who champion medicine, advanced communications and other modern conveniences that make life safer and better. The Technocracy will shepherd the world down a safe, static, predictable path, regardless of the cost.

DISPARATES AND ⊕RPHANS

Since as many forms of magical practice exist as there are magicians, not all mages fall easily into step with the Traditions or the Technocracy. Disparate mages cling to a Craft or organized magical subculture, rather than join any particular Tradition. Orphans, on the other hand, Awaken and discover their magical potential without a mentor, and they must learn magic through their own hard experience.

Disparates are actually fairly common among mages, although not every mage really knows one. The individual cultures that cling to magical beliefs still shield mages who arise from those cultures. Religious crusaders, *djinni*-summoners, candomble practitioners and more thrive in their isolated enclaves and hand down their magical practices. By far, the most prevalent of the Disparates are the Hollow Ones. This loose affiliation of nihilistic mages sometimes aids the Traditions, but most of the individuals thumb their noses at the very idea of a "magical organization." Instead, most Hollow Ones spend more time observing the decay and death of the modern world with morbid fascination.

Orphans come from all walks of life. Sadly, mages aren't always around to teach and shepherd the newly Awakened. While some such abandoned mages go mad or destroy themselves, others develop their own eclectic magical methodologies. An Orphan might pick up a book on New Age occultism and decide that it must have *something* useful. Of course, an Orphan could theoretically build his magic on any number of foundations — even deleterious principles like human sacrifices and maltheism — so more properly schooled mages are quite leery of these unknown quantities. Often, Orphans must keep their heads down since both Tradition mages and Technocrats consider them dangerous mavericks with uncontrolled powers.

SORCERERS AND SERVITORS

Since even before the Dark Ages, mages haven't worked alone. Sure, mages like to claim credit for great human innovations and discoveries, but the fact is that while mages may blaze new paths for humanity, it's up to everyone else to follow. Miracle workers can't do everything alone, so many surround themselves with ranks of assistants, acolytes, confederates and hangers-on.

In fact, mages aren't the only people who do magic! True, the Awakening shatters perceptions and turns someone irrevocably into a mage, but some determined occultists unearth resonating truths or powers without ever Awakening. These sorcerers can stand with the Traditions or Technocracy, or they can simply go their own way. Their powers are not as flexible as those of Awakened mages, though, for the sorcerers don't have the skill to reshape the universe at whim. Nevertheless, few magicians would deride them. Anyone who can perform magic is a beacon of hope in this stark modern age.

Dealing with magic is dangerous even for mages, and it is even more so for the few sorcerers who have the opportunity to do the same. Many of the great Bygone beasts of earlier ages and the spirits in other worlds are inimical to humanity and dangerous. Charms or spells gone awry can strike low their casters, not to mention the defenseless Sleepers nearby. However, a few un-Awakened people still stand with mages for the taste of power or the chance to live and work with a magician. Some even do so simply out of love, ambition or hope. Those assistants are called consors, acolytes or simply friends and companions. Sometimes, those with no talent for magic can learn about the ins and outs of theory, the requirements for casting spells and the sheer wonder of the magical world.

THE MODERN MAGE

The 21st century hides many pitfalls on the mage's path. The Technocracy has suppressed the history of magic and enforced a sterile, rational order over the world. Mages must hide among the Sleepers and avoid notice, lest their

supernatural capabilities draw undesired attention. The days of world-shaking spells, in which monsters and arcane treasures were commonplace, have passed by. The few mages who dare to continue their work find that magic itself is a sputtering, dying force that grows increasingly more difficult to invoke.

And yet, the disappearance of Earth's magical Masters has given birth to a time in which every individual mage can make a difference according to her own drives. Instead of a hierarchy of elite wizards or brooding magicians who are out of touch with the everyday world, a collection of dynamic young individuals leads the Traditions now. If the cost for magic is great, these new leaders claim, then the rewards can be incalculable. A mage has literally the entire cosmos to play in, if only she has the dedication.

Where will mages be tomorrow? Mages once hoped to restore the mythic ages in the modern day, but such a rebirth seems a distant dream now. There will be no great and global Ascension. No Ascension War will determine how everyone Awakens. Rather, the time has come for individuals to make a difference. Humanity may have chosen mediocrity and a world of lazy comforts, but individual mages can strive for something better and inspire other people. For every person who is dissatisfied with the banalities of modern life, an opportunity arises to spread mysticism once again.

Yet the threat of Armageddon still looms....

Old legends and prophecies tell that the world will end after a terrible war or a conflagration takes its toll. Recently, a great Reckoning has come to pass, and it has resulted in the destruction of the most powerful Tradition and Technocracy strongholds. What's worse, a vicious storm rages in the spirit worlds, making passage there a harrowing and perilous undertaking. If these events truly herald Armageddon, as those old legends and prophecies foretell, then the fighting over petty politics will avail nothing, and the true measure of greatness will be in those mages who leave their mark on the world before it ends or is reborn.

LEXICON

Just as mages use special techniques to describe how they do magic, so too have they created their own vocabulary to cover the experiences that are unique to their society.

COMMON PARLANCE

Acolyte: A servitor of a mage who does not perform magic, but who believes in its power.

Arete (AIR-uh-tay): A mage's level of mystical understanding and connection to the Tellurian.

Ascension: The mythical state of enlightenment beyond human comprehension.

Ascension War, The: The conflict to determine whether the world would embrace magic, science or faith.

Arcane: An unconscious "cloaking" effect that some mages possess, which renders them immune to scrutiny.

Avatar: A shard of spirit energy, tied to the human soul, perhaps from the Pure Ones of the long-ago universe. A mage performs magic through the interaction of his Avatar with the universe.

Awakened, The: Blanket term for supernatural entities, including mages.

Awakening, The: The moment in which one discovers the power to change the universe.

Branding: A punishment in which the mage's Avatar is marked.

Bygone: An otherworldly beast, such as a dragon, that has long since disappeared from Earth.

Cabal: A group of mages bound by some common purpose.

Censure: A punishment in which the mage is warned against future violations.

Chantry: A stronghold of mages.

Coincidental Magic: Magic cloaked in circumstance, which appears as if it could have happened coincidentally.

Consensual Reality: The true nature of reality as understood intuitively by the vast majority of Sleepers. Mages and Technocrats recognize the limitations of consensual reality, but they are not constrained by them.

Convention: One of five groups forming the Technocratic Union: Iteration X, the New World Order, the Progenitors, the Syndicate and the Void Engineers.

Craft: A cultural faction of mages.

Deep Umbra: The aspects of the Umbra far beyond Earth, in deep space.

Demon: A name for a dangerous creature from the spirit worlds, possibly a spirit, possibly something else.

Dream Realms: Worlds fashioned from dreams kept alive.

Enlightened Science: The Technocratic philosophy and practice that translates abstract reason into reality. (a.k.a. Technocratic magic)

Epiphany: A magical revelation or sudden insight into magic.

Familiar: A spirit given flesh, which bonds with a mage to serve him and gain sustenance from his Quintessence.

Focus: An item, act, phrase, gesture or similar artifice required to perform magic. Through the focus, the mage concentrates belief and will and creates magical Effects.

Gaia: The Earth Mother, spirit of Earth as related by various naturalistic mages.

Gate: A magical doorway that allows passage between two places.

Gauntlet, The: The barrier separating the material world from the spirit worlds.

Gilgul: The rite of destroying an Avatar as well as a mage's ability to do magic or to reincarnate.

Hollow Ones: A Disparate group that espouses post-modernism, the Gothic subculture and decadence in response to the decaying world.

Horizon, The: The magical limit separating the Near Umbra and the Deep Umbra.

Hubris: The overwhelming pride that leads a mage to believe that he may challenge the cosmos itself, and that convinces a mage that his way is "the right way." Such pride is often fatal, and it lies at the heart of the conflict between mages.

Initiation: A test that a young Apprentice mage must pass in order to gain recognition and accept full responsibility within a Tradition.

Mage: Term for a human who can work magic according to a discrete set of beliefs and practices, and thereby cause the world to change according to her desire.

Magic: The act of altering the world through force of will and the practice of one's belief.

Marauder: A mage whose magical paradigm has become the whole of his reality and trapped him in an endless Quiet.

Metaphysic Trinity: The universal forces of Stasis, Dynamism and Entropy.

Methodology: A sub-group within a Technocratic Convention.

Near Umbra: The parts of the Umbra around Realms and near the Earth.

Nephandus, (-i): A mage who has consigned his soul to demonic slavery for magical power and who seeks to return the universe to primordial chaos.

Node: A place of power where Quintessence flows freely and strongly.

Oracle: A legendary mage whose enlightenment has exceeded the understanding of other magicians, perhaps even to Ascension.

Orphans: Mages who Awaken without formal training and who school themselves in their own magical techniques.

Ostracism: A punishment declaring a mage separated from mage society.

Otherworlds: Realms outside the Gauntlet.

Paradox: Reality's defense against careless magical abuse. Paradox can Backlash against a mage directly, or it may build up subtly to strike with more force later.

Paradox Realm: A temporary Realm created by a huge Backlash of Paradox, wherein a mage must unravel the bizarre twisting of the universe to escape.

Paradox Spirit: A entity that hounds a mage as a result of Paradox.

Path: A general term for destiny, or for a particular branch of magical practice.

Pattern: The metaphysical composition of an object, place, person or idea.

Pogrom, The: The Technocratic purge of supernatural elements.

Portal: A permanent Gate, allowing access to or from (not always both) a particular location. Portals can be keyed to allow only certain access or certain times of activation or any number of security measures.

Prime: The force of energy that describes all of reality's basic composition.

Procedures: Applications of Enlightened Science that produce "magical" Effects.

Protocols, The: A code of honor and set of rules held by the Traditions. Many young Traditionalists see no need to constrain themselves to all of the Protocols.

Pure Ones: Legendary primordial beings from the dawn of creation. Some mages believe that Avatars are pieces of the Pure Ones.

Quiet: A temporary delusional state brought on by Paradox and magic.

Quintessence: The energy of magic; the building blocks of Prime energy. All things are created from Quintessence, and destroyed forms return to it.

Reality Deviant: A Technocratic term for an Awakened mage or other anomalous supernatural creature.

Realms: The various worlds of the Tellurian.
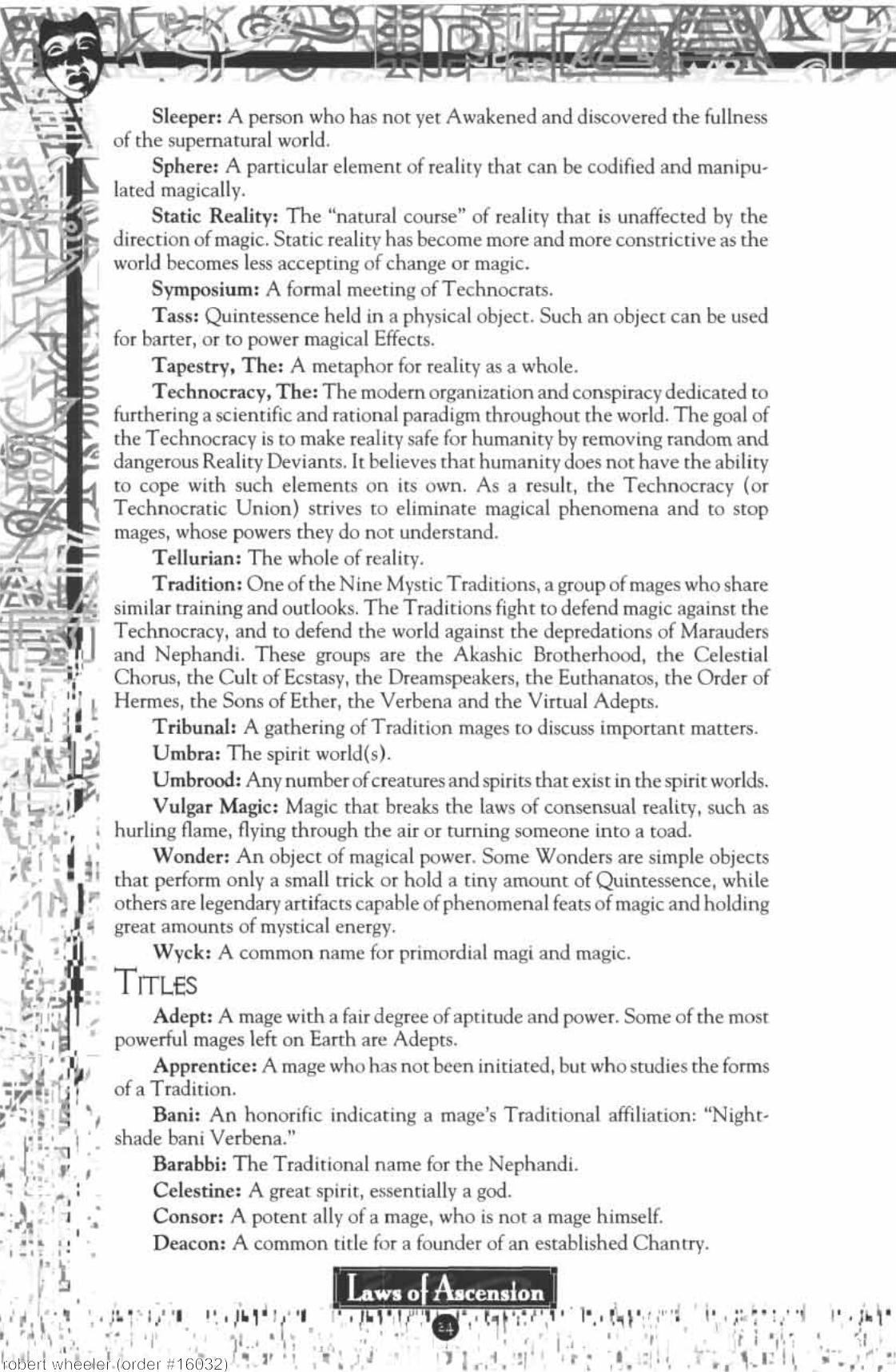
Resonance: Mystical traces and attunements tied to magical actions, emotions, intent and desire. All magic carries Resonance, and Resonance reflects a mage's will in creating an Effect.

Rote: A magical Effect handed down as a common practice.

Seeking: A quest for greater enlightenment.

Shade Realm: The Umbral component of a Shard Realm.

Shard Realm: A Realm or world corresponding to one of the nine elements of magic, which was sundered from Gaia long ago. Each is ruled by a powerful spiritual entity and is thought to correspond with the moon and one of the eight other planets in the solar system.

Sleeper: A person who has not yet Awakened and discovered the fullness of the supernatural world.

Sphere: A particular element of reality that can be codified and manipulated magically.

Static Reality: The "natural course" of reality that is unaffected by the direction of magic. Static reality has become more and more constrictive as the world becomes less accepting of change or magic.

Symposium: A formal meeting of Technocrats.

Tass: Quintessence held in a physical object. Such an object can be used for barter, or to power magical Effects.

Tapestry, The: A metaphor for reality as a whole.

Technocracy, The: The modern organization and conspiracy dedicated to furthering a scientific and rational paradigm throughout the world. The goal of the Technocracy is to make reality safe for humanity by removing random and dangerous Reality Deviants. It believes that humanity does not have the ability to cope with such elements on its own. As a result, the Technocracy (or Technocratic Union) strives to eliminate magical phenomena and to stop mages, whose powers they do not understand.

Tellurian: The whole of reality.

Tradition: One of the Nine Mystic Traditions, a group of mages who share similar training and outlooks. The Traditions fight to defend magic against the Technocracy, and to defend the world against the depredations of Marauders and Nephandi. These groups are the Akashic Brotherhood, the Celestial Chorus, the Cult of Ecstasy, the Dreamspeakers, the Euthanatos, the Order of Hermes, the Sons of Ether, the Verbena and the Virtual Adepts.

Tribunal: A gathering of Tradition mages to discuss important matters.

Umbra: The spirit world(s).

Umbrood: Any number of creatures and spirits that exist in the spirit worlds.

Vulgar Magic: Magic that breaks the laws of consensual reality, such as hurling flame, flying through the air or turning someone into a toad.

Wonder: An object of magical power. Some Wonders are simple objects that perform only a small trick or hold a tiny amount of Quintessence, while others are legendary artifacts capable of phenomenal feats of magic and holding great amounts of mystical energy.

Wyck: A common name for primordial magi and magic.

TITLES

Adept: A mage with a fair degree of aptitude and power. Some of the most powerful mages left on Earth are Adepts.

Apprentice: A mage who has not been initiated, but who studies the forms of a Tradition.

Bani: An honorific indicating a mage's Traditional affiliation: "Nightshade bani Verbena."

Barabbi: The Traditional name for the Nephandi.

Celestine: A great spirit, essentially a god.

Consor: A potent ally of a mage, who is not a mage himself.

Deacon: A common title for a founder of an established Chantry.

Disciple: The initiated beginners of the Traditions. Disciples can perform limited magic, and they are accepted as Tradition members.

Errant: A mage whose Chantry and cabal have been destroyed.

Fellow: A member of a Chantry who is not a founder.

Incarnae: Greater spirits; the servants of the Celestines. For all intents and purposes, demigods.

Lord: An Umbrood spirit less powerful than an Incarna but greater than a Preceptor or Minion.

Master: A mage of great power and ability who has reached the pinnacle of one or more Spheres. Such mages are extremely rare on Earth, as most work their highly dangerous magic in the more pliable spirit worlds.

Mentor: A mage who teaches another.

Minion: A low-ranking Umbrood spirit.

Pedagogue: A Hermetic tutor of great fame, usually quite powerful and surrounded by students.

Preceptor: An Umbrood spirit that is less powerful than a Lord, but more powerful than a Minion.

Primus: "First One," used to refer to the founders of the Traditions and the current living heads of said Traditions. In the wake of the destruction of Doissetep and Concordia, many Traditions are without Primi.

Rogue: A renegade mage.

Sentinel: A mage who guards a Chantry but is not a member.

Technomancer: A mage of a mystic Tradition who uses the trappings of technology, but combines them with mystical understanding. Not to be confused with a Technocrat, a mage who relies wholly on the theories of Enlightened Science.

Tutor: Mages who have become proficient teachers. This term denotes some respect.

Mind's Eye Theatre Terms

Ability — A Trait representing something that a character knows or can do.

Attribute — The raw potential of an individual, from social acumen to intellect to physical prowess, and the Traits to measure such.

Challenge — Any time that two opponents face off and throw Rock-Paper-Scissors to determine the outcome.

Extended Challenge — A challenge that continues until the tester loses.

Health Level — A measure of how injured a character is.

Scene — A location where action is taking place, or the specific duration for such an action.

Simple Test — Any time two opponents throw Rock-Paper-Scissors without comparing Traits.

Static Test — A challenge that requires someone to risk a certain number of Traits to complete a task.

Trait — An adjective or number used to describe the character's Attributes, Abilities and Advantages.

Turn — A unit of time in **Mind's Eye Theatre** play, usually considered to be the equivalent of about three seconds, but generally as long as necessary for everyone involved in a situation to take one simple action.

Florence concentrated intently on one of her many devices, muttering occasionally or tweaking a dial as she studied the readout its tiny lights presented. The small box emitted no sounds, but the set of lights on its face glowed dully as the reading moving from light to light across the arc of LEDs. For the last five minutes, the lights had shined a steady, warm orange right in the middle of the arc.

Walking easily beside Florence, David gazed at the lights once more, then back to his partner. She was oblivious to her surroundings, and he had to catch her by the arm more than once as she tripped over tree roots or wandered off the paved walking path. Florence adjusted her stride each time without even looking up and continued to follow the device.

"Was it wise to bring Tiernan into this?" David mused aloud. The sound of his voice caused Florence to start suddenly, then grin sheepishly at him.

"I'll admit that he's a wildcard," she said, "but he's all we've got, isn't he? Would you rather call on Chancellor and the Order of Hermes? Or maybe Fauntleroy. I don't think he's throwing one of his 'soirees' tonight. He might even be sober."

David shook his head with a wince. "I'll admit Tiernan is the better choice, but I gathered a most unnerving sense from him. He's…"

"Crazy?" Florence offered.

David licked his lips. "Not exactly. Overly intense. He's so wrapped up in what he does, that he has to fight with other people to reaffirm who he is. He risks losing his personal motivations in his struggle with his inner self."

Florence stopped in her tracks and regarded David for a long moment. The park around them was nearly devoid of people. The trees swayed gently in the light breeze. Cars zipped along the streets and past shops at the edge of the park, but the two magicians let the world recede into abstraction.

Finally Florence spoke. "You shouldn't be so judgmental. Maybe he has problems, but so do we all, right? He deals with things his way. That's his strength. And ours."

"Perhaps, but… that self-destructiveness isn't encouraging. Perhaps we should have approached someone from a different Tradition." David's half-lidded eyes appeared to show boredom, but his attention focused on the conversation at hand.

"Who?" Florence challenged. "A Virtual Adept? Even more arrogant than Tiernan. Dreamspeaker? Ideal, but nearly impossible to find. Why would they bother coming to the city? Euthanatos?"

"I don't know," David said.

"We could always ask Fauntleroy."

David winced again. "Point taken. Any luck with your device?"

"Oh, yes," Florence perked up at the change of conversation. "Just over there."

CHAPTER TWO: THE TRADITIONS

Nine Traditions make up the core of mystical society. These Traditions train willworkers in a variety of techniques handed down from mentor to student in unbroken spans of history. Each Tradition has its own heart and culture, but together they span the world in hopes of protecting and promoting magic. Whether standing against the Technocracy or working for mundane causes, the Traditions promote the welfare of mages everywhere by sharing resources, codifying magical phenomena and trading knowledge.

HISTORY

When they hear the tales of ancient plots and wars fought, many Initiates find it hard to think of a time before the Traditions existed. However, the idea of the Traditions and the Council of Nine is a relatively new invention that dates back to the beginning of the Renaissance. During the Mythic Ages, when magic operated in full view of the masses and there was no Paradox to fear, most mages had little in common with each other. Outside of the Order of Hermes in Europe and some scattered groups in China, India and northern Africa, mages kept largely to themselves, learning where they could and uniting under no common cause.

Yet, as the influence of the Order of Reason grew, the Order of Hermes in Europe first attempted to bring all the wizards it encountered under its banner. The Order of Hermes assimilated those wizards its mages encountered whose styles and beliefs differed from the Order's own paradigm. In the Orient, emissaries of the Akashic Brotherhood traveled across several countries and took in myriad religious beliefs, while proselytizing a greater goal of human advancement. Other groups, such as the Celestial Chorus, took nascent form within other supernatural communities as ideas spread to like-minded mages. Each group tried to expand and include other magicians under its banner.

When these efforts failed — mages have always been a proud, stubborn lot, and they do not take kindly to being catalogued by outsiders — the Order shifted instead to recognizing formal groupings of wizards outside of itself. It then asked that those groups organize and elect representatives to serve on a grand council of wizards. Seers of Chronos (who would later become the Cult of Ecstasy) brought predictions of a grand alliance and the reclusive Ahl-i-Batin worked to bring emissaries to the table

from groups around the world. When some of the groups that the Order contacted argued that styles and beliefs varied widely among their own camps (notably those that would become the Verbena and the Dreamspeakers), the Order responded that it was not a single specific set of beliefs they were looking to recognize. Rather, a general "tradition" of magical practice, such as spirit-calling or shapeshifting, would suit the Order's needs just fine. Thus came the recognized term Tradition, for even if two mages disagreed over the actual points of their group's orthodoxy, they could still be counted as part of the same loose magical tradition.

Nine seats were made available on the Council, representing the nine divisions or Spheres of magic that the Traditions eventually agreed upon. One mage from the Tradition that showed the greatest facility for that Sphere held each seat at any given time. Operating from a Chantry named Horizon, the members of the Council formulated Tradition strategies, worked to smooth relations between members of radically different ideologies and otherwise ensure that the Traditions worked toward enlightenment harmoniously. Naturally enough, these lofty goals were sometimes overshadowed by politics, power struggles and other moments of blindness, but the Council endured even during the worst of times. It continued to offer guidance and hope to those mages who fought to bring magic back to the lives of the Sleepers.

⊕bjectives

One of the first orders of business for the Council of Nine was to formulate an overall plan, not simply for the battle against the Order of Reason, but for all Tradition mages and hopefully even humanity itself one day. Some called it hopelessly idealistic and unrealistic, saying that it proposed the impossible, but the Council knew the importance of having a dream to reach for that was greater than any one mage or even than the Council itself. Although time has since altered the way Tradition mages interpret some of these ideals, and although each Tradition has its own take on how and when these ideals apply, the principles that the Council formulated have remained the same for hundreds of years. The most common presentations of the Council's goals are as follows:

Ascension

While every Tradition has its own vision of this lofty goal, pursuing Ascension has been the Council's staunchest position since its foundation. It remains so even now in the aftermath of the Ascension War. Simply put, all mages should be free and encouraged to pursue Ascension — provided that they are not serving the Nephandi, the Marauders or the Technocratic Union by doing so, of course. The Ascension of those factions would result in the destruction or strangulation of the cosmos, so their pursuit of Ascension cannot be allowed to continue. However, interfering with another Tradition mage's sincere efforts to gain enlightenment is not only disrespectful, it also helps strengthen static reality and make magic harder for everyone. By working toward Ascension, the mage keeps hope for the future alive and ensures that even a tiny part of reality will not bow to conformity. Initially the Traditions promoted an idea of global Ascension, in which all humanity would be uplifted to a new level of awareness. However, many mages have since shifted their focus to the idea of individual Ascension, hoping instead to pursue personal truths and encouraging others to do the same.

Sleepers

Although every Tradition's design for them is different, all Traditions are united in their agreement that the Consensus depends on Sleepers to give it power. Even now, with reality sliding toward the hopelessly static, the only real hope for the Traditions lies not in incredible feats of magic, but rather in swaying the hearts and minds of the masses back

to their cause. To that end, mages educate Sleepers as often as possible, Awaken them when they can and protect them at all costs, despite the Sleepers' ignorance of the truth of reality. Without Sleepers who are willing to question static reality and search for something better, all magic would cease to be, and that cannot be permitted to happen.

JUSTICE

With the Awakening comes the potential to cause a great amount of harm and destruction. Some willworkers begin to fancy themselves above the law, doing what they will and using their powers to escape retribution. In mage society, the kinds of powers that can be called on in even a minor conflict necessitate some other way of hearing grievances and settling disputes. To make sure that both extremes of justice were covered, the Council of Nine created a system of crimes and applicable punishments that all members of the Traditions recognize. (For the specifics of this system, see "Tradition Justice" in Chapter Five, page 215.) Mages found guilty of these offenses can expect to be punished in accordance with these rules regardless of where they are or who is judging them. Likewise, particularly serious and/or recalcitrant offenders can expect to find a group of experienced and angry mages hot on their trail before long, even in these dark days.

RESPECT

With the categorization of the Spheres came the concurrent need to find some way of comparing the relative status of different mages. Mages of different Traditions needed to know how to address each other properly and have some general idea of the level of progress other wizards had made along the path to enlightenment. While some Traditions use different titles, and others use none at all save when addressing outsiders, the system has made it possible for mages of differing backgrounds to gauge each other's experience and temper their reactions accordingly. This system is still in use, even in the wake of the recent flight of many of the more enlightened mages. (For the titles and game mechanics inherent to this system, see "Reputation" in the Rules, Systems and Drama Chapter, page 213.)

RULE OF SHADE

While bringing enlightenment to all is a noble goal, the reality is that not everyone is ready to Awaken, and many consider even the slightest hint of the supernatural extremely dangerous. The witch-burning fires of the Inquisition stand as testament to the frightening power of the masses to eliminate what they do not understand. Therefore, the Council created what is known as the Rule of Shade, a general prohibition against exposing the workings of magic to the world in a form that the world is not ready to accept. Revealing one's true nature to those outside magical society or performing especially vulgar magic in public is forbidden, since such acts threaten to start the Inquisition anew and alert the Technocracy to the presence of Tradition mages in the area. While slips of some kind are inevitable, the mage must do his best to repair the damage he's caused. Clever acts of magic are certainly permissible since they help chip away at the facade of static reality, but the Paradox generated by proud and foolish acts usually fry the mages who perform them, making the sacrifices pointless. If a mage is to survive, he must be subtle, discreet and careful.

CURRENT AFFAIRS

Despite the Traditions' noble formative goals, time has altered and eroded many Tradition strengths and agendas. On one hand, many founders and supporters of the Traditions no longer exist. Even mages must succumb to age eventually, and the Council has been around for hundreds of years. On the other hand, the increasingly static and rational world has made some goals difficult or

impossible to achieve. Modern Tradition mages must deal with the realities of their situation. No godlike Master is going to save the Traditions and magic itself from extinction; it's up to Earth's survivors to see to that themselves.

Of course, the situation isn't all bad. The disappearance of the oldest Masters has opened up new possibilities for Initiates and Disciples of the modern era. While magical training may be difficult, no crazed wizards with 200-year-old grudges are guiding the Traditions in pursuit of personal vendettas, and no restrictions exist on what mages can study. Enforcement of many Tradition rules is lax because every mage makes a contribution in *some* form and is just too valuable to alienate or harm. Tradition mages swap ideas and goals with a boundless fervor that surpasses any of the cooperative efforts of earlier ages.

FRACTURED UNITY

Recent events have shattered the former strength of the Council of Nine, leaving most mages without a solid sense of leadership as the fires of the Ascension War die down and the ceaseless monotony of static reality begins to set in. Prompted by the agitation of a rabble-rousing mage long believed dead, a number of young wizards attacked Horizon Chantry from within, sparking a tremendous magical battle that destroyed the entire Realm and left dozens of the most powerful members of the Traditions dead or missing. Efforts to contact the missing have proved fruitless, and many Disciples and lower-ranking mages have been left to fend for themselves in the increasingly dangerous reality of Earth. Some noble mages have stepped in to try to fill the posts now deserted. Others have forsaken the notion of Tradition unity altogether, turning their attentions toward their own interest and closing their eyes to the dream of Ascension that was once the birthright of all Tradition members.

All hope is not lost yet, however. Indeed, some groups have become more internally cohesive than ever. After all, the harshness of circumstance is a better motivation for cooperation than any more lofty ideals could ever be. Cabals composed of different Traditions, even those that include a Hollow One or two, are more common than ever before, and they have proved startlingly effective despite the doubts of more conservative Tradition members. These mages see recent events as only an indication that change must come from the ground up, and they foresee a glorious future with the Traditions bound together stronger than ever. Their eyes have been opened by the shared trials of these difficult times. There is even talk of building a new Horizon Chantry on Earth, where mages can once again meet freely and share their thoughts on Ascension in peace.

Only time will tell if this vision will win out in the end.

A QUICK NOTE ABOUT TRADITION ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Some Tradition Advantages grant bonus levels of Abilities or other Traits, but these bonuses cannot raise the character's Traits above maximum limits. The character is still only human, after all. They do give the character a leg up on the appropriate Traits, though, and they sometimes offer abilities that a character can't gain otherwise (such as the Akashic *Do* specialization of *Brawl*).

Tradition Disadvantages may saddle a character with game penalties or Negative Traits. Most of these flaws are so heavily ingrained into the Tradition's training that they cannot be removed by spending Experience Traits.
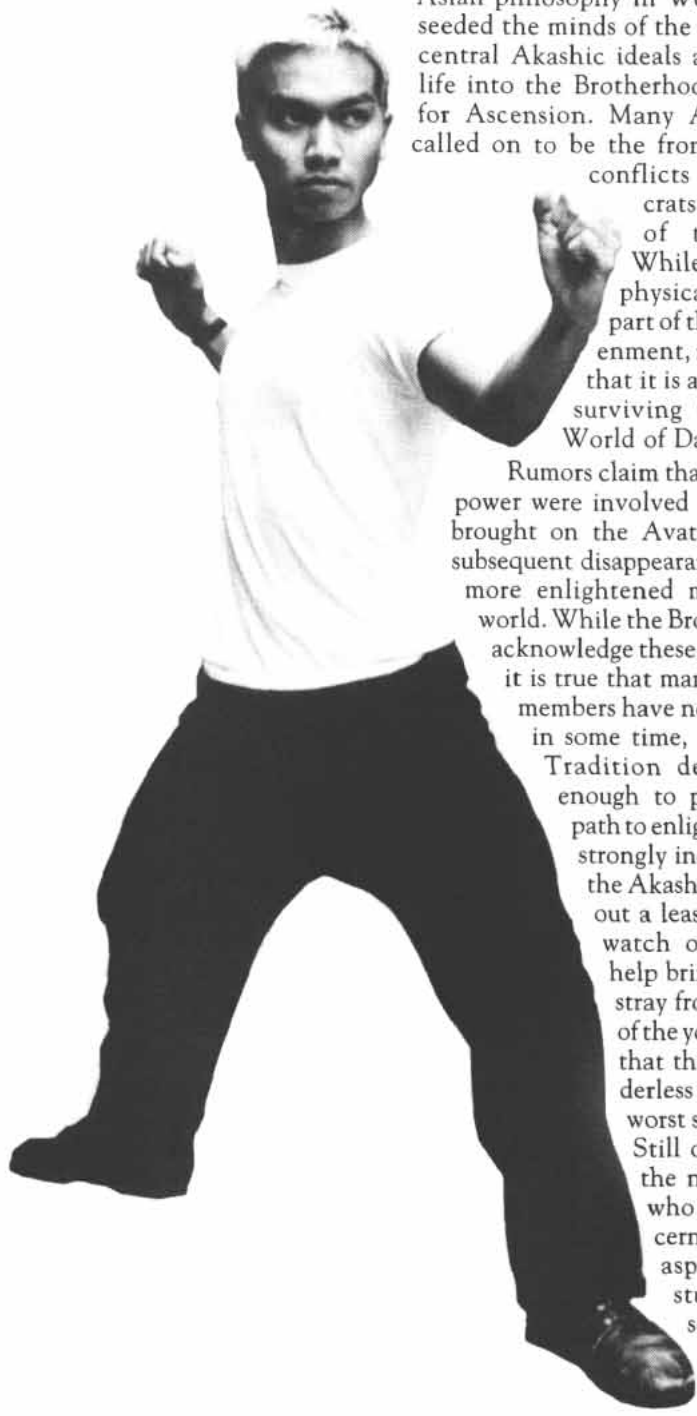

AKASHIC BROTHERHOOD

As long as there have been legends to tell, people have spoken of a golden time when all the world was in harmony and people lived their lives as one with the world around them. Modern times are a far cry indeed from those idealized years, but not everyone has forgotten what it was to strive for balance in all things. In the past, warrior-monks pushed their bodies hard with exercise and martial arts, but they pushed their souls harder with meditation, prayer and study. These first Akashics taught of a way of life centered around personal accomplishment instead of material gain or temporal power, and they recruited others who saw the deeper wisdom in their deceptively simple ways. They were embraced by the common folk especially, when their philosophies of an unadorned life in tune with nature were more easily accepted and their fighting arts helped balance out the oft-sharp divide between social classes.

From the Shaolin temples of China to the remote masters of Japan to the wandering mystics of India, the Akashic Brotherhood spread slowly but steadily, battling the agents of darkness and ignorance and striving to unlock the potential within all the Avatars they came across. They created Do (pronounced "doe," literally "the Way") as an expression of their teachings. It is at once a martial art and a way of living. Those who study Do strive to put their mind, body and magic in harmony in order to create a perfect synthesis of the soul. And while only the Awakened could grasp the true potential of Do, Sleepers nevertheless benefited from the mundane aspects of the training, and the philosophy of righteous thought and action took hold in many areas.

Unfortunately, it is just this attachment to the lower classes that wound up doing the most damage to the Akashic Brotherhood. Empowering the common folk is seldom a popular sentiment with the forces in power. As a result, the martial skills of the Akashics were tested constantly over the centuries in conflicts with authorities both mortal and supernatural. To make things worse, deep philosophical differences drew the Brotherhood into a crippling 300-year war with the Euthanatos Tradition, extending precious resources further and diverting the Akashics from the path to enlightenment.

By the modern age, the temporal strongholds of the Tradition are all but gone, except in the most secluded parts of the world. The Brotherhood is scattered more than ever before, and its members walk in lands undreamed of even a thousand years after their Tradition was founded. However, the Brotherhood is also stronger than ever. Its focus was never on material things, after all, and the recent popularity of martial arts and

Asian philosophy in Western culture has seeded the minds of the masses with many central Akashic ideals and breathed new life into the Brotherhood's ancient quest for Ascension. Many Akashics are also called on to be the front-line soldiers in conflicts against Technocrats and other enemies of the Traditions. While they stress that physical prowess is only part of the path to enlightenment, none of them deny that it is also very helpful in surviving the worst of the World of Darkness.

Rumors claim that Akashics of great power were involved in the events that brought on the Avatar Storm and the subsequent disappearance of many of the more enlightened mages around the world. While the Brotherhood does not acknowledge these whispers officially, it is true that many of their greatest members have not been heard from in some time, which worries the Tradition deeply. It is hard enough to progress along the path to enlightenment with the strongly individual ethic that the Akashics believe in without a least a few Masters to watch over Initiates and help bring back those who stray from the path. Some of the younger mages worry that the Tradition is rudderless in the face of the worst storm in its history. Still others worry about the number of students who seem more concerned with the martial aspects of Do than studying its philosophical side, and who have given the

Tradition an undeserved "chop-socky" reputation among many mages. Regardless of these problems, however, the wise new leaders of the Tradition know that the path of righteous action always leads true in the end. If it takes a hotter fire to forge a finer sword, then into the flames the enlightened traveler must walk.

ROLEPLAYING HINTS

Western preconceptions to the contrary, the Akashic philosophy is neither one of navel-gazing contemplation and fortune-cookie koans, nor is it a flourish of outlandish martial arts followed by a sermon about believing in yourself and eating right. Rather, it is an appeal to simplification, the removal of unnecessary objects and desires so that one can focus on grasping the natural harmony of the universe. Akashics study and pray to cleanse their minds of distractions and expand the realms of possibility. They exercise and undergo martial training to purge the body and create a proper home for the soul. Akashic characters should strive for balance and understanding, as each experience is simply one more in a stream of lifetimes designed to bring the soul back to perfect harmony with the All. Everything else about the Tradition — all the kicks, all the koans, all the chants and all the chi — is really just a way of searching for and expressing this underlying theme.

Specialty Sphere: *Mind*

Common Foci: Do, prayer, chanting, calligraphy, meditation, weapons, incense, bells, prayer sashes or flags, exercise, purification rituals

Tradition Advantage: Souls of Wind and Fire

Akashics are renowned for their self-control, and they retain a certain poise in the face of tremendous pressure. Situations that would knock members of other Traditions for a loss seldom do the same to these disciplined mystics. They can still feel and express emotion — they may be raging or screaming inside, and extreme horrors can still pose a threat to their sanity — but they are better at controlling those impulses than most people. When a Storyteller calls for characters to react automatically to a situation due to emotional trauma, such as indicating that everyone is stunned with revulsion at the sight of a bloody scene of occult sacrifices, the player of the Akashic Brother may make a Simple Test. On a win or tie, the Brother is unfazed and able to act rationally. On a loss, the player must spend a Trait of Willpower for the character to overcome the impulse, just like anyone else.

In addition, all Akashic Brothers receive at least some training in Do regardless of faction. Therefore, beginning Akashics receive a level of *Brawl* and the *Brawl* specialization of *Do* for free. (See the Abilities section of Chapter Three for rules on specialization.) Alternatively, you may replace one or both of these with a free level of *Meditation* instead.

Tradition Disadvantage: Carrying Water and Chopping Wood

As centered as their philosophy is on individuality, Akashic teachers believe that young practitioners must find their own path to Ascension, which often proves very frustrating for young mages. Any mentor that an Akashic Brother relies upon probably either gives very cryptic answers to tough questions, or he can't offer personalized advice. An Akashic Brother cannot

use a *Library* Background to learn Spheres, and he must make a Simple Test (win or tie) to learn a level of Sphere magic from any mentor or tutor. Failure means that the Akashic student simply can't grasp the intricacies of the personal magic, and he can't spend the Experience Traits for the new level until testing again at the end of the next game.

FACTIONS

Jnani — Mystics and ritualists, they study the spirit world in order to reconcile themselves with the ultimate truth of reality. Specialty Sphere: *Spirit*.

Kannagara — Ascetics who impose ordeals on themselves in order to purify their bodies and spirits, these monks typically live in cloisters and emerge only occasionally to see the world.

Li-Hai — Utilitarian moralists who believe that the Brotherhood must modernize its teachings, the Li-Hai stress a creation of new lifestyles that derive from reason as opposed to those predicated on the outdated traditions of the past.

Shi-Ren — These activists seek to promote greater involvement in the politics and cultures of the nations that the Brotherhood sprang from, and they help keep the historical records of the Tradition itself.

Vajrapani — Fierce fighters who give the Tradition its "Warring Fists" nickname, these Brothers develop great martial skills and potent war rotes in order to take the battle to their enemies.

Wu Lung — These bureaucratic mystics joined the Tradition only recently, and they seek to restore China to the glory it enjoyed during the Mythic Ages. Specialty Sphere: *Spirit*.

Celestial Chorus

When the first soul stood in awe of creation and sought to do the will of the creator it believed in, so was the Chorus born. Choristers see the universe as fundamentally shattered, broken apart by the purity and power of the One in an ancient schism that will not be healed until all beings assume their proper place in respect to the One once more. Indeed, while some other Traditions see Ascension as a personal matter or as an elite understanding, the Chorus sees its role instead as that of the shepherd, protecting the Sleepers from wicked forces like the Nephandi and the Technocracy and guiding all humanity to Ascension. Religion has obviously been the most important force in the history of the Chorus, and its roots go back to the beginning of civilization itself.

In its time, the Tradition has embraced all faiths that seek to understand their proper relation to creation, a fact that still burns some of the more conservative members. This diversity has been both a curse and a blessing for the Chorus over time. In some eras, the Chorus became a truly unifying force, embracing all faiths. In others, it became dogmatic and insular, even warring internally over the nature of the one "true" religion. All Initiates learn of the role of the Chorus on both sides of the Crusades and the Inquisition, for example, and they are cautioned not to become so caught up in their individual devotions that they forget the Song of harmony that exists in all things.
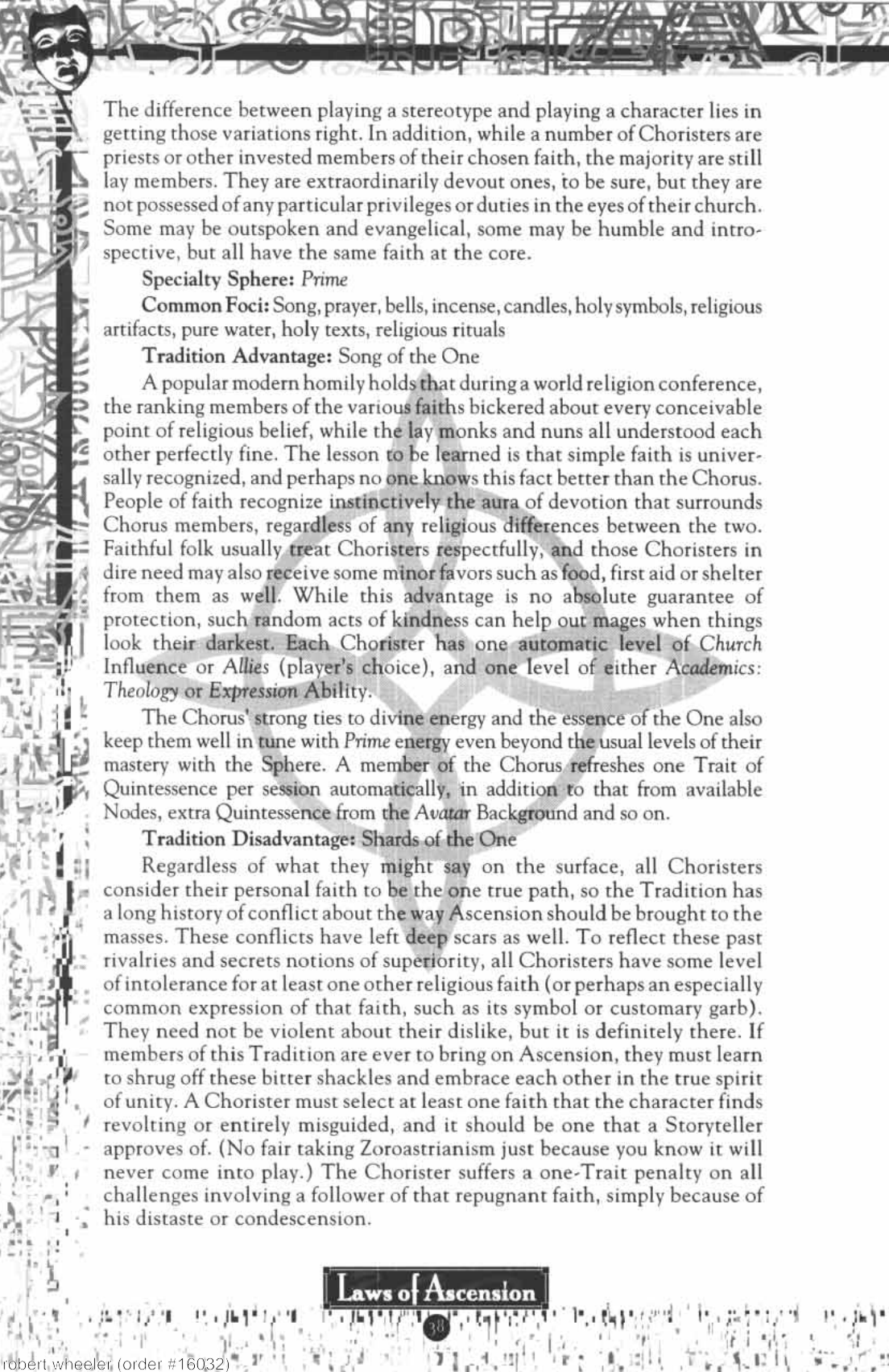
Of course, the other Traditions have not forgotten the role the Chorus played in various tragedies of the past, and the decline in religious observance in general over the past several centuries has further undercut the Chorus' sway with them. The Chorus' early ties to the Order of Reason (especially the branch that became the New World Order) don't help either. Despite the growing number of non-Christian members of the Chorus, they are often lumped under the banner of Catholicism and treated with a measure of scorn and derision by their tragically hip, religiously disinclined peers. Naturally, these same scoffers fail to see not only the different faces of the Chorus around the world but also the tremendous amount of good the Tradition does as well. From soup kitchens and homeless shelters to political lobbying and parochial education, the Chorus still exerts a great deal of influence on mundane society.

Fortunately enough, the turn of the millennia nonetheless ushered in a swell of belief in the tenets of the Chorus, among both Sleepers and the Awakened. After all, the revelation that the divine is not remote and disinterested but imminent and involved knows no barriers. Coupled with the events of the past several years, this revival has been a much-needed shot of life into the stagnating ranks of the Chorus. The previous strict hierarchy has been shaken up, and new, idealistic members of many faiths have a chance to really make a difference without being bogged down in protocols and procedure. It is an accordingly exciting time to join the Chorus. While the Technocracy and a potential apocalypse still lurk around the corner, the Choristers know that this chance may well be the last good one they get for another thousand years, and they intend to take it!

Roleplaying Hints

While religious observance is an important part of all Choristers' lives, what's truly important to them is faith in the existence of something greater than themselves and a desire to stand in proper relation to this force. Chorister characters need not always be models of celibacy, chastity, charity or any other standard measure of piety. While most of them adhere to some moral standard as a part of the search for the divine, actual codes of conduct vary widely depending on what faith the character follows. Players should research their characters' ethics, style of dress and other factors accordingly. After all, a Catholic mystic will react differently to some situations than an Islamic, Shinto or even Protestant member might.
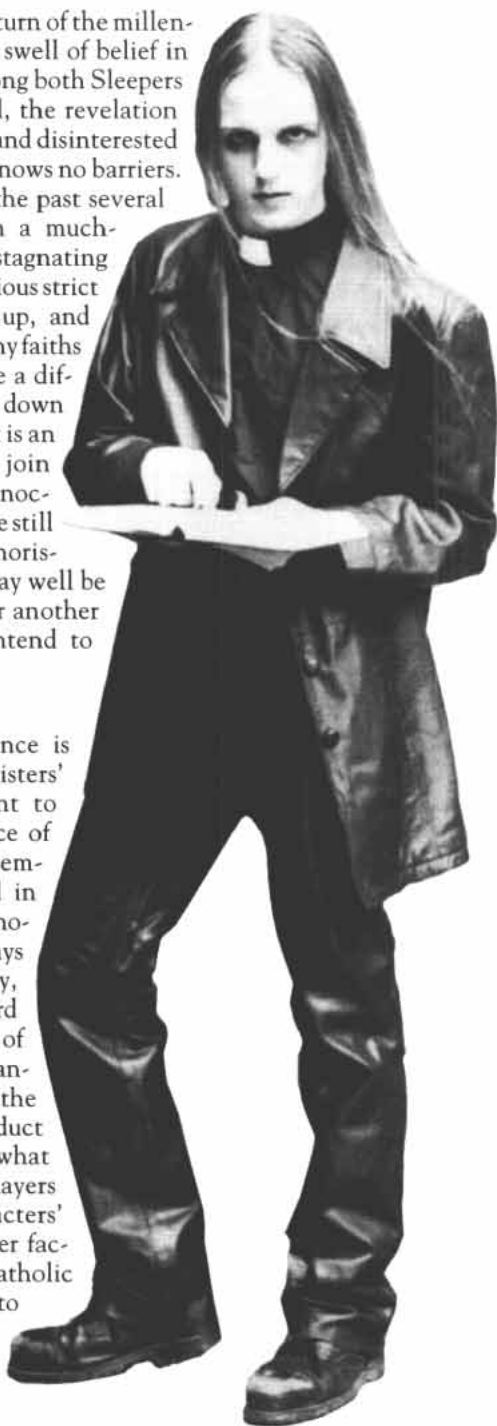
The difference between playing a stereotype and playing a character lies in getting those variations right. In addition, while a number of Choristers are priests or other invested members of their chosen faith, the majority are still lay members. They are extraordinarily devout ones, to be sure, but they are not possessed of any particular privileges or duties in the eyes of their church. Some may be outspoken and evangelical, some may be humble and introspective, but all have the same faith at the core.

Specialty Sphere: *Prime*

Common Foci: Song, prayer, bells, incense, candles, holy symbols, religious artifacts, pure water, holy texts, religious rituals

Tradition Advantage: Song of the One

A popular modern homily holds that during a world religion conference, the ranking members of the various faiths bickered about every conceivable point of religious belief, while the lay monks and nuns all understood each other perfectly fine. The lesson to be learned is that simple faith is universally recognized, and perhaps no one knows this fact better than the Chorus. People of faith recognize instinctively the aura of devotion that surrounds Chorus members, regardless of any religious differences between the two. Faithful folk usually treat Choristers respectfully, and those Choristers in dire need may also receive some minor favors such as food, first aid or shelter from them as well. While this advantage is no absolute guarantee of protection, such random acts of kindness can help out mages when things look their darkest. Each Chorister has one automatic level of *Church Influence* or *Allies* (player's choice), and one level of either *Academics: Theology* or *Expression* Ability.

The Chorus' strong ties to divine energy and the essence of the One also keep them well in tune with *Prime* energy even beyond the usual levels of their mastery with the Sphere. A member of the Chorus refreshes one Trait of Quintessence per session automatically, in addition to that from available Nodes, extra Quintessence from the *Avatar* Background and so on.

Tradition Disadvantage: Shards of the One

Regardless of what they might say on the surface, all Choristers consider their personal faith to be the one true path, so the Tradition has a long history of conflict about the way Ascension should be brought to the masses. These conflicts have left deep scars as well. To reflect these past rivalries and secrets notions of superiority, all Choristers have some level of intolerance for at least one other religious faith (or perhaps an especially common expression of that faith, such as its symbol or customary garb). They need not be violent about their dislike, but it is definitely there. If members of this Tradition are ever to bring on Ascension, they must learn to shrug off these bitter shackles and embrace each other in the true spirit of unity. A Chorister must select at least one faith that the character finds revolting or entirely misguided, and it should be one that a Storyteller approves of. (No fair taking Zoroastrianism just because you know it will never come into play.) The Chorister suffers a one-Trait penalty on all challenges involving a follower of that repugnant faith, simply because of his distaste or condescension.

FACTIONS

Alexandrian Society — Theorists who seek a synthesis between faith and science, these mages fight the soulless efforts of the Technocracy and put forth a vision of world where one can approach divinity rationally. Specialty Sphere: *Matter*.

Anchorites — Recluses who seek a personal connection to the divine, these mystics emerge from seclusion only rarely, but they offer great insights when they do. Specialty Sphere: *Spirit*.

Children of Albi — Mages who maintain a strict division between the physically corrupt and spiritually pure worlds and who seek to live their lives according to sacred scriptures as opposed to temporal laws.

Latitudinarians — These reformers seek to cast off the hierarchy of the Chorus in favor of one more representative of the other faiths it promotes. They also urge a general increase in open dialogue within the Tradition as a whole.

Monists — Members of this faction argue for a unified Church that recognizes all paths as equally valid means of reaching the One. While they find considerable opposition within the Tradition, they are often very tolerant of and open to those outside it.

Nashimites — A splinter group that believes the purity of the One is directly mirrored by the corruption of the spirit world, these mages try to spread messages of compassion and peace to as many people as possible, in hopes of raising the state of the One as well.

Sons of Mithras — These soldiers have made many enemies as a result of their campaigns over the years, but none question their staunch defense of the Tradition and its quest for the divine. Specialty Sphere: *Forces*.

Septarians — Conservative isolationists who claim that contact with the other Traditions pollutes the purity of their works, these mages believe that the Chorus should seek Ascension alone rather than ally with those who do not share its beliefs.

Knights Templar — A shadowy faction initiated into the Tradition recently, the Knights are secretive warrior-mystics who adhere to strict codes of chivalry and spread the truth of the One with military might and fanatical zeal. Specialty Sphere: *Forces*.

CULT OF ECSTASY

For every sensation that exists, some take it to the extreme in hopes of transcending the limits of the flesh and experiencing something greater. Whether it is music or sex or pain or dance or hunger or any of a thousand other things, humanity has always been secretly drawn to extremes. It is the province of the Cult of Ecstasy to take these private vices and push them to the forefront of discussion, to tear away the taboos that surround such practices and to force society to face the wisdom to be gained from them. The Cult originated in India as the seers of Chronos then spread quickly across the world, adapting to the cultures it encountered and their ideas about experience and transcendence. Wherever Cultists went, they shook up established ideas and challenged long-accepted dogmas. Even for mages, the Cultists have always been trail-blazers and innovators, and while conventional morality frowns on some of the more base practices, no one can argue that they haven't been a dynamic force in magic.

Today, the Cult considers itself nothing if not constantly changing, and it embraces gladly just about any practice its members come across if that practice proves to be another key to the door of enlightenment. This process is best expressed in the Code of Ananda, a series of proverbs that are as close to sacred as anything the Cult will admit to. The Cultists preach joy, compassion, pure emotion and respect for the passions of others in order to guide young Cultists along the path to enlightenment and learn to understand the views of others.

While the majority of Cultists are and have always been remarkably responsible individuals who respect themselves and the desires of others around them, one cannot espouse the kind of extreme beliefs and visionary ideas that these mystics do without attracting negative attention from those with less encompassing perspectives. In addition, the Cult has had to struggle with the skeletons of addiction, overdose and burnout throughout its existence as members get caught up in the tools of their craft instead of its ends. What's more, their mastery of *Time* magic is often as much of a curse as it is a blessing. Seeing how a relationship will end on one's first date or witnessing a murder that took place a century ago on the site of a current residence puts a great strain on normal life relations, to say the least.

During the rise of the Technocracy and the ebb of the Mythic Ages, many other mages considered the Cult more interested in fleeting pleasures and

vague prophecies than fighting the growing Ascension War. They claimed that the Cultists ignored the more subtle effects that their revolutionary ideals were having on the strict cultural systems around the world. The other Traditions failed to understand that while Cultists will fight with all their souls for the causes they believe in, they seldom find much wisdom in direct confrontations. Instead, Cultists prefer to alter the very viewpoint of their opponent to something more pleasing instead. A dead body cannot hope to reach Ascension, after all. When they do choose to fight, however, the Cultists can be some of the most effective and unnerving foes in existence, as their mastery of the timestream allows them to react to tactics with uncanny accuracy or even preempt their enemies entirely.

Nowadays, it would seem that the unabashed hedonism of many societal subcultures (especially youth-oriented ones) would fall right into the Cult's designs, but such is not quite the case. While they appreciate and encourage the elimination of many of the old taboos and other empty social restrictions that these lifestyles endorse, they are troubled by the heavy dependence on chemical escape and the rising philosophical nihilism that seems to accompany most of these scenes. To the Cult, what matters is pushing one's boundaries and loving life on all levels, not becoming trapped in an addiction or trying to avoid the experience of living at all costs. As desperate as the fight has become, the Cult has one powerful ally on its side: the knowledge that no matter what limits the Technocracy can come up with, there will always be those who see those doctrines not as limits to accept but as challenges to overcome.

The Traditions

Roleplaying Hints

Only those who are at peace with themselves and their desires have the strength to truly throw themselves into their passions without getting lost. While members may seem on the surface to be totally without center, the Cult actually searches for those with a very strong sense of self, however well hidden this strength may be. Indeed, contrary to popular belief, the typical Cultist is not some pot-smoking hippie leftover, nor is she a sex-crazed New Age massage therapist with magical powers. True, many artists are members of the Cult, but the Tradition accepts anyone who's willing to try new and unexplored paths of enlightenment, artistic or otherwise. Likewise, most Cultists despise drug pushing, prostitution, slavery and other abuses of the body. While they may sometimes use sex and dangerous substances to push the limits of their knowledge, they do so of their own free will, and they do not involve anyone who does not wish to be involved. Doing so robs others of the right to control their own destiny and turns their own body against them, which are outrages the Cult will not tolerate.

Most Cultists are a study in contradiction. Outsiders see them indulge in all manner of excesses without reservation, then turn around and discuss the roots of that behavior and other serious issues without seeming to miss a beat. Cultists are typically eager to try new things and hear different opinions, even if they wind up getting burned in the end. After all, exploring pain is just another way of exploring one's limits.

Specialty Sphere: *Time*

Common Foci: Music, meditation, sex, drugs, fasting, dance, martial arts, exercise, incense, performance

Tradition Advantage: Break On Through!

As open and experimental as their philosophies and lifestyles usually are, most Cultists are used to dealing with a wide range of people, and they usually have little trouble being accepted as they flit between different social scenes. A Cultist might begin the day working hard at the gym, spend the afternoon debating philosophy with professors at the local university, follow dinner by jumping into the pit at an underground punk show and then rave 'til dawn with the local club-going elite. This "coolness" factor is not necessarily an automatic backstage pass, and it is not really helpful beyond some face recognition and a number of casual acquaintances, but it definitely helps smooth things out when traveling in local artistic and philosophical circles. A Cultist's uncanny preparedness and flexibility allows him to move easily between levels of society. Although it doesn't replace the usefulness of *Etiquette* or *Streetwise* Ability, it does mean that the Cultist has a reasonable expectation of what to bring and how to behave to fit in with folks from all social circles.

As centered as they are on finding new perspectives, all Cultists receive two (total) free levels between *Athletics*, *Etiquette*, *Expression*, *Performance*, *Streetwise* or *Subterfuge* in fields that suit their particular style of magic. Many Cultists focus on song, dance or playing instruments that can easily be carried, but that rule is as often observed in its violation as in its practice.

Tradition Disadvantage: Sensation Junkie

Like many mages, most newly Awakened Cultists have trouble separating the will to perform magic from the foci that help channel it into being. Unlike other willworkers, however, the foci that the Cult uses all too easily become addictions in their own right. Drugs, sex, music, daredevil stunts and even meditation can all become crutches for the character using them, and some Cultists find themselves compelled to indulge in their foci on a regular basis even when they are not working magic. Every Cultist character indulges in some sort of vice, and he must take the opportunity to indulge at least once per game session. Usually this indulgence has some sort of down side. For instance, a cultist might wind up out of play for an hour at a really opportune moment, or he might find himself two Traits down on all challenges for an hour. The Storyteller determines the specific severity of the addiction, but either of the preceding penalties is appropriate as a general rule.

FACTIONS

Acharne — Pushers of forbidden pleasures, these seductively wicked mages frequent old-fashioned underground "Hellfire Clubs," where they drive themselves and those around them to deliciously decadent damnation, and seek enlightenment in the abandonment of all morals and restraint. Specialty Sphere: *Mind*.

Aghoris — Fanatics who believe in mutilation and mortification of the flesh, these creepy mages seek spiritual purity through physical pain. Their fellow Ecstatics tend to avoid them.

Dissonance Society — Radicals and intellectuals, these mages uphold individual ethics and responsibility over the bonds of society, and they use everything from debate and discussion to criminal (sometimes terrorist) action to get their point across.

Fellowship of Pan — Longtime allies of the faeries, these wild revelers uphold ancient artistic and hedonistic traditions by honoring the Muses. Frequently, they initiate members through the wild orgies of the satyrs.

Hagalaz — Wild Nordic tricksters who embody the bloody chaos of Loki, these mages fight twice as hard as they drink, and they seek to destroy the illusions of the modern world through all kinds of destructive tricks.

K'an Lu — Taoists who contrast the Akashic Brotherhood by embracing passion and sensation where the Akashics urge restraint and moderation, they balance discipline with chaos in order to throw open the gates of perception.

Klubwerks — Club kids who enjoy the pulse of the crowd, they harness the wild energy and unfettered power of the group consciousness to expose average people to messages of freedom and enlightenment.

DREAMSPEAKERS

Spirits have always been with humanity, from the earliest elementals and elder gods to shades departed and demonic or angelic visitors. Mythology experts like to say that spirits are indicative of a particular culture or even a particular individual's own deepest desires. Of course, these same experts are quick to scoff at the idea that these spirits might actually exist. However, the Dreamspeakers know that that is where those self-professed experts are very, very wrong. The world of spirit is as real as our own, and while many parts of it mirror our own (or the world we know in our heart instead of see with our eyes), many others are realms unto themselves, completely alien to the reality with which we are familiar.

It was not always this way, of course. Once, the realms of spirit and flesh were one, and they knew each other as intimately as the two halves of a heartbeat. In those days, the Dreamspeakers were the wise men and shamans who spoke to these strange entities and used their secrets to help people and appease the spirits' strange hungers. But with the rise of humanity's reliance on technology and its growing skepticism of the old ways, the world was split in two. For the first time, the Dreamspeakers found themselves facing a cold barrier known as the Gauntlet whenever they tried to contact their spirit allies. It was a dark time indeed, and had they tried to weather the storm alone, the Dreamspeakers might not have survived at all.

As it was, salvation did come, albeit as a blessing in disguise. Along with the decline in the ancient ways came the expansion of the Order of Hermes, and rather than war constantly with the different spiritual traditions they came across, the Order offered the spirit mystics a choice. The Dreamspeakers could join the Order under one banner, or face their decline alone. Spirit gateways and unseen messengers brought word from far and wide to the great council fires inviting the magicians to join the new Council. While some groups refused what they saw as a subordinate role, the others saw the wisdom in joining forces, and the Dreamspeaker Tradition was born.

To this day, it remains one of the most diverse Traditions, representing nearly every animistic culture around the world and many more that faded from mortal memory long ago. What unites these mages is their deep respect for the spirits around them, the Earth they defend and the ancient heritage they embody. They threw themselves into the Ascension War with a passion, but seldom on the same battlegrounds as their peers. While other mages battled to define the static reality of Earth, the Dreamspeakers acted as defenders and avengers for the spirit Realms. They sought to prevent the spread of Earthly corruption and keep the Umbra of their spirit

allies as pure as possible. While they could not reverse the damage that was done when the Gauntlet arose, they did their best to keep the old beliefs alive in hopes that one day it would relax a bit, and humanity could once again experience the unseen pageant that unfolds in the spirit worlds daily.

As might be expected, then, the recent onset of the Avatar Storm has been a disastrous blow to these mages. The Dreamspeakers have relied on spirit quests and Umbral travel as part of their arts for millennia, and the heavy toll and higher risks such travel now entails makes it difficult for them to maintain their old sacred places and rites as they once did. They are desperate to find some solution to the problem as fast as possible, and several grand council meetings — the first such gatherings since the founding of the Tradition — have already been called along this line. Fortunately, the neopagan and other such movements of the past half century or so have provided the Dreamspeakers with a fresh base of support in their efforts, and quite a few Dreamspeaker Chantries that were falling into ruin have been restored once again. This is a crucial time for the Tradition. If the Dreamspeakers can use the momentum behind this new infusion of interest to bring ancient beliefs back into the modern consensual reality, they will have made a fantastic leap toward achieving some of their goals. If they fail, however, it may very well be the last such chance that many of these beliefs have. And the fate of the worlds both spirit and flesh depend on what this outcome will be.

ROLEPLAYING HINTS

Dreamspeakers and Verbena are alike in many ways: Both revere ancient practices, respect the sanctity of the Earth and its creatures and seek to preserve their traditions in the face of crippling modern attention. However, where the Verbena turn to the cycles of life and the natural world for their inspiration,

The Traditions

Dreamspeakers look beyond this world entirely and study the spiritual heart that beats underneath its skin. Their actions reflect this difference. While Verbena seek simple and direct solutions, the Dreamspeakers plead with or command spirits to bring about the changes they desire. They often have an air of otherworldly mystique to them, as if they have just gazed straight on at what you keep seeing out of the corner of your eye. They also tend to act with great deliberation since they are aware of the many levels of repercussions even the slightest actions might have on the unseen realms. Many also observe any number of small superstitions and other eccentricities, which stem from the very particular demands of the spirits they deal with. Some Dreamspeakers may refuse to wear a certain color, for example, or eat a certain type of food. Some even go to such extremes as talking backward when speaking of certain spirits or always making sure to spread a circle of salt around them as they sleep.

Specialty Sphere: *Spirit*

Common Foci: Drumming, chanting, fires, fasting, herbs, sacred elements, dust, bones, mandalas, amulets, dancing
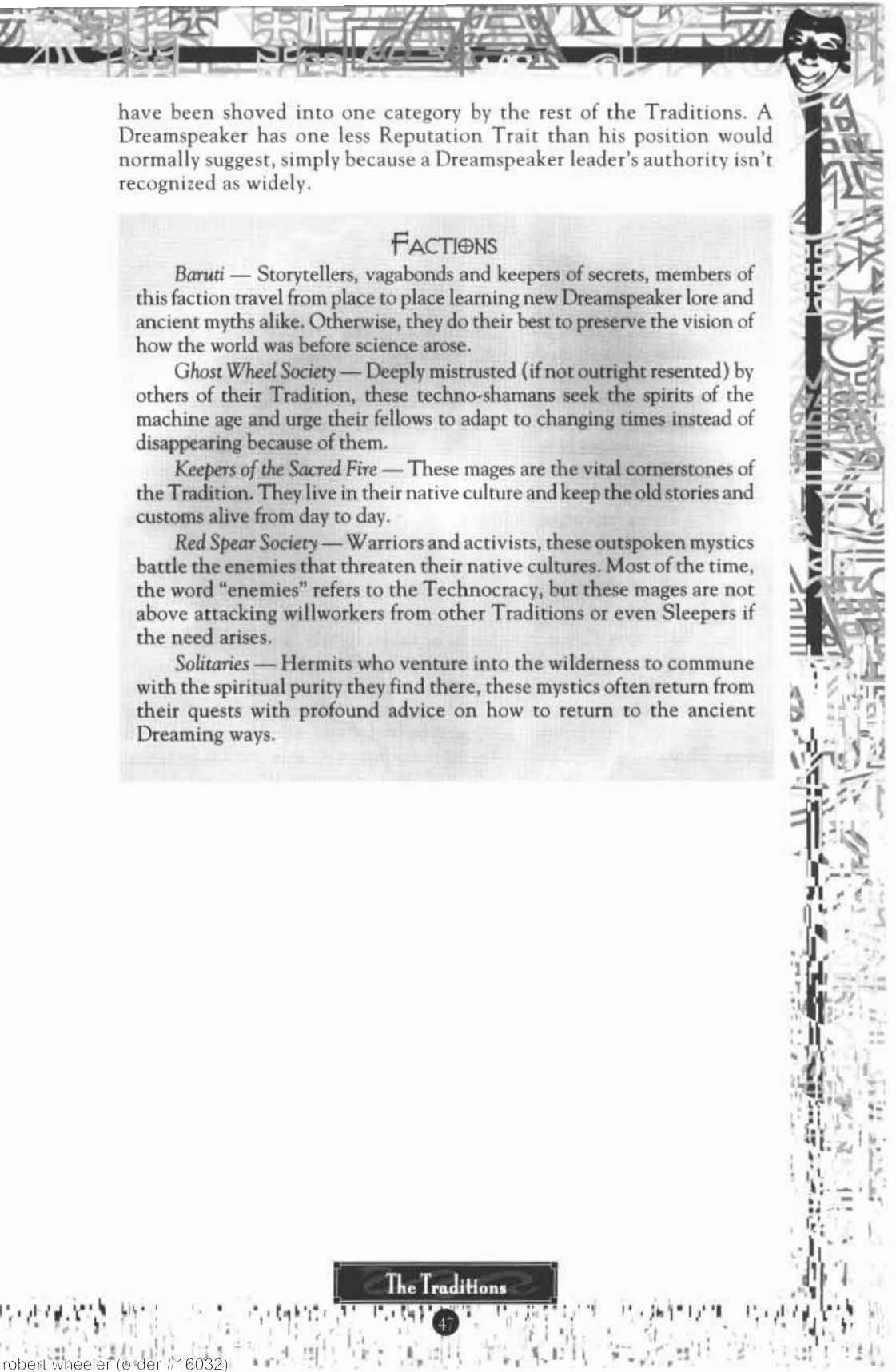
Tradition Advantage: Heart Whispers

Since they are attuned to the currents of the invisible world, many Dreamspeakers learn to recognize the subtle, telltale omens of spirit activity even before using their magic. For example, they might see a flicker of fire in their eyes when they look in the mirror one morning — which is a sure sign that someone they will meet that day is possessed — or they might detect a faint rotting scent of corruption before entering a spiritually defiled area. These hints are seldom very direct, but they can offer a clue as to what might be lurking in the area. They can also be invaluable to those unable to use actual magic for some reason. Clever Storytellers will be quick to employ this Tradition Advantage to add elements of mood and foreshadowing to the story, while still offering the character some helpful hints about the state of spirits in the region.

During character creation, Dreamspeakers receive a free level of the *Cosmology* Ability that reflects their natural knowledge of the spirit world. Dreamspeaker characters also have a level of *Awareness*, which shows their ties to mystical cycles. Better still, unlike other mages, a Dreamspeaker may use his *Etiquette* Ability with spirits.

Tradition Disadvantage: Dying Ways

Since they were never a very close knit group to begin with, the Dreamspeakers have suffered greatly from a lack of communication in recent years. These days, it is difficult for them to find others of their kind at all. Even if they do find others, the diverse practices of the Tradition make learning from them a haphazard matter at best. Dreamspeaker libraries are nearly nonexistent as well since most of these groups rely on oral traditions. Dreamspeakers may not begin with more than two levels of either the *Mentor* or *Library* Backgrounds, and it is within the Storyteller's discretion to ban those Traits entirely. Furthermore, while most other Traditions have an organized and unified structure, the Dreamspeakers are more a hodgepodge of spiritualists and shamans who

have been shoved into one category by the rest of the Traditions. A Dreamspeaker has one less Reputation Trait than his position would normally suggest, simply because a Dreamspeaker leader's authority isn't recognized as widely.

FACTIONS

Baruti — Storytellers, vagabonds and keepers of secrets, members of this faction travel from place to place learning new Dreamspeaker lore and ancient myths alike. Otherwise, they do their best to preserve the vision of how the world was before science arose.

Ghost Wheel Society — Deeply mistrusted (if not outright resented) by others of their Tradition, these techno-shamans seek the spirits of the machine age and urge their fellows to adapt to changing times instead of disappearing because of them.

Keepers of the Sacred Fire — These mages are the vital cornerstones of the Tradition. They live in their native culture and keep the old stories and customs alive from day to day.

Red Spear Society — Warriors and activists, these outspoken mystics battle the enemies that threaten their native cultures. Most of the time, the word "enemies" refers to the Technocracy, but these mages are not above attacking willworkers from other Traditions or even Sleepers if the need arises.

Solitaries — Hermits who venture into the wilderness to commune with the spiritual purity they find there, these mystics often return from their quests with profound advice on how to return to the ancient Dreaming ways.

EUTHANATOS

To most people, talk of topics such as euthanasia, living wills and capital punishment seems a uniquely modern phenomenon. For the devoted and all-too-often misunderstood mages of the Euthanatos Tradition, however, these questions and many more like them are but recent variations of the same timeless question: What does or does not constitute a Good Death? These mysterious and often frightening mages believe that while every soul has a part in the Tapestry, some threads become tangled and useless over time. Some threads, the Euthanatoi claim, even become destructive to the other threads around them. When this occurs, the Euthanatoi argue that it is better to cut a thread and allow another to take its place than allow it to continue fouling the Tapestry around it. The Euthanatoi see ending such an existence not as a punishment but as a release, a chance for the soul to start anew and hopefully avoid some of the same mistakes it made in this life.

Naturally, this duty is not one to be taken lightly, and the Euthanatoi have developed over time what is known as the Thanatoic Code. This code is a series of rules governing whether it is appropriate to give a target the Good Death or use some more subtle means of influence. A Euthanatos mage's conduct is also monitored closely by his fellows, especially early in his career. Those who seem overly lax in their duties or who kill for personal pleasure or gain are brought into line or even given the Good Death themselves in extreme cases.

The Euthanatos belief system arose in India. The religious background in favor of reincarnation inspired some wizards to take a more active role in manipulating the Wheel of Fate. They hoped to make the world better by removing dangerous individuals before those individuals could cause further harm, and they desired to bring souls to Ascension through enlightened reincarnation. Although the Euthanatoi operated as scattered cells at first, the disastrous Himalayan War with the Akashic Brotherhood eventually forced them to unite under a single banner, known then as the Chakravanti. Open hostilities between the two Traditions have been a thing of the past for several centuries, but both still shoulder a good deal of antipathy toward each other. Sometimes this legacy haunts the modern Euthanatoi still, as they meet an Akashic Brother and suddenly see the enemy they once battled for several lifetimes.

As fate would have it, however, these two Traditions are often called on to work together these days to battle enemies of the Traditions, and the karmically sensitive Euthanatoi cannot help but appreciate the irony of the situation (test their patience though it might). Their relations with members of their fellow

Traditions have never been terribly good, either. Most mages are unnerved by the Euthanatos outlook on death, however carefully applied it may be in practice, and they find the negative energies that the Euthanatos attract repellent. While they are valuable for their skill and their professionalism, Euthanatoi are seldom welcomed with real warmth by their fellows, which only makes their duty that much harder.

Events of recent years have stretched even this resourceful Tradition to its limits. In addition to the many battles that the Euthanatoi faced during the Ascension War, the number of mundane problems and people involved in them have spiraled beyond the means of the Euthanatoi to influence as they would desire. Now, many Euthanatoi are confused as to what course of action they should follow. Some see the need for some massive event to bring balance back to the Wheel and smooth the transition between lifetimes again. Others refuse to consider such drastic solutions, and they try instead to find key individuals to manipulate in order to effect change on the masses. Conflict has not yet come to a head between proponents of these different viewpoints, but there is certainly a growing rift within the Tradition. Initiates had best watch themselves carefully, lest they find that they have taken a side in a war they didn't even know was taking place.

The Avatar Storm troubles the Euthanatoi deeply as well, for they see it as a sign of a great disruption in the cycle of reincarnation. They would go to great lengths to find some way to end the fury of the storm. Ironically, the Euthanatoi consider themselves healers. The Good Death may seem a terrible and wicked tool, yet ultimately it is a scalpel one must use to end

suffering. Where the world suffers under the weight of despair or horror, the Euthanatos cuts away the evil in hopes of bringing about something new.

ROLEPLAYING HINTS

The Euthanatos mage takes on a heavy responsibility when he holds a life in his hands. Some would say that members of this Tradition are morally bankrupt, but the Euthanatos reply that at least they are taking a stand, when nobody else is willing to do so. As a rule, one can be sure when a Euthanatos makes a decision that she has examined the consequences carefully beforehand. The nature of their duty demands no less of them.

As for personal comportment, most Euthanatoi actually do exhibit some degree of their legendary chilly aura, at least when they are carrying out their duty. Most Euthanatoi save their more passionate faces for close friends and family. People who do get to know a Euthanatos mage are typically surprised at the deeply thoughtful and often quite fun-loving streak that the mage exhibits. Euthanatoi are extremely loyal friends and cabal members when they have the luxury to develop those relationships. Many build friendships that last (quite literally) lifetimes, and they take those relationships as seriously as they take their grim duty.

Specialty Sphere: *Entropy*

Common Foci: Weapons, games of chance, scales, prayer, probability mathematics, ashes, flame, bones

Tradition Advantage: Hands of Fate

Either as a side effect of their long relationship with the forces of chance or due to some accumulated Resonance from their ancient association with the inevitability of death, minor events just tend to fall in favor of the Euthanatoi without the mage having to exert any magical influence. These coincidences and lucky breaks have even become part of the Tradition's eerie mystique over time. The Euthanatos cannot control when or how they occur, though, and they're usually little more than a style thing anyway, such as always arriving at 13 minutes after the hour or always finding enough change for a cup of coffee. Having an enemy's gun jam, winning a crucial poker hand or finding a stash of 20-dollar bills is beyond the scope of this affinity. As a rule, if it would require magic or seriously impact any character (especially one other than the mage with the affinity), it's too powerful for this Tradition Advantage. If it would just look damn cool or creepy without changing Traits, it's probably appropriate.

Furthermore, all Euthanatoi are versed in either healing or killing, and usually several varieties of it. As a result, beginning characters receive two free Ability Traits to spend on *Brawl*, *Firearms*, *Medicine* or *Melee*.

Tradition Disadvantage: Hands of Destruction

All Euthanatos must maintain vigilance to avoid obtaining too much Entropic Resonance, lest they become mindless killing machines or little more than corpses themselves. A Euthanatos character must start the game with the *Entropic* Resonance Trait: *Jhor*. A Euthanatos gains *double* the listed Trait modifiers for his Entropic Resonance thereafter, so even a little Resonance can cause the Euthanatos to suffer hideous social penalties. (More subtly, this flaw can encourage the Euthanatos to become a destruc-

tive killing machine, with its combative advantages.) A Euthanatos with five Entropic Traits *will* be hunted down and executed by other Euthanatos, even if the Storyteller has to do it.

FACTIONS

Aided — Celtic mages who carry out the bloody sacrifices necessary for the culling of the herd, be it human or animal, their numbers have risen sharply in recent decades.

Albireo — Diplomats who act as the face of the Tradition to outsiders, explain the Thanatoic code and police the Tradition for corruption, this august body is open to all. However, full membership comes only after a probationary period of duty.

Golden Chalice — Secretive mystics who remove dangerous men and women from the political stage, they do not hesitate to use every means at their disposal to uphold their goals. Membership is by invitation only, though.

Knights of Radamanthys — Mercenaries who hire themselves out to other Traditions (but only for just causes), these honorable warriors hone magic and conventional fighting methods to a razor edge in their pursuit of enlightenment.

Lhakmists — Risk takers who leave just about everything in their life to chance, members of this faction have a fascination with modern technology and quantum theory. They have taken to patrolling the chaos of the Digital Web.

Madzimbabwe — Compassion and healing rites are the hallmarks of this African faction, which practices ghost-calling and other ancient traditions in order to reconcile the physical world with that of the departed.

Natatapas — Keepers of the most ancient rites of the Euthanatos, these reclusive Indian militants keep the Tradition centered on its quest for karmic purity.

Pomegranate Deme — Mystics who study the Greek Underworld and the rites of Persephone, these wizards are disappearing quickly in the modern world.

ORDER OF HERMES

No magical organization can claim the kind of spectacular successes that the Order of Hermes has seen in its illustrious history. Unfortunately, no other organization has been responsible for as many infamous disasters either. The roots of this still-powerful society of mages stretch back to a fateful mixture of Egyptian rituals, Hebrew Kabbalah lore and the numerology of the early Greek philosophers, which produced a formulaic, precise and extremely powerful magic unlike any the world had ever seen. It was an attractive approach, especially compared to the fearful propitiation of inscrutable gods or touchy spirits that many other wizards practiced at the time, and the cult of Thrice-Great Hermes gained in power even as the societies that birthed it slid into decline. Eventually, the banner of the Order of Hermes could been seen flying over strongholds throughout Europe, the Mediterranean and even parts of northern Africa.

Indeed, the greatest strength of the Order was that it expanded constantly, creating new Houses within itself to accommodate the various practices it came in contact with while still cataloging and codifying disparate styles to suit Hermetic tastes. During the Mythic Ages, the Order reigned supreme, battling agents of the Infernal and expanding the boundaries of magical knowledge. Hermetic mages sought such elusive goals as the philosopher's stone, an elixir of immortality and even the means to bring the dead back from their rest. Peasants marveled and nobles bridled at the power of the Order, but none dared challenge it.

Then the Artificers came.

The Artificers — who were also known as the Order of Reason, and who would later become the Technocracy — represented the desire to take magic from the hands of the elite and give it to the masses as a whole. The Order of Hermes believed that doing so would lead to the destruction of the world at the hands of uncontrolled mystical forces. So began the Ascension War and the end of the Hermetics' golden age. While the early contests were fierce, the Order was also riddled with infighting and other petty squabbles. These distractions took away from the Hermetic war effort, and the tide of battle changed conclusively in favor of the Artificers. By the end of the Renaissance alone, Chantries were ruined, cabals were decimated, and entire Hermetic Houses had been destroyed. With the bitter defeat of the Order of Hermes came the end of the consensual acceptance of magic, and that loss remains a thorn in the Order's side even today.

Fortunately, one of the last moves the unified Order made was to call the conclave that led to the establishment of the Council of Nine. In fact, most Hermetics are glad to recall this fact in the company of their fellow Tradition mages with no small amount of pride. Even now, the Order sees itself as the head of the resistance against the static reality of the Technocrats. It claims to guide the other Traditions so that they might best use their resources effectively. Naturally, this paternal attitude doesn't always endear Hermetics to their peers, but that's simply the price of leadership.

Unfortunately for the Order's collective pride, the de facto end of the Ascension War and the losses it suffered during the genesis of the Avatar Storm have dealt another blow to the Tradition's good name. The Tradition has also suffered more than any other Tradition due to the subsequent disappearance of many of the more enlightened mages from Earth. Advancement in the Order is a formal, hierarchical process. Initiates are trained in classes, rather like college students, and they must undergo several years of rigorous training before they are considered full members of the Tradition. From that point on, a mage's standing is a careful mix of Reputation, magical achievement and other factors such as Influence and important victories over Technocratic or Nephandic forces. What's more, it is virtually impossible for a Hermetic to ignore the constantly shifting sea of alliances and rivalries within her Tradition, since it affects such things as finding instruction and accessing Nodes or other Tradition resources.

However, the recent loss of so many upper-echelon members has opened up the ranks in a way unheard of in centuries. While all too many younger mages are hurrying to set themselves up in the same pointless feuds as their elders, a growing

force within the Order seeks to use this upset to focus once more on what was supposed to be the goal of the Order all along. Now that the Young Turks have a chance to dictate policy for once, they hope to put the Order back on the track of bringing magic back to a world in dire need of its aid.

ROLEPLAYING HINTS

Hermetic magic is difficult, complex, precise and highly specialized, so the Order tends to attract mages of a similar disposition. While general practitioners or more relaxed wizards are not unheard of, most Hermetics focus intently on one or two areas, and their style of magic shifts accordingly to reflect this concentration. All Hermetics carry themselves with pride. This attitude is as much a function of the bonding Initiates experience surviving their intense training as it is a reflection of the glorious history of the Order.

Furthermore, nearly all Hermetics owe at least a nominal allegiance to one House within the Order of Hermes, and their choice of House reflects their personalities. The techno-rebels of House Thig are typically hyperactive and idealistic, for example, while the Janissaries are famous for their icy composure. Few Hermetics would mistake the reserved and intellectual members of House Shaea for the contentious warriors of House Flambeau. While exceptions certainly occur, those mages whose outlook conflicts too strongly with the general tone of their House may find themselves effectively ostracized before long.

Specialty Sphere: *Forces*

Common Foci: Varies widely by House, but some foci common to most Hermetics include chanting in obscure languages, pentagrams/ circles, Seals of Solomon, rituals, numbers, mystic tomes, staves and wands, swords

Tradition Advantage: Noble Heritage

The very name of the Order commands respect in mystical circles in this world and beyond. Sorcerers and other hedge wizards typically mind their tongues and do what they're told when a Hermetic is around, and most minor spirits won't mess with Hermetics either. Even those characters who dislike the Order's past works give Hermetics a grudging degree of respect and a fairly wide berth. Hermetics cannot simply issue orders whenever they're around lesser wizards or walk unmolested through the spirit realms, however. Rather, think of this Advantage as a "Big Man On Campus" effect. While resistance is definitely possible — especially if the Hermetic treats his lessers poorly — those who know the mage's affiliation will typically give lip service to his advice and try not to trouble him without good reason. Of course, this Advantage doesn't necessarily apply to other truly Awakened folks. A Hermetic character can recoup and refresh one used Reputation Trait each game session.

As a side effect of this heritage and the very traditional training methods the Order employs, all beginning characters receive a free level of the *Occult* Influence Background and an extra Reputation Trait of their choice. Therefore, Hermetics are usually some of the most eager mages to pursue the Reputation system, as it can effect their chances at advancement within their Tradition directly. (If your game does not use the Reputation system very frequently, substitute a level of the *Occult* Ability instead.)

Tradition Disadvantage: Pride's Legacy

Because of the Tradition's long history of arrogant self-aggrandizement, all Hermetic mages receive the Negative Social Trait: *Condescending* when dealing with other mages and sorcerers. Even if the mage is personally a rather open-minded sort, people still consider him "one of those stuffy Hermetics." For the sake of game balance, this penalty applies even if the character isn't recognized widely as a Hermetic. Considering the fact that Hermetic training relies on developing one's confidence and authority to such a degree that one can control reality, however, many Hermetics can't help but deserve the Trait.

FACTIONS

House Bonisagus — This august body upholds the oldest rites and practices of the Tradition, and members plumb the depths of magical theory in pursuit of the truths at the root of reality. Specialty Sphere: *Prime*.

House Ex Miscellanea — Comprised of a motley and vibrant assortment of different practices, this House is home to just about any kind of mystic who follows a different paradigm than most Order members, but who still sought the training and structure the Order provides.

House Flambeau — Soldiers and builders of war-engines, these wizards are rightly feared for their command of *Forces*. They carry the Order's standard into battle on all fronts.

House Fortunae — Students of chaos, chance and probability, these mystics see the magic underneath fortune and coincidence. They seek to exploit these studies for the benefit of the Order as a whole. Specialty Sphere: *Entropy*.

House Janissary — Enforcers who check on other Order mages for signs of corruption or divergence from Hermetic ideals. Members of this House are rightly feared for their political power and personal dedication.

House Quaesitor — Acting in concert with the Janissaries, this House formulates Hermetic law and holds tribunals for cases too complicated or important for the Janissaries to resolve in the field. They are also known for discovering the Gilgul rite.

House Shaea — Students of the way language both creates and defines reality, this House promotes education as a means to enlightenment. As the record-keepers of the Order, House Shaea has access to secrets both envied and feared by the other Houses.

House Thig — Thig mages combine technology with magic to create a bizarre synthesis of the mystical and the technical, and they see modernization in general as the direction the Order must take to survive. Other Hermetics typically don't trust members of House Thig.

House Tytalus — Tytalus members seek strength through physical, magical and intellectual conflict, and they thrive on the rush of competition. They also seek to improve the Order itself by shaking up the status quo. Many mages in the other Houses question the means this House uses for those ends.

House Solificati — Alchemists who gained full recognition only recently, these mages see material transformation as a metaphor for the elevation of the spirit from mortal to divine. Specialty Sphere: *Matter*.

Sons of Ether

There is science, and then there is Science. What the world knows as science is the dull, drab and utterly uninspired recitation of lifeless facts. To the Sons of Ether, their Science is the true exploration of a universe of infinite possibilities, where a good theory, some sound equipment and a whole lot of inspiration can literally make anything happen. "If it can be imagined, it can be achieved," is a popular slogan these mages use, and they certainly have imagination to spare. Of course, some Etherite experiments can never seem to be duplicated by anyone except the Scientist who originated the theory, and volunteering as a lab assistant for one of these frenetic geniuses is about as safe as doing a combat tour of duty without body armor. However, pursuing Science is better than succumbing to the heartless science the Technocrats would have the public believe in.

Like their Technocratic foes, however, most Etherites bristle at the suggestion that the experiments they are performing involve magic. While many Etherites incorporate a liberal amount of paraphysics into their theories, most believe that they are simply applying previously undiscovered scientific principles that are too bold or too arcane for most people to understand and/ or unacceptable for the Technocrats to release to the public. The idea that sufficiently advanced science might as well be magic, to paraphrase a noted Etherite sympathizer, is entirely lost on them.

Despite their current high level of antipathy toward the Technocracy, the early Sons of Ether (then known as the Electrodyne Engineers) were in fact one of the Technocratic Conventions. They remained strong supporters of the Technocracy until near the end of the 19th century, when they split from the Technocracy after a heated dispute over the nature of space and space exploration. To strengthen the Gauntlet and further isolate the Earth from hostile alien entities, the Technocracy wished to reveal that space was cold, lifeless and inhospitable. This revelation would also debunk the idea that space was filled with breathable, easily traveled "ether" (an idea that was enjoying a great deal of popularity at the time). Furious that their fellows would take such a strong stand against exploration, the Etherites parted company with their colleagues and wound up joining the Tradition Council after a probationary period. Since then, they've been doing their best to undermine their former allies by spreading radical new theories, stretching the limits of existing science and introducing doctrines that tweak the rigid rules that Technocratic science seeks to enforce.

The end of the millennium has seen the Etherites take several promising strides. Quantum physics, chaos mathematics, nanotechnology and
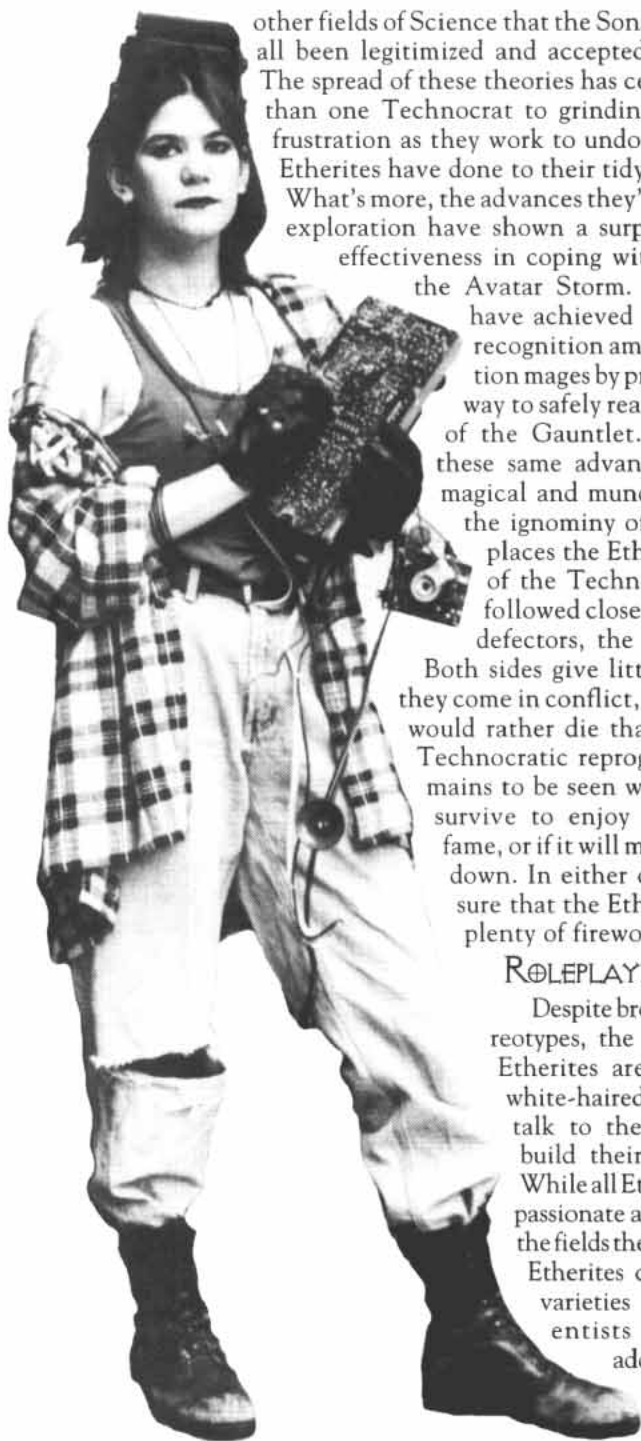
other fields of Science that the Sons pioneered have all been legitimized and accepted by the masses. The spread of these theories has certainly set more than one Technocrat to grinding their teeth in frustration as they work to undo the damage the Etherites have done to their tidy little paradigm. What's more, the advances they've made in space exploration have shown a surprising degree of effectiveness in coping with the results of the Avatar Storm. Many Etherites have achieved a new degree of recognition among other Tradition mages by providing the only way to safely reach the other side of the Gauntlet. Unfortunately, these same advances in both the magical and mundane worlds and the ignominy of their defection places the Etherites at the top of the Technocracy's hit list, followed closely by their fellow defectors, the Virtual Adepts. Both sides give little quarter when they come in conflict, and all Etherites would rather die than fall victim to Technocratic reprogramming. It remains to be seen whether they will survive to enjoy their newfound fame, or if it will merely bring them down. In either case, one can be sure that the Etherites will cause plenty of fireworks.

ROLEPLAYING HINTS

Despite broad Tradition stereotypes, the vast majority of Etherites are not wild-eyed, white-haired professors who talk to themselves as they build their latest monster. While all Etherites are deeply passionate about Science and the fields they choose to study, Etherites come in as many varieties as mundane scientists do. Some are addicted to the excitement of

venturing out into the field, testing new equipment and watching theories in practice. Others prefer the laboratory, where they can play in the realms of pure thought and harvest new ideas from the old. Still others like the largely thankless task of duplicating other's experiments, recording discoveries for posterity and otherwise making sure at least some cross-referencing of confusing Etherite theory is possible. No matter what capacity an Etherite chooses to represent herself in, that love of Science is always foremost. All Etherites develop a certain gleam in their eye or urgency in their voice when something related to their field comes up, and one can always count on them to enter such a discussion no matter what else they might have to do at the time.

Specialty Sphere: *Matter*

Common Foci: Computers, mental disciplines, mathematical constructs, hand tools, engineering schematics, ether goggles, scientific meters, specialized alloys, timepieces, notebooks full of theories, lab rats (literal or figurative)

Tradition Advantage: Eureka!

Many scientific prodigies burn out at a young age, but not so the Sons of Ether. If anything, most Etherites have too many ideas, and their homes and labs fill up with jumbles of half-completed projects and hastily scribbled research notes. While they might not always have the magic, materials or minutes necessary to actually conduct the experiment or Effect that's burning up their thoughts, they always have a theory in mind. After all, when television shows prove that duct tape, a Swiss Army knife and some common household items can be fashioned into just about mundane device one might desire, imagine what a font of inspiration the world is to those with true enlightenment. Lower all accessibility costs for non-weapon objects by one level of Influence (player's choice as to which category). Chances are, an Etherite can scrounge up a replacement, prototype, discarded model or something to get his hands on whatever scientific gear he needs.

Of course, all Etherites receive a free level of the *Science* Ability during character creation, and many take more on top of that. They also receive a free level of either *University* or *Medical* Influence to reflect the mundane resources they can command in their field of expertise.

Tradition Disadvantage: Reinventing the Wheel

With so many geniuses at work all across the globe, each pursuing their own pet theories and following their own particular procedures, the professional communication between the Etherites is frantic and usually hopelessly conflicted. Many Etherites are either unaware of or unwilling to learn the rotes of others since they are bent on viewing the world through the lens of their own personal theories. Therefore, they must constantly retrace territory covered by other mages instead of discovering truly new avenues of inspiration. Son of Ether characters cannot teach rotes to non-Etherites, nor can they learn rotes from non-Sons of Ether. Learning from another Son of Ether requires a successful Mental Challenge, with a difficulty equal to the rote's usual vulgar difficulty. Otherwise, the Etherite hasn't found a way to incorporate the ally's Science into his personal studies, and he must wait to try again at the end of the next game. Such stubbornness is the price of genius, after all.

FACTIONS

Adventurers — An emerging faction, these dashing mages take Science out of the lab and into danger zones all across the world. They employ highly sophisticated vehicles, armor and weaponry in their battles against mundane criminals and Technocratic agents alike.

Cybernauts — Dwindling in numbers but still active, these mages believe that the Digital Web is the next true frontier of humanity. They seek to improve conditions on the Net and promote Ascension through global connection. Specialty Sphere: *Correspondence*.

Ethernauts — Space explorers without equal, these mages brave the dangers of the Umbra in search of new truths. They also have several promising ideas about shielding craft against the Avatar Storm, which have drawn the envious attention of the other Traditions.

Mad Scientists — Not so much a faction as simply a recognized phenomenon, these Etherites have a sad but definite tendency to pursue dubious experiments with dangerous results. Their fellow Tradition members give them a wide berth.

Progressivists — Largely female in composition, this faction advocates a modernization of the Tradition from the ground up, starting with its name and political structure and working all the way up to theories and practices.

Utopians — Evangelical proponents of a better world through Science, members of this faction reject sterile Technocratic practices in favor of promoting uplifting ideals and helpful new technologies.
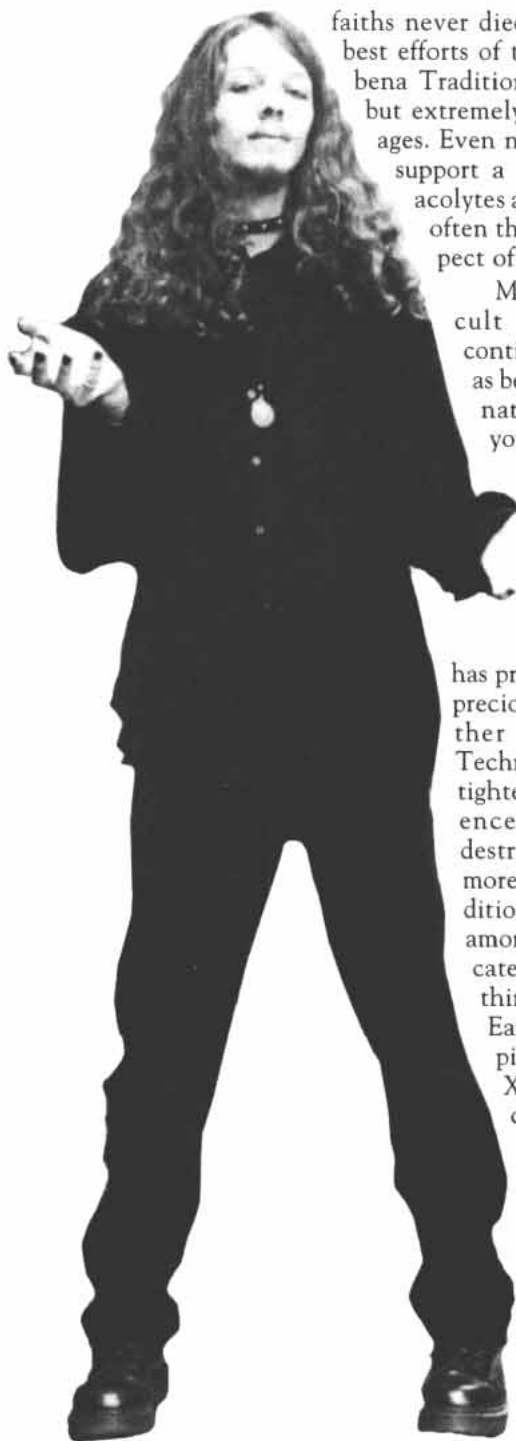
VERBENA

Like the Dreamspeakers, the Verbena Tradition is one of the most ancient Traditions. When their cousins sought to study the unseen world, however, the Verbena focused on the primal life force they sensed flowing all around them. Running with animals, listening to the whispers of the plants and calling the elemental forces by their secret names, these mystics forged a deep link with the natural world that even the most urban Verbena can feel stirring in their souls long before their actual Awakening.

Ancient Verbena recognized and embraced the sacred fusion of the Avatar with mortal flesh, and they taught those tribes they lived with to do likewise. Their knowledge of life's ebb and flow made them the first healers, and they passed on herbal remedies and other folklore, so that even un-Awakened people might learn to tend their own. While they recognized that death is as natural as life, the Verbena insisted that those who followed them take life only when necessary, and always with respect. Even then, their frankness about life's functions and the reality of death earned them an uncertain reputation. They were often forced to join secret societies and retreat into hiding from the same people who begged them for their cures. Although they certainly didn't like such furtive behavior, the Verbena accepted it as the price they had to pay in order to keep the knowledge of the living world alive among the people they loved.

Then came the fall of Rome, and the rise of the Catholic Church which told people that their natural urges were base and shameful, that their bodies were impure and untrustworthy, and that anyone who practiced simple folk cures was actually in league with the Devil. With this change came the witch hunts, and the Verbena found themselves at war with the Church and the governments that supported it for the next thousand years. They had to go deeper underground or face extinction in the witch-hunters' bonfires. Many fled Earth entirely, waiting for a time when they could practice their arts in peace once more. Others disguised their knowledge as simple woodlore or plain herbalism so as not to arouse any dangerous suspicions. Small groups survived in secrecy, maintaining the old ways as best they could, but by the time of the Renaissance and later the occultism of the Victorian age many of these traditions had been lost to antiquity. Now, modern Verbena must often deal with frustrating gaps in the history and practices of their Tradition. While neopagan and New Age ideas have replaced some of these missing pieces, it has only been after great debate and dissent within the Tradition.

Verbena are careful to make sure that their rites exceed what even the most fervent un-Awakened practitioners of similar crafts consider proper ceremony, if only to prove that their Tradition's roots go deeper than the past half-century's resurgence of interest. Fortunately, most of the old

faiths never died out entirely despite the best efforts of the Church, and the Verbena Tradition has maintained a small but extremely loyal following over the ages. Even now, most Verbena covens support a tight network of Sleeper acolytes and other helpers, which is often the most underestimated aspect of their organization.

Modern Verbena face a difficult decision. Should they continue practicing the old ways as best they know and risk stagnating in the eyes of their younger followers, or should they incorporate new beliefs and practices at the risk of alienating their older members and losing sight of their roots? Balancing the two has proved difficult, and there is precious little room for error either way, especially as the Technocratic noose draws ever tighter. What's more, the existence of weapons of mass destruction disturbs them far more deeply than any other Tradition. The Verbena have been among the most driven advocates of removing these terrible things from the face of the Earth at all costs, which has pitted them against Iteration X and the Progenitors in increasingly devastating confrontations. The Verbena know that the odds are against them in this fight, but they cannot sit idly by while such affronts to the river of life exist. If it costs them their lives to remove such monstrosities from the face of the Earth, then so be it.

ROLEPLAYING HINTS

Like the animals they love and the seasons they serve, the Verbena are a curious mix of caution and directness, compassion and brutality. Most of all, they act as the needs of the situation require. When they choose to speak, they often do so with a disarming level of honesty. If an animal is caught in a trap or a patient is in the grip of a terrible ailment, they will do their best to nurse them back to health. If the situation is hopeless for the victims, however, they have no trouble ending those lives either. What matters is that the cycle of life continues, and Verbena do their best to see that balance is maintained.

They have little time for pretension and civility. While they honor ancient rites of hospitality and they respect those who they feel deserve it, most Verbena delight in taking especially troublesome folks down a peg or two and revealing the primal urges civilization tries so hard to hide. Among their friends, they are consummate lovers and revelers who go to great lengths for those they trust, and they will always say what's on their mind, no matter how painful it might be to hear. To their enemies, they are merciless, patient and vindictive, and they tend to take the phrase "blood for blood" very literally.

Specialty Sphere: *Life*

Common Foci: Altars, athame, blood, cauldrons, chalices, chanting, dance, herbs, incense, ordeals, pentacles, runes, sacrifices, sex

Tradition Advantage: Flow of Life

The Verbena are so attuned to living cycles that they neither hesitate nor second-guess themselves in matters of nature. Verbena are completely at ease with even the most brutal and bloody aspects of life, but similarly they have caring, nurturing natures that can't be denied. Verbena gain one free retest per session on any challenge of *Animal Ken*, *Medicine* or *Survival*.

Due to their ancient ties with the cycle of death and rebirth, all Verbena receive a free level of *Medicine* Ability. Furthermore, they receive a free level of the *Survival* Ability, since their knowledge of natural ways permits them to fend for themselves more easily in the wild. (Naturally, this extra Trait stacks with their retest, so many Verbena follow pursuits in medical or wilderness careers.)

Tradition Disadvantage: Bad Blood

Verbena are well known for their habit of speaking freely about how they feel about their fellow Traditions, and they don't use any comfortable modern euphemisms to clean up descriptions of their practices. Since so many of their rites are quite intimate in nature and so deeply tied to natural processes, blood and sacrifice, this honesty has put off many members of the other Traditions. Members of other Traditions consider the Verbena disturbing and bloodthirsty. (The centuries of persecution known as the Burning Times have put quite a chip on many Verbena shoulders as well, which naturally only makes things worse.)

Verbena tend to unsettle even normal people, who just aren't comfortable with the Verbena's openness about topics like death, sexuality and

bodily functions. A Verbena may acquire and use the *Etiquette* Ability, but he must expend two *Etiquette* Traits (instead of one) to cover for a social gaffe or faux pas.

Factions

Gardeners of the Tree — Record-keepers, genealogical scholars and ritual experts, members of this faction strive to promote Tradition unity and keep the ancient practices alive for every generation of new Initiates.

Lifeweavers — Frequently frowned upon by others of the Tradition, these mystics disregard old practices in favor of making up new rites as they go along. They are forever pushing the boundaries of the Tradition with their dedication to innovation.

Moon-Seekers — Questing mages who travel in search of new lore to add to the Tradition's repertoire, members of this faction often have deep ties with their communities. They will take time to learn all manner of new rituals in hopes of finding sparks of the divine life.

Twisters of Fate — Usually regarded as somewhat extreme, even by other Verbena, these primal mystics dance to rhythms that even others of their Tradition have forgotten. They seek a return to the simplest rituals and oldest ways both culturally and magically.

VIRTUAL ADEPTS

While the other Traditions bicker about whose roots stretch back the farthest and how they will restore the mythic sensibilities of ages past to the modern world, the technological wizards and digital savants of the Virtual Adepts look to the horizon instead. They take the sterile technology of the Technocracy and give it the spirit it so desperately needs. As they see it, nothing is inherently wrong with science or technology, as the other Traditions like to claim. Rather, it is how those tools are applied that makes them beneficial or destructive.

Like the Sons of Ether, the Virtual Adepts began as a Convention of the Technocracy, known as the Difference Engineers. Using Babbage's difference engine, Lovelace's computational theory, Bell's long-distance technology and a whole lot of inspired theories of their own, these proto-Adepts were the pioneers responsible for devising new ways of gathering, storing and interpreting data for the rest of the Technocracy. As the 20th century progressed, however, the Adepts went farther and farther beyond their assigned sphere of influence. They got caught up in the excitement of discovery as they theorized the first virtual realities (earning their new moniker in the process), and they began working in earnest on their dream of bringing the world together through technology. Unfortunately, the Technocracy didn't see things their way. The other Conventions rejected the Adept's utopian vision for placing too much power in the hands of the masses, and they cracked down brutally on what they saw as a dangerous liability.

Horrified that the Union would use such extreme measures against its own kind — and unwilling to give up the dream they had within their reach — the always-rebellious Adepts made a daring decision to defect. After stealing as much information and equipment as they could and leaving behind as many nasty surprises for their former allies as they could, the Adepts came to the Council of Nine and asked if it could use another faction in its war against the Technocracy's enforced static reality.

As it happened, the struggling Council was in dire need of inside information with which to strike against the Technocratic juggernaut. It also needed a Tradition to take the seat of Correspondence, which had been vacant since the loss of the Ahl-i-Batin. While many members of the other Traditions still have trouble accepting the Adepts and their enthusiastic reliance on technology, no one can question the invaluable services the Adepts have performed since they

joined. As the recent Internet boom has testified, the idea of the Digital Web has an immense appeal to people in all sectors in society. Try as it might to regulate it, the Technocracy has still been unable to uproot the chaotic, anti-authoritarian sentiments the Adepts seeded throughout the Net and its culture. Indeed, the Ascension War would have ended several decades sooner without the Virtual Adepts' defection. Even in the wake of that event, the Adepts continue to offer perhaps the best chance the Traditions have for keeping the Technocracy from gaining an absolute stranglehold on reality… if the other Traditions don't choke the life out of the smug little bastards first, that is.

Aside from the outstanding prices on their heads from the Technocracy, that hubris is perhaps the greatest problem facing this Tradition today. All mages must struggle to maintain some sense of humility once they learn of their talent for shaping the world, but events have been falling almost entirely in the Adepts' favor lately. That being the case, they're in danger of becoming victims of their own success. After the crash of the original Digital Web due to Sleeper overload, many Adepts have become condescending and territorial. They've foregone their vision of spreading information and creating a digital Utopia in favor of resolving petty grudges, exchanging nasty viruses and engaging in other largely meaningless instances of computer sabotage. They claim to despise the lowest-common-denominator attitude that they find in society, but their own actions encourage it all too often. They drown intelligent discourse and vital information in a deluge of flames and video games as they seek to demonstrate
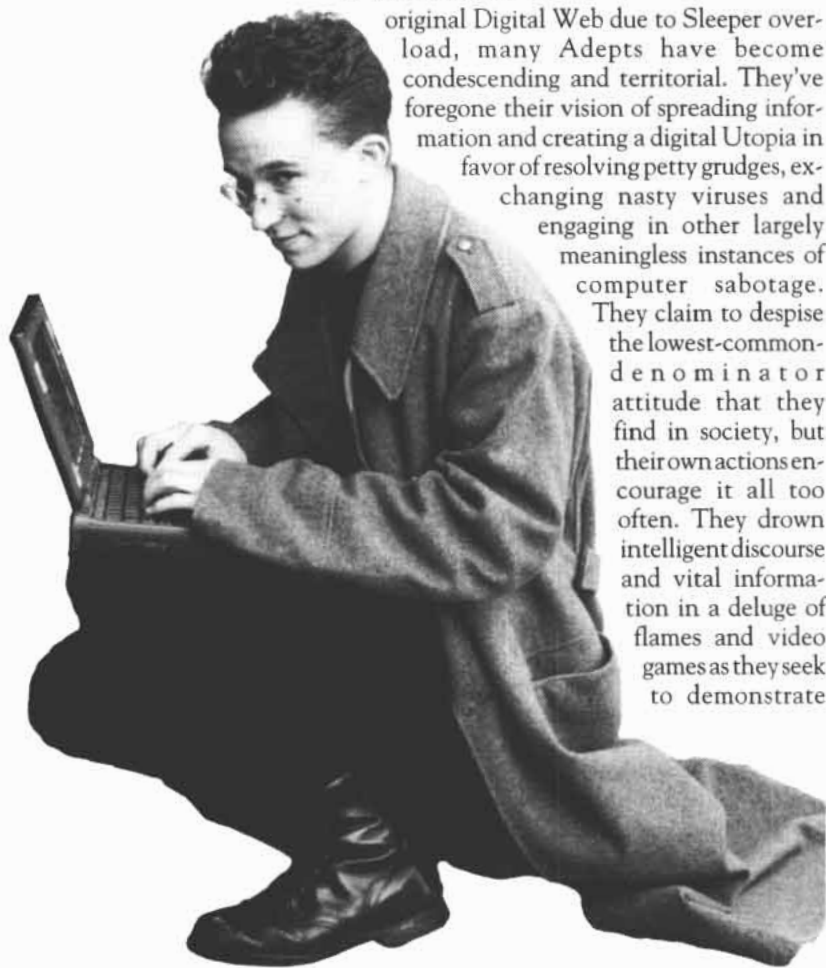
their superiority over the Sleepers and all other travelers they find in their chosen domain. They have the potential to steal the technological future right out from under the Technocrats in the coming years, but it's anyone's guess whether the Adepts will finally mature and do so or simply fall into the same traps that undid so many other wizards before them.

Roleplaying Hints

On the Digital Web, differences like age, gender, race and social class disappear, and the only true measure of another person is their eloquence and their accomplishments. The Virtual Adepts likewise come from all ages and walks of life. For every stereotypical college dropout coding from the darkness of his parent's basement, the Adepts count a university professor teaching a different kind of mathematics to his students or an intense metaphysician who uses computer code as means of expressing and altering the nature of the universe itself.

Adepts rank each other by eliteness, a measure of a member's past deeds and general style. Gaining such status is important to most of them, and they will go to great lengths to demonstrate their ingenuity to each other when the opportunity arises. Most Adepts share a highly rebellious and vandalistic streak, and they typically do not deal well with formal authority of any kind. While they will bend over backwards to help out those they consider elite, anyone else who tries to give them an order will often find that the Adepts make the process as difficult as possible, even if they actually carry out the order in the end.

They love pranks, especially ones that tweak the status quo, and they have a deep love of an underdog. Some Adepts even act as digital angels for rebellious Sleepers they admire, erasing arrest records, raising grades, lowering bills and otherwise helping smooth their lives out for them. Most Adepts are fervently, almost feverishly idealistic about the possibilities of technology and how it can be used to create a better world for the masses. In addition, the Adepts consider the Sleepers integral to their vision, however annoying the un-Awakened might be at times, and they refuse to rob their creations of the spirit and sense of humor with which they were born.

Specialty Sphere: *Correspondence*

Common Foci: Caffeine, computers, cybernetic implants, hacking rituals, mathematics, programs, sensory gear, surveillance equipment, video games

Tradition Advantage: Zen and the Art of Hacking

Although they are frequently dismissed as juvenile and overly competitive by mages of other Traditions, the Adepts thrive on contests of cleverness and ingenuity among their own kind. (So what if these contests often take the form of designing video games or other "frivolous" things?) More importantly, Adepts who show some promise at this system of dares (namely people like players' characters) receive unexpected software uploads or other anonymous puzzles from their fellow Adepts. If the character is able to figure out how these puzzles work, the solutions can give her insight into some problem she may be having in her own life as well. No one knows exactly how this process works, but most agree that it has made the difference for some Adepts stuck on particularly difficult problems in the past. However, some of the younger

Adepts are really starting to wonder just how it is that these surprises are so well timed after all....

An Adept confronted with a riddle, puzzle or similar problem gains double the normal number of clues or amount of time other players get to solve it, depending on the nature of the puzzle. For instance, if a Storyteller asks a riddle and gives the players five minutes to come up with an answer, the Virtual Adept is allowed 10 minutes to think about it. This benefit reflects the fact that he's probably either dealt with a similar puzzle in some form or received some tidbit of information previously that just happens to be useful right then.

In less mysterious terms, however, all Adepts have one thing in common: a love of anything and everything computer-related. Therefore, starting Adepts begin with two free levels of the *Computer* Ability, and most purchase more on top of that. If any Adepts have ever complained of this narrow focus, no one else has heard of it yet.

Tradition Disadvantage: Digital Despots

Being the latest thing to hit the Traditions and the masterminds behind what's now a global computer revolution, most Adepts have very little in the way of humility. They reinforce this condition constantly through their cynical evaluation of the millions of irritatingly clueless souls who now log onto the once exclusive Net every day. All Adepts receive the Negative Social Trait: *Obnoxious* as a result when they deal with the subject of computers in any way. As a general rule, assume that the Negative Trait applies if the *Computer* Ability is necessary to challenge or understand a given conversation or practice.

FACTIONS

Chaoticians — These wild theorists explore chaos math, fractals and so-called hard problems for hints about the unstable nature of information and reality. They delight in exploiting the cracks they discover in the static facade. Specialty Sphere: *Entropy*.

Cyberpunks — An old but declining faction, these mages know that the modern world is sliding into a sterile technological dystopia. They use heavy weapons, hardcore rotes and other extreme measures to battle those who are responsible. Specialty Sphere: *Forces*.

Cypherpunks — Intellectual packrats and hackers without compare, these mages share many of the same goals and targets as the Cyberpunks, but they rely on computers and data analysis instead of hardware and heavy weapons. Restive by nature, they enjoy exploring all sides of a problem. However, they have no problem acting once they reach a decision. Specialty Sphere: *Mind*.

Nexplorers — Explorers and guardians of the Digital Web, these mystics seek to create a new reality online, where the masses will find true enlightenment and fulfillment that does not rely on the imperfect physical world.

Reality Hackers — The universe is really just the most complicated code in existence, and these innovative mages alter reality magically by figuring out some of the elements of this code and how to change them to suit their needs.

HOLLOW ONES

Mention the Hollow Ones to most Tradition mages, and you'll get a disappointed sigh at best. At worst, you'll get a curse and a muttered invective about "those damn kids." Of course, it might be expecting too much to think that the Traditions would appreciate those who openly defy their ways like the Hollow Ones do. Plus, it can't be debated that the Hollow Ones stand for many of the things that the Traditions fight against. Where the Traditions fight to shape a better future of the world, the Hollow Ones believe that the world is already doomed, and they are determined to enjoy the decline as best they can.

Everything else Tradition mages know about this renegade group of mages is more rumor and supposition than solid fact, which is one more reason that few trust the Hollow Ones much. What's more, even what little is known is often frustratingly contradictory in nature. Although some of the more pretentious members like to say that Hollowers have been around in all times — fiddling as Rome burned and otherwise reveling in the darkness of society — more pragmatic Hollowers are not so cavalier. They point to the Romantic poetry and spiritualist movements of the Victorian era, the 1920s American flapper counterculture and the gothic-punk music underground of the '70s to find the roots of their grim society. Above all, they are creatures of the modern age, for all the good and ill that description encompasses, and they delight in mentioning as much to any condescending Tradition mages or other authority figures who look down on their shadowed ways.

Within this most loose of magical associations, Hollow Ones group themselves by cliques, groups of friends and allies who look after each other. Unlike more formal cabals, some Hollow One cliques include not only Sleeper members but even other supernatural beings as vampires or ghosts as well. Even those cliques that don't do so more than likely have a good idea where to find the nearest member of that species.

While Hollow Ones claim not to judge each other by petty societal standards, clique rivalry can sometimes become as fierce as any other type of conflict. Hollow Ones are more likely to come in conflict with each other over who has rights to an exclusive nightclub or a prime graveyard location than more esoteric points of conflict, though. As their motley background might indicate, Hollowers take what they like and discard

anything else. It's not uncommon to find a Hollow One who practices a nearly perfect imitation of Hermetic magic when commanding the elements, does yoga for *Life* rotes, turns to a Ouija board for communing with spirits and then listens to custom music mixes to invoke his mind magic. In fact, it's precisely this eclectic style that infuriates many of their more traditional counterparts. The Hollowers can seemingly make anything magical, rather than just adhering to the limited range of things that each Tradition preaches as the one true way. For their part, the Hollowers say that if it works for them, the others can just deal with it.

ROLEPLAYING HINTS

Let it be stated now, for the record. Hollow Ones are not all Goths in black lace and white face paint, nor are they all punks with mohawks out trashing the local mosh pit. Honestly, while those little conventions were certainly fun in their heyday, they died out over a decade ago, you know? Hollowers place a lot of importance on style, and style is a function of expressing oneself and finding new and innovative ways to present oneself, not simply cloning what's on television.

Perhaps the only definite overall trend one might notice among the Hollow Ones is a preference for dark colors. Outside of that, the mix of Victorian, Prohibition, punk, industrial, fetish and other fashions the Hollowers employ can literally dazzle the eye. Understand this drive for individuality, and you understand a lot more about the Hollow Ones' sense of identity. Still, this loose group gets more than its fair share of new blood from those who grow up in the Goth and industrial subcultures, and usually *some* part of their fashion and style reflects it, be it a tendency to quote Byron or a penchant for lacy shirts.

Fashion secrets aside, being a Hollow One really is more a mindset than anything else. While one need not be perpetually depressed and cynical, Hollowers who dress in bright colors constantly, bring out the best in everything and otherwise focus on the lighter side of life will quickly be looking for other friends. The Pangloss view of the world is just not what the

Hollowers are about. The world is dying, and nothing can change that. Why not relax a bit, indulge the passions that mean something (as opposed to the frantic need to accumulate possessions), and otherwise try to enjoy the ride? It's a special sense of decadence and of liberty in the contemplation of destruction. If you don't feel up to the task, then stay away from the shadows.

Specialty Sphere: None

Common Foci: Literally just about anything. However, some of the more common Hollower foci include: arcanology, blood, candles, crystals, dusty tomes, incense, music, neopagan texts, poetry, Ouija boards, seances, Victorian spirituality, wishing
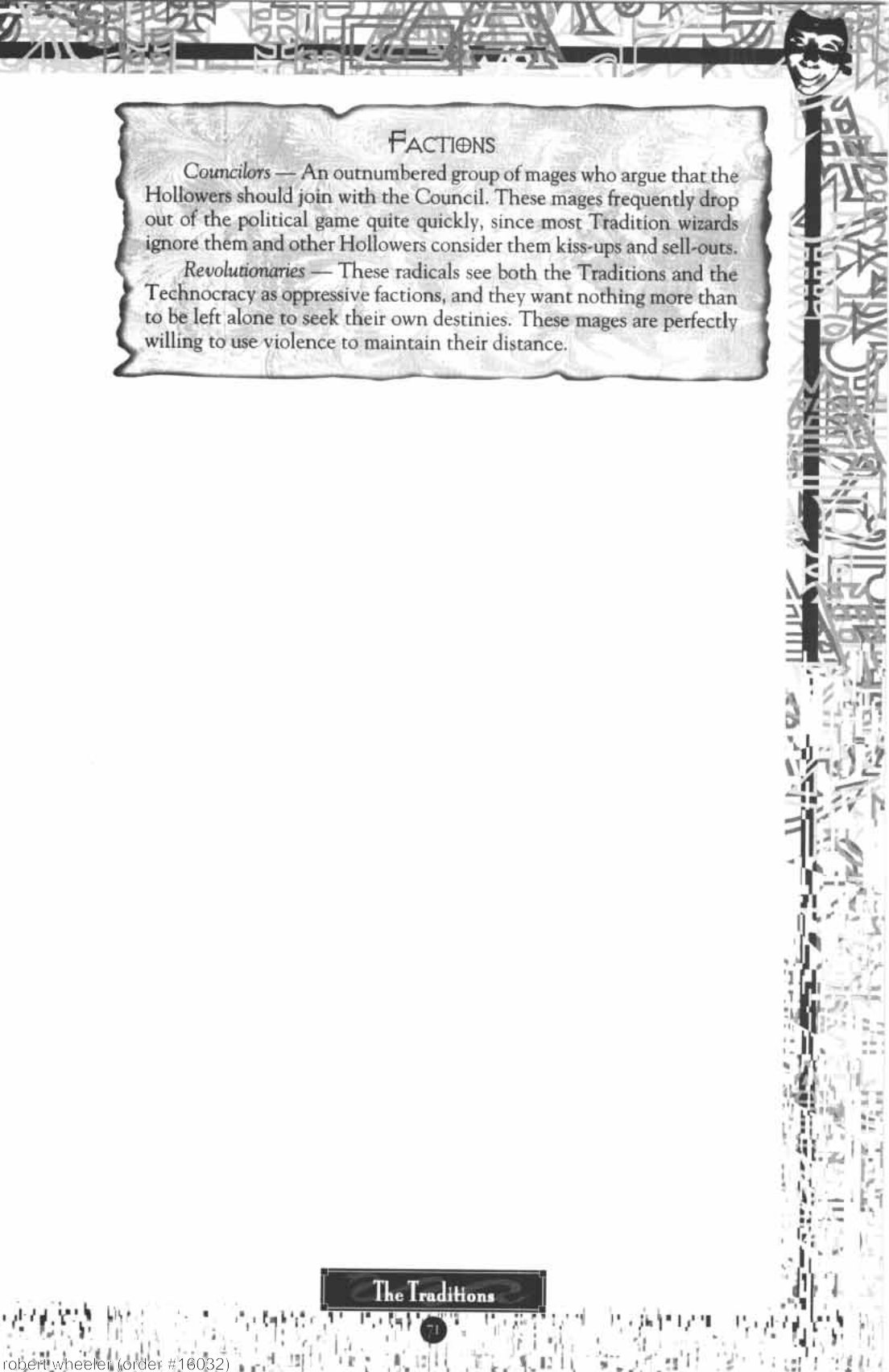
Tradition Advantage: Shadows Passing

Inspired as they are by the darkest parts of the soul, Hollowers just naturally blend into the shadows wherever they go. While they are not actually invisible to those around them and they don't simply go unnoticed (which are the realms of Spheres or the *Arcane* Background, respectively), Hollowers have a lucky tendency to wander untouched through areas that would be serious trouble otherwise. Likewise, many Hollowers prefer to make their homes in rundown buildings in rather scary parts of town, yet they never seem any worse the wear for it unless they really stick their necks out. Of course, whether the hazards they skirt are simple muggers and hooligans or prowling vampires and hungry ghosts is simply a matter of style, scale and (most of all) timing.

Storytellers should give Hollowers the benefit of the doubt when it comes to avoiding such unpleasant attentions, provided of course that they're not doing anything to draw attention to themselves and slipping through the shadows safely won't disrupt the needs of the story. All told, however, if anyone can walk through the graveyard on Halloween or the forest on a full moon and not get torn to pieces by some night creature or another, it's probably a Hollower — as long as they mind their manners, anyway.

A phenomenon composed in modern times of equal parts scholars and club-goers, all Hollowers receive a free level each of the *Occult* and *Streetwise* Abilities. This Advantage reflects their group's unique take on the magical lifestyle.

Tradition Disadvantage: Doom and Gloom

Being part of a magical subculture based entirely on negativity takes its toll eventually. Many Hollowers develop some form of depression over time (if they didn't start with one to begin with), and some are so apathetic that they not only mock the Traditions and their politics but simply waste their lives in revelry and idleness on top of it. They fiddle away the potential that they fight so hard to keep from falling under anyone else's control. Many must also fight addictions to various drugs or other nasty habits as well, which are side effects of their active nightlives. For despite all their jaded posturing otherwise, Hollowers are still very fragile spirits in many ways, and they are not nearly as inured to the nightly horrors around them as they would like to believe. Typically, a Hollow One has any two of the following Negative Traits: *Docile, Lethargic, Condescending, Tactless, Oblivious* or *Submissive*.

FACTIONS

Councilors — An outnumbered group of mages who argue that the Hollowers should join with the Council. These mages frequently drop out of the political game quite quickly, since most Tradition wizards ignore them and other Hollowers consider them kiss-ups and sell-outs.

Revolutionaries — These radicals see both the Traditions and the Technocracy as oppressive factions, and they want nothing more than to be left alone to seek their own destinies. These mages are perfectly willing to use violence to maintain their distance.

Meandering through the heavy underbrush, Tiernan paused occasionally, then wrapped the dark red cord in ever-shifting knots between his fingers. As his fingers worked intuitively, his feet carried him over rough terrain. The canyons near the community college presented little challenge to him. Even though he'd never been around this set of cliffs before, he understood how the terrain worked. He knew how to move in harmony with his surroundings and leave no trace of his passage. He wondered idly if the Akashic Brotherhood's vaunted balance ever provided any similar practical advantages out in the real world.
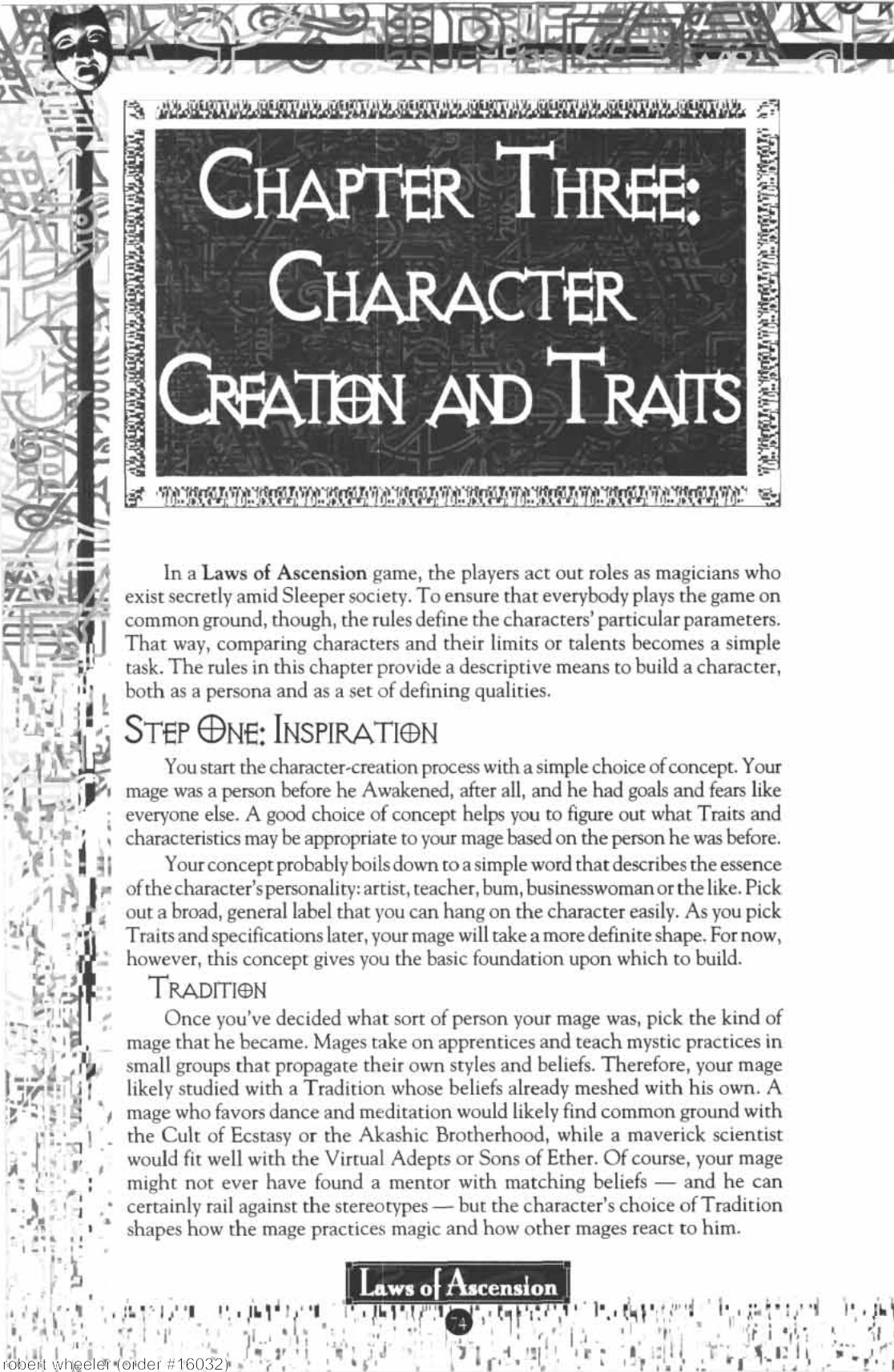
Tiernan skidded down a pebbly incline on the soles of his boots and looked around. The scrub and bushes were dry and scraggly, and they were decorated with only a few berries and withered leaves. Tiernan paused for a moment and knelt down to look at some of the bushes more closely. Many of the branches had been broken or trampled on a path through the middle of them, and the knots on his cord lined up along the center of the path. Whatever it was that he was tracking, it had come this way. The cord practically vibrated in his hands. He couldn't smell it on the branches, though. All he could smell was city smog and pollution weeping from the brittle leaves and clinging to the plant like his own cigarette smoke clung to his clothing. He finally pushed himself to his feet and resumed his search.

Following the knots and weaves that played across his knuckles through the red cord, Tiernan walked alongside the dried-out riverbed in pursuit of the "weird-lookin' critter" that had supposedly taken up residence out here. He ducked under a few low-hanging trees and halted near a series of small caves in front of which lay a pile of old dead sticks and rocks. His cord pointed right at them, and he stopped winding it around his hands. Whatever the beast was, it had gone into one of the caves.

As he approached the cave mouths, though, Tiernan realized that the sticks he'd seen from a distance were actually bleached bones. He paused; few animals left corpses and bones around like that. Now he was really puzzled. After a few moments of reflection, he stepped forward and picked up a small fragment of bone. He turned it over between his finger and thumb, looking at the jagged edges, the gnawed-upon sides and the general shape. He'd seen all kinds of animal bones, but this type was one he had encountered only rarely in the wilderness. It was human.

Tiernan quickly stuffed the piece of bone into a pocket and backed away. He didn't know what sort of creature was out here, but he was sure now that it wasn't natural and that it was dangerous. What was worse, it was nowhere to be found. He could see in the early afternoon light that the caves before him were empty, but he saw no tracks leading to or from them. Even the bushes he'd stopped at before stood whole and undisturbed now. Tiernan had to admit that his fellow Traditionalists were right... something was definitely wrong in the city, and it had spread out here.

With a frown and a nervous glance around, Tiernan headed back the way he had come.

In a **Laws of Ascension** game, the players act out roles as magicians who exist secretly amid Sleeper society. To ensure that everybody plays the game on common ground, though, the rules define the characters' particular parameters. That way, comparing characters and their limits or talents becomes a simple task. The rules in this chapter provide a descriptive means to build a character, both as a persona and as a set of defining qualities.

STEP ONE: INSPIRATION

You start the character-creation process with a simple choice of concept. Your mage was a person before he Awakened, after all, and he had goals and fears like everyone else. A good choice of concept helps you to figure out what Traits and characteristics may be appropriate to your mage based on the person he was before.

Your concept probably boils down to a simple word that describes the essence of the character's personality: artist, teacher, bum, businesswoman or the like. Pick out a broad, general label that you can hang on the character easily. As you pick Traits and specifications later, your mage will take a more definite shape. For now, however, this concept gives you the basic foundation upon which to build.

TRADITION

Once you've decided what sort of person your mage was, pick the kind of mage that he became. Mages take on apprentices and teach mystic practices in small groups that propagate their own styles and beliefs. Therefore, your mage likely studied with a Tradition whose beliefs already meshed with his own. A mage who favors dance and meditation would likely find common ground with the Cult of Ecstasy or the Akashic Brotherhood, while a maverick scientist would fit well with the Virtual Adepts or Sons of Ether. Of course, your mage might not ever have found a mentor with matching beliefs — and he can certainly rail against the stereotypes — but the character's choice of Tradition shapes how the mage practices magic and how other mages react to him.

Quick Character Creation Process

- **Step One: Inspiration** — Who are you?
- — Choose a concept
- — Choose a Tradition
- — Choose a Nature and Demeanor
- — Choose an Avatar Essence
- **Step Two: Attributes** — What are your basic capabilities?
- — Prioritize Attributes (seven primary, five secondary and three tertiary)
- — Choose Traits
- **Step Three: Advantages** — What do you know?
- — Choose five Abilities
- — Assign Tradition/faction Sphere (one level of Tradition specialty Sphere, and one level of faction specialty Sphere if the faction's specialty is different from the base Tradition's)
- — Choose seven Backgrounds
- **Step Four: Last Touches** — Fill in the details.
- — Assign Arete Trait (1)
- — Assign Willpower Traits (5)
- — Choose Resonance Trait (1)
- — Choose Negative Traits
- — Choose a derangement (if any)
- — Spend 5 (or more) Free Traits
- — Choose additional Spheres (4 more if your faction has a specialty Sphere; 5 more without a faction specialty; 6 all together if you have no Tradition specialty in the first place), up to the level of your Arete Trait total
- **Step Five: Spark of Life**

The Tradition teaches a budding Apprentice the necessary tools to work magic and strive for improvement and Ascension. This foundation also determines the sorts of magic that the character studied most during his formative years, which leads in turn to his special proficiency with an individual Sphere. Lastly, a Tradition determines the sorts of mages that the individual may know, work with or struggle against. It influences the character's political position in the society of mages.

Of course, some mages are rarer than others. You may not find too many Dreamspeakers in the midst of downtown New York, and you similarly won't see many Virtual Adepts in the heart of the Amazon. That being the case, your Storyteller may restrict your choice of Tradition based upon the circumstances of the chronicle.

Should you find that no Tradition seems to match the sort of magician you want to portray, you can always choose to be an Orphan — a mage who learned magic from some minor society or even taught himself. You could also play a Hollow One — a member of a loosely affiliated group of mages who share only a few common practices. Of course, playing such a character also subjects you to the rigors of being outside normal mage society, and makes it more difficult to learn the Spheres. A mage without a Tradition doesn't have hundreds of years of his predecessors' study and experience to draw upon, after all.

Character Creation and Traits

THE TRADITIONS

• Akashic Brotherhood — Martial artists and mystics, the Warring Fists are a study in personal discipline and zeal for war.

Specialty Sphere: *Mind*

• Celestial Chorus — The Singers celebrate divinity through song and prayer, but few agree on the true form of the divine.

Specialty Sphere: *Prime*

• Cult of Ecstasy — The Seers transcend the barriers of time, space and mortality through dance and exhausting pleasures — but only if they do not lose themselves in temptation and hedonism.

Specialty Sphere: *Time*

• Dreamspeakers — Around the world, many and varied naturalists, spiritualists and shamans commune with the very Earth and struggle to survive as belief in their holistic practices withers.

Specialty Sphere: *Spirit*

• Euthanatos — These reclusive mages hail from India's teeming cities. They seek to bring Balance and relieve suffering, even if doing so means slaying the unrighteous or the doomed.

Specialty Sphere: *Entropy*

• Order of Hermes — The great Order descends from a thousand years of mystical symbolism, alchemy, numerology and linguistic study. They seek to control the Universe with words and icons of power, yet few escape the pressures of the Order's deadly, internecine political struggles.

Specialty Sphere: *Forces*

• Sons of Ether — These scientists who reject boundaries bring new inspiration to cast-off technology or seek out visionary directions of study in a combination of brilliance and madness.

Specialty Sphere: *Matter*

• Verbena — Those who remember the bloody rites of yesteryear and pay heed to the cycles of nature feel no shame in the pulse of life and growth, for they recognize its intrinsic majesty.

Specialty Sphere: *Life*

• Virtual Adepts — Hackers, revolutionaries, computer engineers and chaoticians, the Virtual Adepts struggle to see past the physical world for the information beneath. Yet they are caught up in the trappings of reputation and elitism at the same time.

Specialty Sphere: *Correspondence*

• Hollow Ones — Goth is dead and it's doing fine, say the soulless outcasts who have no place among the Traditions. They foresee the end of the world, but they anticipate it with a nihilistic sense of humor in their individual quests for identity and magic.

Specialty Sphere: None

• Orphans — The few rare mages who Awaken without guidance and unlock their powers through personal study develop their own roads of enlightenment, but they have no one to aid them in their path.

Specialty Sphere: Any one

Nature and Demeanor

Just as a concept gives you a simple foundation for your character's history, a set of personality Archetypes gives a quick and easy means to identify the character's disposition. Each of the Archetypes listed here presents a pattern of behavior for a character, but this list certainly isn't exhaustive. Storytellers can and should expand the list of Archetypes to give characters a broad range of personality traits.

The character's Nature represents his internal drives and desires. The Nature provides the strong formative elements of the personality, but it's often hidden beneath the character's outer actions. Since the Nature forms as a result of strong personal experiences, it's a central part of the character that rarely changes, except as a result of extreme trauma.

The character's Demeanor, on the other hand, is the face that she presents to the world. The Demeanor is the means through which the character often expresses herself. Since few people are totally honest, even with themselves, most individuals' Demeanors differ from their Natures. A character's Demeanor may change with mood or circumstance, as the individual tries to fit into surrounding events, but many people have one Demeanor that they commonly resort to.

Avatar Essence

An Awakened mage struggles with his inner spirit in ways that few Sleepers comprehend. As the mage seeks enlightenment and Ascension, her very soul drives her in strange ways that are sometimes contrary to her personal desires and often mirrored through countless incarnations and legends. To some mages, this inner Avatar speaks and appears, making demands or cajoling the mage along the path to awareness. For others, the Avatar's guidance is a subtle interplay of feelings, hunches, dreams and emotions. Every Awakened mage feels it to some degree, though, and the form of these compulsions stems from the Avatar's Essence — the persona of the Avatar itself.

Mages recognize four basic Avatar Essences: Dynamic, Pattern, Primordial and Questing. In theory, an Infinite Essence exists as some combination of these drives, but no modern mage has discovered such an Avatar. Regardless, each mage has a single driving Avatar with one Essence and one view of the cosmos.

AVATAR ESSENCES
Dynamic — The Avatar seeks endless change and the birth of new forms.
Pattern — The Avatar enforces conformity and reinforces existing structure carefully.
Primordial — The Avatar destroys old forms and sows chaos to bring about renewal and rebirth.
Questing — The Avatar builds upon a series of experiences to reach some eventual goal.

At this point, just pick one Essence for your mage's Avatar. This choice determines the ultimate magical goals that the mage often feels compelled to pursue, and it plays an important part in Seekings as the mage strives for greater enlightenment.

STEP TWO: ATTRIBUTES

A mage can be smart, strong or handsome, or perhaps a little closer to average, but he certainly isn't bereft of the basics of humanity. Defining your character's innate talents and limits is the purview of Attribute Traits.

CHOOSING ATTRIBUTES

A character's Attribute Traits describe a wide range of human gifts and capabilities. You can decide whether your mage is physically adroit, mentally nimble or socially adept. Although few people excel in all fields, most mages stand out in one category or another. You should assign your mage's Traits to highlight his aptitudes.

• Physical Attributes cover the range of muscle power, speed, fitness and general health. A character with few Physical Attributes is not very fast or strong, while a character with a high number of Physical Attributes has a good athletic build and sterling physical qualities.

• Social Attributes describe the character's leadership skills, personality, appearance, speaking quality and his ability to interact with people. A character with few Social Attributes isn't a very compelling speaker, and he doesn't attract others easily. A character with many Social Attributes may possess a commanding presence, a natural authority or an air of compelling sensuality.

• Mental Attributes measure the character's thinking speed, recall, alertness, logic and ability to deduce facts from the evidence at hand. A character with few Mental Traits may not be a clear thinker, he might have only a modest education, or he just seems oblivious to his surroundings. A character with many Mental Traits has strong intellectual skills, a good grasp of what's going on around him and lots of common sense, even in the absence of formal education or scientific training.

Decide on the area in which you want your mage to be strongest and which areas will be closer to the average. Generally, each character has a slightly different balance of strengths, although your character can grow in competence with time and experience. Of course, some Attributes are more useful to certain concepts and Traditional practices, but you don't have to rely solely on that utility.

CHOOSING TRAITS

After deciding on your character's specific areas of talent, you need to pick out some descriptions that show how your character stands out. To describe your

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ATTRIBUTES

• Physical Traits: *Agile, Brawny, Brutal, Dexterous, Enduring, Energetic, Ferocious, Graceful, Lithe, Nimble, Quick, Resilient, Robust, Rugged, Stalwart, Steady, Tenacious, Tireless, Tough, Vigorous, Wiry*

• Social Traits: *Alluring, Beguiling, Charismatic, Charming, Commanding, Dignified, Diplomatic, Elegant, Eloquent, Empathetic, Expressive, Fearsome, Friendly, Genial, Gorgeous, Ingratiating, Intimidating, Magnetic, Persuasive, Seductive, Witty*

• Mental Traits: *Alert, Attentive, Clever, Creative, Cunning, Dedicated, Determined, Discerning, Disciplined, Flexible, Insightful, Intuitive, Knowledgeable, Observant, Patient, Rational, Reflective, Shrewd, Vigilant, Wily, Wise*

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character, you pick Attribute Traits, as shown here and on p. 87. Each Trait represents a specific strength. Pick the adjectives that elaborate on the way your character should be presented. An astute, bookish professor may be more *Knowledgeable* and *Rational* than his wise-cracking companion, who is *Clever* and *Intuitive*, but both have strong Mental Traits.

Choose seven Traits in your primary Attribute category. Choose five Traits in your secondary category. Choose three in your tertiary category. You can choose the same Trait multiple times to reflect a character's higher-than-usual aptitude in that particular area.

Step Three: Advantages

Since your mage probably had just as many life experiences as any more mundane person, it only makes sense that he has a comparable range of skills and capabilities. Just about everyone has some hobby, job or education, and this generalization applies to mages as well. Furthermore, a mage has various characteristics that normal humans don't have. The Awakening brings with it an awareness of the universe that most people lack, not to mention the magical talent to reshape reality based on this enlightened awareness. All together, these characteristics are Advantages. They make up the special areas of learning or mystical heritage that have developed with experience or magical talent.

Of course, there are many sorts of Advantages. Abilities represent learned and practiced capabilities that most people have. They represent natural talents, working skills and useful mundane knowledge. Backgrounds cover the mage's connection to mundane or magical society, as well as some measures of the mage's inherent magical power. The Spheres describe the mage's knowledge of magical practice in different aspects of reality. Finally, Resonance elaborates on the personal, unique nature of the character's magic.

Choosing Abilities

Pick any five Abilities that make sense for your character's life history, training, Tradition and personal predilections. You can choose multiple levels of an Ability to show higher levels of skill. See the list of Abilities on p. 94 for complete descriptions of what the various Abilities do.

Assigning Specialty Spheres

Each Tradition trains (some would say indoctrinates) its novices in the practice of its key Sphere. Since each Tradition has a heritage of study that covers one Sphere in great depth, Apprentices reap the benefits of that legacy of concentrated study. This base specialized Sphere is often easier for the mage to improve and understand, simply because his fundamental studies were so much more detailed and because the Tradition itself bases its magical practices

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Abilities

Academics, Alertness, Athletics, Awareness, Brawl, Computer, Cosmology, Crafts, Dodge, Drive, Enigmas, Etiquette, Expression, Firearms, Hobby/ Professional/ Expert Ability, Intimidation, Investigation, Law, Leadership, Linguistics, Medicine, Meditation, Melee, Occult, Performance, Science, Stealth, Streetwise, Subterfuge, Survival, Technology

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on principles that mesh well with that Sphere. Write down the first level of your Tradition's specialty Sphere, as listed on the Tradition chart on p. 76.

Furthermore, some Traditions' factions teach variants on the Tradition's base practices. If you decide to choose to make your character a member of a faction within his Tradition (see the Tradition descriptions in Chapter Two), you gain the first level of the faction's specialty Sphere as well as the first level of the Tradition's specialty Sphere. This faction Sphere then becomes your mage's specialty instead of the Tradition's Sphere for purposes of Experience Trait costs. If you don't pick a faction, or if your faction doesn't have a different specialty, just note the Tradition specialty as your specialty Sphere for purposes of Experience Trait costs.

CHOOSING BACKGROUNDS

Your mage's mix of mortal and magical heritage gives her access to a wide range of social characteristics and mystical strengths known as the character's Backgrounds. You can pick seven total Background Traits for your mage, although you can't have more than five levels in any one Background, and your Storyteller will certainly want a good explanation for any Background that exceeds three Traits. See p. 102 for a full description of Backgrounds.

STEP FOUR: LAST TOUCHES

After you've fleshed out your character's various Attributes, Abilities, Tradition and Backgrounds, you can determine your mage's Arete Traits, Willpower Traits, Negative Traits, derangements and Sphere levels.

ARETE TRAITS

The mage's enlightenment, mystical insight and awareness of magic combine to form his Arete. A young Initiate most often has only a single Arete Trait,

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BACKGROUNDS

Allies — Normal human confederates and aides who can help you out.

Arcane — An unnatural tendency to escape notice.

Avatar — The strength of your mage's mystic aura and soul and the limit to the mage's ability to store and channel magical energy naturally.

Contacts — Information sources and snitches.

Destiny — A great task or fate that lies ahead and demands fulfillment.

Dream — Connection to the universe through the subconscious mind and ability to access information through that link.

Influence — Sway over normal Sleeper society in any number of areas, including: *Bureaucracy, Church, Finance, Health, High Society, Industry, Legal, Media, Occult, Police, Political, Street, Transportation, Underworld* or *University*.

Library — Access to records and information about magic.

Mentor — An older (maybe) and wiser (hopefully) mage who helps and educates you.

Node — Regular access to a place of mystical power.

Resources — Money, holdings and possessions.

Wonder — An item your mage owns that has magical properties and characteristics.

representing the burst of fresh insight that characterizes the change from Sleeper to Awakened mage. With time, experience and Seekings, the mage can improve his rating in this Trait.

Your mage's Arete determines the success or failure of most of his spell Effects (see Chapter Four), as well as the limit of how much of the Spheres the character can comprehend. Your mage cannot learn a Sphere level above the character's total Arete Traits. Therefore, a mage with only a single Arete Trait can learn only the first level of any of the Spheres.

Unless you spend Free Traits at character creation, your mage starts the game with only a single Arete Trait. You cannot raise your Arete above three Traits by spending Free Traits, however. Further enlightenment comes only with experience.

WILLPOWER TRAITS

Mages have strong reserves of internal fortitude. Reshaping the cosmos demands nothing less. Willpower represents the resilience that allows the magician to overcome extreme hardship or continue to fight when all seems lost. Willpower determines a mage's maximum number of Arete Traits, helps him resist extreme physical injury and lets him draw on deep reserves of strength when he is worn down.

Your starting mage character has five permanent Willpower Traits. In play, you spend temporary Willpower Traits, which refresh themselves later to a maximum of your permanent rating. With experience, you can improve this rating to a maximum of 10 Willpower Traits.

RESONANCE TRAITS

Each mage has an individual spin on magic that colors his Effects subtly when he performs them. These personal twists of magic show up as Resonance. Generally, a magical spell resonates with its creator's individual characteristics, and a mage with a large amount of Resonance injects it ever more clearly into his Effects.

Pick one *Dynamic*, *Entropic* or *Static* Resonance Trait when you begin play. You may gain additional Resonance Traits as the story unfolds.

NEGATIVE TRAITS

Your mage has some specific deficiency. Maybe she's forgetful, or perhaps she is just small and weak. Perhaps these problems are natural, or maybe they stem from some accident or injury. In any case, these difficulties become Negative Traits. You don't have to take any Negative Traits, they help to flesh out specific hindrances that your character suffers.

In addition to giving you a means to describe a character's minor problems and peccadilloes, Negative Traits provide extra opportunities to strengthen your character elsewhere. Each Negative Trait that you take is good for one Free Trait that you may spend later. You can take up to a total of five Negative Traits, although you shouldn't take more than three Negative Traits in the same Attribute category. You usually shouldn't take the same Negative Trait more than once either.

While you can often make up new Attribute Traits to describe your character, you should stick to the Negative Traits listed here. If you have a Trait that's not listed, other players won't be able to invoke it in play because they won't know it exists.

Also, remember that you need to roleplay your character's Negative Traits. Pick Traits that you think will be fun or challenging to portray, and that you can get across

NEGATIVE TRAITS

- **Negative Physical Traits:** Clumsy, Cowardly, Decrepit, Delicate, Docile, Flabby, Frail, Lame, Lethargic, Puny, Sickly, Slow, Soft
- **Negative Social Traits:** Bestial, Callous, Condescending, Dull, Feral, Ghastly, Meek, Naïve, Obnoxious, Repugnant, Shy, Tactless, Untrustworthy
- **Negative Mental Traits:** Deceitful, Forgetful, Gullible, Ignorant, Impatient, Oblivious, Predictable, Shortsighted, Squeamish, Submissive, Unstable, Violent, Witless

to other players. If you choose Traits that you can't or won't portray, the Storyteller may force you to buy off these Traits with your hard-earned Experience Traits.

Descriptions of how specific Negative Traits affect play begin on p. 121.

DERANGEMENTS

It's a simple fact of life that some people just don't see the world the way everyone else does. While mages certainly fit into this generalization, they usually continue to deal with day-to-day life in a fashion that most people would consider sensible given mages' unusual problems and powers. When someone suffers a serious mental disorder, though, it has a deleterious effect on his entire personality. Such a problem, be it a subtle twitch or a very noticeable psychosis, is known as a derangement.

Taking a derangement grants you two additional Free Traits that count against your limit of five Negative Traits. Remember that taking derangements requires advanced roleplaying. A character with a derangement has specific personality problems and a very different outlook on living, all of which will require you to think long and hard about how you present the mage. Talk to your Storyteller before you consider taking any derangement.

Derangements are described in Chapter Five on p. 121.

DERANGEMENTS

Bulimia, Crimson Rage, Fugue, Hysteria, Manic-Depression, Megalomania, Multiple Personalities, Obsessive/ Compulsive, Paranoia, Regression, Schizophrenia

FREE TRAITS

You can customize your mage to some degree using Free Traits. Your Free Traits can improve just about any facet of your character, so you can improve your Abilities to represent a character with strong natural talent. You can also take additional Abilities or even improve your mage's Advantages and Backgrounds.

A starting mage character has five Free Traits. You also get additional Free Traits for any Negative Traits or derangements that you selected earlier. However, some improvements cost more Free Traits than others.

- One Free Trait buys an additional Attribute Trait.
- One Free Trait buys an additional Ability Trait.
- At a cost of one Free Trait, you may take a specialization in an Ability that you already have (see p. 95 for information about specializations). Remember that each Ability may have only one specialization.

• One Free Trait converts to an additional Background Trait, subject to Storyteller approval.

• Two Free Traits grants you an additional Arete Trait. You cannot raise that rating above a total of three Arete Traits in this manner, though.

• Three Free Traits convert to an extra Willpower Trait, to a maximum of 10 permanent Willpower Traits.

• Three Free Traits allows you to learn the first level of *any* Sphere, subject to Storyteller approval.

CHOOSING SPHERES

Now that you've set down your mage's Arete Traits, you can determine her knowledge of the various Spheres. If your mage just had one Tradition specialty Sphere, you get five additional levels of Spheres. If your mage had a Tradition Sphere and a faction specialty Sphere, then you pick four additional Sphere levels. If your mage has no specialty Sphere, you can pick six levels of Spheres of your choice.

Remember that no Sphere level can exceed your Arete Trait total. If you have only one Arete Trait, you can have only the first levels of the various Spheres. See Chapter Four for information about all of the Spheres.

STEP FIVE: SPARK OF LIFE

At the end of Step Four, your mage should have a list of Traits and capabilities. However, a good character isn't just a collection of numbers and adjectives. Now it's time to deepen the character's story. Look into her motives, her history, her Awakening and the other details of her experience that turned her into the person she is today.

• History — Consider the mage's pre-Awakening days. Did she have any special hopes and dreams that were inspired or dashed by the change? Does her family know of her powers, or does she even contact her family members any more? Where did she live, how did she grow up, and what sort of jobs and education has she had?

• Secrets — Come on, everyone has a few. Does your mage harbor a secret shame or desire? Does she regret what she's become, or does she embrace it a little too passionately? Has she learned something better left buried, or does she despise some aspect of her Tradition secretly?

• Motivation — Although all mages feel a call to pursue enlightenment, not every mage does so in the same way. For some, this pursuit takes the form of humanitarian action. For others, it's a continued drive for personal goals. What makes your mage get up and go? Does she want to help other people Awaken, or would she protect them from that fate? Does she really believe in her Tradition's dogma? Maybe she just moves as her fate takes her. Whatever form it takes, motivation is the push or pull that helps the character go places and do things.

• Appearance — How does your mage look? Is she disheveled and unkempt, or is she a shining gorgeous beauty? Does she have any distinctive features or mannerisms? People remember the Hermetic who wears tweed or the Verbena with the dazzling tattoo and seductive walk, so pick a couple of features that will stand out.

• Foci — Your mage's foci are very important to her magical technique, even though you use no Traits to represent them. Without foci, your mage will be hard-pressed to perform even the slightest tricks. What foci does your mage favor? Pick a special focus for each Sphere, and make sure to list the sorts of foci that your mage

uses. Check out the list in Chapter Four for ideas. You can match up your foci with your mage's Abilities to get some hefty bonuses when casting spells.

• Quirks — Everyone has a few distinctive mannerisms. Your mage's quirks can be anything from giving your adversaries the finger right before you escape to keeping pictures of cats on everything you own. A quirk can help distinguish you from an imposter, or you could try to copy someone else's mannerisms should the need arise.

ARCHETYPES

An Archetype describes a fundamental personality characteristic. The Archetypes provide specific examples of what motivates an individual. Naturally, most humans are sums of multiple (sometimes conflicting) drives, but the Archetypes represent the strongest, most visible or important part of a personality. A character's Nature Archetype describes the individual's inner drives and desires, while the Demeanor represents the face that the character presents to the world at large.

Because it represents her most important and dearly held impulses, a character's Nature provides insight into her plans and serves to reinforce her conviction. Should a character be affected by some sort of mind-influencing power that violates her Nature, you gain an automatic free retest to resist that power by calling upon that Nature. Conversely, if someone guesses your character's Nature and uses it in a challenge to convince your character to do something in line with that Nature, then you must risk an additional Trait in that challenge.

In certain circumstances, a Storyteller may rule that you regain a Trait of Willpower if you perform some suitably arduous task in keeping with your Nature. This reward can be difficult to track or adjudicate fairly, though, so it doesn't always apply. You won't gain Willpower simply by spouting rhetoric or performing little acts that pay lip service to your Nature. It's only by rediscovering your purpose through trials and exertions that you reaffirm your drive.

Example: *Ulfston, a mage with the Caregiver Nature, finds himself in a conflict with a Master of Mind who's trying to invade his psyche. Convinced that a certain child has a strong destiny that must be avoided, the Master tries to force Ulfston to slaughter that child. They make a challenge, and Ulfston's player loses. However, Ulfston's player announces that he is a true Caregiver who would never commit such an atrocious act. The two retest, and Ulfston wins. He is able to fight off the Master's commands... for now.*

Later, once Ulfston has dealt with the threat, he takes the child to his friend Anneke for help. Anneke says that she just doesn't have the resources to take care of a child right now, but she can give him some money if he can look after the child. She makes a Social Challenge to convince Ulfston that this is the right thing to do. Furthermore, she ups the stakes by using Ulfston's Nature against him ("I know that you are a true Caregiver. You would never let this poor child down."). Ulfston's player must now bid an additional Social Trait. They test, and Ulfston loses. He realizes that he can't simply leave the child alone, so he takes the child with him, bewildered as to how they'll survive. He checks into a hotel for the moment and takes the child to get some food, then spends some time trying to figure out how to help educate and protect the orphan. Due to his concern and care (which takes a great deal of time and effort), the Storyteller rules that Ulfston reinforces his Caregiver Nature, and regains a Trait of Willpower.

• Architect — You hope to leave a lasting legacy, a spark of inspiration or change that passes down through the ages.

- Autocrat — You take charge, either to impose order or to foment chaos.
- Bon Vivant — Sybaritic pleasures and temptations are your stock in trade.
- Bravo — You whip others into shape by force of strength or personality.
- Caregiver — The gifts of Awakening allow you to help the needy and the weak.
- Celebrant — Awakening has only strengthened your ebullient spirit.
- Child — You are naïve and dependent, either by choice or by lack of experience.
- Competitor — You strive to come out on top in any circumstances.
- Conformist — No sense bucking authority; you follow trends and support leaders.
- Conniver — Why work for something when you can get it more easily some other way?
- Curmudgeon — The world's gone to hell, and you want nothing more than to bitch about it.
- Deviant — You're so far outside the norm, you can't even spot "normal" with a telescope.
- Director — Orderly structures and predictable hierarchies make life simpler and prosperity easier to achieve.
- Fanatic — Some cause or passion calls to you and drives you to the limits of your endurance.
- Gallant — You love to be the center of attention, and you make sure everyone knows it.
- Judge — Separating truth from falsehood and justice from anarchy is your difficult quest.
- Loner — Even among a crowd of people you feel alone.
- Martyr — You'll give of yourself until there's nothing left out of a morbid self-chastisement or true altruism.
- Masochist — You inflict pain upon yourself to test your limits or out of some twisted need.
- Monster — You are the evil that stalks the nights.
- Pedagogue — Not only do you know a lot about everything, you're more than happy to share. And share. And share.
- Penitent — You feel a need to atone for some real or imagined slight.
- Perfectionist — Good just isn't good enough for you.
- Rebel — Tear down the system before it swallows you up. Don't succumb to the stifling conformity of society!
- Rogue — You'll get what's yours however you can. The only rule is to look out for yourself.
- Survivor — Nothing can keep you down for long.
- Thrill-Seeker — Life is just the search for the next big thrill.
- Traditionalist — The old ways must be good ways, or they wouldn't have lasted so long.
- Trickster — The only way to deal with the world is to recognize life as the great joke that it is.
- Visionary — The distant hopes and dreams of tomorrow fill your mind with wonder.

AVATAR ESSENCES

In a flash of insight, a mage Awakens to a wider universe. In this moment, the Avatar stirs and becomes the connection between a mage and the Tapestry. A mage works magic through his Avatar, and the Avatar holds memories and drives from many former incarnations. It also connects the mage to Resonance from age-old spells and memories of legendary times past. A mage's Avatar guides him with subtle emotions, shocking visions or blatant spiritual manifestations.

It is widely believed that the Avatar guides the mage throughout his magical growth toward eventual Ascension. However, not all Avatars are equal. Some have stronger drives, some have very individual motives, and some are satisfied only if the mage overcomes deep personal difficulties or fulfills dangerous quests. Ultimately the Avatar's essential drive, determines how it interacts with the mage and to what ends it drives him.

Of course, the Avatar — be it soul, spirit, guardian angel, subconscious desire, whatever — rarely interacts directly with a mage. Only a rare few mages have Avatars that make themselves known deliberately. For most mages, the Avatar appears in dreams and sudden intuitive hunches or emotions.

In game terms, the Avatar Essence describes the Avatar's goals and methods. Each mage has one Avatar Essence, which in turn shows the Avatar's specific relation to the cosmos. Typically, this Essence becomes most clear during Seekings (see p. 122). When a mage undergoes a Seeking, a Quiet or some other highly charged encounter with the Avatar, the Essence makes itself evident.

An Avatar's Essence determines in part the requirements of a Seeking. Although a Seeking often forces a mage to confront unexplored or unsavory elements of his personality in order to achieve a more enlightened understanding of himself, the requirements of his Avatar's Essence always surface in a Seeking as well.

The four known Essences are:

DYNAMIC ESSENCE

Your Avatar strives for change at all times. It delights in all manner of random, whirling, creative exploration, be it in creating new things, coming up with unique ideas or just pushing you to experience things you've never done before.

When you engage in a Seeking, your Avatar requires you to have done something totally new. If you haven't had a new experience or learned something completely new since your last Seeking (such as a new Ability, for instance), then you will not be able to satisfy the impulses of this Essence.
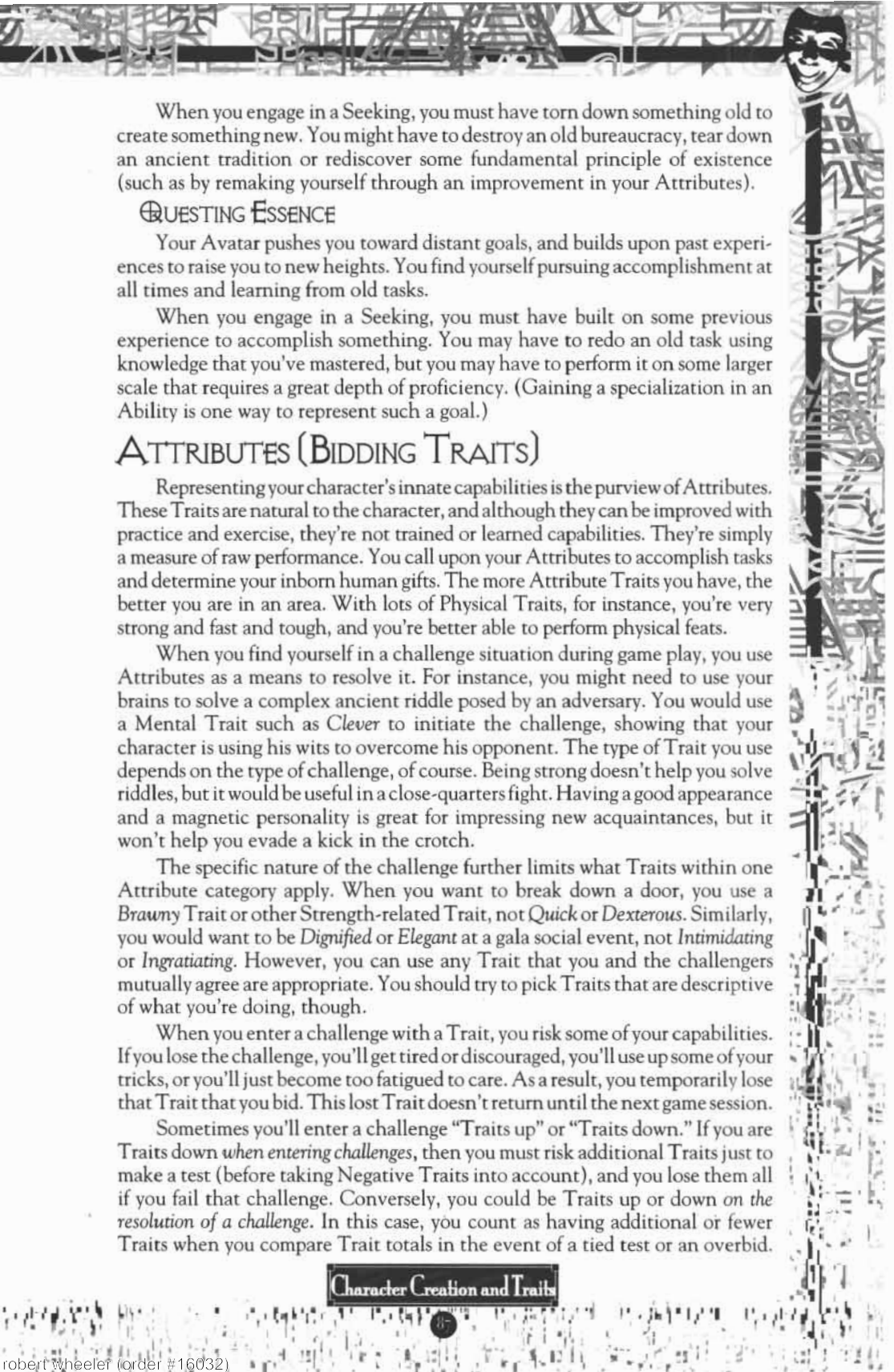
PATTERN ESSENCE

Your Avatar desires to reinforce existing structures or build up coherent models. You find yourself drawn to the beauty in order, and you are sometimes compelled to defend or elaborate on known principles and beliefs.

When you engage in a Seeking, you must somehow reinforce an existing structure. You can do so in any number of ways, including helping to raise a building, elaborating on a scientific theory or improving one of your own areas of knowledge (such as by gaining new levels in an Ability that you already have).

PRIMORDIAL ESSENCE

Your Avatar springs from the original, primordial soup of Creation. Therefore, this Essence revels in death, rebirth and the bubbling chaos of beginnings and endings.

When you engage in a Seeking, you must have torn down something old to create something new. You might have to destroy an old bureaucracy, tear down an ancient tradition or rediscover some fundamental principle of existence (such as by remaking yourself through an improvement in your Attributes).

QUESTING ESSENCE

Your Avatar pushes you toward distant goals, and builds upon past experiences to raise you to new heights. You find yourself pursuing accomplishment at all times and learning from old tasks.

When you engage in a Seeking, you must have built on some previous experience to accomplish something. You may have to redo an old task using knowledge that you've mastered, but you may have to perform it on some larger scale that requires a great depth of proficiency. (Gaining a specialization in an Ability is one way to represent such a goal.)

ATTRIBUTES (BIDDING TRAITS)

Representing your character's innate capabilities is the purview of Attributes. These Traits are natural to the character, and although they can be improved with practice and exercise, they're not trained or learned capabilities. They're simply a measure of raw performance. You call upon your Attributes to accomplish tasks and determine your inborn human gifts. The more Attribute Traits you have, the better you are in an area. With lots of Physical Traits, for instance, you're very strong and fast and tough, and you're better able to perform physical feats.

When you find yourself in a challenge situation during game play, you use Attributes as a means to resolve it. For instance, you might need to use your brains to solve a complex ancient riddle posed by an adversary. You would use a Mental Trait such as *Clever* to initiate the challenge, showing that your character is using his wits to overcome his opponent. The type of Trait you use depends on the type of challenge, of course. Being strong doesn't help you solve riddles, but it would be useful in a close-quarters fight. Having a good appearance and a magnetic personality is great for impressing new acquaintances, but it won't help you evade a kick in the crotch.

The specific nature of the challenge further limits what Traits within one Attribute category apply. When you want to break down a door, you use a *Brawny* Trait or other Strength-related Trait, not *Quick* or *Dexterous*. Similarly, you would want to be *Dignified* or *Elegant* at a gala social event, not *Intimidating* or *Ingratiating*. However, you can use any Trait that you and the challengers mutually agree are appropriate. You should try to pick Traits that are descriptive of what you're doing, though.

When you enter a challenge with a Trait, you risk some of your capabilities. If you lose the challenge, you'll get tired or discouraged, you'll use up some of your tricks, or you'll just become too fatigued to care. As a result, you temporarily lose that Trait that you bid. This lost Trait doesn't return until the next game session.

Sometimes you'll enter a challenge "Traits up" or "Traits down." If you are Traits down *when entering challenges*, then you must risk additional Traits just to make a test (before taking Negative Traits into account), and you lose them all if you fail that challenge. Conversely, you could be Traits up or down *on the resolution of a challenge*. In this case, you count as having additional or fewer Traits when you compare Trait totals in the event of a tied test or an overbid.

The Trait listings that follow include some run-downs of what Traits are appropriate for certain types of challenges. You can ignore them if you desire, since some weird situations may make different Traits appropriate for certain types of challenges. Ideally, though, you should bid Traits from categories appropriate to the challenge at hand. Doing so helps to describe the action and give you a feel for the different ways that characters handle problems.

New players may simply use a pool of generic Traits, just to speed play. Eventually, when they get the hang of things, you can help them to pick out more specific Traits that are appropriate to the action.

See Chapter Five for descriptions and examples of how to use Attributes in challenges.

PHYSICAL TRAITS

Strength-related: *Brawny, Ferocious, Stalwart, Tough, Wiry*

Dexterity-related: *Dexterous, Graceful, Lithe, Nimble, Quick*

Stamina-related: *Enduring, Resilient, Robust, Rugged, Tireless*

Miscellaneous Physical: *Agile, Brutal, Energetic, Steady, Tenacious, Vigorous*

Agile: You have a well-honed and flexible body. You can bend, twist, run and jump with ease.

Uses: Acrobatics. *Athletics*. Competitive events. Dodging.

Brawny: Bulky and strong.

Uses: Punching, kicking or grappling in combat when your goal is to inflict damage. Power-lifting. All feats of strength.

Brutal: You are capable of taking nearly any action to survive.

Uses: Fighting an obviously superior enemy.

Dexterous: General adroit and skillful in the use of one's hands.

Uses: Weapon-oriented combat (*Melee* or *Firearms*). Pick-pocketing. Punching.

Enduring: Persistently sturdy against physical opposition.

Uses: When your survival is at stake, this Trait is a good one to risk as a second or successive bid.

Energetic: You have a powerful force of spirit. A strong internal drive propels you, and you can draw on a deep reservoir of enthusiasm and zeal in physical situations.

Uses: Combat. *Athletics*.

Ferocious: Possessed of brutal intensity and extreme physical determination.

Uses: Any time that you intend to do serious harm.

Graceful: Controlled and balanced in the motion and use of the entire body.

Uses: Combat defense. Whenever you might lose your balance.

Lithe: Characterized by flexibility and suppleness.

Uses: Acrobatics, gymnastics, dodging and dancing.

Nimble: Able to make light and skillful movements.

Uses: Dodging, jumping, rolling, acrobatics. Hand-to-hand combat.

Quick: You can react to a situation with fast, coordinated movements.

Uses: Defending against a surprise attack. Running, dodging, attacking.

Resilient: Characterized by strength of health; able to recover quickly from bodily harm.
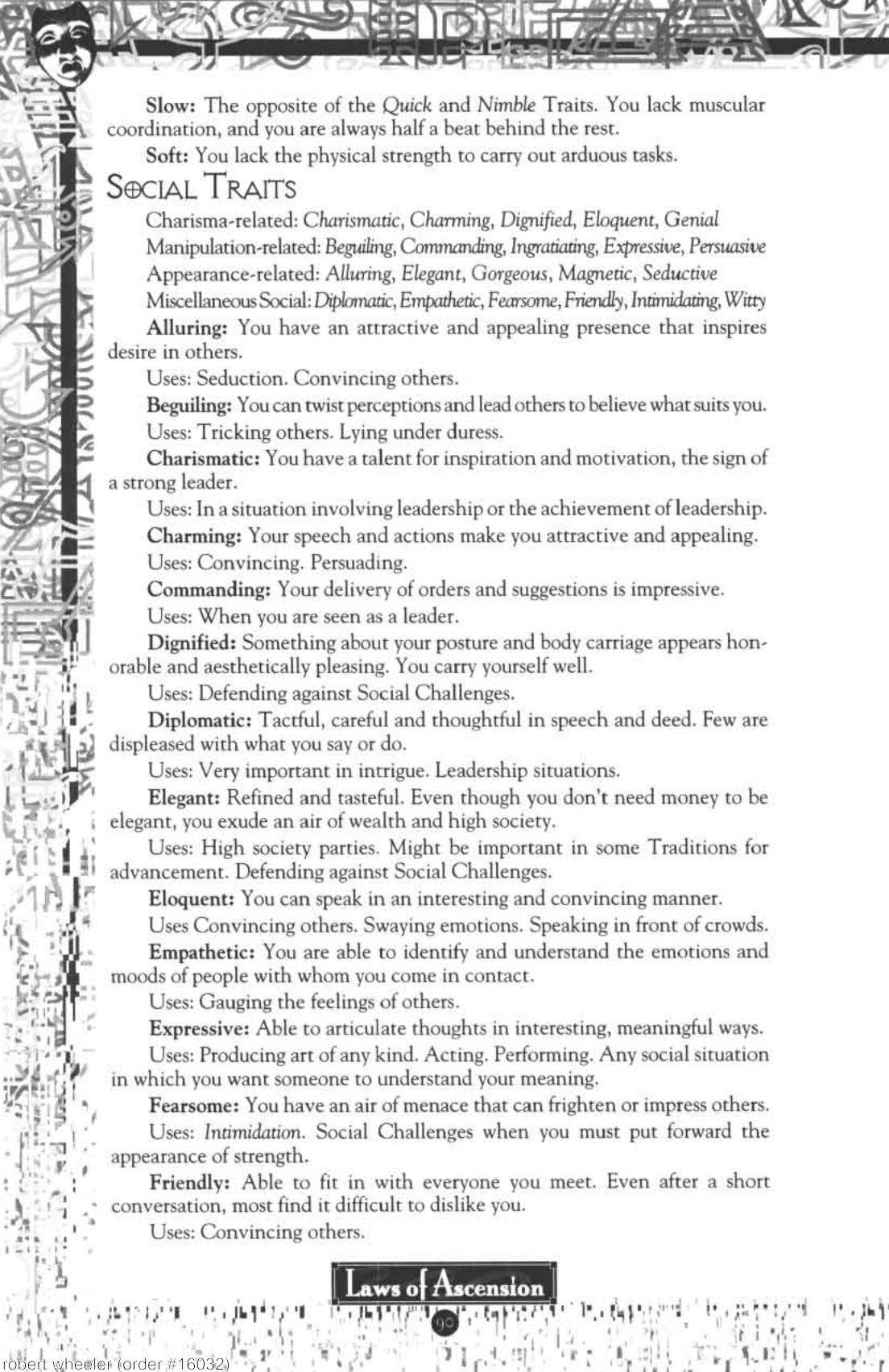
Uses: Surviving in adverse environments. Defending against damage in an attack.

Robust: Resistant to physical harm and damage.

Uses: Defending against damage in an attack. Endurance-related actions that could take place over a period of time.

Rugged: Hardy and brutally healthy. Able to shrug off wounds and pain to continue struggling.

Uses: When resisting damage, any challenge that you enter while injured.

Stalwart: Physically strong and uncompromising against opposition.

Uses: Resisting damage, or when standing your ground against overwhelming odds or a superior foe.

Steady: More than simply physically dependable. You are controlled, unfaltering and balanced. You have firm mastery over your physical skills.

Uses: Weapon attacks. Fighting in atypical environments.

Tenacious: Physically determined through force of will.

Uses: Second or subsequent Physical Challenge.

Tireless: You have a runner's stamina, and you are less taxed by physical efforts than ordinary people are.

Uses: Any endurance-related challenge, second or subsequent Physical Challenge with the same foe or foes.

Tough: You have a harsh, aggressive attitude, and you are reluctant to submit.

Uses: Whenever you're wounded.

Vigorous: Your efforts combine energy, power, intensity and resistance to harm.

Uses: Combat and athletic challenges when you're on the defensive.

Wiry: Possessed of tight, streamlined muscular strength.

Uses: Punching, kicking or grappling in combat. Acrobatic movements. Endurance lifting.

NEGATIVE PHYSICAL TRAITS

Clumsy: Lacking physical coordination, balance and grace. You are prone to stumbling and dropping objects.

Cowardly: In threatening situations, saving your own neck is all that is important. You might even flee when you have the upper hand, just out of habit.

Decrepit: You move and act as if you are old and infirm. You recover from physical damage slowly, you are unable to apply full muscular strength, and you tire easily.

Delicate: Frail and weak in structure; you are damaged easily by physical harm.

Docile: The opposite of the *Ferocious* and *Tenacious* Traits. You lack physical persistence, and you tend to submit rather than fighting long battles.

Flabby: Your muscles are underdeveloped. You cannot apply your strength well when you need to.

Frail: You are fragile and easily broken. You always come out of a fight looking like you got the worst of it — even if you didn't.

Lame: One or more limbs is disabled. The handicap can be as obvious as a missing leg or as subtle as a dysfunctional arm.

Lethargic: Slow and drowsy. You suffer from a serious lack of energy or motivation.

Puny: You are small and weak.

Sickly: Your body responds to physical stress as anyone else's would in the throes of a debilitating illness.

Slow: The opposite of the *Quick* and *Nimble* Traits. You lack muscular coordination, and you are always half a beat behind the rest.

Soft: You lack the physical strength to carry out arduous tasks.

Social Traits

Charisma-related: *Charismatic, Charming, Dignified, Eloquent, Genial*

Manipulation-related: *Beguiling, Commanding, Ingratiating, Expressive, Persuasive*

Appearance-related: *Alluring, Elegant, Gorgeous, Magnetic, Seductive*

Miscellaneous Social: *Diplomatic, Empathetic, Fearsome, Friendly, Intimidating, Witty*

Alluring: You have an attractive and appealing presence that inspires desire in others.

Uses: Seduction. Convincing others.

Beguiling: You can twist perceptions and lead others to believe what suits you.

Uses: Tricking others. Lying under duress.

Charismatic: You have a talent for inspiration and motivation, the sign of a strong leader.

Uses: In a situation involving leadership or the achievement of leadership.

Charming: Your speech and actions make you attractive and appealing.

Uses: Convincing. Persuading.

Commanding: Your delivery of orders and suggestions is impressive.

Uses: When you are seen as a leader.

Dignified: Something about your posture and body carriage appears honorable and aesthetically pleasing. You carry yourself well.

Uses: Defending against Social Challenges.

Diplomatic: Tactful, careful and thoughtful in speech and deed. Few are displeased with what you say or do.

Uses: Very important in intrigue. Leadership situations.

Elegant: Refined and tasteful. Even though you don't need money to be elegant, you exude an air of wealth and high society.

Uses: High society parties. Might be important in some Traditions for advancement. Defending against Social Challenges.

Eloquent: You can speak in an interesting and convincing manner.

Uses Convincing others. Swaying emotions. Speaking in front of crowds.

Empathetic: You are able to identify and understand the emotions and moods of people with whom you come in contact.

Uses: Gauging the feelings of others.

Expressive: Able to articulate thoughts in interesting, meaningful ways.

Uses: Producing art of any kind. Acting. Performing. Any social situation in which you want someone to understand your meaning.

Fearsome: You have an air of menace that can frighten or impress others.

Uses: *Intimidation*. Social Challenges when you must put forward the appearance of strength.

Friendly: Able to fit in with everyone you meet. Even after a short conversation, most find it difficult to dislike you.

Uses: Convincing others.

Genial: Cordial, kindly and warm. You are pleasing to be around.

Uses: Mingling at parties. Generally used in a second or later Social Challenge with someone.

Gorgeous: Beautiful or handsome. You were born with a face and body that most people adore.

Uses: Modeling, posing.

Ingratiating: Able to gain the favor or people who know you.

Uses: Dealing with Masters in a social situation. Defending against Social Challenges.

Intimidating: You have a frightening or awesome presence that causes others to feel timid. This Trait is particularly useful when attempting to cow opponents.

Uses: Inspiring common fear. Ordering people around.

Magnetic: People feel drawn to you. People around you are interested in your speech and actions.

Uses: Seduction. First impressions.

Persuasive: Able to propose believable, convincing and correct arguments and requests. Very useful when someone else is undecided on an issue.

Uses: Persuading or convincing others.

Seductive: Able to entice and tempt. You can use your good looks and your body to get what you want from others.

Uses: Subterfuge, seduction.

Witty: Cleverly humorous. Jokes come easily to you, and people consider you a funny person when you want them to.

Uses: At parties. Entertaining someone. Goading or insulting someone.

Negative Social Traits

Bestial: You have features that some would consider animalistic. Maybe you have reflective eyes, thickly ragged hair or pronounced teeth. Whatever the case, you certainly seem a bit inhuman.

Callous: You are unfeeling, uncaring and insensitive to the suffering of others.

Condescending: You just can't help it. Your contempt for others is impossible to hide.

Dull: Those with whom you speak usually find you boring and uninteresting. Conversing with you is a chore.

Feral: You have uncivilized, animalistic behaviors, such as scratching at yourself or sniffing people.

Ghastly: Your shockingly frightful or dreadful visage unsettles everyone around you.

Meek: It is difficult for you to make your presence known, and you are often overlooked for honors or advancement. Further, your mild nature makes it difficult for you to enter combats. You often hesitate before acting.

Naïve: You lack the air of worldliness, sophistication or maturity that most carry.

Obnoxious: You are annoying or unappealing in speech, action or appearance.

Repugnant: Your appearance disgusts everyone around you. Needless to say, you make a terrible first impression with strangers.

Shy: You are timid, bashful, reserved and socially hesitant.

Character Creation and Traits

Tactless: You are unable to do or say things that others find appropriate to the situation.

Untrustworthy: You are rumored or perceived to be unreliable, regardless of whether you really are.

Mental Traits

Perception-related: *Attentive, Discerning, Insightful, Observant, Vigilant*

Intelligence-related: *Cunning, Disciplined, Knowledgeable, Rational, Reflective*

Wits-related: *Alert, Clever, Intuitive, Shrewd, Wily*

Miscellaneous Mental: *Creative, Dedicated, Determined, Flexible, Patient, Wise*

Alert: Mentally prepared for danger and able to react quickly when it occurs.

Uses: Preventing surprise attacks. Defending against *Mind*.

Attentive: You pay attention to everyday occurrences around you. When something extraordinary happens, you are usually ready for it.

Uses: Preventing surprise attacks. Seeing through supernatural concealment when you don't expect it. Preventing *Mind* magic.

Clever: Quick-witted and resourceful. You think well on your feet.

Uses: Using a Mental Challenge against an opponent.

Creative: Your ideas are original and imaginative, which implies an ability to produce unusual solutions to your difficulties. You can create artistic works. A requirement for any true artist.

Uses: Defending against *Prime*. Creating anything. Dynamic magic.

Cunning: Crafty and sly, possessing a great deal of ingenuity.

Uses: Tricking others.

Dedicated: You give yourself over totally to your beliefs. When one of your causes is at stake, you stop at nothing to succeed.

Uses: Useful in any Mental Challenge when your beliefs are at stake.

Determined: When it comes to mental endeavors, you are fully committed. Nothing can divert your intention to succeed once you have made up your mind.

Uses: Staredowns. Useful in a normal Mental Challenge.

Discerning: Discriminating, able to pick out details, subtleties and idiosyncrasies. You have clarity of vision.

Uses: Sensory magic. Investigating and tracking.

Disciplined: Your mind is structured and controlled, and this rigidity gives you an edge in battles of will.

Uses: Pattern magic. Staredowns. Useful in just about any Mental Challenge.

Flexible: You change your thinking to accommodate the situation at hand. It's difficult to catch you by surprise because you are adaptable.

Uses: Defending against ambushes or surprises. Dynamic magic.

Insightful: You can look at a situation and gain an understanding of it more handily than most.

Uses: Investigation (but not defending against it). *Prime* or *Spirit* magic.

Intuitive: Knowledge and understanding somehow come to you without conscious reasoning.

Uses: Spontaneous deduction. *Spirit* magic.

Knowledgeable: You know copious and detailed amounts of information about a wide variety of topics. This Trait represents "book-learning."

Uses: *Mind* magic. Remembering information your character might know.

Observant: You have the depth of vision to look at something and pick out its most relevant and important details.

Uses: Sensory magic. Picking up on subtleties that others might overlook.

Patient: Tolerant, persevering and steadfast. You can wait out extended delays with composure.

Uses: Staredowns or other mental battles after another Trait has been bid.

Rational: You believe in logic, reason, sanity and sobriety. Your ability to reduce concepts to a mathematical level helps you analyze the world.

Uses: Defending against emotion-oriented mental attacks. Defending against aura reading and Resonance sensing. Technomancy.

Reflective: Meditative in self-recollection and deep thought. The Trait of the serious thinker, *Reflective* enables you to consider all aspects of a conundrum thoroughly.

Uses: Meditation. Remembering information. Defending against most Mental Challenges.

Shrewd: Astute and artful, able to keep your wits about you and accomplish mental feats with efficiency and finesse.

Uses: Defending against mental powers.

Vigilant: Watchful. You have the disposition of a guard dog, and you don't miss much.

Uses: Defending against investigation. Seeing through supernatural persuasion and concealment. Sensory magic. More appropriate for mental defense than for attack.

Wily: Sly and full of guile. Because you are wily, you can trick your opponents easily.

Uses: Tricking others. Lying under duress. Confusing mental situations.

Wise: You have an overall understanding of the way the world works.

Uses: Giving advice. Dispensing snippets of Zen. Understanding Akashic Brothers.

Negative Mental Traits

Deceitful: Occasional white lies, minor adjustments to the facts and misleading others all seem like second nature to you.

Forgetful: You have trouble remembering even important things.

Gullible: Easily deceived, duped or fooled.

Ignorant: Uneducated or misinformed on almost every subject.

Impatient: Restless, anxious and generally intolerant of delays. You want everything to go your way immediately.

Oblivious: Unaware and unmindful. You'd be lucky if you noticed an airplane landing in your living room.

Predictable: Because you lack originality or intelligence, even strangers can figure out what you intend to do next.

Shortsighted: Lacking foresight. You rarely look beyond the superficial.

Squeamish: You have difficulty coping with the brutality of a world in which everything is dirty, foul or uncomfortable.

Submissive: You relent and surrender at any cost rather than stand up for yourself.

Unstable: Your mind is constantly teetering on the edge, and anything could upset the careful balancing act.

Violent: You lack self-control, and you fly into rages at the slightest provocation.

Witless: Lacking the ability to process information quickly. Foolish and slow to act when threatened.

ABILITIES

Studious education, intensive training and finely honed instinct contribute to a character's various Abilities. Ability Traits represent capabilities that a character might learn or develop. They aren't necessarily innate to human nature, but rather they stem from study and practice study. With the right Abilities, a character can perform various sorts of difficult tasks, and he has a better chance of success even with mundane problems.

If your character fails a challenge, you can use an Ability for a retest and try to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. You use up the Ability Trait until the next game session (you exhaust part of your repertoire of tricks), and you still lose the initial Attribute Trait(s) you bid for the challenge, but you may be able to win the challenge itself.

Multiple levels of Abilities reflect a character's growing competence. Few people exceed three levels of any Ability. Such dedication and professional skill doesn't come easily, and many people simply don't have the necessary talent and dedication. Even most mages can't exceed the limits of human knowledge, which peaks at five levels of Ability. The total level of Ability in a given field corresponds roughly to the character's professional capabilities:

Competent (Able to earn a living)

Professional (Licensed, capable of supervision)

Journeyman (Bachelor's degree or instructor)

Expert (Master's degree or researcher)

Master (Doctorate or true innovator)

Because of the highly skilled nature of some fields, certain tasks may be impossible without a given Ability. In such a case, a character without the requisite Ability, or who has used up all of his levels of that Ability for the session, cannot even attempt the feat. Usually, though, attempting a task based on a prerequisite Ability does not use up an available Trait. Only using the Ability for a retest exhausts it.

If you use an Ability for a set problem or scenario (such as trying to hack a computer with the *Computer* Ability), the Storyteller sets the difficulty of the task in question. Such a task is usually a Static Challenge, and it often requires that you bid a Trait or sometimes multiple Traits. You may or may not know the difficulty beforehand, but such is the risk of diving headlong into difficult or dangerous tasks.

Should you use an Ability in a challenge against another player, the Ability may have certain special characteristics, as described on the following pages. See Chapter Five for examples of using Abilities in challenges.

FOCUSED ABILITIES

Learning some Abilities requires concentrated study in particular areas. One cannot simply study all forms of *Crafts*, for instance. That's just too broad a subject. In such a case, you must pick a focus for the Ability. Each such focus

is considered a separate Ability, so *Academics: Art History* is distinct from *Academics: Theology*. You don't add the total levels you have in every Ability, but you could have up to five levels in each focused Ability.

ABILITY SPECIALIZATIONS (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule functions only if you're willing to put up with a little extra paperwork on your character's Abilities and you feel comfortable coming up with specifications that aren't too broad or too narrow.

Dedicated practitioners often develop highly concentrated skills. When you specialize in an Ability, you focus on areas that you do best or with which you want to become a true expert. As a result, you can use certain facets of that Ability to greater effect.

To specialize, you must spend one Experience Trait or Free Trait on an Ability that you already possess. You then pick a single, narrow field of expertise related to the Ability. When you're working in that area of expertise, you not only gain the benefits of the Ability itself, but you gain a one-Trait bonus on resolution for all tasks with the Ability as long as you have at least one unused level of the Ability in store. You can pick only one specialization for each Ability, so choose carefully. Furthermore, you can gain only one specialization Trait bonus at a time, even if you have multiple Ability specializations that might be appropriate. For instance, even if you have *Occult: Library Research* and *Investigation: Unearthing Lost Knowledge*, you gain only a one-Trait bonus on a challenge to dig up arcane Hermetic books.

A specialization is a fairly narrow area of research or practice. For instance, you cannot take a *Firearms* specialization in "guns," nor could you have an *Occult* specialization in "writing." An appropriate specialization refers to one class of items or to one technique with the Ability, such as *Politics: Tradition Hierarchies* or *Law: Historic Gilgul Cases*.

You may take a specialization in an Ability that has a focus. In such a case, you have a good specialized technique in an Ability that covers one aspect of a broad field. Therefore, you could have *Performance: Dance* with a specialization of *Pakistani Folk Practices*, or *Academics: World History* with a specialization of *Recognizing Historical Editing*.

Note that the bonus Trait for a specialization has no adjective, nor is it bid or used up. It simply adds to totals for resolution of challenges with the Ability in question.

Ability specialization Trait bonuses don't apply to Arete challenges.

Example: *Ariel, a Verbena sociology student, is quite skilled at influencing people, but she's especially good at seduction. She has the Ability* Subterfuge x3: Seduction. *When she indulges in a little light conversation, she's an expert at steering matters as she desires, but if she decides to vamp someone, she gains a bonus Social Trait that makes her usual nine Social Traits become a total of 10. Of course, if she has worn out her charm or just become discouraged (from losing challenges), her Trait total may not be as high. However, as long as she has at least one unused level of* Subterfuge, *she gains the one-Trait bonus for all seduction-related challenges.*

Academics

You possess a level of education and general knowledge beyond rudimentary schooling. With *Academics*, you can express artistic criticism, debate the classics, consider philosophy and indulge in studies of culture. This broad Ability covers the humanities in learning.

Academics allows you to recognize historical, artistic and cultural references. You can use *Academics* when working in such fields, when developing a critique or when researching. Calling on the *Academics* Ability may require a Mental or Social Challenge to determine your exact level of competence.

You should choose a focus in a specific field of *Academics*, such as *Literature*, *Philosophy*, *Music Appreciation* or anything that could be studied with a higher education.

Alertness

You pay attention to your surroundings. Even if your senses aren't particularly good, you know enough to put together clues and scrutinize things going on around you.

You use *Alertness* in conjunction with your Perception-related Mental Traits to notice sounds, detect things that are out of place and spot concealed objects or people.

When you're surprised (see p.193), you may spend one level of *Alertness* to negate the surprise penalty and act normally instead.

Athletics

Whether due to a background in sports or just personal talent, you are skilled in all manner of athletic endeavors. You can throw a ball, sprint, climb, jump and swim.

Your *Athletics* Ability applies to retests on most forms of raw physical activity including: acrobatics, swimming, jumping, throwing, climbing and running. You may choose to focus on one sport or activity. Use *Athletics* in conjunction with thrown or hand-propelled weapons like bows and hurled knives.

Awareness

You have a talent for knowing when things are not as they should be, whether by that strange feeling in the pit of your gut or through tested observation. This Ability is particularly useful for sensing when other supernatural creatures are about, detecting evidence of strange magical phenomena, or just getting that weird feeling when the laws of nature are about to take a hard left.

Awareness challenges usually pit your Mental Traits against a Static Challenge determined by a Narrator. If someone performs a magical Effect with no visible result, you can call for an *Awareness* challenge with a difficulty of six Traits minus the Effect's casting difficulty before modifiers (minimum zero for a really big Effect). If you succeed, you know that something magical happened, although you don't necessarily know what it was. Actually figuring out the properties of something magical may require other Abilities such as *Occult*.

Brawl

Back alleys, martial arts schools and rough bars are your stomping grounds. You might have military training, or maybe you just grew up with a passel of rough-and-tumble siblings. Whatever the case, you know how to dish out the damage with your fists and your feet.

Use the *Brawl* Ability for retests in combat when you are using your natural weapons (teeth and fists, or even magically grown claws and appendages). This

Ability is also the province of the martial arts, although you should specify which art your character performs when you take this Ability.

Akashic Brothers may take a specialization of *Do* when using *Brawl*. With the *Do* specialization, the Akashic Brother may choose to inflict lethal damage in unarmed combat, instead of scoring bashing damage (see p. 191).

Computer

With the *Computer* Ability, you understand how to use, program and access computers of all sorts. Since computer technology facilitates Virtual Adept technomagic and serves all sorts of roles in the Technocracy, this Ability is very handy for a cutting-edge modern magician to have.

Use *Computer* with a Mental Challenge (difficulty determined by the Storyteller) to break into systems, alter data, write programs or figure out unfamiliar computer operations.

Cosmology

The Tellurian is vast and full of mysteries, but some of those mysteries are clear to you. Whether through hearsay or personal experience, you know of many fantastic places and creatures throughout the cosmos.

When you encounter a strange Realm, a mystical Node or an unknown spirit, you use your *Cosmology* Ability to puzzle out its nature. Usually doing so calls for a Mental Challenge with a difficulty determined by the Storyteller. By expending a *Cosmology* Trait, you can determine the strength of a Node or how powerful a spirit is. Additional information relies on challenges and your ability to roleplay through the process of dealing with alien places and changeable entities.

Crafts

You can build things. Depending on your area of expertise, you know how to manufacture items and make handy tools or decorations. You must choose a focus for *Crafts*, specifying your preferred form of creation. *Carpentry*, *Clockworks*, *Blacksmithing*, *Leatherworking* and the like are all possibilities. You can fashion works of art by studying *Painting*, *Drawing* or similar physical media. *Crafts* also covers more technical skills, such as *Mechanics* and *Electronics*.

Making or repairing an item with *Crafts* usually involves a Physical Challenge of your dexterity, with a difficulty set by the Storyteller based on the type of job. Making a concealed spring-loaded trap is far more difficult than planing a board, for instance. Making a work of art may require Mental Traits instead, such as when you draw a precise map or devise an electrical design.

Dodge

When trouble rears its ugly head, you know how to get out of its way. Unhesitating reactions let you evade blows and gunshots, getting aside just in time to avoid injury. You can use *Dodge* against any attack that you're aware of. You can dive for cover as someone fires a gun or twist away from a sword before it bisects your spine, for instance. You may use the *Dodge* Ability as a retest when defending against an attack that you can see or sense coming.

Drive

Although most people can drive in the modern age, you can drive well. You are equally at home with a manual or automatic transmission, rush hour is no concern, and you can eke the most performance out of your car. In dangerous situations, you can evade traffic and even use your vehicle as a weapon. Bear in

mind, though, that just because you can drive a station wagon doesn't mean you can drive an 18-wheeler with equal ease. A Mental Challenge may be necessary to allow you to figure out where everything is in an unfamiliar vehicle.

Drive tests most often involve a Physical Challenge of your reflexes.

Enigmas

Puzzles, riddles and problems are your hobby and passion. Whether you're working on the morning crossword or translating an ancient scrawl in a buried tomb, you have a penchant for coming up with unusual solutions, answering mystical conundrums and solving all manner of brain-twisters.

You use *Enigmas* most often with a Mental Challenge to help figure out a puzzle of some sort. Of course, the Ability alone shouldn't substitute for all of the roleplaying involved in working out the puzzle. However, when you are trying to work out a riddle or other such challenge, your *Enigmas* Ability allows you to double any given time limit for each Trait expended, or to make an extra guess for each Trait expended.

Etiquette

Mages have their own arcane rules and regulations for society, above and beyond the concerns of normal human manners. You know the proper way to greet someone, when to rise and how to make introductions, and you can even tell the difference between a salad fork and a dinner fork. You can make a toast with the best of them, and you keep your cool in any social scenario, from high tea to a gang's rally.

The *Etiquette* Ability can supplement Social Tests to impress or blend in at parties. If you make a social faux pas, you may expend an *Etiquette* Trait immediately to negate the gaffe — your character knew better than to make the mistake. Note, however, that this rule applies only to (reasonably) normal human social interactions. Human etiquette is of little use when dealing with puzzling Umbrood or centuries-old Archmages who have transcended human comprehension.

Expression

Words and feelings flow freely from you. When the muse strikes, you put pen to paper (or fingers to musical instrument) and pour out a torrent of emotion and stirring imagery. You can convey message and meaning in your art, from symphonies to poetry, and whatever you write is both clear and moving.

When writing or composing, you can sink *Expression* Traits into the work. Doing so typically denotes some level of quality. Professional poets, writers and musicians often use three or more levels to make their best material.

Firearms

A little time at the gun range goes a long way. You know how to hold, fire and clean a gun. You can unjam one too, and you can tell different models apart. You know how to stand to get the best aim, how to handle recoil and how to take care of problems in the field.

If you possess the *Firearms* Ability, you use your Mental Traits for gun combat instead of using Physical Traits. You can expend *Firearms* for a retest in ranged-fire combat with pistols, rifles, shotguns, crossbows and similar weapons.

Hobby/Professional/Expert Ability

In a certain area of expertise not covered by another Ability, you have achieved some level of skill. You may have a small grasp of a trade due to some work on the side, or perhaps you've studied a topic specifically.

Hobby/Professional/Expert Ability is a catch-all category for unusual Abilities such as *Mage Lore, Hypnotism, Explosive Ordnance Disposal* and so on. The Storyteller must approve any Ability of this type specifically and define its capabilities.

Intimidation

Intimidation represents any of a broad variety of techniques used for terrifying people into compliance. Using *Intimidation* could rely on anything from physical size, to a particularly frightening grin, to knowing which emotional buttons to push. Note that *Intimidation* generally covers the *threat* of force. Actual applications of violence fall under *Brawl, Melee,* or *Professional Ability: Torture.*

You can use *Intimidation* in conjunction with a Social Challenge in order to scare someone. Victims may flee or give up information at the Storyteller's discretion.

Investigation

You know how to pick up clues and put together disparate pieces of information. By habit and training, you can set a jumbled mass of data into order, discovering identities, motives and patterns in an otherwise chaotic scene. You can use *Investigation* with a Mental Challenge to puzzle out meaning to a random series of events, to spot when someone is carrying a concealed weapon or to find a clue at a crime scene.

Law

Nobody is above the law, except those who know how to use it to their advantage. You're one of those people. Perhaps you uphold the law, or maybe you have been on the wrong side of it so often that you've picked up a few tricks. Your knowledge of *Law* allows you to understand legal processes, courts and lawyers, and to use and twist them effectively to your own ends.

Use the *Law* Ability in court situations or with Social Challenges involving legal matters. Because the legal body is so vast, your Storyteller may require you to select a focus of legal expertise such as *Criminal Law, Civil Law* or *Tax Law.* Alternatively, you may choose to study *Tradition Law* in depth.

Leadership

A good speaking voice and self-confidence lend a powerful presence to a leader. *Leadership* represents your ability to motivate people and convince them to follow your guidance. Even among those who do not know or respect you, you can demand attention.
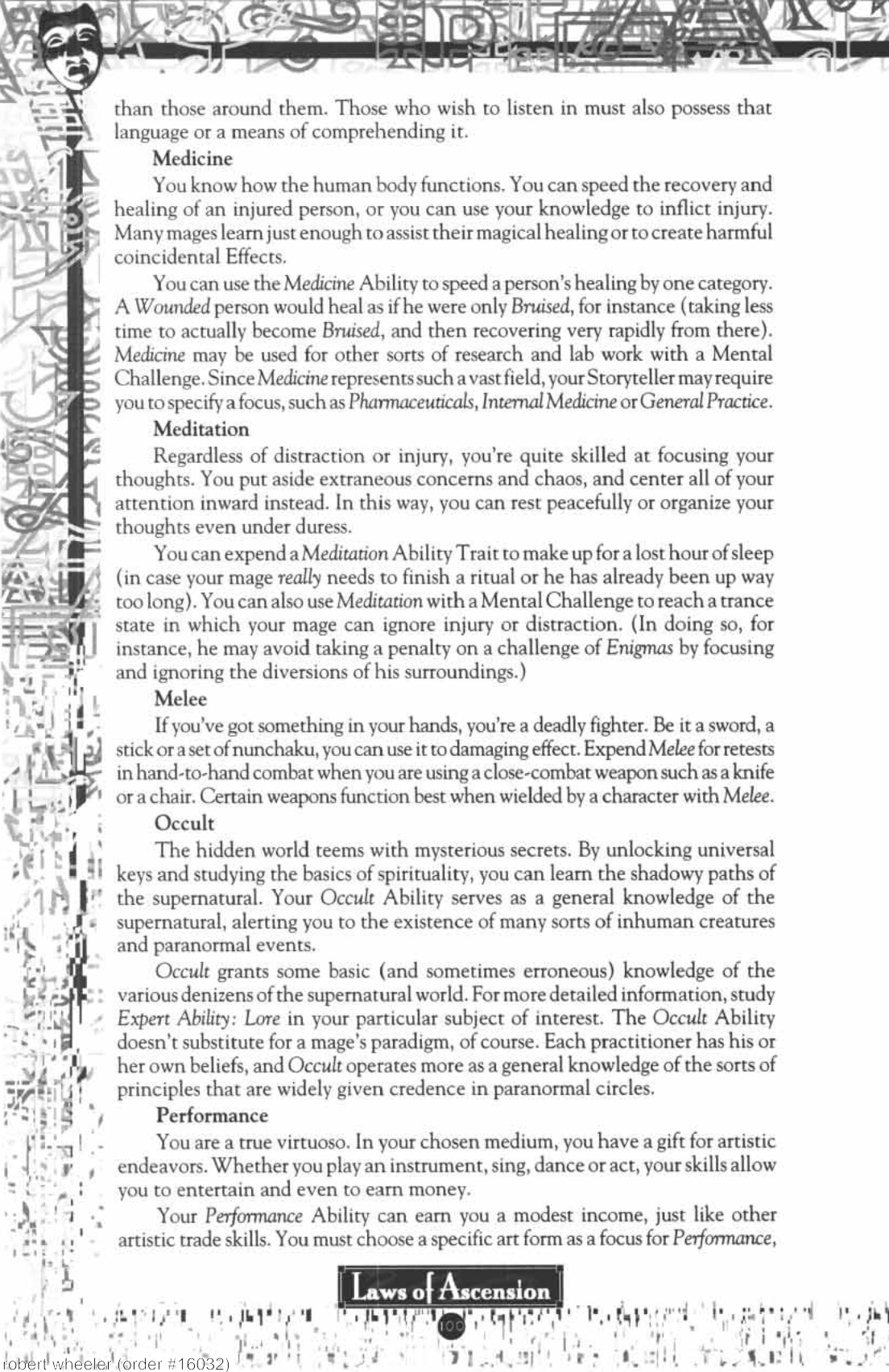
You can use *Leadership* with a Social Challenge to try to get a minor favor or task from a character.

Linguistics

You've studied a language — or languages — other than your native tongue. Whether you're a scholastic mage whose Tradition relies on special magical words or your skill is necessary for other studies, you can speak, write and read other languages.

You must choose one language for each Trait of *Linguistics* you possess. Each language is a separate focus. Therefore, you could have *Linguistics: Cantonese* and *Linguistics: German.* Alternatively, you can focus on the underlying study of *Linguistics* itself, granting some understanding of the principles behind the structure of language. Languages need not be spoken; American Sign Language or Egyptian hieroglyphics are also fields of linguistic study.

Those who wish to converse in another language (but cannot actually do so) should hold up one hand with the first finger and thumb making an L-shape to indicate to other players that the characters are speaking a different language

than those around them. Those who wish to listen in must also possess that language or a means of comprehending it.

Medicine

You know how the human body functions. You can speed the recovery and healing of an injured person, or you can use your knowledge to inflict injury. Many mages learn just enough to assist their magical healing or to create harmful coincidental Effects.

You can use the *Medicine* Ability to speed a person's healing by one category. A *Wounded* person would heal as if he were only *Bruised*, for instance (taking less time to actually become *Bruised*, and then recovering very rapidly from there). *Medicine* may be used for other sorts of research and lab work with a Mental Challenge. Since *Medicine* represents such a vast field, your Storyteller may require you to specify a focus, such as *Pharmaceuticals*, *Internal Medicine* or *General Practice*.

Meditation

Regardless of distraction or injury, you're quite skilled at focusing your thoughts. You put aside extraneous concerns and chaos, and center all of your attention inward instead. In this way, you can rest peacefully or organize your thoughts even under duress.

You can expend a *Meditation* Ability Trait to make up for a lost hour of sleep (in case your mage *really* needs to finish a ritual or he has already been up way too long). You can also use *Meditation* with a Mental Challenge to reach a trance state in which your mage can ignore injury or distraction. (In doing so, for instance, he may avoid taking a penalty on a challenge of *Enigmas* by focusing and ignoring the diversions of his surroundings.)

Melee

If you've got something in your hands, you're a deadly fighter. Be it a sword, a stick or a set of nunchaku, you can use it to damaging effect. Expend *Melee* for retests in hand-to-hand combat when you are using a close-combat weapon such as a knife or a chair. Certain weapons function best when wielded by a character with *Melee*.

Occult

The hidden world teems with mysterious secrets. By unlocking universal keys and studying the basics of spirituality, you can learn the shadowy paths of the supernatural. Your *Occult* Ability serves as a general knowledge of the supernatural, alerting you to the existence of many sorts of inhuman creatures and paranormal events.

Occult grants some basic (and sometimes erroneous) knowledge of the various denizens of the supernatural world. For more detailed information, study *Expert Ability: Lore* in your particular subject of interest. The *Occult* Ability doesn't substitute for a mage's paradigm, of course. Each practitioner has his or her own beliefs, and *Occult* operates more as a general knowledge of the sorts of principles that are widely given credence in paranormal circles.

Performance

You are a true virtuoso. In your chosen medium, you have a gift for artistic endeavors. Whether you play an instrument, sing, dance or act, your skills allow you to entertain and even to earn money.

Your *Performance* Ability can earn you a modest income, just like other artistic trade skills. You must choose a specific art form as a focus for *Performance*,

such as playing an instrument, singing, acting or doing dramatic readings. Note that *Performance* generally applies to art rendered before an audience, while *Expression* most often focuses on literary works or underlying emotions, and *Crafts* concentrates on the creation of physical objects such as paintings or sculptures.

Science

The Technocracy has broadened man's understanding in hundreds of fields of study. Categorizing and breaking down the world into many different forms, the methods of logic and reason give sentient beings the means to understand the universe one piece at a time. Education in *Science* covers techniques of inquiry, modern studies and a broad scope of foundational work in a diverse range of fields.

Science Ability requires a focus. *Biology*, *Chemistry*, *Physics*, *Metallurgy*, *Mathematics* and *Cognitive Science* are all possibilities, but this list if far from comprehensive. Combining the *Science* Ability with different fields may yield a wide variety of results. For example, *Science: Metallurgy* with *Academics* may give results regarding historical research and theory, while the same *Science* with *Occult* may center around ancient alchemical techniques. Actually constructing objects or devices based on scientific theories may require the use of the *Crafts* or *Technology* Abilities.

Using a particular branch of *Science* usually requires a Mental Challenge of some sort to determine the success of research or the viability of theoretical work.

Stealth

By blending into cover, blurring your lines and moving carefully and quietly, you can evade notice or sneak past people. You know how best to take advantage of surrounding cover and how to use light and shadow. Opportunities for unnoticed movement are not lost on you, as you understand the uses of timing and diversion.

With an appropriate Physical Challenge, you can sometimes sneak past the notice of guards and searchers (who contest your Ability with their Mental Traits and *Investigation* Ability).
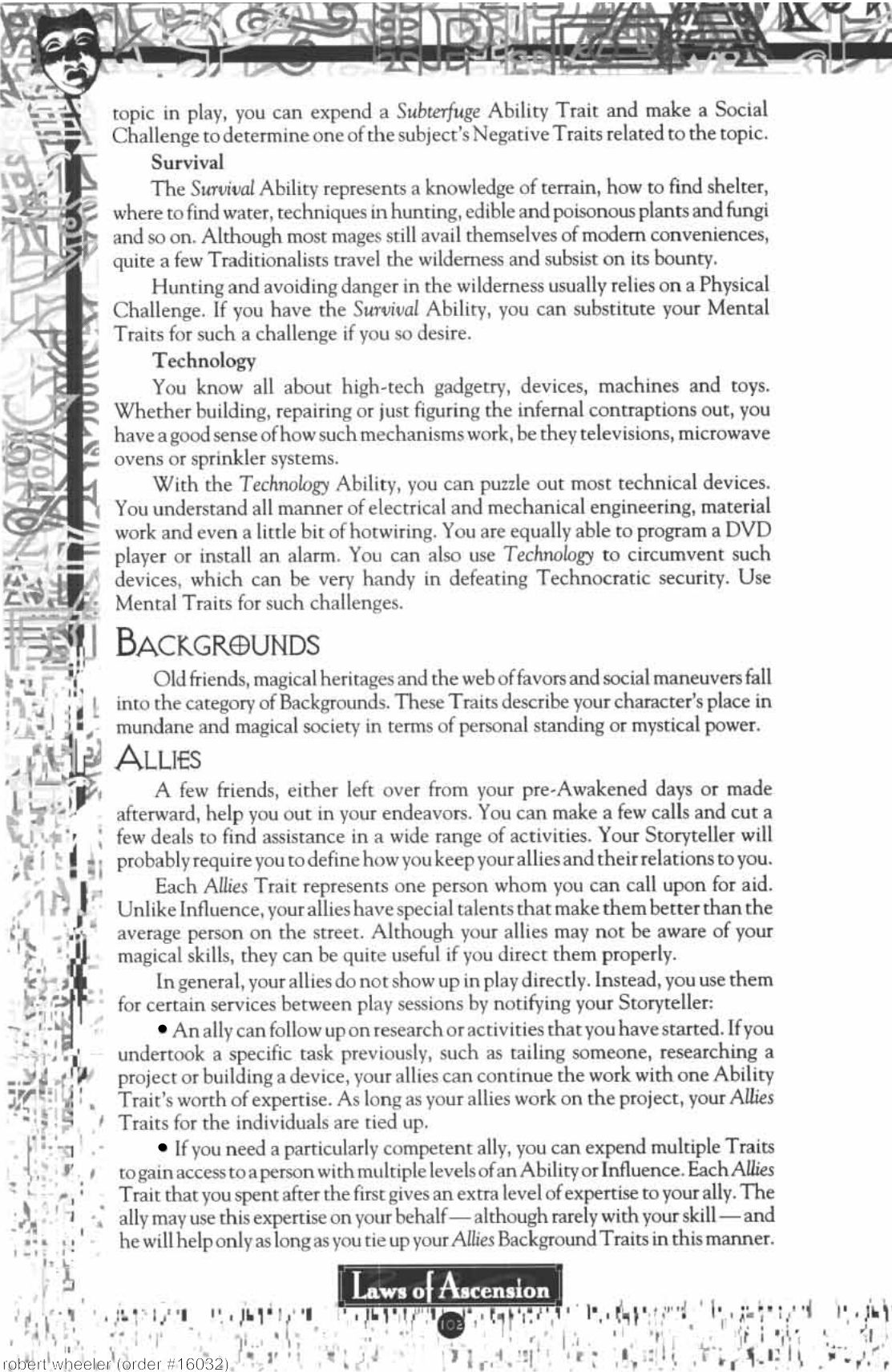
Streetwise

You're no stranger to the word on the street. Even if you don't have any particular friends or contacts in the area, you know about the different communities and gangs that hang out in town. You recognize tags and other territorial markers, and you know some of the signs, colors and clothes that denote street people, gangers, hoodlums, criminals and social workers.

Using the *Streetwise* Ability with your Mental Traits lets you recognize the influence of various gangs or street communities. You also know about criminal organizations and activities, and you could perform a little larceny yourself. An appropriate Social Challenge can help you smooth dealings with a hostile gang, but you may need *Etiquette* to make a really good impression.

Subterfuge

Even in idle conversation, people use little white lies, slip hints about their true motives, try to guide the course of discussion and give away their secrets indirectly. The art of *Subterfuge* is the art of reading these tells and using them against the person who lets them slip.

When someone confronts you with one of your own lies, you can use the *Subterfuge* Ability in your defense. By guiding a conversation, you can unearth someone's Negative Traits. If you manage to steer conversation to a particular

topic in play, you can expend a *Subterfuge* Ability Trait and make a Social Challenge to determine one of the subject's Negative Traits related to the topic.

Survival

The *Survival* Ability represents a knowledge of terrain, how to find shelter, where to find water, techniques in hunting, edible and poisonous plants and fungi and so on. Although most mages still avail themselves of modern conveniences, quite a few Traditionalists travel the wilderness and subsist on its bounty.

Hunting and avoiding danger in the wilderness usually relies on a Physical Challenge. If you have the *Survival* Ability, you can substitute your Mental Traits for such a challenge if you so desire.

Technology

You know all about high-tech gadgetry, devices, machines and toys. Whether building, repairing or just figuring the infernal contraptions out, you have a good sense of how such mechanisms work, be they televisions, microwave ovens or sprinkler systems.

With the *Technology* Ability, you can puzzle out most technical devices. You understand all manner of electrical and mechanical engineering, material work and even a little bit of hotwiring. You are equally able to program a DVD player or install an alarm. You can also use *Technology* to circumvent such devices, which can be very handy in defeating Technocratic security. Use Mental Traits for such challenges.

BACKGROUNDS

Old friends, magical heritages and the web of favors and social maneuvers fall into the category of Backgrounds. These Traits describe your character's place in mundane and magical society in terms of personal standing or mystical power.
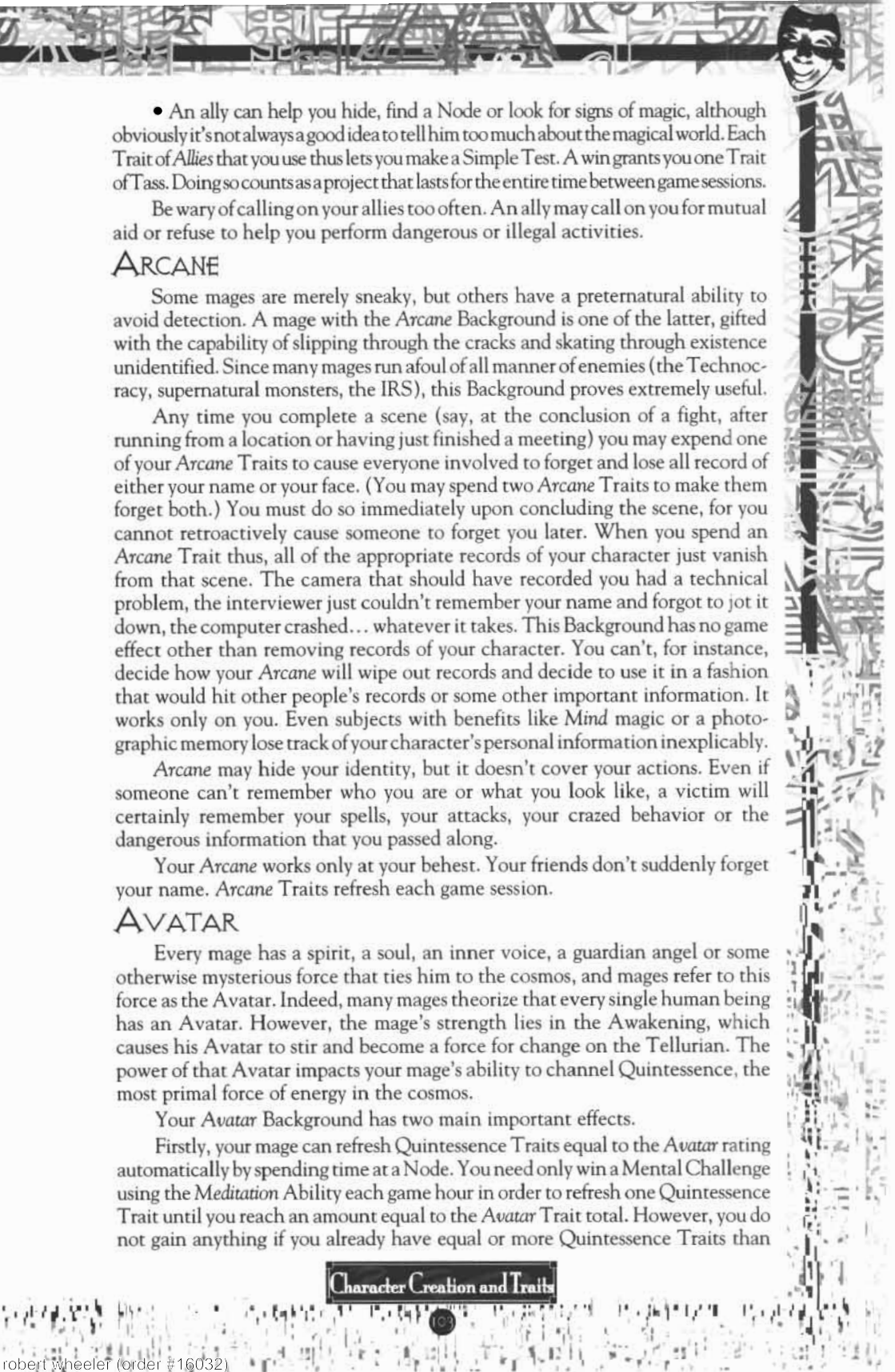
ALLIES

A few friends, either left over from your pre-Awakened days or made afterward, help you out in your endeavors. You can make a few calls and cut a few deals to find assistance in a wide range of activities. Your Storyteller will probably require you to define how you keep your allies and their relations to you.

Each *Allies* Trait represents one person whom you can call upon for aid. Unlike Influence, your allies have special talents that make them better than the average person on the street. Although your allies may not be aware of your magical skills, they can be quite useful if you direct them properly.

In general, your allies do not show up in play directly. Instead, you use them for certain services between play sessions by notifying your Storyteller:

• An ally can follow up on research or activities that you have started. If you undertook a specific task previously, such as tailing someone, researching a project or building a device, your allies can continue the work with one Ability Trait's worth of expertise. As long as your allies work on the project, your *Allies* Traits for the individuals are tied up.

• If you need a particularly competent ally, you can expend multiple Traits to gain access to a person with multiple levels of an Ability or Influence. Each *Allies* Trait that you spent after the first gives an extra level of expertise to your ally. The ally may use this expertise on your behalf — although rarely with your skill — and he will help only as long as you tie up your *Allies* Background Traits in this manner.

- An ally can help you hide, find a Node or look for signs of magic, although obviously it's not always a good idea to tell him too much about the magical world. Each Trait of *Allies* that you use thus lets you make a Simple Test. A win grants you one Trait of Tass. Doing so counts as a project that lasts for the entire time between game sessions.

Be wary of calling on your allies too often. An ally may call on you for mutual aid or refuse to help you perform dangerous or illegal activities.

ARCANE

Some mages are merely sneaky, but others have a preternatural ability to avoid detection. A mage with the *Arcane* Background is one of the latter, gifted with the capability of slipping through the cracks and skating through existence unidentified. Since many mages run afoul of all manner of enemies (the Technocracy, supernatural monsters, the IRS), this Background proves extremely useful.

Any time you complete a scene (say, at the conclusion of a fight, after running from a location or having just finished a meeting) you may expend one of your *Arcane* Traits to cause everyone involved to forget and lose all record of either your name or your face. (You may spend two *Arcane* Traits to make them forget both.) You must do so immediately upon concluding the scene, for you cannot retroactively cause someone to forget you later. When you spend an *Arcane* Trait thus, all of the appropriate records of your character just vanish from that scene. The camera that should have recorded you had a technical problem, the interviewer just couldn't remember your name and forgot to jot it down, the computer crashed… whatever it takes. This Background has no game effect other than removing records of your character. You can't, for instance, decide how your *Arcane* will wipe out records and decide to use it in a fashion that would hit other people's records or some other important information. It works only on you. Even subjects with benefits like *Mind* magic or a photographic memory lose track of your character's personal information inexplicably.

Arcane may hide your identity, but it doesn't cover your actions. Even if someone can't remember who you are or what you look like, a victim will certainly remember your spells, your attacks, your crazed behavior or the dangerous information that you passed along.

Your *Arcane* works only at your behest. Your friends don't suddenly forget your name. *Arcane* Traits refresh each game session.

AVATAR

Every mage has a spirit, a soul, an inner voice, a guardian angel or some otherwise mysterious force that ties him to the cosmos, and mages refer to this force as the Avatar. Indeed, many mages theorize that every single human being has an Avatar. However, the mage's strength lies in the Awakening, which causes his Avatar to stir and become a force for change on the Tellurian. The power of that Avatar impacts your mage's ability to channel Quintessence, the most primal force of energy in the cosmos.

Your *Avatar* Background has two main important effects.

Firstly, your mage can refresh Quintessence Traits equal to the *Avatar* rating automatically by spending time at a Node. You need only win a Mental Challenge using the *Meditation* Ability each game hour in order to refresh one Quintessence Trait until you reach an amount equal to the *Avatar* Trait total. However, you do not gain anything if you already have equal or more Quintessence Traits than

Avatar Traits. Quintessence gained in this fashion is considered personal Quintessence, and it cannot be stolen from you by anything short of an Archmage of *Prime*.

Secondly, you can spend Quintessence only up to a limit of your *Avatar* Trait rating each turn. If you have one *Avatar* Trait, you can spend only one Quintessence Trait each turn. If you do not have the *Avatar* Background, you cannot spend personal Quintessence at all. However, you can still use *Prime* to transfer it to other people or sources, or to use it from Tass.

At the Storyteller's discretion, your mage's *Avatar* rating may affect his Seekings. A strong Avatar (many Traits in the Background) will almost certainly guide a Seeking more strongly and personally.

CONTACTS

With the right contacts in all walks of life, you can get a line on all sorts of useful information. Although having an ear to the wall doesn't necessarily provide you with good help or loyal servants, it does mean that you know who to ask when looking for the movers and shakers behind the scenes.

In game terms, your rating in *Contacts* allows you to pick up rumors and information. When you call on your contacts, you make a few phone calls, check with likely snitches and grease a few palms. In return, you get rumors and information as if possessed of a certain amount of Influence. Doing so lets you find out exactly what is going on in the city within a particular area. You can get information of a level equal to how ever many contacts you use. If you use *Contacts* x3 on *Industry*, for instance, you get information that *Industry* Influence x3 would yield. The advantage of the *Contacts* Background is that contacts can be switched from place to place each game, getting information in different areas at your demand.
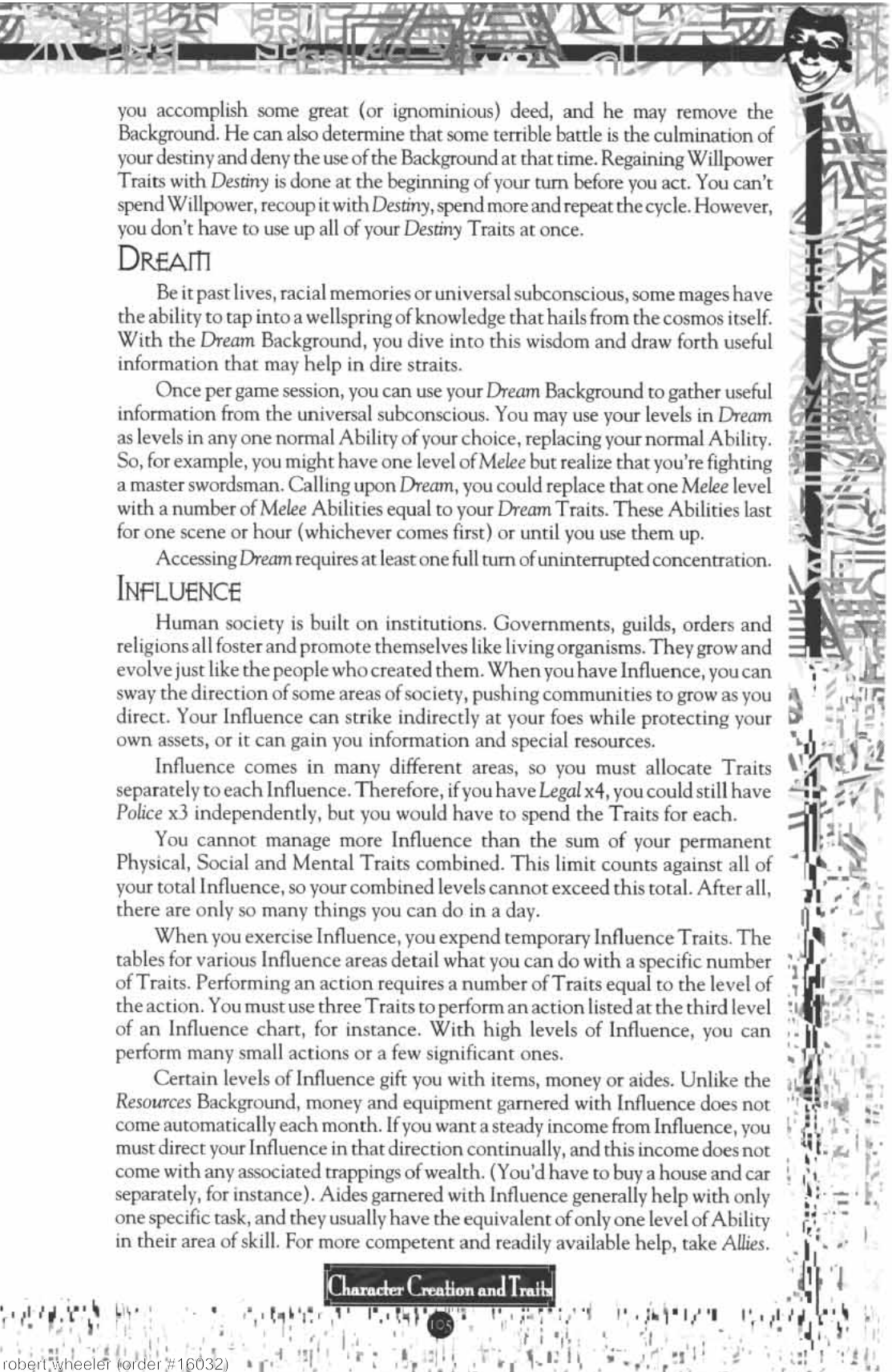
At the discretion of a Storyteller, using *Contacts* to find especially dangerous or well-guarded information may require your character to spend some money or perform a few favors. On occasion, accidents can cause contacts in one area to dry up, such as a strike that affects your *Industry* contacts, or a particularly unlucky astronomical conjunction that sends your *Occult* contacts running for the hills. Your contacts will not generally function as aides or lackeys; that is the purview of the *Allies* Background.

Example: *Devon has Contacts x3. This month, he decides to check up with the equivalent of University Influence x1 and Industry Influence x2, in order to see what's happening in the worlds of technology. Next month he'll change those to Underworld and Street to see who he'd talk to about hiring some muscle to deal with the sensitive information he gathered previously.*

DESTINY

Some people are fated for great callings — or terrible failures. With the *Destiny* Background, you have some trial or famous circumstance in your future, an appointment for which you are almost sure to be present. You can still be killed or captured (since someone else might fulfill the terms of the destiny or that fate might be an interpretation of your own destiny), but you are almost sure to take part in some great event and to last long enough to get there. There's no guarantee that your destiny is a good thing, though, and you usually know of it only in the vaguest sense, so beware....

Once per game session per Trait of *Destiny*, you may make a Simple Test (win only). If you succeed, you regain one Willpower Trait. You know that you're destined for some fate, and this knowledge helps you persevere even when the chips are down. However, a Storyteller can conversely declare that you have fulfilled your destiny if

you accomplish some great (or ignominious) deed, and he may remove the Background. He can also determine that some terrible battle is the culmination of your destiny and deny the use of the Background at that time. Regaining Willpower Traits with *Destiny* is done at the beginning of your turn before you act. You can't spend Willpower, recoup it with *Destiny*, spend more and repeat the cycle. However, you don't have to use up all of your *Destiny* Traits at once.

DREAM

Be it past lives, racial memories or universal subconscious, some mages have the ability to tap into a wellspring of knowledge that hails from the cosmos itself. With the *Dream* Background, you dive into this wisdom and draw forth useful information that may help in dire straits.

Once per game session, you can use your *Dream* Background to gather useful information from the universal subconscious. You may use your levels in *Dream* as levels in any one normal Ability of your choice, replacing your normal Ability. So, for example, you might have one level of *Melee* but realize that you're fighting a master swordsman. Calling upon *Dream*, you could replace that one *Melee* level with a number of *Melee* Abilities equal to your *Dream* Traits. These Abilities last for one scene or hour (whichever comes first) or until you use them up.

Accessing *Dream* requires at least one full turn of uninterrupted concentration.

INFLUENCE

Human society is built on institutions. Governments, guilds, orders and religions all foster and promote themselves like living organisms. They grow and evolve just like the people who created them. When you have Influence, you can sway the direction of some areas of society, pushing communities to grow as you direct. Your Influence can strike indirectly at your foes while protecting your own assets, or it can gain you information and special resources.

Influence comes in many different areas, so you must allocate Traits separately to each Influence. Therefore, if you have *Legal* x4, you could still have *Police* x3 independently, but you would have to spend the Traits for each.

You cannot manage more Influence than the sum of your permanent Physical, Social and Mental Traits combined. This limit counts against all of your total Influence, so your combined levels cannot exceed this total. After all, there are only so many things you can do in a day.

When you exercise Influence, you expend temporary Influence Traits. The tables for various Influence areas detail what you can do with a specific number of Traits. Performing an action requires a number of Traits equal to the level of the action. You must use three Traits to perform an action listed at the third level of an Influence chart, for instance. With high levels of Influence, you can perform many small actions or a few significant ones.

Certain levels of Influence gift you with items, money or aides. Unlike the *Resources* Background, money and equipment garnered with Influence does not come automatically each month. If you want a steady income from Influence, you must direct your Influence in that direction continually, and this income does not come with any associated trappings of wealth. (You'd have to buy a house and car separately, for instance). Aides garnered with Influence generally help with only one specific task, and they usually have the equivalent of only one level of Ability in their area of skill. For more competent and readily available help, take *Allies*.

Most cities have only a set amount of Influence in various areas. For instance, Atlanta has a great deal of *Transportation* Influence, because it is a hub of travel, while Hollywood would have a lot of *High Society* and *Media* Influence. A rust-belt city where manufacturing and heavy industry has all but disappeared would have very little to no *Industry* Influence.

Storytellers should map out the total amount of each type of Influence that exists in the city. Once all the Influence of a given type is used up, the only way to get more is to use Influence to grow that area of society, destroy someone else's Influence and thus free up those resources or acquire an adversary's Influence in an area. Each city may also have different reflections of the Influences listed here. A city with a thriving independent film community is going to have a different picture of *Media* or *High Society* than a city where the arts are being literally starved out due to budget cuts.

Each area of Influence has its own description. Certain Technocratic agents and Master mages may possess truly far-reaching Influence, giving them power to exert control beyond the levels included here.

BUREAUCRACY

You can manage various government agencies and bureaus. By dealing with social programs and public servants, you can spin red tape, bypass rules and regulations or twist bureaucratic regimentation to your advantage. *Bureaucracy* is useful in operating or shutting down businesses, faking or acquiring permits and identification papers and manipulating public utilities. City- and county-level government clerks, utility workers, road crews, surveyors and other civil servants are potential contacts or allies.

Cost	Effect
1	Trace utility bills
2	Fake a birth certificate or driver's license
	Disconnect a single small residence's utilities
	Close a small road or park
	Get public aid ($250)
3	Fake a death certificate, passport or green card
	Close a public school for a single day
	Shut down a minor business on a violation
4	Initiate a phone tap
	Fake land deeds
	Initiate a department-wide investigation
5	Start, stop or alter city-wide programs or policy
	Shut down a big business on a violation
	Rezone areas
	Obliterate records of a person on a city or county level

CHURCH

Although the modern church has arguably less control over temporal society than it did in the Middle Ages, its policies still exert considerable influence over the direction of politics and communities. Knowing the appropriate people allows insight into many mainstream religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Shinto or Buddhism. (Fringe or alternative groups,

such as Scientologists, are the purview of the *Occult* Influence.) When you exercise *Church* Influence, you can change religious policy, affect the assignment of clergy and access a variety of lore and resources. Contacts and allies affected by *Church* Influence would include ministers, priests, bishops, Church-sponsored witch-hunters, holy orders and various attendees and assistants.

Cost	Effect
1	Identify most secular members of a given faith in the local area
	Pass as a member of the clergy
	Peruse general church records (baptism, marriage, burial, etc.)
2	Identify higher church members
	Track regular church members
	Suspend lay members
3	Open or close a single church
	Find the average church-associated hunter
	Dip into the collection plate ($250)
	Access private information and archives of a church
4	Discredit or suspend high-level church members
	Manipulate regional branches of the church
	Organize major protests
5	Access ancient church lore and knowledge

FINANCE

Avoiding unwanted notice while maintaining a reasonable standard of living takes some work for mages, especially those who've outlived their records or just happened upon wealth that's too good to be true. Although your actual available money comes from your *Resources* Background, you can use *Finance* Influence to start or smother businesses, crush or support banking institutions and alter credit records. Clearly, such power over money is not to be trifled with. Fortunes are made and destroyed with this sort of pull. CEOs, bankers, stockbrokers, bank tellers, yes-men, financiers and loan agents all perform such work.

Cost	Effect
1	Learn about major transactions and financial events
	Raise capital ($1,000)
	Learn about general economic trends
	Learn real motivations for many financial actions of others
2	Trace an unsecured small account
	Raise capital to purchase a small business (single, small store)
3	Purchase a large business (a few small branches or a single large store or service)
4	Manipulate local banking (delay deposits, some credit rating alterations)
	Ruin a small business
5	Control an aspect of city-wide banking (shut off ATMs, arrange a bank "holiday")
	Ruin a large business
	Purchase a major company

Character Creation and Traits

HEALTH

Many good-hearted mages use their talents to assist the needy and the wounded, while others simply rely on clever scams to bilk people with snake oil. Technologically minded mages often devote work to the invention of new medical techniques. Either way, such mages move in the circles of hospitals and HMOs. All of these sorts of research and development are the purview of *Health* Influence. Coroners, doctors, lab workers, therapists, pharmacists and specialists are just a few of the folks you can find in this field.

Cost	Effect
1	Access a person's health records
	Fake vaccination records and the like
	Use public functions of health centers at your leisure
	Get a single pint of human blood
2	Access some medical research records
	Have minor lab work done
	Get a copy of a coroner's report
	Instigate minor quarantines
3	Corrupt results of tests or inspections
	Alter medical records
4	Acquire a body
	Completely rewrite medical records
	Abuse grants for personal use ($250)
	Have minor medical research performed on a subject
	Institute large-scale quarantines
	Shut down businesses for "health code violations"
5	Have special research projects performed
	Have people institutionalized or released

HIGH SOCIETY

The glitterati at the top of society move in circles of wealth and elegance. Most mages would avoid such public notice if they could, but a few try to influence policy or just get noticed so as to spread their ideals. Access to famous actors, celebrities and the idle rich grants a certain sway over popular trends. With a few choice spells, a mage can become a force for change and the spread of new ideas. Among these circles, one finds dilettantes, artists of almost any stripe, old-money families, models, rock stars, sports figures and jet-setters.

Cost	Effect
1	Learn what is trendy
	Obtain hard-to-get tickets for shows
	Learn about concerts, shows or plays well before they are made public
2	Track most celebrities and luminaries
	Be a local voice in the entertainment field
	Borrow idle cash from rich friends ($1,000)
3	Crush promising careers
	Hobnob well above your station

4	Minor celebrity status
5	Get a brief appearance on a talk show that's not about to be cancelled
	Ruin a new club, gallery, festival or other posh gathering

INDUSTRY

The grinding wheels of labor fuel the economies and markets of the world. Machines, factories and blue-collar workers line up in endless drudgery, churning out the staples of everyday living. *Industry* Influence sways the formation of unions, the movements of work projects, locations for factories and the product of manufacturing concerns. Union workers, foremen, engineers, construction workers, manual laborers and all manner of blue-collar workers exist among these ranks.

Cost	Effect
1	Learn about industrial projects and movements
2	Have minor projects performed
	Dip into union funds or embezzle petty cash ($500)
	Arrange small accidents or sabotage
3	Organize minor strikes
	Appropriate machinery for a short time
4	Close down a small plant
	Revitalize a small plant
5	Manipulate large local industry

LEGAL

When a mage winds up in a jail cell with witnesses and evidence pointing to all sorts of strange events and forbidden practices, there's nothing like having a little bit of sway in the courts. This sway is especially important when a mage wants to avoid the ire of national agencies, Technocrats and hunter groups, who might otherwise be attracted by stories of criminals with unusual occult records. Of course, a little *Legal* Influence is also excellent for attacking an enemy's assets too. Such Influence grants you a measure of leverage over law schools and firms, lawyers, judges, DAs, clerks and public defenders.

Cost	Effect
1	Get free representation for minor cases
2	Avoid bail for some charges
	Have minor charges dropped
3	Manipulate legal procedures (minor wills and contracts, court dates)
	Access public or court funds ($250)
	Get representation in most court cases
4	Issue subpoenas
	Tie up court cases
	Have most legal charges dropped
	Cancel or arrange parole
5	Close down all but the most serious investigations
	Have deportment proceedings held against someone

Media

Directing media attention to certain practices and away from others is a delicate procedure. Encouraging belief in magic, without drawing attention overtly, requires utmost finesse. With *Media*, you can crush or alter news stories, control the operations of news stations and reporters or sway public opinion through DJs, editors of all varieties, reporters, cameramen, photographers and broadcasters at your disposal. At Storyteller discretion, *Media* Influence may also allow access to the more technical areas of television, radio or movies.

Cost	Effect
1	Learn about breaking stories early
	Submit small articles (within reason)
2	Suppress (but not stop) small articles or reports
	Get hold of investigative reporting information
3	Initiate news investigations and reports
	Get project funding and waste it ($250)
4	Ground stories and projects
5	Broadcast fake stories (local only)
	Kill small local articles or reports completely

Occult

The hidden world of the supernatural teems with secrets, conspiracies and unusual factions. Of course, mages are part and parcel of this world, and they are often quite familiar with its intricacies and aware of all manner of magical happenings. By using *Occult* Influence, you can dig up information to improve your knowledge, get inside the occult community and find rare components for magical rituals. Revisionist histories, lost secrets, ancient maps and forbidden tomes are all available to the mage with the right connections. Cult leaders, alternative religious groups, charlatans, occultists, New Agers and a few more dangerous elements can be found here.

Cost	Effect
1	Contact and make use of common occult groups and their practices
	Know some of the more visible occult figures
2	Know and contact some of the more obscure occult figures
	Access resources for most rituals and rites
3	Know the general vicinity of certain supernatural entities and (possibly) contact them
	Access vital or rare foci and components
	Milk impressionable wannabes for bucks ($250)
	Access occult tomes and writings
	Research a basic rote
4	Research a moderately complex rote
5	Access minor magic items
	Unearth the formula of a powerful rote

Police

"To protect and serve" is the motto of the police, but police are a hindrance and a menace to many mages. After all, the police don't take kindly to people who buck the establishment with brimstone and lightning. With care, a mage can manipulate

the police to avoid persecution, protect personal interests or attack enemies indirectly. Police of all ranks, detectives, clerical staff, dispatchers, prison guards, special divisions (such as SWAT or homicide) and local highway patrol make up these ranks.

Cost	Effect
1	Learn police procedures
	Hear police information and rumors
	Avoid traffic tickets
2	Have license plates checked
	Avoid minor violations (first conviction)
	Get "inside information"
3	Get copies of an investigation report
	Have police hassle, detain or harass someone
	Find bureau secrets
4	Access confiscated weapons or contraband
	Have some serious charges dropped
	Start an investigation
	Get money, either from the evidence room or as an appropriation ($1,000)
5	Institute major investigations
	Arrange setups
	Instigate bureau investigations
	Have officers fired

POLITICAL

The political landscape is dangerous territory, and few willworkers see a need to interfere, unless they want to change laws and policies directly. Altering party platforms, controlling local elections, changing appointed offices and calling in favors is the purview of *Political* Influence. Well-timed blackmail, bribery, spin-doctoring or any sundry tricks are stock in trade on both sides of this fence. Some of the likely contacts and allies include pollsters, lobbyists, activists, party members, spin-doctors and politicians from rural zoning committees to the mayors of major cities or Congressional representatives.

Cost	Effect
1	Minor lobbying
	Identify real platforms of politicians and parties
	Be "in the know"
2	Meet small-time politicians
	Garner inside information on processes, laws and the like
	Use a slush fund or fund-raiser ($1,000)
3	Sway or alter political projects (local parks, renovations, small construction)
4	Enact minor legislation
	Dash careers of minor politicians
5	Get your candidate in a minor office
	Enact encompassing legislation

STREET

Ignored and often spat upon by their betters, those in the dark alleys and slums have created their own culture to deal with life and any outsiders who might come calling. When calling on *Street* Influence, you use your connections on the underside of the city to find the homeless, gang members, street buskers, petty criminals, prostitutes, residents of the slums or barrios and fringe elements of the so-called deviant cultures.

Cost	Effect
1	Open an ear for the word on the street
	Identify most gangs and know their turf and habits
2	Live mostly without fear on the underside of society
	Keep a contact or two in most aspects of street life
	Access small-time contraband
3	Get insight into other areas of Influence
	Arrange for some services from street people or gangs
	Get pistols or uncommon melee weapons
4	Mobilize groups of homeless people
	Panhandle or hold a "collection" ($250)
	Get hold of a shotgun, rifle or SMG
	Have a word in almost all aspects of gang operations
5	Control a single medium-sized gang
	Arrange impressive protests by street people

TRANSPORTATION

Some mages travel extensively; others settle down and remain largely anonymous in a local area. Either way, though, mages need to be able to protect their homes, just like anyone else. Getting access to special supplies and services can take a measure of *Transportation*. All these things can be controlled with a bit of sway over truckers, harbors, railroads, airports, taxis, border guards, pilots and untold hundreds, as well as more mundane aspects like shipping and travel arrangements.

Cost	Effect
1	Know what goes where, when and why
	Travel locally quickly and freely
2	Track an unwary target if he uses public transportation
	Arrange safe (or at least concealed) passage from mundane threats such as robbery, terrorism or searches
3	Seriously hamper an individual's ability to travel
	Avoid most supernatural dangers when traveling (such as Technocratic squads)
4	Shut down one form of transportation (bus lines, ships, planes, trains, etc.) temporarily
	Route money your way ($500)
5	Reroute major modes of travel
	Smuggle with impunity

UNDERWORLD

The world of crime offers lucrative possibilities to strong-willed or subtle leaders. *Underworld* Influence lets you call on such favors for all manner of illegal dealings, and its ranks are filled by the Mafia, La Cosa Nostra, drug dealers, bookies, Yakuza, tongs, hit-men, fences and criminal gangs.

Cost	Effect
1	Locate minor contraband (knives, small-time drugs, petty gambling, scalped tickets)
2	Obtain pistols, serious drugs, stolen credit cards
	Hire muscle to rough someone up
	Fence stolen loot
	Prove that crime pays (and score $1,000)
3	Obtain a rifle, shotgun or SMG
	Arrange a minor hit
	Meet someone important in "the Family"
4	Make white-collar crime connections
5	Arrange gangland assassinations
	Hire a demolition man or firebug
	Supply local drug needs

UNIVERSITY

The halls of academia are familiar to many a willworker. Impressionable young minds await as ready sources of recruitment and assistance. Institutions of learning and research, then, are the purview of the *University* Influence. Access to the halls of learning can help you with any number of resources, from ancient languages to research assistance to many potential students. School boards, students from kindergarten through college, graduate students, professors, teachers, deans, Greek orders and a variety of staff members fill the ivy-covered halls.

Cost	Effect
1	Know layout and policy of local schools
	Have access to low-level university resources
	Get records up to the high school level
2	Know a contact or two with useful knowledge or Abilities
	Have minor access to facilities
	Fake high school records
	Obtain college records
3	Call in faculty favors
	Cancel a class
	Fix grades
	Discredit a student
4	Organize student protests and rallies
	Discredit faculty members
5	Falsify an undergraduate degree

Library

It was once thought that the accumulated wisdom of the ages could always be found in *some* book *somewhere*. While there are too many universal mysteries to catalog them all, many wise mages have recorded their findings and musings in various journals and materials designed to pass on their knowledge, keep it safe or just remind themselves of key points. You happen to have some of those sorts of records.

A magical library is an invaluable tool for research. Normally, developing greater proficiency in a Sphere of magic requires quite a bit of study time (see p. 137). With the *Library* Background, you can cut this time down thanks to your study materials and access to copious notes. For each *Library* Trait that you have, you can shave one study session (generally, one game session) worth of time off the period required to learn a Sphere level, down to a minimum of one session. You must still pay the usual Experience Trait costs.

Other people cannot benefit from your library unless you specifically assist them, which ties up your use of the *Library* Trait for that study time. The notes and books are all organized in a personal fashion, and you need to be there to interpret them, find the right materials and otherwise separate the chaff from the wheat.

Example: *Gregor wishes to improve his command of* Forces. *He has a modest two-Trait* Library *(or the equivalent of a few good books and a lot of disorganized notes and junk material).* Forces *isn't his specialty Sphere, so learning the Initiate level will take four game sessions (two per level). Using his* Library *Traits, though, Gregor learns the magical principles in only two game sessions.*

Mentor

An older or more experienced mage looks after you and comes to your aid occasionally. Whatever the case, you can get assistance from your mentor, although his favor may be fickle.

When you call on your mentor, you risk a certain number of Traits to achieve a given effect. A lowly one-Trait mentor probably knows only little more than you, while a five-Trait mentor may well have luminous standing within your sect and a wide range of potent powers. Regardless, taking up your mentor's valuable time is costly. You must engage in a Simple Test when you call on your mentor. If you succeed, your mentor deigns to aid you. If you tie, your mentor grants you assistance, but then requires something in return. If you fail, your mentor demands the favor first before helping. In any case, your mentor can be called upon only once in any given game session, and only if you have an appropriate way to contact him or her.

The level of aid that your mentor can give depends on the number of Traits you have in this Background (and Storyteller approval, of course):

• For one Trait, your mentor is privy to a single piece of specialized information at a level above your own. If you have *Expert Ability: Mage Lore* x2, for instance, your mentor can be called upon to gift you with one piece of information from *Expert Ability: Mage Lore* x3.

• For one Trait, your mentor can instruct you in an Apprentice-level Sphere that's outside your specialty.

• With one or more Traits, your mentor can teach rotes. Your mentor can teach one rote per his Trait value for the highest Sphere level, plus one Trait per

additional Sphere. Therefore, a rote requiring an Adept-level Sphere could be taught by a mentor worth four Traits; a rote requiring two Initiate-level Spheres would require a mentor worth three Traits (two for the Initiate level, one for having an extra Sphere).

• For two Traits, you can borrow one level of *Contacts*, Influence, *Resources* or Reputation from your mentor for the duration of the game. If your mentor is very powerful (four or five Traits), you can borrow two levels.

• Two Traits allow your mentor to instruct you in an Initiate-level Sphere that's outside your specialty.

• For three Traits, your mentor can instruct you in a Disciple-level Sphere that's outside your specialty.

• Also at a cost of three Traits, your mentor can train you in the ways of a special *Hobby/ Professional/ Expert Ability* that is outside your normal ken, such as *Vampire Lore.*

• For four Traits, your mentor can train you in an Adept-level Sphere outside your specialty.

• For five Traits, your mentor can train you in a Master-level Sphere outside your specialty.

Since mentors can prove unbalancing by providing too many different powers over the course of a long game, the Storyteller may lower your total *Mentor* rating as you call on his knowledge. This decrease represents the fact that the mentor has less left to teach as your character learns the mentor's secrets.

NODE

Places of mystical power are rare and hotly contested in the modern age of dying magic, and you happen to have regular access to one such place. There may be certain fees or quests levied on you, or you may have to travel through dangerous territory to get there, but you at least know the location of a stable Node, and you can usually rest there to refresh your energies.

When you rest in a Node, you can restore your Quintessence as described for the *Avatar* Background (see p. 103). A Node also generates Tass, or portable Quintessence. Each game session, you can test a number of times equal to the Traits of *Node* that you have. Each win (no tie) on a Simple Test is worth one Trait of Tass. Furthermore, you can come into play automatically with your Quintessence Traits equal to your *Node* or *Avatar* Trait total (whichever is lower). The Node has enough power for only one person to use. If you allow someone else to use the Node in one game session, then you cannot take its power for yourself as well.

Technocrats, lupines and enemy mages all tend to hunt for Nodes, so watch out. Your territory may become endangered by other supernatural creatures. Spirits and strange phenomena tend to haunt Nodes. Storytellers may restrict this Background heavily to represent the fact that Nodes are rare and valuable.

RESOURCES

You have access to liquid capital and spending money. You also have some solid resources that you can use when times are tight. Unlike the use of *Finance* Influence, these resources are always readily available, and they come to you automatically due to your investments, jobs and holdings.

Resource Allocation

No Traits:	Poverty. Income $200. Get roommates and a bus pass.
One Trait:	Small savings and holdings; income $500. Have apartment, cheap means of transportation.
Two Traits:	Modest savings and holdings; income $1,000. Have condo and motorcycle or modest car.
Three Traits:	Significant savings and holdings; income $3,000. Own house, car.
Four Traits:	Large savings and holdings. Income $10,000. Own large house or some small properties, two vehicles, some luxuries and unusual items.
Five Traits:	Rich. Income $30,000. Own estate and grounds, multiple small properties, several vehicles, arts and treasures, luxury items.

Your number of *Resources* Traits determines the amount of money that you can secure. By expending temporary *Resources* Traits (which return at the next game session), you can draw on your regular income, as shown in the accompanying table. If you expend permanent *Resources* Traits, you can divest yourself of holdings, allowing access to 10 times the amount shown on the table. However, the limits of what you can buy are always adjudicated by the Storyteller. Truly powerful uses of *Resources* are best left to downtimes and moderation between game sessions.

Wonder

You own a rare and potent device with magical powers. This Wonder could have any number of effects. Some Wonders cast spells. Others store Quintessence. Still others simply have permanent magical Effects cast upon them. A few rare ones have combinations of these traits.

The number of Traits that you place in the *Wonder* Background determines the overall power of the object. Use the accompanying table:

- Per level of Effect: +1
- Disposable charms (set of 10): -1
- Per 5 Quintessence held: +1
- Per Trait of Arete held: +1

Example: *Thurston has an ancient, rune-covered staff. The staff can heal wounds in others when touched to them. This is a Disciple-level Effect, so it costs three Traits. Additionally, the staff holds five Traits of Quintessence, which adds one Trait to its value. The healing staff is a four-Trait Wonder. His candles, on the other hand, have the same effect, but they're used up once they're burned. The candles don't hold any Quintessence, so their value is three for the Disciple-level healing Effect, minus one because they're a set of disposable charms. They cost a total of two Traits for all 10 candles together.*

Arete

A mage's mystic understanding, enlightenment, personal insight, connection to the Tellurian and magical will all are part and parcel of Arete. The

Awakening causes a mage to gain an inkling of the possibilities of the cosmos, and thus blossoms the first spark of Arete. From there, however, the mage must seek out further enlightenment and understanding in order to increase his Arete and develop his supernatural wisdom.

Arete Traits do not have adjectives. Rather, a mage simply has a number of Arete Traits, representing his overall enlightenment. The more Traits the mage has, the more potent his mystical abilities are and (theoretically) the greater his understanding of the cosmos is. Arete Traits are not spent or temporarily used up like many other Traits. Rather, the mage's Arete Traits remain a constant measure of the mage's steps toward knowledge. Therefore, Arete ranges from zero (an un-Awakened human) or one (a neophyte mage) to 10 Traits, although very, very few mages ever achieve more than five Arete Traits.

You start with one Arete Trait — the most basic wisdom that comes with Awakening. You can purchase additional Arete with your Free Traits for two Free Traits each. However, you can't start with more than three Arete Traits. Even the most profound Awakening has limits.

Your Arete has a few profound effects:

• You use your Arete Traits to determine the success or failure of your magical endeavors. When you enter a magical challenge (trying to cast a spell), you pit your Arete against the spell's difficulty. A more powerful spell can be cast reliably only by a wise, enlightened mage.

• Your knowledge of individual Spheres cannot exceed your overall wisdom. Therefore, you cannot have more levels in any Sphere than you have Traits of Arete. If you have only three Arete Traits, you cannot exceed Disciple-level Spheres. You could theoretically be ranked a Disciple in every Sphere, but further improvement would require an advancement of Arete.

• As your Arete increases, you become aware that it's the magician's will alone that creates magic, not some dependence upon props and tools. Once you gain your sixth Arete Trait, you may discard the use of foci from one Sphere. You don't need to use any foci to do magic with that Sphere at all. Each additional Trait you accrue allows you to discard foci for another two Spheres, until you don't need foci at all to perform magic.

Note especially that your Arete is limited by your permanent Willpower Traits. Your number of Arete Traits cannot exceed your permanent Willpower Traits. If your permanent Willpower falls below your Arete, the excess Arete Traits are not permanently lost. However, you can't use them or count them toward casting Effects until your Willpower is restored.

WILLPOWER

When everything else has failed and you're utterly exhausted, Willpower is your last resort. Your Willpower Traits measure your inner resolve, final tenacity and sheer guts. A character committed wholeheartedly to a course of action can force himself beyond normal human endurance to achieve incredible feats.

Willpower Traits do not have adjectives. Rather, you have permanent Willpower Traits — the rating that you start each game with — and temporary Willpower Traits — the Willpower Traits that you can expend to do things and which refresh with time. You start with five Willpower Traits, and you may gain

more as you garner experience. If you use some of your Willpower, it refreshes at a rate of one Trait every game session (although your Storyteller may vary this pace to simplify bookkeeping or suit the needs of the chronicle).

Expending a Willpower Trait can have any one of a number of effects, generally related to incredible resolve and self-determination:

• You may spend Willpower Trait to refresh all of your lost Traits in one Attribute category — Physical, Social or Mental. You can refresh each category only once per game session.

• Expenditure of a Willpower Trait allows you to gain a single retest when defending against a Mental or Social challenge. You lose the initial Traits you bid, as usual with a retest. You may use Willpower thus only once for any given challenge. Note that certain powers or stipulations override this ruling.

• Spending one Willpower Trait enables you to enter a challenge for which you don't have an appropriate Ability. For instance, if you're trying to figure out a complex security system and you don't have the *Technology* Ability, you can use a Trait of Willpower to make a test as normal. This expenditure doesn't guarantee success, but it lets you try something you normally wouldn't be able to figure out.

• You can spend a Willpower Trait to assert brief control over your senses while you're in an episode of Quiet (see p. 174). Doing so allows you to speak a brief sentence coherently or banish hallucinations for a short time, enough for you to get your bearings temporarily.

• You can spend one Willpower Trait to ignore all wound penalties, up to and including Incapacitated, for the duration of one turn.
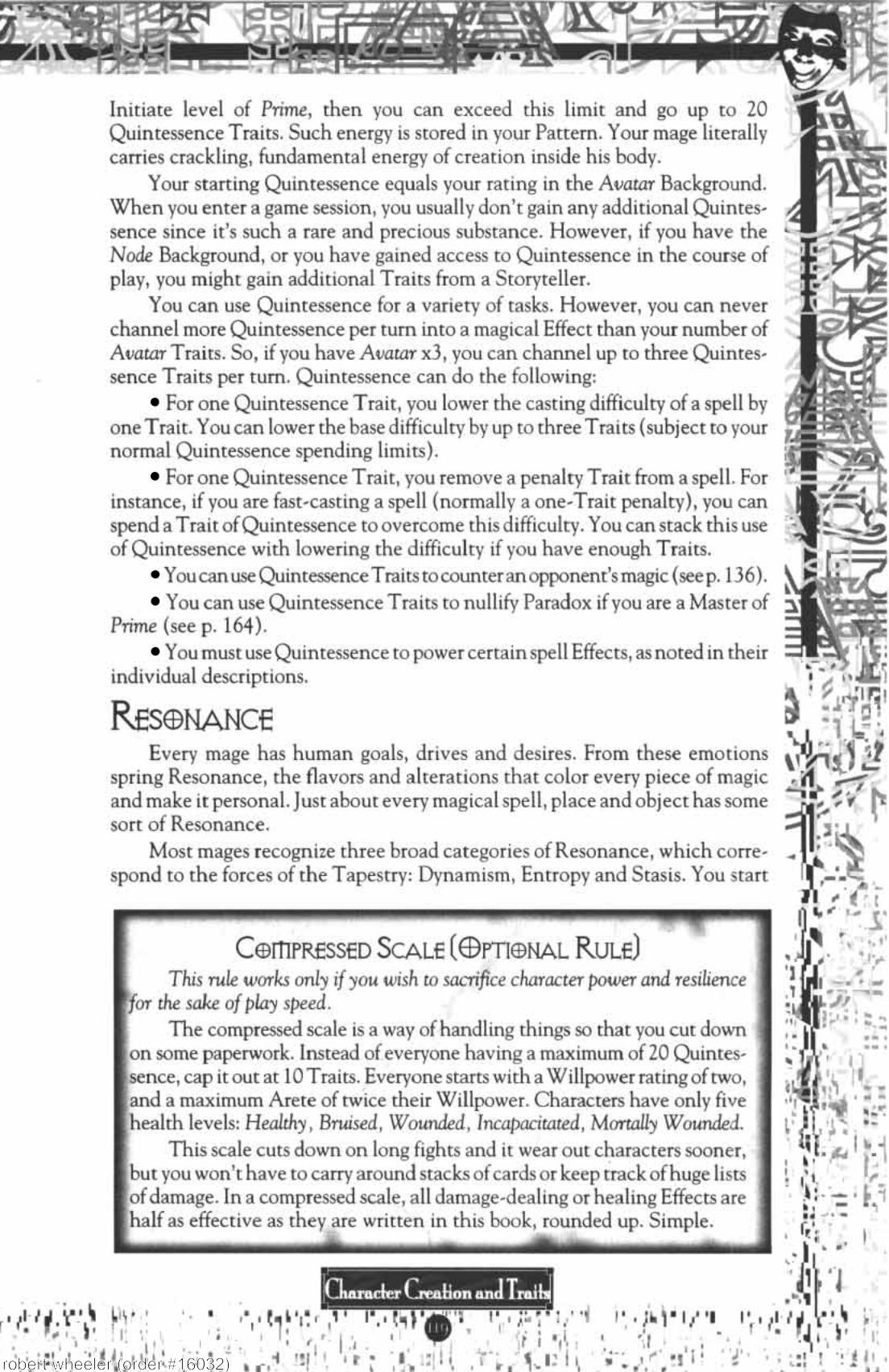
• Spending a Willpower Trait lets you suppress a derangement temporarily. If you spend enough Willpower Traits on suppressing a derangement, you may overcome it eventually.

You may lose permanent Willpower Traits due to certain terrible traumas. This happens only at the discretion of the Storyteller. The most likely cause is suffering some great emotional or psychic trauma after you have exhausted all of your temporary Willpower Traits. In this event, your maximum Willpower drops. If your permanent Willpower Trait total falls below your Arete Traits, then your Arete is suppressed, as described previously.

QUINTESSENCE

The building block of the universe, the raw energy of the Tapestry, the Fifth Element, the power of the Tellurian — Quintessence is all this and more. Mages believe that all reality springs from Patterns of Quintessence. Objects or creatures exist because their Patterns are suffused with Quintessence, thereby giving them reality. Proficient willworkers can take this very energy in its pure state and channel it to fuel their workings, to create new things or to reinforce their magics. As such a potent commodity, Quintessence is highly valuable among mages.

Track your Quintessence Traits with temporary Traits. Quintessence Traits can have a Resonance adjective, or they can be flavorless. You might have small cards for your Quintessence Traits, which record their Resonance and can be turned in to a Storyteller once you use them. You can hold Quintessence Traits up to your number of *Avatar* Background Traits. If you have even the

Initiate level of *Prime*, then you can exceed this limit and go up to 20 Quintessence Traits. Such energy is stored in your Pattern. Your mage literally carries crackling, fundamental energy of creation inside his body.

Your starting Quintessence equals your rating in the *Avatar* Background. When you enter a game session, you usually don't gain any additional Quintessence since it's such a rare and precious substance. However, if you have the *Node* Background, or you have gained access to Quintessence in the course of play, you might gain additional Traits from a Storyteller.

You can use Quintessence for a variety of tasks. However, you can never channel more Quintessence per turn into a magical Effect than your number of *Avatar* Traits. So, if you have *Avatar* x3, you can channel up to three Quintessence Traits per turn. Quintessence can do the following:

• For one Quintessence Trait, you lower the casting difficulty of a spell by one Trait. You can lower the base difficulty by up to three Traits (subject to your normal Quintessence spending limits).

• For one Quintessence Trait, you remove a penalty Trait from a spell. For instance, if you are fast-casting a spell (normally a one-Trait penalty), you can spend a Trait of Quintessence to overcome this difficulty. You can stack this use of Quintessence with lowering the difficulty if you have enough Traits.

• You can use Quintessence Traits to counter an opponent's magic (see p. 136).

• You can use Quintessence Traits to nullify Paradox if you are a Master of *Prime* (see p. 164).

• You must use Quintessence to power certain spell Effects, as noted in their individual descriptions.

RESONANCE

Every mage has human goals, drives and desires. From these emotions spring Resonance, the flavors and alterations that color every piece of magic and make it personal. Just about every magical spell, place and object has some sort of Resonance.

Most mages recognize three broad categories of Resonance, which correspond to the forces of the Tapestry: Dynamism, Entropy and Stasis. You start

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COMPRESSED SCALE (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if you wish to sacrifice character power and resilience for the sake of play speed.

The compressed scale is a way of handling things so that you cut down on some paperwork. Instead of everyone having a maximum of 20 Quintessence, cap it out at 10 Traits. Everyone starts with a Willpower rating of two, and a maximum Arete of twice their Willpower. Characters have only five health levels: *Healthy, Bruised, Wounded, Incapacitated, Mortally Wounded.*

This scale cuts down on long fights and it wear out characters sooner, but you won't have to carry around stacks of cards or keep track of huge lists of damage. In a compressed scale, all damage-dealing or healing Effects are half as effective as they are written in this book, rounded up. Simple.

with one Resonance Trait in one category, describing how your emotions cause your spells to manifest unique qualities. Each type of Resonance tends to be similar to a specific Avatar Essence. Dynamic Resonance is like the Dynamic Essence, Entropic Resonance is like the Primordial Essence, and Static Resonance is like the Pattern Essence. Simply pick an adjective that may be appropriate for one type of Resonance. This adjective influences your magic's appearance.

As you gain experience and strengthen your magic, your personal style and feelings come through more strongly. Eventually your Resonance will increase in strength. As your Resonance increases, you become noticeably more magical, quirky and different. Your personality traits shine through.

You can gain a new Resonance Trait from the following circumstances, if you lose a Simple Test:

- Going into Quiet
- Finishing a Seeking (whether passing or failing)
- Losing a permanent Willpower Trait
- Learning a Master-level Sphere
- Undergoing a strong magical or emotional event (Storyteller's discretion)

You don't typically lose Resonance Traits.

Your character's Resonance has a few noteworthy effects:

• You gain a one-Trait Arete resolution bonus on all spell Effects that match up with your highest Resonance level. You're encouraged to describe your spells so that they show off your Resonance. If you have the Dynamic Resonance of Fiery, for instance, then your spells should have contrails of flame and washes of heat. To claim this bonus, you must use the Resonance adjective in your spell description. You would have to elaborate on how fiery your spell is, potentially alerting your adversaries to your Resonance and style.

• You gain a one-Trait Arete resolution penalty on all spells that oppose your highest Resonance. For instance, if you have the Dynamic Resonance Trait Fiery, you take a penalty on all ice-based magic.

• If you have multiple Traits, you start to become more inhuman and magical. You gain cumulative bonus Attribute Traits (which can exceed your normal human limits) and Negative Traits, depending on your Resonance totals, as shown here:

Traits	Dynamic		Entropic	Static
1-2	No modifiers (yet)			
3-4	Energetic/Clumsy	Fearsome/Ghastly		Rational/Predictable
5	Vigorous/Delicate	Intimidating/Repugnant		Disciplined/Shortsighted

Example: *Isla has the Resonance Traits of* Entropy: Lethal x3 *and* Static: Patterned, Instructive, Reinforcing. *From his Entropic Resonance, he gains the bonus Social Trait* Fearsome *but the Negative Social Trait* Ghastly. *From his Static Resonance, he gains the bonus Mental Trait* Rational *but the negative Mental Trait* Predictable. *If he gains two more Entropic Resonance Traits, he will also get the Social Trait* Intimidating *and the Negative Social Trait* Repugnant *on top of these.*

• With certain *Mind* and *Prime* magics, you can sense Resonance, alter it or tell who cast a given spell. You may also discover that your Resonance opposes

the Resonance of a place or piece of Tass, in which case, that Resonance cancels your magic and makes it harder for you to work spells (see the magical modifiers chart on p. 134).

DERANGEMENTS

Mental instability and insanity go hand-in-hand with the enlightened perceptions that blast their way through the Awakening. Not all mages come through unscathed. Many more become unbalanced after battles with powerful spirits or trips to strange hellish spirit lands. Derangements cover the specific sorts of mental problems that could crop up.

Derangements are advanced roleplaying tools, and they should be taken only with special Storyteller approval. They are described on p. 207. Taking a derangement gives a player two Free Traits at character creationrickdeb@bellsouth.net.

NEGATIVE TRAITS

As listed earlier in the Trait categories, Negative Traits represent specific shortcomings of characters. You can take Negative Traits in order to gain additional Free Traits to spend elsewhere. You may take up to five Negative Traits.

When someone guesses one of your Negative Traits, you are one Trait down on your challenge. For instance, if you happen to have the Trait *Docile* and someone guesses as much while fighting you, then you must risk an additional Physical Trait to continue fighting since your foe has discerned your weakness. If you don't have enough Traits to cover the bid, you lose automatically. Negative Traits don't go away or get used up, so you could be in trouble once your Trait is discovered. Fortunately, if your enemy guesses wrong, then he must bid an additional Trait instead, because he counted on a weakness that you didn't have.

EXPERIENCE

Given time, mages slowly claw their way up from Awakening toward Ascension — at least, many do. This system is reflected in play with Experience Traits. As you play and learn, you become better at what you do. You learn new magical skills, improve your Attributes and hopefully become a more upstanding example of a mage.

Generally, you earn from one to three Experience Traits at the end of each game session. The Storyteller decides upon the exact award, based on roleplaying, solving puzzles, being creative and generally contributing to everyone's enjoyment. Typically, you earn one Trait just for surviving. You will improve, albeit slowly, as long as you manage to stick around. If you do a good job of playing your role and trying your foci and the like, you may garner two Experience Traits. Those players who help with Narration and set-up, bring great costumes and props and encourage phenomenal roleplaying may deserve three Experience Traits.

When awarding Experience Traits, be consistent. If you give a bonus Experience Traits to someone for having a good costume, you should announce as much and make that reward available to everyone. That way, nobody is cheated, and you offer an incentive for everyone to meet your high standards.

- New Attribute Trait — One Experience per Attribute Trait.
- New Ability Trait — Once Experience per Ability Trait.
- New Background Trait — One Experience per Trait with Storyteller approval. Backgrounds can and should also rise and fall according to story and roleplaying situations.
- New Sphere — Four Experience Traits for Initiate or Apprentice level; eight Experience Traits for Disciple or Adept level; 12 Experience Traits for Master level. These costs increase to five/ 10/ 15 for Spheres other than your specialty Sphere.
- New Arete — Four Experience per Trait, with appropriate Seeking.
- New Rote — One Experience Trait for each Sphere level used in the rote.
- New Specialization — One Experience Trait in an Ability you already have.
- New Willpower — Three Experience per Trait.
- Buy Off Negative Trait — Two Experience per Trait.

Be warned, Experience Traits do allow characters to build and grow. Over time, some mages may become very, very potent with Experience Traits. Slow advancement is best. You can't be too careful, and it gives the players time to savor their work. Play a careful balance between reward and conservation, and you'll do fine.

USING EXPERIENCE

You can spend Experience Traits to earn new Abilities, Attributes, specializations, Spheres and other Traits. In some cases you can buy off Flaws or gain other special characteristics. See the chart on this page.

SEEKINGS

Every mage Awakens with some rudiments of enlightened awareness. The Avatar stirs, and the mage finds a new ability to perceive and alter the Tapestry, as expressed through his Arete. However, most mages start with only a rudimentary understanding of these new powers. A mage must work, practice and strive for a deeper, more enlightened state of mind in order to increase the depth of this universal connection.

A mage increases Arete through Seekings. In a Seeking, the mage grapples with metaphysical symbols, personal fears, problems, hopes and changing fates. Most often, this struggle occurs through dream-states or exploration of the mind. The Avatar may trigger a Seeking, drawing the mage's awareness inward, or the mage might hope to bring on a Seeking through various forms of personal entrancement with self-mortification, hypnosis or mystically augmented substances. There's no guaranteed way to cause a Seeking, although most occur while the mage is in a relatively secure state. (That is, mages don't find themselves yanked out-of-body and into a lucid dream while in the midst of a firefight. More likely, the mage will have bloody nightmares and waking hallucinations later, at home, which indicate a Seeking.)

During a Seeking, the mage encounters various symbolic representations of personal issues. These symbols could represent anything from

ATTRIBUTE LIMITATIONS

At the end, mages are only human. More or less. As a result, there are limits to the Attributes that a mage can attain.

Typically, a mage is limited to no more than 10 Traits in each Attribute category, no more than five levels of any Ability and a maximum of 10 Willpower Traits.

If you wish to emphasize differences in character strength, you can also use a sliding scale on Attributes. The mage can have up to 10 Traits in one Attribute category, nine in the second and eight in the third. Your different mages will then have different potential. Of course, if you do use this system, you should do it for every character in the game. (In the case of characters with different maximum Traits, it's just maximum in one Attribute category, maximum-minus-one in the second and maximum-minus-two in the third.)

Note that under rare circumstances, a mage can exceed these limits, due to Resonance (p. 119), special magical Effects or the like.

BEYOND HUMAN LIMITS (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if you want mages to become legendary, more-than-human figures as they increase in enlightenment.

For the most part, mages remain human. They still have their human frailties and foibles. However, you can choose to allow mages an opportunity to exceed human limitations as they grow in enlightenment. In such cases, the mage's increasing Arete takes him farther and farther from his simple human roots, into the realm of the truly supernatural.

For every Arete Trait a mage has, add one to his Trait maximums in all Attributes. Therefore, a beginning mage with one Arete Trait has a maximum of 11 Traits in all Attribute categories (Physical, Social and Mental). A mage with five Arete Traits has a maximum of 15 Traits in each category. You can still use differential limits as well. The aforementioned mage with five Arete Traits would have a maximum of 15 Traits in one category, 14 in a second and 13 in the weakest.

phobias to childhood traumas to anxieties to failures to assumptions. Problems can appear in very straightforward manifestations or in cryptic allegory. A mage with a phobia of spiders might find himself trapped in a room full of arachnids, or strange, spiritual shapes might question the mage's beliefs or press him into dreamlike quests that make little rational sense, all with a deeper meaning of dealing with personal matters. Often, the mage must overcome some deeply held belief or difficulty. These quests force the mage to re-examine his values and personal relationships to the Tellurian. Eventually, a determined and insightful mage can work through Seekings to find new understanding.

The problems and symbols in a Seeking aren't always constant. A mage with a Pattern or Questing Avatar may have to solve and re-solve the same trials over and over, adding a new layer each time. A Dynamic or Primordial Avatar

is likely to use different tools each time. Ideally, the mage overcomes old habits and problems or realizes some great new truths.

At the conclusion of a Seeking, the mage's awareness returns. A failed Seeking can be like a nightmare. The mage struggles with inner problems and realizes that they're not yet resolved, that they'll continue to press in painfully and that a greater awareness has been snatched away. A successful Seeking leads to something much like Awakening as the mage suddenly realizes a new level of reality. This change isn't as profound as the first Awakening, but nevertheless, it can leave the mage with a deep spiritual lucidity that lasts for hours or days. Eventually, the mage settles back into the fold of Awakened existence, ready to strive for the next higher level of enlightenment.

A Seeking can take a few minutes or hours, and most require some time and effort on the part of the mystic. It's very rare for a Seeking to last longer, however. A mage who dives into his subconscious mind for more than a few hours risks madness, and he may actually be locked in a mindscape, an episode of Quiet (see p. 74).

You can undertake a Seeking each time you have enough Experience Traits for the next Trait of Arete. This is a matter to resolve personally with the Avatar Guide (see p. 250). If you succeed, you spend the Experience Traits and gain one Arete Trait. You do not lose the Traits if you fail, but you do not gain the Arete Trait either. In either case, you cannot engage in another Seeking until you meet the criteria of your Avatar Essence once more (see p. 86). You may gain only one Trait of Arete with each Seeking.

Fortunately, once you've wrested enlightenment from the jaws of personal demons, you never lose it. Only the most disastrous of circumstances would cause you to lose an Arete Trait. However, your Arete can be suppressed temporarily if you lose Willpower Traits (see p. 118).

Ascension

The eventual stated goal for mages remains Ascension. Every Awakened mage realizes that the potential exists for some higher level of consciousness. Just as the Awakening raises the mage up above human perceptions, so too do mages know intuitively that some greater enlightenment hovers just out of reach.

Mages don't agree on the nature of Ascension. Each group has its own view of what constitutes Ascension and how to bring it to people. Few mages have a real idea of what it would be like. Surely it's beyond simple human (or magely) comprehension. Only rarely does anyone find any concrete evidence of the process. Very few mages have ever claimed to witness Ascension, and nobody has ever met an Ascended being. Nevertheless, the urgings of the Avatar push mages on toward this unknown and unknowable goal.

Some mages theorize that the Oracles are heralds of Ascension. The Oracles, all very enlightened mages of great power, seem to watch over the world and rarely interfere. When they do, it is with cryptic commentary and subtle action. Most mages agree that the Oracles seem to help mages along the path to a personal Ascension, although this help may not be immediately apparent.

Ascension isn't tied to power or mystical understanding. In theory, a Sleeper could have a moment of fundamental brilliance, Awaken and Ascend all at once. Even the rankest novice could Ascend, under the right conditions.

Conversely, a mage can study for hundreds of years, master a multitude of Spheres and never reach the sublime levels of Ascension. The Ascended realize their true potential as entities instead of as simple material existences tied to a complex Tapestry, and nothing is beyond their reach. Ascension isn't covered by rules: It's beyond rules.

The quest for Ascension remains one of the strong undercurrents of every mage's existence. If a character finally reaches Ascension, that character disappears from the chronicle and goes to some other fate or greater cosmic purpose. Perhaps the character might appear once or twice to dispense some pure insight from the well of enlightenment, but the Ascended mage has moved beyond the concerns of the everyday world.

Reunited over coffee, Florence, David and Tiernan all shared a nervous edge. Something had gone wrong, certainly, but it was something outside their range of experience. Tiernan had left the chunk of bone on the table and explained about where he'd found it. David turned it over curiously once, while Florence seemed hesitant to even touch it.

"I'm telling you, it's just symptomatic," Tiernan insisted, pointing to David over his cup of coffee. "Sure I care that people are getting eaten, but I'd rather know what did it. Or where it came from. Or how it got here in the first place."

The young Akashic Brother frowned. "I still don't like it. If people are suffering, we should take steps to mitigate that suffering at each occurrence. Doing so may even provide the necessary clues to unravel the rest of this puzzle."

"Boys, it's not that simple," Florence sighed. "If we spend all of our time tracking individual problems, we may not be able to even find the core trouble. And if we look for that first, we might not have the means to do anything about it. We need a real plan."

Tiernan rolled his eyes in disgust and sat back in the chair, stretching his legs out under the table. "Yeah, right. Here we are, the People's Magician Army, charging to the rescue with our cunning plan and our fabulous spells, saving the day. Why did I let you drag me into this in the first place?"

David hesitated in his response to let a thundercloud of anger pass from his face. "We are solving very real problems here that normal people are not equipped to deal with. I sensed it in the place that Florence and I visited. The flow of natural energy has been perverted. The natural world bends into unusual shapes in response. The source was orderly and controlled, but the end result was not. Someone tried to perform a potent magic, and it went awry. The result? Chaos across the city, and it will only grow."

Tiernan puffed on a cigarette and looked at the ceiling. Fortunately, in the secluded corner of the coffee shop, nobody could overhear the bizarre conversation.

"Yeah, I noticed it out in the gorge," he said. "Not a sense of 'natural energy' like that, but something wrong. Whatever did this—" he tapped the bone fragment, "—isn't part of any living cycle I know. If it's a local animal, something's driven it crazy. And the terrain itself is covering up for it."

As Tiernan spoke, Florence looked suddenly inspired. "Wait... if something has disrupted Quintessential Patterns — which is what it sounds like — then how do we know that we aren't affected as well?"

David's brow furrowed, while Tiernan hunched forward. The Verbena crushed out his cigarette with a quick motion. "You think we're part of the problem? I know what I saw."

"It isn't entirely impossible," David said. "If something is wrong with the flow of Quintessence in this area, it would make sense that we've been contaminated ourselves. That could explain why we can tell that something is wrong but we can't see what it is."

"I don't see how that explains anything," Tiernan said.

"No, wait," Florence said, snapping her fingers. "I'm having an inspiration. I may not know about 'natural energy' and 'living cycles,' but I know about quantum resonance, fluctuations and stabilization. Here." From her satchel, she produced a handful of small metallic boxes that were devoid of lights but covered with intricate tangles of wire and solder.

"What are these?" Tiernan asked, picking one up with a sour expression.

"Polarized Resonance filters," Florence said. "Once they attune themselves to us, they should isolate us from the local Quintessence flow. Maybe then we'll actually be able to see just what's going on around here."

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SPHERES

Magic comes in wondrous diversity. Everything that humanity has ever imagined, from space ships to dragons to hidden faerie glades, is possible. The magic lies in bringing imagination to life. A mage has the power to turn his fancies into reality. Through will and belief, the mage shapes the very stuff of Creation into a new form. In theory, with enough study and training, anything is possible. A mage's ability to shape the world bows only to his understanding of the cosmos.

Of course, were mages truly without limits, the world would be far different. A mage must study, work and learn the ways of magic. This painstaking process lasts a lifetime. Few mages truly master their talents, and nobody knows the real limits of magic. Pursuing Ascension — becoming something more than human, developing an innate and intrinsic connection to the universe — is the final goal. For most mages, though, the fact remains that practical magic lies in the execution of little mystical tricks or creations. The more experienced the mage is, the broader and more potent these skills become. With time and effort, a mage can also create lasting spells or build special talismans and magical devices. Ultimately, magic opens the door to opportunity, but the occasions it affords are only as broad as the creativity and dedication of the magician.

Because magic can be limitless, it's difficult to describe and work effectively. How do you handle something that's sublime and infinite in scope? For this reason, most mages agree upon the categorization of the following nine Spheres: *Correspondence, Entropy, Forces, Life, Matter, Mind, Prime, Spirit* and *Time*. Each Sphere describes a specific piece of magical reality. With expertise in a Sphere, a mage can effect changes over that aspect of the Tellurian. Of course, the Spheres simply work as one model for magic. They provide a means for mages to have a common basis for talking about their spells, or to give Apprentices a handle on what they're doing. Two mages of widely different Traditions use such disparate techniques that describing their magical practices could prove nearly impossible. With the Spheres, however, a mage can give his ally a general idea of what he's doing, whether he's manipulating *Forces*, recasting *Time*, shaping *Prime* energy or whatever.

The Power of Awakened Magic

Ultimately, an Awakened mage warps or rewrites reality with her powers. The Spheres are simply a measure of the practical knowledge necessary to do so. It's the force of enlightenment, channeled through the mage's belief in the efficacy of certain practices and items, that bends the world to the mage's will.

Of course, reality already has its own pattern. The world got along fine before the mage ever Awakened, and it will probably continue to do so. The basic, underlying level of reality that most people see is called static reality. The everyday person on the street lives and breathes in static reality. Whatever most people believe is real has a great effect on the shape of the world itself. Belief isn't necessarily everything (some elements of the cosmos certainly predate humanity), but it does exert significant change over the Tellurian. This underlying reality is considered the common experience for most people, or the consensus. When a mage works Awakened magic, she reshapes the Tellurian, most often against the consensus.

Mages don't really agree on the source of Awakened magic's power. Is the Avatar really an angel, a friendly spirit or the mage's soul? Nobody knows for certain. All that mages known is that when someone Awakens and has the eye-opening experience that says, "I can change the world," the person becomes capable of exerting his will to change reality. That's Awakened magic.

Of course, even the un-Awakened have some capacity for magic. Patterns that have existed so long in reality that they're part and parcel of the world contain their own power, and sorcerers practice and use these Patterns. So magic remains a mysterious force. Certainly the Awakened have more flexibility, but theirs isn't the only magic, nor is it necessarily a superior one. It's simply a magic that comes from within, from will, enlightenment and belief in tools and trappings of magic, rather than from the power inherent to those tools or trappings themselves.

Vulgar Magic

When a mage calls upon his greatest powers and invokes a display of stunning mystical forces, the act violates the consensus — it flies in the face of what people believe to be possible. The static reality, or mundane world, follows laws and rules that say that such things aren't possible. Through his enlightened will, the mage says "By my will, this *is* possible," and he makes it so. The mage literally bends or reweaves the Tapestry to his desires. He does not do so without cost, however.

When a mage performs some feat that breaks the expectations of normalcy, he commits a vulgar display of magic. People don't just hurl lightning, fly through the air or shrug off bullets — reality doesn't work that way. So say the laws of the world, and so it is difficult for mages to gainsay these rules. Vulgar magic is difficult and often uncontrollable. Many vulgar workings go awry, and the world snaps back at the mage through the force of Paradox. When the mage does something that's clearly impossible, he creates a Paradox, and the titanic forces he unleashes are often beyond human control.

Vulgar magic is also called vain or dynamic magic, because it's a mighty change to the world and a small example of the mage's hubris in reshaping Creation. Mages who rely on vulgar magic often find themselves shunned by other mages who consider them dangerous, and they succumb to the forces of Paradox.

Coincidental Magic

Of course, many of the charms and spells used by mages don't have to violate the sanctity of the consensus. A mage can weave a subtle spell that takes off and nudges

little bits of reality here and there to work to his advantage. Such magic is called coincidental magic because it seems like little more than a lucky coincidence. When it's something that could reasonably happen in the real world, when people would say, "Wow, that's unusual and lucky, but I guess it could happen," it's coincidental magic.

Mages rarely give direct shape to coincidental magic. Rather, working coincidental magic is a matter of channeling desire into an Effect, then letting the spell go so that it nudges the Tellurian in a favorable way. The spell simply carries the mage's need — "I want him to be harmed by lightning," or, "I want to win this game of chance" — and the end result comes about in a way that could have plausibly happened anyway. Since this magic flows with the Tapestry instead of tearing it apart, it rarely suffers the burden of Paradox. The mage may not control it directly, but he nudges a few Patterns here and there to gain a desirable result.

Note that, when casting coincidental magic in play, it's customary for you (the player) to describe the nature of the coincidence, but your mage may not realize it. For instance, your mage could cast an Effect designed to help heal a wound. You rationalize it by saying, "The wound wasn't as severe as it looked at first," and indeed, when someone checks, the wound seems to be not nearly as bad. Your mage, though, simply chanted and invoked a charm to help with healing, and lo and behold, she seems to be better. She let the magic form the coincidence without directing it, even though you (as a player) decided on what coincidental form it might take.

Coincidence can be mutable. Feats that seem irrational in one time or place may be coincidental in another. When many coincidences string in a row, they become

THE COINCIDENCE RULE OF THUMB

Because of the benefits in terms of difficulty and (lack of) resultant Paradox, players will argue long and loud about how their Effects are plausibly coincidental. Ultimately a Storyteller has the final call, but some good guidelines include:

• If the average person off the street wouldn't believe it, it's not a coincidence.

• If it takes more than a sentence to explain why it's a coincidence, it's not.

• If it takes more than a minute to come up with an explanation that fits into one sentence for why it's a coincidence, it's not.

CONSENSUS COINCIDENCE (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if you trust your players to make objective, fair judgments of coincidence.

When determining whether the local consensus would consider something coincidental, you can simply vote on it. The casting player announces his Effect, then everyone present presents a thumbs-up (coincidental) or thumbs-down (not coincidental). If more people have their thumbs up, then the Effect seems plausible and it's a coincidence. If more people have their thumbs down, the Effect seems implausible and it's vulgar. On a tie, the Effect is vulgar.

If you feel more strict, you can rule that even a single dissenter makes the Effect vulgar.

Naturally, players will be tempted to vote for their friends' Effects as coincidental and their enemies' Effects as vulgar. If you think that they'll be unfairly swayed thus, don't use this rule.

increasingly implausible, until they become vulgar. In some parts of the world, belief in mysticism makes certain magical feats accepted occurrences, so they remain coincidental.

THE DOMINO EFFECT

When too many coincidences happen in one place, they stretch the bounds of possibility. As more and more events favor a mage, the likelihood of other good luck becomes smaller. Eventually, the run of good luck becomes improbable, and Effects that would've been coincidental become vulgar instead. Mages refer to this complication as the Domino Effect — knock down too many coincidences in a row, and they stack up until they're just too implausible.

Each time you cast a coincidental Effect, you decrease the likelihood of another favorable coincidence. You add a +1 Trait difficulty to the casting of subsequent coincidental Effects. This modifier stacks, so you take a +3 Trait difficulty to your next Effect after three successive turns of coincidental Effects. In this case, it may be harder to cast each following Effect than it would be to cast vulgar magic. You still won't garner Paradox if you succeed, though. The modifier drops by one for each turn that you don't perform a coincidental Effect.

If your domino modifier reaches +3 Traits, then it stays at that level, and all subsequent coincidental Effects are now vulgar until you spend a turn without casting any magic. Then it drops back to a +2 modifier and dissipates at the standard rate.

THE METAPHYSIC OF MAGIC

Mages recognize intuitively the same thing that many young children know: Reality itself is subjective, bent to whims and desires if one only believes hard enough. Although the modern world teaches children to reject this notion in favor of a scientific worldview in which natural laws govern everything and you can't change the world no matter how much you want to, mages know better. Their every working is testament to that fact.

Of course, more than a few mages wonder at magic's real limits. Can a mage truly remove all gravity from the world, allowing everyone to fly? Could a mage pluck the sun and moon from the sky and drink from the stars? Is it possible to rework Heaven, to brave Hell and to remake the face of Creation itself? Or, more plausibly, how about just conjuring a buck and a quarter for lunch?

While the Spheres of magic do describe and allow for great feats, even mages have their limits. The consensus is one such limit. The more strongly that people believe in the way the world should work, the harder it is to fly in the face of such belief. History provides another limitation. Things that have been true for a very long time tend to remain true, which is one reason why traveling back in time and changing the past is so very difficult. And then there are aspects to reality that simply seem fixed in place, like the facts that all material things have an ephemeral Pattern and that Quintessence forges the nature of reality.

As mages understand it, reality itself springs from a cycle of growth, patterning and decay. Everything stems from Quintessence, the mystic energy that fuels reality. It is a sort of intangible essentia that creates perfect Patterns that coalesce into solid form.

THE CYCLE OF THE TELLURIAN

Mages perceive reality metaphorically as a great cosmic Tapestry, consisting of threads woven from concepts, ephemera and matter alike. It's the interaction of these threads, and their weight from Quintessential strength, that

creates the Tellurian — the whole of existence. As mages see it, various things spring into being from belief, ideas or the raw bubbling of creation and rebirth. In time, these things take on Patterns — insubstantial ideals of form. These Patterns can collect Quintessence. That is, they strengthen within reality until they have a true nature, be it ephemeral or material. In time the Patterns wear away until they are gone. This never-ending cycle ensures the constant change of the universe and the flow of Quintessence through the Tapestry.

Dynamism

It's from Dynamism that creation first begins. The universe holds infinite possibility. From time to time, new things are given form, as a result of mages creating something, the universe itself clashing and growing to make new forms, or just raw creation spewing forth a brand-new idea. The power of Dynamism ensures constant change and possibility. Every time a mage twists the Tapestry, he fuels Dynamism in some fashion, because he creates possibility.

Statis

Once something is created, it exists in a form that takes a place in the Tapestry. The object or creature, invested with Quintessence, has a form that can be manipulated. It's a spirit, a device, a being, a force or some other presence that has a consistent existence in the universe. This force of Stasis causes the universe to have a constant, understandable basis. Although Stasis eventually gives way, it does provide a foundation for existence.

Entropy

In time, all things erode. Patterns change or decay into nothingness, and their associated objects, spirits, creatures or forces come to an end. This is aspect of the metaphysical trinity is known as Entropy — the renewal of things. Quintessence returns to the unformed parts of the cosmos, to be taken back into the cycle. Old things give way to new. Through this part of the cycle, the universe has room for new growth, and it prunes those things that have remained too long.

Patterns and the Tapestry
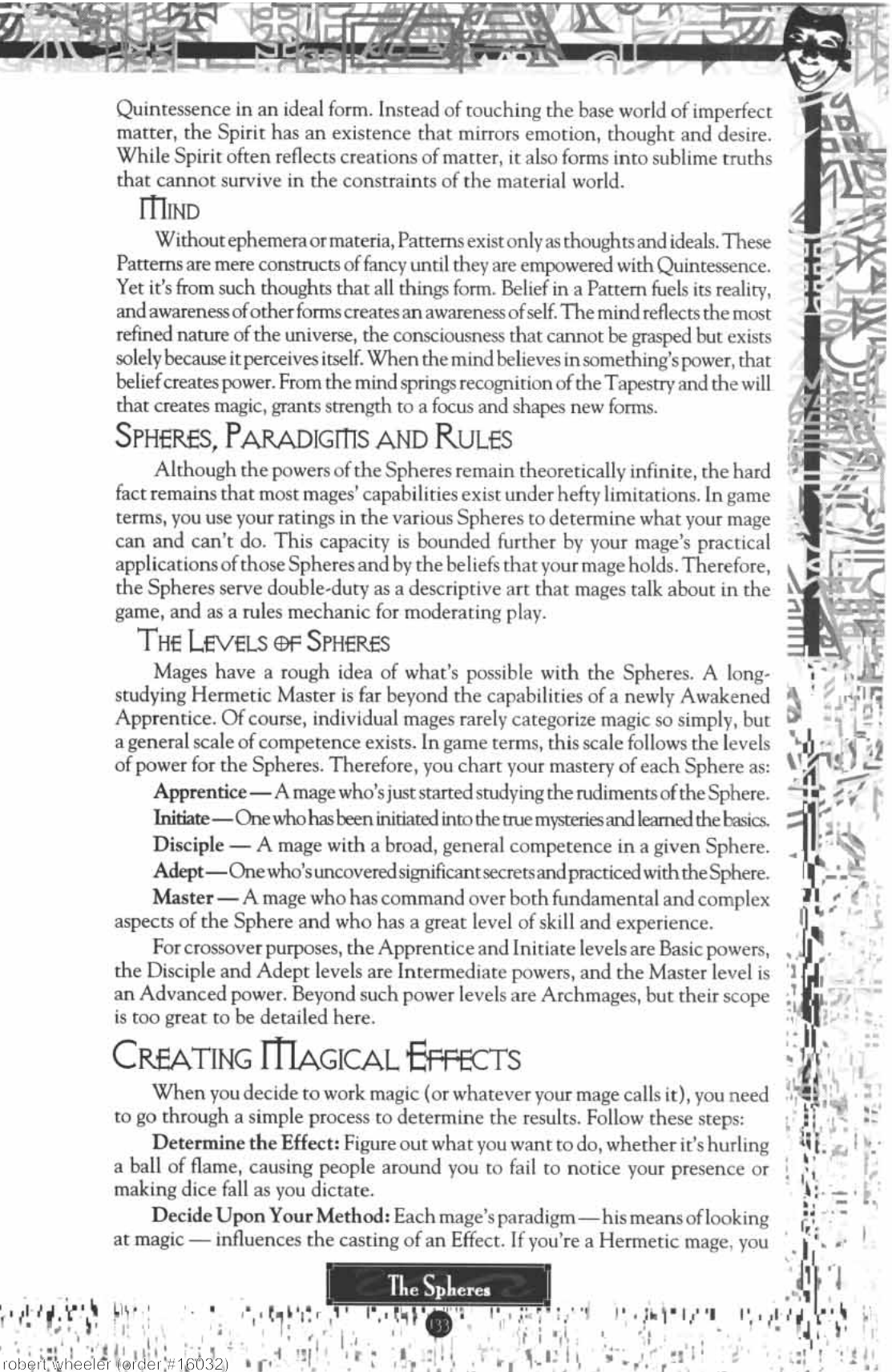
As the cycle of the Tellurian creates and destroys things, their forms and Patterns weave throughout the complex Tapestry of existence. Each piece of creation is tied to every other piece through the thread of essential cosmic energy known as Quintessence. The merest parts combine to form greater Patterns and wholes. Just as a person's Pattern is made up from many tiny Patterns all built together, so too is the cosmos formed of a great conjunction of interwoven Patterns. The interaction of mind, body and spirit gives form and recognition to these Patterns.

Body

The physical world begins with the body — the Patterns of *Matter*, *Life* and *Forces* that make up reality as it's perceived by the senses. Chunks of material have inert Patterns of *Matter*, while living beings grow and change as complex Patterns that draw Quintessence from the cosmos and return it in a cycle of living Dynamism. The forces that act upon creatures and objects also have a Pattern. They are suffused with bright energy for their brief existences, and they transfer that energy to change or manipulate other Patterns.

Spirit

Given an ephemeral existence but separate from the material world, Spirit comprises the refined levels of nature that occur when a Pattern takes on

Quintessence in an ideal form. Instead of touching the base world of imperfect matter, the Spirit has an existence that mirrors emotion, thought and desire. While Spirit often reflects creations of matter, it also forms into sublime truths that cannot survive in the constraints of the material world.

MIND

Without ephemera or materia, Patterns exist only as thoughts and ideals. These Patterns are mere constructs of fancy until they are empowered with Quintessence. Yet it's from such thoughts that all things form. Belief in a Pattern fuels its reality, and awareness of other forms creates an awareness of self. The mind reflects the most refined nature of the universe, the consciousness that cannot be grasped but exists solely because it perceives itself. When the mind believes in something's power, that belief creates power. From the mind springs recognition of the Tapestry and the will that creates magic, grants strength to a focus and shapes new forms.

SPHERES, PARADIGMS AND RULES

Although the powers of the Spheres remain theoretically infinite, the hard fact remains that most mages' capabilities exist under hefty limitations. In game terms, you use your ratings in the various Spheres to determine what your mage can and can't do. This capacity is bounded further by your mage's practical applications of those Spheres and by the beliefs that your mage holds. Therefore, the Spheres serve double-duty as a descriptive art that mages talk about in the game, and as a rules mechanic for moderating play.

THE LEVELS OF SPHERES

Mages have a rough idea of what's possible with the Spheres. A long-studying Hermetic Master is far beyond the capabilities of a newly Awakened Apprentice. Of course, individual mages rarely categorize magic so simply, but a general scale of competence exists. In game terms, this scale follows the levels of power for the Spheres. Therefore, you chart your mastery of each Sphere as:

Apprentice — A mage who's just started studying the rudiments of the Sphere.

Initiate — One who has been initiated into the true mysteries and learned the basics.

Disciple — A mage with a broad, general competence in a given Sphere.

Adept — One who's uncovered significant secrets and practiced with the Sphere.

Master — A mage who has command over both fundamental and complex aspects of the Sphere and who has a great level of skill and experience.

For crossover purposes, the Apprentice and Initiate levels are Basic powers, the Disciple and Adept levels are Intermediate powers, and the Master level is an Advanced power. Beyond such power levels are Archmages, but their scope is too great to be detailed here.

CREATING MAGICAL EFFECTS

When you decide to work magic (or whatever your mage calls it), you need to go through a simple process to determine the results. Follow these steps:

Determine the Effect: Figure out what you want to do, whether it's hurling a ball of flame, causing people around you to fail to notice your presence or making dice fall as you dictate.

Decide Upon Your Method: Each mage's paradigm — his means of looking at magic — influences the casting of an Effect. If you're a Hermetic mage, you

probably use Enochian chants, the names of powerful angels and spirits, geometric sigils or glyphs. If you're a Virtual Adept, you might reprogram a computer to project energy or re-code the surrounding universe itself. Figure out how your mage justifies the Effect in order to determine what focus and what Ability you use with the spell. Mages don't just crank out spells. They work, chant, pray and invoke to make the magic happen.

Check Your Knowledge: Do you know how to accomplish what you want to do? Look at your character's Spheres and determine what knowledge will help complete the feat. If you have the appropriate rote, you're fine. If not, you may not be able to work the Effect. If you use the optional rule for fast-casting, you can try to cast the rote even if you don't know it. If you use the optional rule for dynamic magic, you can try to build an Effect that does what you want, even if there is no rote for it. However, if you don't have the necessary Sphere requirements, you can't perform the magic.

The base assumption is that you cannot perform a given spell unless your Spheres and rotes explicitly list the ability to do so.

Calculate Difficulty: The base difficulty for a magical Effect is the Effect's Sphere level in Traits if it's coincidental, plus one if it's vulgar, plus another one if it happens in view of Sleepers who wouldn't believe that it's possible. Add modifiers based on the circumstances, as shown in the following chart.

CASTING DIFFICULTY TRAIT MODIFIERS

Already maintaining an Effect: +1 per two Effects maintained

Spending Quintessence: -1 per Quintessence Trait spent (You may cancel opposing modifiers and/ or gain a Trait modifier bonus to a maximum -3 from the base difficulty of the Effect, limited by your ability to spend Quintessence.)

Domino Effect: +1 per Effect, up to +3 (see p. 134)

Opposed Resonance Trait: +1

Assisting Resonance Trait: -1

Using specialty focus: -1

Using unique focus: -1 (cumulative with specialty focus)

Using focus that isn't required: -1

Spending Extra Time: -1

In or near a Node: -1

Surpassing a necessary focus: +3

OPTIONAL CASTING MODIFIERS

Conjunctional Effect: +1 per additional Sphere beyond the highest (use this modifier only if you use the conjunctional magic optional rule)

Fast-casting (use this modifier only if you use the fast-casting optional rule): +1

Mage distracted: +1 (use this modifier only if you have set criteria for what constitutes a distraction)

In conflict with Avatar: +1 (use this modifier only if you have an Avatar Guide who determines what Effects would conflict with the Avatar's Essence)

Has item with subject's Resonance: -1 (use this modifier only if you have item cards that include notes on possessions with strong Resonance)

Perform the Effect: You cast the Effect by making a Static Challenge. Generally, no Narrator is required as long as your Effect conforms to the rules presented here. You simply make the challenge against anyone handy. (Just be sure to tell the other person what you're doing so that she doesn't get the wrong idea.) If you win the challenge, your Effect succeeds. Work out the result as described for your rote or Sphere and continue. If you lose, your Effect fails. If you tie, you must check your Arete Traits against the Effect's static difficulty, which you computed before. You win if you have more Traits or equal Traits. Note that if you lose the test, you can retest with an appropriate Ability for your focus (see the list of foci and Abilities on p. 178, which you picked when you decided upon your method. Also, you can overbid with your Arete if you have twice as many Arete Traits as the Effect's Trait difficulty. However, your opponent can overbid if the reverse is true.

Wound modifiers do not affect your Static Arete Challenge. Therefore, you do not come into the challenge Traits down or lose on ties automatically simply for being wounded. However, you cannot perform an Effect if you are unconscious and have not somehow maintained your thinking process magically.

Suffer Paradox: Once you've finished the Effect, you will take Paradox. Typically, Paradox causes a small amount of damage, but the Paradox Judge may decide upon another Effect as well. See the section on Paradox later in this chapter.

PERMUTATIONS

Magic isn't as simple as all that, of course. Besides the basic Arete Challenge and the modifiers, you can influence your outcome in a couple of ways and incur a couple of potential difficulties.

ABILITIES ENHANCING MAGIC

When you roleplay a focus properly, you can claim its benefits to your character. For instance, if you actually take the time to speak some mystical words, flourish your hands and grasp your mystic amulet, you may well represent your mage's use of *Linguistics: Enochian*, and you're certainly putting that knowledge to work.

If you spend a full turn on the roleplaying of your focus before you cast an Effect, that focus' Ability helps with the result. The list of sample foci gives some ideas for appropriate Abilities for each focus. When you meet this requirement, you can use that Ability for one retest on the Arete Challenge as long as you have any levels left.

Example: *Kitty really, really, really needs to help her friend Miguel, who's been shot by Technocratic agents and is dying. She decides to risk some vulgar magic and heal him instantly. As a Verbena, Kitty can use any sort of life-affiliated focus. She decides to use blood (as an in-play style, not real blood, of course), to represent her character strengthening Miguel's life force with her own. She spends a full turn pantomiming the act of cutting her arm with the item card of her athame, then waving her hands over Miguel as if to drip blood on his wounds as she chants in a low murmur. The next turn, she makes the magical challenge. Since it's a vulgar, Disciple-level Life Effect, the difficulty has a base of four Traits. She tests and ties; with three Arete Traits, she fails. However, she expends a Medicine Ability Trait, because she used her focus properly and took extra time with it. She retests and wins. Miguel is healed of one level of lethal damage immediately, and stabilizes from Mortally Wounded to merely Incapacitated. Now Kitty just needs to survive the Paradox and the Technocrat....*

USING QUINTESSENCE

As noted on the difficulty chart, using Quintessence allows you to make difficult Effects much easier. Each Trait of Quintessence that you channel, up

to a maximum of your *Avatar* rating, lowers the difficulty of the Effect by one Trait. At best, you can have a net difficulty of three Traits lower than the base difficulty, to a minimum difficulty of two Traits.

Example: *Having recovered from his run-in with the Technocracy, Miguel is working on a nasty Forces spell to garner vengeance. He tracks down the Technocrat and lets loose with the spell. Since it's a vulgar Forces Adept-level Effect in public, it has a base difficulty of six Traits. However, Miguel is also distracted (he's being shot at again), which adds one Trait, and he's fast-casting (because he hasn't mastered the rote yet), for another additional modifier of one, for a total difficulty of eight Traits. Miguel's player decides to offset this penalty with five Traits of Quintessence. Miguel's a fortunate mage with an Avatar rating of five, so he can do just that. He drops his difficulty back down to three Traits.*

If Miguel had suffered from some other modifier — another Trait penalty of opposed Resonance, for instance — and the difficulty had gone up to nine Traits, he would have still been able to spend no more than five Traits of Quintessence. In that case, he would not have been able to bring the difficulty down past four Traits. If he didn't have any negative modifiers, then his Quintessence expenditure couldn't lower the difficulty below the base-minus-three limit, or a minimum of three Trait difficulty, so he wouldn't have any need to spend more than three Quintessence Traits.

SPENDING EXTRA TIME

Should you choose to spend extra time, you can help to guarantee success in casting Effects. Taking a full extra turn to cast gives you a +1 Trait modifier on the resolution of the Arete Test. You can stack this modifier with the use of a focus Ability. Therefore, if you take three turns total (one turn for extra time, one turn for the focus, one for the base Effect), you can cast with a +1 Trait bonus and an Ability retest.

INTERRUPTIONS

If you're interrupted while casting an Effect — say, you're wounded while you're working your focus — you have two choices. You can either cast the Effect immediately and lose any bonuses from the extended casting, or you can take the penalty for being distracted and continue. Therefore, if you are trying to gain the Ability bonus and casting an Effect, but you are wounded later in the same turn, you can decide to release the Effect without penalty but without gaining the retest. Similarly, you could continue to cast the Effect and gain a bonus for taking extra time, which would cancel the distraction penalty.

COUNTERMAGIC

Sometimes you just can't let the enemy get the drop on you, and you have to find a way to fight or cancel his spell. That's where countermagic comes in. A mage works countermagic by using his own powers to cancel or wash out his enemy's Effect. Doing so counts as your action for the turn, so you can't do it if you've already acted. The three basic types of countermagic are sphere countermagic, anti-magic and unweaving.

Sphere Countermagic occurs when you have the Spheres necessary to know what the opponent is doing. You pit your Arete against the enemy's. In such a case, you make an Arete Test, at the same difficulty as the opponent (although you take your modifiers for distractions and Resonance into effect). If you win, the spell is canceled. If you have Apprentice-level (or better) *Prime* and your Arete is higher than the opponent's, the Effect can be reflected back upon him, so he might be hit by his own fire bolt or wounding spell.

Anti-Magic uses Quintessence to strengthen the Patterns of reality against an Effect. You spend Quintessence to raise the difficulty of the opponent's Effect. You can spend Quintessence up to the limit of your *Avatar* Background, as usual.

Unweaving tries to tear apart an existing spell. You make a challenge against the difficulty of the original spell (although your difficulty might still be modified by distractions or Resonance). You must have the Spheres necessary to have cast the Effect, and you must have at least the Apprentice-level *Prime* Sphere. If you win, the spell loses one grade of success. Unweaving can degrade the duration of a spell. If the spell has no grades of effect left (i.e., it's down to a simple Effect), then an unweaving destroys it.

SIMULTANEOUS EFFECTS

You can cast only one Effect in a turn. Even with *Time* magic, you are limited to channeling only so much magical energy. If you want to do multiple things at once, you will probably have to build a conjunctional Effect, if your game uses that optional rule.

However, some Effects have a duration, especially if you use the grades of success mechanic from performing rituals or using Willpower (see the optional rules on p. 138). If you have an Effect running already, it takes some of your concentration and makes casting other Effects difficult.

Performing any Effect that requires full concentration, like controlling weather with constant changes, precludes you from doing anything else. All of your attention is occupied on the spell. Even with *Mind* multi-tasking, you can't divert your magical will to another feat.

Any other Effect typically requires a little magical will to sustain, but it's not too taxing. For every two full Effects of this sort that you have running, you take a one-Trait penalty on all new casting challenges, because you're slightly distracted. Therefore, you might keep up a *Forces* shield without difficulty, but if you also add on the **Better Body** rote, then you'll suffer a one-Trait penalty to all additional Effects that you weave.

SPHERES AND ROTES

What follows are the descriptions of the nine Spheres as used by the Traditions (and, with some changes, the Technocracy). Each Sphere has a broad, general description to note its characteristics, followed by a series of level descriptions, each of which lists the capabilities of that level of magic. With each level is a set of sample rotes that mages can learn and use. Also, special rules regarding the format and uses of the Spheres are covered immediately hereafter.

LEARNING SPHERES

Mage characters start with six levels of Apprentice or Initiate Spheres. With time and experience, they may learn more, but doing so is a difficult process. Typically, a character takes two sessions per Sphere level to learn a new set of powers successfully. Therefore, learning the Initiate level of *Forces* would take four game sessions from the time that the player spent the Experience Traits. This time is halved for a specialty Sphere to only one session per level. (Note, however, that if you're in a large organization with many games, this rate is based on your home game. No fair going to a bunch of other games during the week and claiming that you've fulfilled your session time. The progression is based on the game sessions of your local, usual game.)

Having the *Mentor* or *Library* Background can greatly facilitate learning new Spheres (see p. 114).

The Spheres

USING WILLPOWER (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if you're willing to make Willpower a key asset in determining magical battles.

If you spend a Willpower Trait before you begin an Effect, you negate the chance to botch. Even if the Effect difficulty is twice your Arete Trait total or more, the worst you can do is fail. If you succeed, you gain a one-grade bonus to the Effect.

OVERBIDDING FOR SUCCESS (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if you want to allow Master-level characters easy access to very powerful simple Effects.

If you win your Arete Challenge, you may choose to overbid if you have the required Traits (i.e., your Arete total equals or exceeds twice the difficulty of the Effect). If you win the overbid as well, you add one grade of success to the Effect at no additional cost. If you fail the overbid, you fail the Effect.

ACTING IN CONCERT (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if you want to allow cabals to perform very powerful Effects quickly.

Multiple mages can work together to form an Effect that they'd have difficulty performing alone. Everyone involved must have at least Apprentice-level knowledge of the Spheres used, and they must find a way to make their paradigms and foci work in concert. A Euthanatos' knife probably can't enhance a Virtual Adept's computer program, for instance, but a Verbena's blood work could complement a Dreamspeaker's sand-paintings.

Each participant who has the Spheres necessary for the Effect can either choose to add one Trait to the main casting group's Arete Trait total for purposes of the challenge, or he may add one grade of success to the spell if he also manages to make a successful test for the Effect.

Each participant who has at least rudimentary Sphere knowledge for the Effect, but not the level necessary to cast it, adds one Trait to the main caster's Arete Test.

Each group of five un-Awakened acolytes who helps (generally by holding candles, chanting, forming circles, etc.) adds one Trait to the main caster's Arete Test.

Add all the modifiers to the Arete Test before any caster involved makes the challenge. Therefore, if 10 acolytes help and two mages work together on an Effect for which they have the right Spheres, both mages get to test. The acolytes add two Traits to both challenges, and if the assisting mage wins his test, he adds a grade of success if the main caster also wins.

RITUALS AND EXTENDED MAGIC (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if you are willing to track downtimes and handle some additional complexity in combinations of rotes.

By extending the time it takes to cast a spell and taking extra care, a mage can cause his spell to work far more Effectively. Many rotes have an entry for "Grades of Success." If the mage wants to not just improve his chances to get a spell right, but to actually facilitate a more potent spell, he does so by performing a ritual.

When you use a ritual, you spend extra time to generate a stronger Effect. You don't get the bonus of taking extra time on the Arete Test unless you actually double your ritual time—therefore, if you spend an hour on ritual, you must spend an extra hour to garner such a bonus. You can still claim a focus retest, though.

The more time you spend, the Effect becomes more powerful, but the casting becomes more risky. A "simple Effect" is one listed with the normal Spheres, and which takes only a turn to cast. Rituals, on the other hand, may take an extra minute, an extra hour or an extra day (the limit of human endurance). When you cast the ritual, you make a succession of Arete Tests, and you must succeed in all of them (win, or tie with more Traits, including retests for focus Abilities).

Each time-part you spend requires one test, so you test after the first turn of casting, then after the first minute, after the first hour, and finally for the end of a full day. If you fail any test, the difficulty goes up by one Trait, and you must recast that time part. So if you fail on the first turn, the difficulty goes up one, and you must take another turn. If you fail after the first minute, the difficulty goes up one and you must take another minute before testing again. The difficulty can continue to increase until it reaches double your Arete Trait total. At that point, the ritual botches utterly, and you not only garner Paradox for a botched Effect, you gain an additional Paradox Trait for each time-part you spent on the ritual (+1 for an extra turn, +1 more for an extra minute, etc.).

You can cancel a ritual at any time. The spell fails, but you don't suffer any other penalties. You might cancel a ritual so that you can react to an attacker before the ritual is interrupted, or so that you can avoid a horrible botch as described previously.

If you're interrupted, the ritual typically botches. You can spend a Willpower Trait to keep going, but that time-part is considered a failure. Add one to the difficulty, and start that time part over again.

Each time extension adds a grade of success to an Effect. The rotes all list ideas on the changes to the power grade. For instance, the **Sense Forces** rote normally lasts on yourself for a scene or on another subject for a turn. If cast as a one-minute ritual, it lasts on yourself for a session or on a subject for a scene.

Example: *Kitty decides that she wants to help Miguel to heal more quickly, but she can't just heal one health level and wait for the rest to heal on their own. She applies an extended ritual to a Disciple-level healing* Life *Effect. Shooting for three health levels, she notes that she needs to add two grades of success, so the ritual will take a turn, a minute and an hour to complete. The base difficulty is four, because it's vulgar yet nobody's watching.*

Kitty's player spends one turn using her focus so that she can claim an Ability retest on any of the ritual tests.

After the first turn, Kitty's player makes the first Arete Test. She fails. She decides to use her one level of an Ability for a retest, and she wins.

During the first minute, Miguel's friend James drops in to visit. He distracts Kitty inadvertently, which interrupts the ritual. She grits her teeth, spends a Willpower Trait and keeps going, with a +1 Trait difficulty. She spends another minute recasting this part of the ritual. She tests at the end, now against a difficulty of five Traits. Fortunately, she wins — if she'd lost, the increase to a difficulty of six Traits would have brought the ritual to twice her Arete, and it would have botched horribly.

At the end of the first hour, Kitty's luck holds out, and she wins the final test. The ritual finishes successfully, Miguel heals three health levels. Kitty sucks up some Paradox, but she emerges victorious.

SUPERHUMAN RITUAL (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if you use ritual extension and you are willing to have truly phenomenal Effects cast during downtime.

Although most humans can concentrate for only so long, therefore limiting typical rituals to a day of work at most, a mage can use magic to boost her capabilities and then perform a superhuman ritual. It's very, very risky. Failure usually obliterates the caster, as the weight of Paradox is truly phenomenal. But it can shake the world.

To perform a superhuman ritual, the mage must have a magical means of prolonging his endurance (typically through an already ritually extended *Life* or *Mind* Effect to banish or ignore fatigue), or use up two Willpower Traits for each additional day of casting.

Each day you add extends a ritual by one grade. This addition requires the additional test and bears the risk of increased Paradox on the botch. If a given day's work is failed or interrupted, the mage needs to make up one additional day, not the whole time spent already.

Generally, rotes don't list progressions for superhuman ritual. It's up to the Storyteller to determine the exact Effect. However, many rotes have a sample progression. Therefore, a superhuman ritual might be capable of casting a spell that lasts for a year, or one that inflicts a huge amount of damage (four or more health levels) in a single strike. Of course, such Effects can be mightily unbalancing. It's upon the Storyteller to determine what's appropriate and to disallow abusive nonsense.

FAST-CASTING (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if your players are quite familiar with the rotes available in your game and you have sufficient rote cards or books to prevent cheating.

It's possible to cast a rote that you don't know. Since it's not something you've practiced, you're limited to coming up with the Effect on the fly, by improvising based on your knowledge of the Sphere in question. This trick is called fast-casting.

You pick a rote for which you have the necessary Spheres, but that your character hasn't learned. Add one Trait to the casting difficulty. Other than that, you cast the Effect normally.

DYNAMIC MAGIC (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if you trust your players not to try to overreach the limits of the Spheres, or if you have a Narrator for every five players or so.

Skilled mages recognize that rotes are just a teaching tool. The real flexibility of the Spheres lies in endless variety. With true dynamic magic, a mage can accomplish anything, as long as he knows the proper Spheres.

Each Sphere has a listing of general guides for each level. As long as an Effect doesn't exceed that level, the mage can create an Effect from scratch and customize it to do what he wants. For instance, the Initiate level of *Forces* allows a mage to channel enough power to inflict one health level of damage. The mage might instead decide to channel electricity to jump-start a car. Since this amount of energy seems to be approximately equivalent, the Effect is possible. Similarly,

Adept-level *Life* magic allows major changes to life Patterns, such as shapeshifting. The mage could decide to give a target gills. Although there may not be a specific rote for such a change, it's within the descriptive effect of the Sphere, so it's possible.

Making a dynamic Effect is considered fast-casting, of course.

If anyone present does not agree with the interpretation of a dynamic Effect, you must consult a Narrator or Storyteller. For this reason, dynamic magic should be limited to only the most experienced troupes, and only if they have sufficient Narrating staff.

CONJUNCTIONAL EFFECTS (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if you want greater flexibility of magic at the potential of game-unbalancing combinations.

By combining Spheres, a mage can often perform a greater Effect that overlaps different areas and thus performs a substantial transmutation. Any Effect that relies on multiple Spheres is called a conjunctional Effect.

A list of conjunctional rotes appears at the end of the Sphere descriptions. This list covers many special Effects that mages might try, although it's by no means exhaustive. A mage can learn and use conjunctional rotes like any other rotes. The difficulty is based on the highest Sphere, plus one for each Sphere added on.

A mage can add two existing rotes together to make a conjunctional Effect if you allow fast-casting. Doing so causes the two rotes to both happen. For instance, you could grant someone heightened senses while healing him, or you could launch a fire bolt while scrying at a distance. Calculate the Effect difficulty as the highest Sphere level, plus one for each extra Sphere added on, and one more for fast-casting.

You can also make a conjunctional Effect with dynamic magic. In this case, you sling together some of the powers of Spheres to arrive at a new combination. You might, for instance, decide to combine *Mind* and *Forces*, so as to create a free-standing Effect that reads a subject's mind and projects light pictures of his thoughts. Your Storyteller arbitrates the equivalent Sphere levels, and you add one to the difficulty for each Sphere added past the highest Sphere.

LEARNING AND USING ROTES

Each Sphere description includes several sample rotes. These rotes are examples of the powers possible with that level of the Sphere, and of the common techniques that mages develop. You gain one rote automatically for each level that you learn in a Sphere. Therefore, you have an Apprentice-level rote for the Apprentice-level of a Sphere, an Initiate-level rote when you learn the Initiate-level of the Sphere and so on. You can learn additional rotes with experience, although you can usually learn only one rote per game session. You should have a card for each rote you know, with a description of its Effect. Such a card is not only a helpful rules reminder, but it also serves as proof that you know the rote in question.

You can cast any rote that you know, as shown on the casting chart of page 134. If you want to cast a rote that you don't know, you must fast-cast (see p. 140), which may or may not be legal in your game. If you want to do an Effect for which no rote exists, you must either use dynamic magic and fast-cast the Effect (see p. 140), or else approach your Storyteller and work out a new rote and have it approved for play.

Making new rotes is fine, and it should be encouraged. Just make sure that the Storyteller handles it between games. It's hardly sporting to come up with and purchase a new rote immediately in the middle of play, especially if the Storyteller doesn't have time to tell if it's balanced or not.

Magical Attacks

Many of the Spheres have useful applications in battle. However, they often require a subsequent challenge to hit or best the target.

If a Sphere uses a hurled Effect, like a lightning bolt, you must best the subject in a challenge of your Mental Traits against the victim's Physical Traits. If the Sphere uses a touch Effect, like an enchantment on a sword or your hand, you must win a Physical Challenge against the victim. Either sort of attack can be retested with the opponent's *Dodge* Ability if the victim is aware of the attack. You can use an Ability with the attack if you have an appropriate one: Use *Occult* if you hurl eldritch bolts, *Firearms* if you enchant a gun, *Melee* with a weapon, *Brawl* if you deliver the Effect by touch and *Athletics* if you throw an object.

If you have complete physical control over a subject (if you have someone tied down, an object held in your hand with nobody else vying for it, etc.), you may forgo the attack challenge and affect the subject automatically.

Some Effects have other requirements, as described in their individual rules.

Magical Reach

Most Effects can reach to the distance of your line of sight or senses. Exceptions are noted in the individual power descriptions. If you wish to extend your range further, you must be able to cast a conjunctional Effect (see p. 141) with the *Correspondence* Sphere.

Effect Duration

Most spells take effect immediately upon being cast. If a spell is instant, it takes effect and is done, although the results may linger. For instance, a bolt of fire is instant, so it just flashes into existence and strikes, but it may leave something burning naturally. If a spell has a duration of one turn, it lasts until the end of your next turn. Therefore, you can cast an augmenting Effect, then use it with your next action in the next turn. If a spell has a duration of one minute or conflict, then it lasts either for a minute (if you're not in combat time) or for the series of tests necessary to complete one conflict. If a duration is listed as a scene or an hour, then the spell lasts either for one hour (if you're not in combat time) or until you leave the location or have a break in game time. Longer durations will typically exceed a game session and last throughout it.

Durations rate on a scale, and certain Effects or techniques can modify a spell's duration. The grades for duration are: instant, one turn, one minute or conflict, one hour or scene, one day. A Storyteller must adjudicate longer durations. A spell might last for a week, a month or more. Some Effects, like magical item creations or wards over areas, might be made permanent until another mage counters them.

Most Effects have an assumed duration of one minute/conflict, unless otherwise stated. Generally, casting an Effect on a subject other than the mage causes that Effect to lose one grade from its duration. An Effect that lasts for one minute/conflict when you cast it on yourself last for only one turn when you cast it on someone else. Keep these limits and grades in mind when making and approving your own rotes.

GRADES OF SUCCESS

Most rotes have a listing for grades of success. If you cast a lengthy ritual or you use Willpower, you can boost a spell's power so that it has a greater effect. The exact effects are listed in the *"Grades of Success:"* section for each rote.

STACKING

Unless otherwise noted, you can't stack multiple instances of the same Effect. For instance, if you hit someone with the *Entropy* Effect **Blight of Aging**, the subject suffers a Negative Physical Trait. You can't use the Effect again to cause another such Trait at the same time. If a subject is under multiple instances of the same Effect, only the most powerful one works. If the duration on one instance of the Effect runs out, the next longest duration kicks in. Therefore, if someone is under the **Blight of Aging** Effect to have two Negative Physical Traits for a conflict, and another **Blight of Aging** Effect to have one Negative Physical Trait for a scene, then the victim suffers two Negative Physical Traits for the first conflict and then one Negative Physical Trait for the remainder of the hour. He does not suffer the one-Trait penalty for an additional hour after the first conflict. The duration times overlap, and only the most powerful Effect affects the target at a time.

When unweaving an Effect, you may choose which instance of an Effect to unweave. Therefore, you can unweave a longer-running Effect, a more-powerful Effect, or any one that you choose.

CORRESPONDENCE

Manipulation of space and distance is the purview of *Correspondence*. With this Sphere, the mage can sense, stretch or distort space, teleport from place to place or extend the range of his other senses or magics. This Sphere also covers mystical connections, so *Correspondence* helps create sympathetic magics, like breaking or strengthening the ties between an object and a person.

Theorists espouse the idea of the Correspondence Point and argue that all of space is an illusion. They argue that all things exist simultaneously in the Tapestry. Through the Correspondence Point theory, they defy distance and even step outside of space itself.

Normally, a mage can send Effects only to the distance of his normal senses. If you allow conjunctional Effects, though, then the mage can work Effects at the distance of his *Correspondence* scrying. However, no other Sphere added to such an Effect can exceed the level of the *Correspondence* power.

You must use *Correspondence* on whole Patterns. Therefore, you couldn't just teleport someone's head to Saturn. You'd have to teleport the whole person if you had a ritual strong enough to reach that far in the first place.

APPRENTICE (BASIC) CORRESPONDENCE: IMMEDIATE SPATIAL PERCEPTIONS

You can extend your senses so that you have an abstract awareness of everything around you. You become completely aware of distance and of various magical Effects that alter space.

Sense Connection: You determine the strength of connection between objects, places or people. When you cast this Effect on a subject, you become aware immediately whether that subject is somehow tied supernaturally to something else. You can tell if it's a *Correspondence* gate, for instance, or if it has

a strong sympathetic link to someone. You don't know what it's tied to, only that it has a strong connection. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Landscape of the Mind: You feel the space around you without having to rely on your normal senses. For the next minute or conflict, you gain a one-Trait bonus on all challenges involving distance or range automatically, and you sense obstacles and people even if you can't see them. This effect reaches up to 15 paces plus an additional three paces per Arete Trait. You can also make a Mental Challenge to detect physically concealed individuals (not including those hiding with mental invisibility or the vampiric Discipline *Obfuscate*). You may grant these senses to another person, in which case, they have a base duration of only one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to double the Effect's reach, or extend its duration by one grade.

Whereami?: By clearing your mind and sensing local space, you gain an absolute location sense. You gain a rough axis of your location immediately with respect to a location that you already know. In so doing, you can tell the direction to the known location and its rough distance (near, moderate, far, very far). *Grades of Success:* No effect.

INITIATE (BASIC) CORRESPONDENCE: SENSE AND TOUCH SPACE

The Initiate may cast his senses out to other locations or even touch them remotely. You can scry a distant location, although doing so forms a *Correspondence* link to you that can be detected with **Sense Connection**. You can also extend your physical reach to these locations.

Apportation: You can physically touch an object at a distance. You may exert your normal touch (strike, kick, whatever) on anything up to a distance of 15 paces plus three paces per Arete Trait. If you make an attack, you must make the usual challenge to hit. The Effect lasts for one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to double the Effect's reach or extend its duration by one grade.

Correspondence Sensing: You can use your normal senses at a distance. Your maximum range for sensing is 10 paces plus two paces per Arete Trait. You can send your senses to any location you specify within this distance. Alternatively, if you have an object with an arcane connection to a subject (as might be determined by **Sense Connection**), you may send your senses to the object of that connection. Therefore, if you have a key that has an arcane connection to its owner, you can hold the key and send your senses to the location of the owner, regardless of distance. This Effect lasts for one minute or conflict. You can grant these senses to someone else, in which case the base duration is one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to double the Effect's reach or extend its duration by one grade.

Ward: You can defend against distant perceptions and scrying by muddling space in the area. If you ward an area, then any attempt to view the area remotely with magic (such as with **Correspondence Sensing** or the vampiric Discipline *Auspex*) suffers a retest automatically even if it succeeds. That is, someone casting **Correspondence Sensing** to spy on you must win a retest as well to penetrate the **Ward**. The **Ward** lasts until it is penetrated or for a scene or hour, whichever comes first. You can **Ward** an area up to 15 paces in diameter plus three paces per Arete Trait. If you have Disciple-level *Correspondence* or higher, you may instead cast a **Ban**. A **Ban** cannot be crossed physically unless the violator wins a Static Physical Challenge with a difficulty of three times your

Arete Traits. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to double the Effect's diameter or extend its duration by one grade.

DISCIPLE (INTERMEDIATE) CORRESPONDENCE: PIERCE SPACE

You can tear the fabric of space and manipulate it for short distances. With this magic, you can step from place to place without crossing intervening spaces, and you can change the ties between Patterns. You can also split your perceptions so that you see several places at once.

Chain: You can cause two things (people, places or items) to have an arcane connection. You must be able to sense the two things that you wish to chain while you cast the Effect. Thereafter, they have an arcane connection that can be useful with other *Correspondence* Effects. The arcane connection lasts for a scene or hour, whichever comes first. You must win a Static Mental Challenge to use **Chain** on an unwilling subject. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

The Seven-League Stride: You can step across short distances without crossing the intervening space. You may step up to 15 paces plus three paces per Arete Trait, in any direction as desired. You do not exist physically in the intervening space so you can pass through any wall or barrier except a **Ban**. You can take with you anything that you can carry. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to double the Effect's distance.

Filter All-Space: You can spread your senses across space to look for something in many places at once. You radiate your senses out to a distance of 15 paces plus three paces per Arete Trait. If you know what you're looking for, you can send a Narrator to find it. As long as it's not within a **Ward**, you sense it immediately and gain a general idea of its location. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to double the Effect's reach. For one grade of success, you may cast this Effect on another person.

ADEPT (INTERMEDIATE) CORRESPONDENCE: REND SPACE

You can create actual free-standing gates where space touches other spaces at a distance, and where things warp from point to point. You can even manifest yourself in multiple places at once or close something off in a pocket dimension.

Bubble of Reality: You shift a subject into an area of non-space, where it does not interact with the rest of the world. You must make an attack to "hit" with this power. If you succeed, you thrust the target (up to human size) into an area outside space. You maintain an arcane connection to it, so you can still scry on it. You may also thrust yourself into non-space and scry out. Null space still counts as part of the reality to which it's linked, for purposes of Paradox and magic. The bubble lasts for one turn. Beings put into non-space aren't harmed, but they may be taken out of play for a time. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade or double the total affected target volume (so you could affect two people with an extra grade, or four with two extra grades).

Hermes Portal: A gate appears that looks like a dark window, leading to another place. The other end of the gate may be anything within the usual 15 paces plus three paces per Arete Trait, or any location to which you have an arcane connection. Anything may pass through, and the gate is not one-sided, so if you make a gate to a dangerous location, you'll suffer the same toxic effects as everyone else. The gate lasts for one turn then winks out. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to double the Effect's reach or extend its duration by one grade.

Polyappearance: Co-locating space around yourself, you appear in multiple places at once. Whatever you do affects all of those locations simultaneously, but you can also be affected by things in all of those places. If you decide to attack or manipulate multiple things simultaneously, you suffer a two-Trait concentration penalty on all challenges because your single body is trying to interact with multiple differently reacting things. Also, anything that happens to your body in one of its locations happens to your body in every location. Therefore, if you use this Effect to appear in three dangerous locations, the damage you take in one applies to you in the other two locations as well. If one body gets shot, another gets stabbed and the third gets pierced with an arrow, the witnesses in each location will see a knife slash, a bullet hole and an arrow wound. You can appear in one additional place up to a distance of 15 feet plus three feet per Arete Trait. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to make another spatial appearance, or double the Effect's reach. For one grade, you may cast this Effect on someone else.

Master (Advanced) Correspondence: Mutate Localities
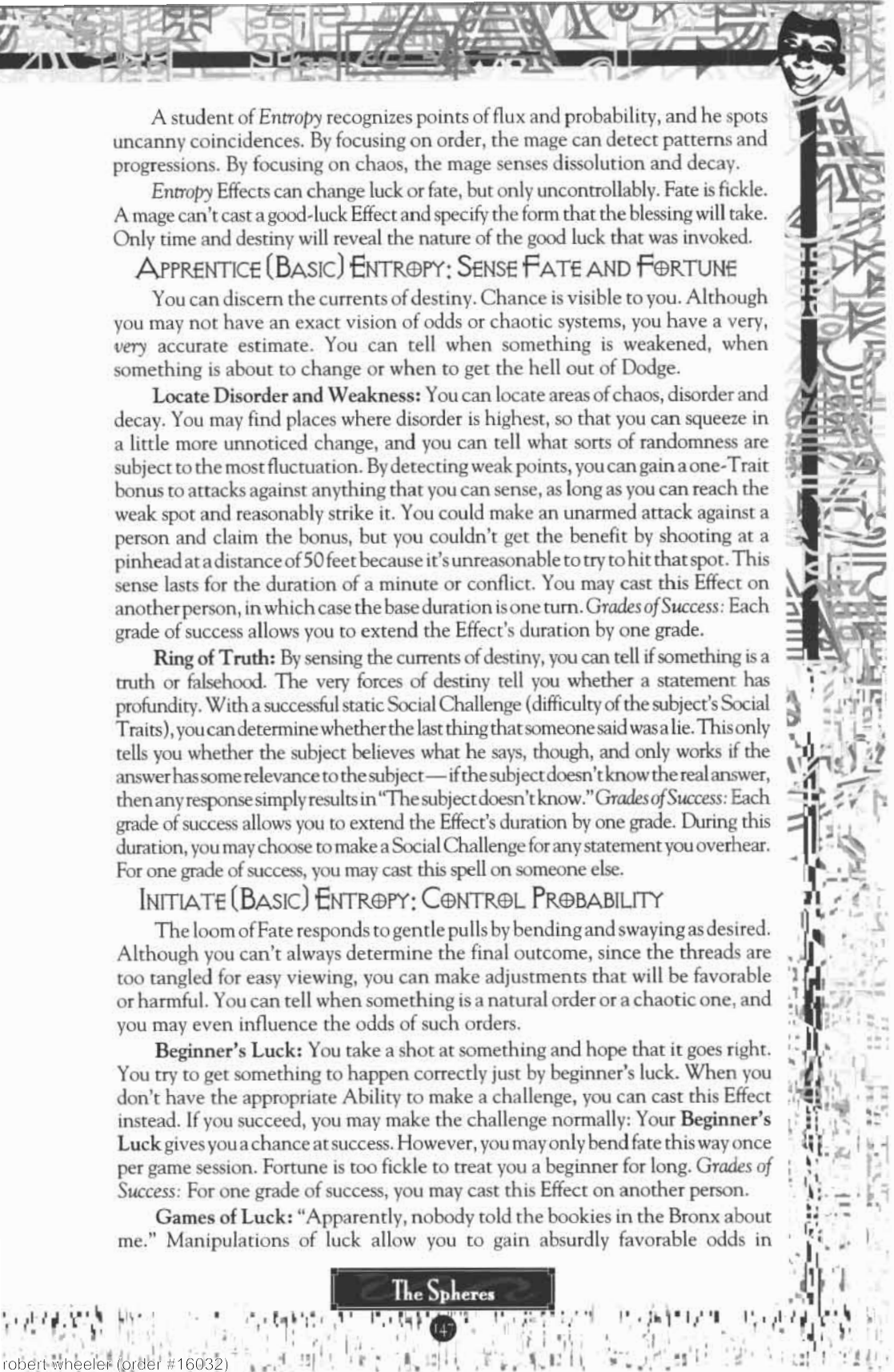
Your control of space is so absolute that you can warp or bend it freely. You can make multiple objects share the same perceived space while each remains unharmed, or you can warp space around something to isolate it from normal space.

Co-Location: You cause two points of space to act as if they're the same. Pick one other point in space. You can pick one target up to the size of a person, superimpose it on one other target, and vice versa. Superimposed objects do not suffer harm from sharing space, although local environmental conditions may cause damage (such as co-locating a person into a large fire). Therefore, if you have a space with a chair in one location and a person in another, you can stack the two. The chair appears in the same place as the person, and the person in the same place as the chair. Anyone can affect the co-located spaces freely. If two co-located objects separate, they do not co-locate again on their own. This bizarre appearance lasts for one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to double the Effect's reach or extend its duration by one grade.

Spatial Mutations: Space warps and twists around the subject so that its subjective sense of space tells it that the universe is bending. To everything else, the subject seems to be bent. You can change relative perceived space so that something shrinks, grows or seems to take on different shapes. Doing so does not cause actual damage to the subject, nor can it cause the subject to be crushed by surroundings. The space changes around the subject; the subject is not actually growing. Increasing the effective spatial volume of a creature makes it double in size, so it is easier to hit (two-Trait bonus to resolve attacks). Shrinking a creature makes it correspondingly harder to hit. If you warp a subject, you can make it incapable of taking any coherent physical action with the physical world because its subjective space is bent relative to the universe. However, the subject could still hurl objects or work magic. Any application lasts for one turn. *Grades of success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Entropy

The command of *Entropy* affects death, decay and rebirth. Masters of *Entropy* command the very fates and dance the outcomes of fortune on their fingers. Randomness shudders and takes the forms of order, or structure dissolves into chaos.

A student of *Entropy* recognizes points of flux and probability, and he spots uncanny coincidences. By focusing on order, the mage can detect patterns and progressions. By focusing on chaos, the mage senses dissolution and decay.

Entropy Effects can change luck or fate, but only uncontrollably. Fate is fickle. A mage can't cast a good-luck Effect and specify the form that the blessing will take. Only time and destiny will reveal the nature of the good luck that was invoked.

APPRENTICE (BASIC) ENTROPY: SENSE FATE AND FORTUNE

You can discern the currents of destiny. Chance is visible to you. Although you may not have an exact vision of odds or chaotic systems, you have a very, very accurate estimate. You can tell when something is weakened, when something is about to change or when to get the hell out of Dodge.

Locate Disorder and Weakness: You can locate areas of chaos, disorder and decay. You may find places where disorder is highest, so that you can squeeze in a little more unnoticed change, and you can tell what sorts of randomness are subject to the most fluctuation. By detecting weak points, you can gain a one-Trait bonus to attacks against anything that you can sense, as long as you can reach the weak spot and reasonably strike it. You could make an unarmed attack against a person, and claim the bonus, but you couldn't get the benefit by shooting at a pinhead at a distance of 50 feet because it's unreasonable to try to hit that spot. This sense lasts for the duration of a minute or conflict. You may cast this Effect on another person, in which case the base duration is one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Ring of Truth: By sensing the currents of destiny, you can tell if something is a truth or falsehood. The very forces of destiny tell you whether a statement has profundity. With a successful static Social Challenge (difficulty of the subject's Social Traits), you can determine whether the last thing that someone said was a lie. This only tells you whether the subject believes what he says, though, and only works if the answer has some relevance to the subject — if the subject doesn't know the real answer, then any response simply results in "The subject doesn't know." *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade. During this duration, you may choose to make a Social Challenge for any statement you overhear. For one grade of success, you may cast this spell on someone else.

INITIATE (BASIC) ENTROPY: CONTROL PROBABILITY

The loom of Fate responds to gentle pulls by bending and swaying as desired. Although you can't always determine the final outcome, since the threads are too tangled for easy viewing, you can make adjustments that will be favorable or harmful. You can tell when something is a natural order or a chaotic one, and you may even influence the odds of such orders.

Beginner's Luck: You take a shot at something and hope that it goes right. You try to get something to happen correctly just by beginner's luck. When you don't have the appropriate Ability to make a challenge, you can cast this Effect instead. If you succeed, you may make the challenge normally: Your **Beginner's Luck** gives you a chance at success. However, you may only bend fate this way once per game session. Fortune is too fickle to treat you a beginner for long. *Grades of Success:* For one grade of success, you may cast this Effect on another person.

Games of Luck: "Apparently, nobody told the bookies in the Bronx about me." Manipulations of luck allow you to gain absurdly favorable odds in

situations of total chance. You can influence your roll of dice or your fall of cards. Although doing so becomes increasingly improbable because of the Domino Effect, you can take a few shots at good luck. When you cast this Effect in a situation of total chance (like rolling dice or generating a random number), you may take two chances on the next turn (roll a second time, pick a new number, etc.) and take the better result. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success lets you pick another chance element (another die roll, another number, etc.). For one grade of success, you may cast this Effect on another person. You may choose whether the subject gets the better pick or the worse pick.

DISCIPLE (INTERMEDIATE) ENTROPY: AFFECT PREDICTABLE PATTERNS

You can now recognize the hand of *Entropy* in other Patterns, and you can even affect it to some degree. Although you can't avert the eventual fate of all things, you can arrest decrepitude in a subject temporarily or accelerate the process of decay. Only set Patterns like material objects or forces can be so dissipated. The constantly changing Patterns of Life remain too fluid for you to alter.

Like Clockwork: You invest a machine or pattern of force with greater strength and resistance to decay or change. The item gains one additional Trait to resist damage, natural corrosion, error or running-down. This Effect does not improve the Bonus Traits of a weapon, armor or device. It simply grants a Trait for purposes of resisting damage. The Effect lasts for one scene or hour. *Grades of Success:* Every two full grades of success allow you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade or add an additional health level to the item.

Slay Machine: You reduce a device to rubble. You cause iron to rust, plastic to warp, wood to rot and complex electronics or mechanics to become befouled and useless. The spell causes the item in question to lose one Trait or health level immediately. If the item loses all of its Traits/ health levels, it collapses into a useless heap. You do not need to make an attack to use this power. Rather, you affect the entropy that naturally occurs in an object or system. *Grades of Success:* Every two full grades of success inflict another Trait or health level of damage on the item.

ADEPT (INTERMEDIATE) ENTROPY: AFFECT LIFE

At this point, you've learned to sense and manipulate even the complex patterns of chance that work around living beings. You can change their fate and fortune or cause them to fall ill with bad luck and curses. Your command of the cycle of life and death is strong. Although you cannot kill someone immediately, you can certainly cause him great misfortune.

Blight of Aging: By speeding the course of *Entropy* through a living subject, you cause it to age, sicken or fall prey to injury. You cause the subject to suffer from one Negative Physical Trait of your choice. Otherwise, you cause the subject to make a Simple Test (win or tie) If he loses the test, one level of damage from the attack is considered one category more severe (bashing to lethal, lethal to aggravated). You do not need to make an attack challenge. You simply affect the natural patterns of *Entropy* in the target. The Effect lasts for one minute or conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade or add an additional Negative Physical Trait.

Midwife's Blessing: By casting good fortune over a living being, you make it resistant to harm or disease. The subject becomes more likely to avoid damage, and it has a better chance to recover from deleterious conditions. You can remove one Negative Physical Trait that has been inflicted by magic, disease, poison or the like,

although you can't cancel a natural Negative Trait. Alternately, you can shield the subject against harm. Each time the subject takes damage, it gains a Simple Test. On a win or tie, one level of the damage becomes one category less severe (bashing to none, lethal to bashing, aggravated to lethal). The effects last for one minute or conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade or cure one additional Negative Physical Trait.

Master (Advanced) Entropy: Affect Thought

Not only can you disperse physical Patterns, you can affect ephemeral and ideological constructs. You can make a maze of streets seem more random and confusing, change someone's mind or turn the passing of minutes and hours into a welter of jumping progressions. Your control of destiny allows you to mark future fate and place traces of *Entropy* through time.

Binding Oath: You place a compulsion on a willing subject and enforce it with the power of Fate and Destiny. Should the subject choose to break the oath, he suffers the full weight of misfortune immediately. Anyone capable of sensing *Entropy* (with **Locate Disorder and Weakness**) can tell immediately that the individual is an oath-breaker, and the subject immediately loses all temporary Willpower Traits. This oath lasts for one scene or hour. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Mutate Ephemera: The roads of chance carry off even thought, space and time. You can destroy a subject's thoughts, causing the victim to suffer a Negative Mental Trait of your choice for one conflict. You also stun the victim with indecision for her next turn if you win a subsequent Mental Challenge. Placing good or bad luck over an area, you cause it to prosper or wither at your command, so that a subject's mundane Background of *Allies, Contacts,* Influence or *Resources* gains or loses one level for a single downtime. Note that you can affect only one Background and subject at a time thus. You can't grant fortune to all of your Backgrounds while cursing all of your adversary's. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Forces

The most vulgar and dynamic mages are those who study *Forces.* Every universal power and energy is the bailiwick of this Sphere. Through *Forces,* a mage manipulates fire, light, electricity, sound and their opposites cold, darkness, stillness and silence. Every force is essentially a Pattern of Quintessence in motion. With this magic, the mage senses and manipulates those Patterns.

Different forces have different Effects. If you hit someone with electricity, the damage is bashing, but it penetrates most armor. You will usually incapacitate a foe before killing. Kinetic damage can be bashing or lethal at your choice, depending on whether you spread it over an area or strike in a point or edge. Extreme cold inflicts lethal damage. Fire damage is aggravated. Silence or darkness "damage" causes the subject to lose the sense in question for the duration of the Effect. The *Forces* Sphere tends to inflict a lot of damage compared to other Spheres, and it has other special combat Effects as well (such as setting things on fire or crushing them).

Apprentice (Basic) Forces: Perceive Forces

You can sense local Patterns of force. Kinetic energy, radio waves, heat sources and the like are all clearly visible to you. Sources of forces like batteries and radioactive substances are outlined clearly to your perceptions, even if those forces are normally invisible.

Darksight: By tuning your senses to infrared, sound waves or the like, you become capable of seeing even in darkness. You might take on the senses of a type of animal or borrow the capability to see elemental animas. Whatever the case, you suffer no penalties for darkness. The Effect lasts for one minute or conflict. You may grant these senses to another person, in which case they have a base duration of only one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Quantify Energy: You become aware of the types and quantities of energy around you. You can clearly see the *Forces* shield of another mage, spot invisible radiation or even see radio waves in the air (although you don't understand them). You gain a +1 Trait bonus to control or channel energy. Most forms of energy rely on *Science, Computer* and *Technology* Ability, for instance. The Effect lasts for one minute or conflict. You may grant these senses to another person, in which case they have a base duration of only one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

INITIATE (BASIC) FORCES: CONTROL MINOR FORCES

Although you can't yet create forces or change them into other forces, you can redirect and divert them. You can bend sound waves so that they travel in a different direction, cause light to bend around yourself or alter kinetic motion. Your control extends to a single force or collection that affects something up to the size of a person. Attacks made with these *Forces* Effects inflict one level of damage.

Electrical Chaos: By shifting the flow of electricity or diverting it to different concentrations, you cause it to play havoc with a piece of electronic machinery. A targeted electrical device (like a car starter or a computer) goes haywire and becomes useless for a full turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade or to affect one additional Pattern.

Energy Shield: A barrier that diverts one type of force defends you against certain attacks. You can pick one type of force to shield against: kinetic energy, light, heat, sound, hard radiation and so on. Anything that relies on said force loses two health levels of effectiveness when it strikes you. Therefore, you could easily block most minor attacks. A shield against light bends light around you and makes you physically invisible, although it renders you blind as well. A shield against sound makes you totally silent but unable to hear. A shield against gravity allows you to float effortlessly, although you'd have to push off from something in order to move. The shield persists for a full turn. You may grant this shield to another person, in which case it has a base duration of only one turn. Alternatively, you could redirect an existing force by making an attack challenge so that it strikes a target, and the force would score one level of damage (presumably bashing, lethal or aggravated based on the attack type). You could, therefore, make a swung fist feel like it connected with someone else or cause a sword-blow to injure a different target. Each force shield or form of redirection (such as **Fire Shield, Kinetic Shield, Redirect Cold, Redirect Silence** and so on) is a different rote. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade, except for an attack. For an attack, each grade of success inflicts an extra level of damage or allows you to affect one additional Pattern.

DISCIPLE (INTERMEDIATE) FORCES: TRANSMUTE MINOR FORCES

Not only can you manipulate small forces or groups of forces, you can change them into other types of forces. You can turn sound into electricity,

convert fire into darkness or replace kinetic energy with radio waves. Channeling and redirecting local forces allows you to create bolts of lightning or fly through the air. Attacks with this level of *Forces* typically inflict two levels of damage, unless some other special effect is added on.

Friction Curse: You turn the subject's kinetic energy into heat or cold. Each time the subject takes a physical action, it must win a Simple Test. Failure inflicts one level of lethal damage and means that the action fails. This Effect typically lasts one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade or to affect one additional Pattern.

Telekinesis: By manipulating local forces and turning them into kinetic energy (or altering the direction of other kinetic forces), you can grab an object or person, shove it around or hammer into it. You can similarly transmute forces into fire, lightning or the like. The end result is the same. You can snatch and move an object at walking speed by winning a Mental vs. Physical Challenge, or you can attack it magically for three levels of lethal damage (aggravated if you convert forces to fire). You can even lift yourself up and fly. Duration of the Effect is one turn. To manipulate an object, you must exert full concentration. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade, except on an attack. For an attack, each grade of success inflicts an extra level of damage or allows you to affect one additional Pattern.

ADEPT (INTERMEDIATE) FORCES: CONTROL MAJOR FORCES

Having surpassed the simpler elements, you now have mastery over complex mixtures of force, grandiose displays and the chaotic coruscations of *Forces* Patterns far beyond your own scale. You can redirect huge concentrations of energy or even powerful primal forces like radiation and gravity. Your ability to focus and channel forces typically causes attacks that inflict two health levels of damage, barring some other special effect.

Embracing the Earth Mother: Gravity intensifies around the subject, pinning it in place and causing injury. The subject must beat you in a challenge of his Physical Traits versus your Mental Traits to even be capable of movement. Even if he wins, he still suffers two levels of lethal crushing damage each turn. Alternatively, you could intensify forces such as heat, causing the victim to burst into flames, or you could redirect forces away from yourself for major protection. A direct *Forces* attack (like channeling a huge stroke of lightning) at this level inflicts two health levels of damage, based on the attack type. A force shield of this magnitude blocks the first two levels of any such attack against you. Any of these manifestations except a strike lasts for one minute/ conflict if you cast it upon yourself, or one turn if you cast it upon someone else. Each type of attack or shield (**Channel Fire**, **Deflect Radiation** and so on) is a different rote. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade, except for an attack. For an attack, each grade of success inflicts an extra level of damage or allows you to affect one additional Pattern.

Storm Watch: You manipulate titanic forces to control the weather. You can settle fog over a small area, disperse clouds, cause gentle rain on an otherwise clear day and so on. Once conjured, the weather takes a normal course. Unless it's maintained, for instance, snow disperses rapidly or rain pours down and then ends. Since you're only redirecting existing forces, you can't make major changes to the weather. The Narrators and Storyteller should alert the game's

other players to changes of this magnitude. To manipulate weather continuously, you must exert your full concentration. *Grades of Success*: Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

MASTER (ADVANCED) FORCES: TRANSMUTE MAJOR FORCES

The fearsome Master of *Forces* can open raging volcanoes and sent hurricanes ripping through a city. (Given enough time and effort, of course.) Any great force can not only be manipulated but transformed as well. The mage can grab all of the kinetic energy in an area and turn it to silence, for instance, rendering a battlefield immediately *still* and quiet. Strikes with this level of *Forces* typically inflict three health levels of damage, perhaps even reducing an opponent to cinders on the spot.

Inferno: You grab all the local forces of heat, light, energy, whatever, and turn them into a raging blast that consumes the target. You make a normal attack. If you are successful, the subject suffers three health levels of damage of a type appropriate to the strike immediately. You can also spread the damage over a large area, inflicting a level of damage on everyone in a room if they fail to evade your mass attack. *Grades of Success*: Each grade of success inflicts an extra health level of damage.

Tempest in a Teapot: You turn tremendous forces to your whims in order to make major manipulations to the weather. You can change local weather patterns as you desire: Perhaps you disperse clouds while heating the area, or you chill a place as winds die down and snow starts to form. The Effect typically lasts for one turn. To manipulate weather continuously, you must exert full concentration. *Grades of Success*: Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

LIFE

All living, growing things undergo constant change. The Patterns of *Life* take in and give out Quintessence in a dance that connects them fundamentally to the universe. With *Life* magic, the mage can sense and guide these beautiful and resilient Patterns. At first, the mage has only rudimentary awareness of the most fragile *Life*, but with time and experience, she learns to see the deeper secrets of complex and self-aware Patterns, until she becomes able to shape the experience of *Life* to her desires. She learns to create new beings, to change living creatures or to spur an early death.

Life magic that is used to harm often manifests as lesions or hemorrhaging. Such attacks often strike as mystical black energies or as "coincidental" diseases or injuries. Using *Life* magic to heal is vulgar if the Effect heals aggravated wounds. Plus, after a subject is healed with *Life* magic, further *Life* healing magic cannot be used on it again until it has suffered new injuries. Typically a mage is better at healing himself than at healing or harming others. With the Basic levels of power, the mage can heal one health level of personal injury. With Intermediate power, he can heal two health levels. With Advanced power, he can heal three health levels. All of these limits decrease by one level when the mage uses them on someone else.

Altering another *Life* Pattern generally requires a magical attack, be it a hurled spell or a hands-on manipulation.

APPRENTICE (BASIC) LIFE: SENSE LIFE

The mage has an intuitive awareness of living things. The mage can feel the existence of life all around her, and she can hone her perceptions to watch its energies flow. Simple magics allow her to determine age, gender, state of health and the like with ease.

Life Scan: With a simple scrying tool, you search out nearby *Life* Patterns and identify them. You may separate friend from foe easily even under harsh or low-visibility conditions, and you can determine the presence and number of other entities, even those that are otherwise physically invisible (such as rats hiding in a trash can or a mage bending light away with *Forces* magic). As long as you can sense a target, you can determine immediately whether it's someone you know. Even if it's not, you can tell its general type if it's something you've encountered before. You would recognize a dog or human easily, but you might know only that a werewolf or yeti was "something never before encountered." The Effect lasts for one minute or conflict. You may grant these senses to another person, in which case, they have a base duration of only one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Prayer of Healing Revelation: A simple prayer, chant or divination grants you vision of a subject's health. You recognize the flaws in a *Life* Pattern that indicate illness, poisons, physical weaknesses and the like. You determine automatically the remaining health levels of any creature you sense, and if you win a Static Mental Challenge (difficulty of the subject's Mental Traits), you can determine one Negative Physical Trait of a subject with a turn of scrutiny. You gain a one Trait resolution bonus on tests involving health or physical condition (like *Medicine*). The Effect lasts for one minute or conflict. You may grant these senses to another person, in which case they have a base duration of only one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

INITIATE (BASIC) LIFE: ALTER SIMPLE PATTERNS

The early manipulation of *Life* Patterns begins with those most near and familiar. The simple Patterns of rudimentary life forms and the mage's own Pattern. The willworker can influence the growth processes of simple creatures (from bacteria to plants) and cause them to grow in specific ways, although she can't yet make them take on totally new characteristics. She can also affect her own Pattern as well, encouraging growth and healing.

Alter Simple Creature: You reshape some of the simple threads of a basic *Life* Pattern. Doing so encourages or discourages growth and healing. As a result, you can cause the subject to heal one health level or to suffer one health level of lethal or bashing damage. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to heal or inflict another health level, or to affect an additional creature.

Heal Self: Because you are most familiar with your own *Life* Pattern, you can mend your wounds and heal your injuries. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to heal another health level or affect an additional creature.

DISCIPLE (INTERMEDIATE) LIFE: TRANSFORM SIMPLE PATTERNS

The mage can now grasp and manipulate simple life forms, changing them to suit her whims and mutating them into new shapes as long as the base body form remains roughly similar. She can encourage or discourage simple growth in more complex Patterns, up to and including herself. Although she can't yet transform complex Patterns completely, she begins to learn to influence them, and she can make a startling array of personal changes.

Better Body: You improve your own Pattern as desired, gifting yourself with increased speed, better strength, more health, body armor or similar benefits. The

only limits are your imagination and skill. When you invoke **Better Body**, you may choose one of the following benefits: gain three Physical Traits, gain one extra Healthy health level, gain the ability to resist one level of bashing or lethal damage from each attack by winning a Simple Test, act first in each turn, gain a physical survival change (gills, wings, temperature tolerance), gain natural weapons (strike for lethal damage). This Effect lasts for one minute/ conflict. You can also use this Effect on plants or simple creatures (bacteria, algae and the like), with a base duration of one turn. *Grades of Success*: Each grade of success allows you to invoke one additional benefit or increase the Effect's duration by one grade. Each grade of duration that elapses causes the subject to suffer one bashing health level of damage that cannot be soaked or healed until the Effect ends.

Rip the Man-Body: The Euthanatoi practice cutting Patterns apart to inflict injury. Conversely, reversals of the process can heal. You can inflict or cure one health level of lethal or bashing damage on any subject. *Grades of Success*: Each grade of success allows you to heal or inflict another health level or to affect an additional creature.

Adept (Intermediate) Life: Alter Complex Patterns

Your command of *Life* Patterns allows you to metamorphose yourself entirely, to reshape simple creatures into whatever form you desire or to make complex transformations to the Patterns of people and higher animals. You can assume any living shape you wish, turn plants into crabs or fish into lizards, and even gift people with unnatural capabilities and extensions of their normal limits.

Mutate Form: As with **Better Body**, you create modifications to a *Life* Pattern, but you can do so in any other creature. You could, for instance, give another person gills or the like. If you rework your personal Pattern, you can transform it into something else entirely. You can become a lion, a bird, a small tree or the like. Similarly, you can twist a simple Pattern into any other simple shape (such as by turning leaves into lobster, for instance).

If you work this Effect upon yourself, the base duration is one minute/ conflict. If you work it on something else, the base duration is one turn. If you remain in a foreign form for more than a day, you must expend a Willpower Trait each day or else lose your mind and become the very creature that you have transmuted into. If you do not spend this Trait, you will stay in the form forever with the mind of a beast (or plant) until someone counters the magic. *Grades of Success*: Each grade of success allows you to invoke one additional benefit or increase the Effect's duration by one grade. Each grade of duration that elapses causes an enhanced subject to suffer one bashing health level of damage that cannot be soaked or healed until the Effect ends. You do not suffer this damage for transmuting yourself into a new form, but you risk losing your mind if you stay changed for too long.

Physiological Emotion Control: Stimulation of various hormones, essences and bodily functions causes a subject's behavior to shift as you desire. You cause the subject to experience one emotion of your choice if you win a Social Challenge against the subject's Physical Traits. Use one simple word (such as love, anger, fear, curiosity, etc.) to describe the emotion. The subject should roleplay this feeling (have a Narrator enforce if necessary). The Effect lasts for one minute/ conflict. *Grades of Success*: You can affect one additional subject per grade, or you can increase the duration by one grade for each grade of success.

Master (Advanced) Life: Transform Complex Patterns

The mage can totally rewrite his own Pattern, turning into whatever shape he desires. Simple creatures can be similarly mutated into any end state, while complex creatures may be altered in large ways to turn them into other creatures or gift them with unnatural abilities.

Animal Form: You turn the subject into an animal. You could turn men into pigs or dogs into soldiers, at your whim. You must make a magical attack to strike. If you succeed, the subject transforms for one minute/ conflict. A subject that remains in animal form for more than a day must expend Willpower to retain its original mind, as with **Mutate Form**. Healing a subject repairs two health levels of damage, or you may cause two health levels of direct injury. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to affect an additional creature or to add one grade of duration.

Perfect Metamorphosis: When you alter your own Pattern, you may do so to suit any of your whims. You can shift into any form from clam to eagle and anything else you can imagine, even creating the traits of an imaginary creature. You take on the capabilities of the specified entity, although you may not know how to use them, and you do not gain additional magical powers automatically. (Therefore, you could fly as a bird, albeit clumsily, but you could not breathe fire as a dragon.) You remain shifted for one minute/ conflict, but you never suffer any difficulties of mentality in this state because you merge your Pattern with the characteristics of the desired creature. With a complex spell, you can whisk away age, injury or disease, healing yourself of three levels of damage or curing up to three inflicted Negative Physical Traits. Healing is instant and lasting, so the wounds don't reappear later. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to heal an additional level of damage, to remove an additional Negative Physical Trait or to add one grade of duration.

Matter

Base matter may be crude and simple, but it forms the vast stretches of the inanimate world. Any Pattern that is sedate and without living qualities or energetic characteristics is the purview of *Matter*, which encompasses a large quantity of things that a mage might manipulate.

Apprentice (Basic) Matter: Matter Perceptions

A mage's simple enchantments, experiments and studies allow for precise measurements of matter, including determinations of its magical and physical characteristics, hidden features and near-exact scientific statistics. For some mages, this knowledge comes through alchemical analysis or intuitive touch. Others use technological devices, mysterious powders, experimental light-beams or weights and measures.

Analyze Substance: You can determine the gross properties of a piece of matter immediately. You know what sort of substance it is (or isn't), how much mass it has, what it can hold, what sorts of properties it has, whether it's ductile or flammable and so on. You gain a one Trait bonus on the resolution of any challenge that involves influencing, building or destroying pure *Matter* that you sense in this fashion, such as using *Crafts* to make an item or just hitting something with a hammer to break it.

The Effect lasts for one minute or conflict. You may grant these senses to another person, in which case they have a base duration of only one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Fragments of Dream: Careful scrutiny of a *Matter* Pattern allows you to determine its hidden features and special qualities. If a particular item has concealed compartments, secret catches, traps or the like, you can discern them immediately (although you may need to make a Static Mental Challenge if they're particularly cunningly built). The difficulty varies based on the Storyteller's discretion. You can even sense Patterns within or beyond other *Matter* Patterns, up to a range of 15 paces plus three paces per Arete Trait.

The Effect lasts for one minute or conflict. You may grant these senses to another person, in which case they have a base duration of only one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success extends the Effect's duration by one grade or doubles its range.

INITIATE (BASIC) MATTER: BASIC TRANSMUTATION

Although the mage can't actually change matter from one form into another yet, he can alter the basic composition of homogenous substances. A chunk of brick turns into a loaf of bread, or a metal wire becomes a piece of straw. The caster can turn nearly any common material substance into another substance, as long as the mage doesn't transmute its shape or state magically, or alter its properties from the norms of the object. That is, the mystic can make a jug of wine turn into gasoline, but he couldn't change it into rock or air (because that would change state) or into jet fuel (because that's too complex a substance).

Melt and Reform: You turn an object into an easily malleable substance, such as turning a rock wall into clay or a steel statue into butter. You can manipulate the resulting material easily. Once it transforms back, it retains whatever shape changes you made. If you have an appropriate *Crafts* skill, you could even make works of art from otherwise rigid or brittle materials like obsidian, all with your bare hands. The material retains the melted form for one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Straw into Gold: Through alchemical transformation or pseudo-scientific manipulations, you cause an object to turn from one substance into another. If you use a vulgar Effect, you can turn simple substances into gold, diamonds, titanium or other valuables, as long as they retain a homogenous substance. With a coincidental working, you can cause a subject to seem stronger than it first appeared or perhaps more valuable than a first glance might have indicated.

The Effect lasts for one turn, just long enough to strengthen or weaken an object or allow it to use special characteristics of the new form. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade. With enough successes, you might manage to turn a simple object into a valuable one long enough to bilk a merchant once.

DISCIPLE (INTERMEDIATE) MATTER: ALTER FORM

With metaphysical motions, the willworker can stretch, compress or alter basic *Matter* Patterns. The object in question responds, perhaps even without a physical touch, and quivers, reshapes and changes state according to the mage's manipulations.

Destroy Structures: You tear apart the Pattern and remove the bonds that hold an item together. A series of quick manipulations causes it to fall apart or disperse into dust or gas. Each use of the Effect causes the item to lose one health level or one Trait. If it loses all of its health levels/Traits, it disintegrates. You must make an attack to affect an object that someone else is holding. *Grades of Success:* Each additional grade of success causes one additional health level/Trait of damage.

Sculpture: Instead of changing an object's composition and shaping the resulting putty, you just grab and manipulate the Pattern of any object you can sense. The object changes shape in response to your ministrations. You can make a sword bend or even cause a set of clothing to wrap around and constrict the wearer, perhaps preventing movement for a turn or so as the subject tries to fight his way out. You must make an attack to affect an object someone else is holding. You can typically manipulate an object as if you could shape it with both hands, to the limits of what you could do in one turn. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Adept (Intermediate) Matter: Complex Transformation

No Pattern is immutable to the mage. *Matter* Patterns can be combined freely, changed in state, mixed with other properties or otherwise transformed as you choose. You can cause an object to take on some property of some other object briefly, or you can combine two objects into a resulting alloy.

Alloy: You press two items together and cause them to turn into a homogenous substance. Doing so can be as simple as shoving a bar of steel into a block of wood without resistance, or as complex as finely mixing together a combination of gold and ash. The two objects have a shared set of properties. For instance, the block of wood could still burn, while the mixture of gold and ash could be sprinkled as a glittering, blackened dust. You should have a Narrator make a special item card for your alloy. Once merged, the two objects remain combined. You can merge any two objects that you could push together with your hands. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Transformers: You reshape and repair an item easily with your *Matter* skills or cause it to take on totally new shapes and properties. Therefore, you could sharpen an ancient sword or repair the tiny clockworks of an ancient pocket-watch all by magic, as long as you have the right knowledge of *Crafts*, *Science* or *Technology*. Your transformations are limited only by your theoretical knowledge. You can change the item's properties as long as it doesn't exceed the powers of your *Matter* skills. (So unless you're a Master, you can't work with radioactive properties or actual violations of mass/density/volume.) You don't have to actually work the item, just use your magic. You might (for instance) sprinkle a little powder or oil over something and magically find that it works better than ever. The resulting transformation lasts for one minute/ conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Master (Advanced) Matter: Alter Properties

No longer constrained to physical common sense, the mage can rebuild an object with any combination of physical properties. Items can be transmuted easily into strange and irrational substances, or they can even be made to change their interactions with other matter.

Alter Weight: You change the weight properties of objects, generally by doubling or halving them. An object that you affect doesn't change size, density or strength, but its weight does change. You might be able to push around a car made lighter, or you could make a sword too heavy to use. An item with increased weight doubles its Negative Traits of *Heavy*, *Clumsy* or *Slow* (a *Heavy* sword becomes *Heavy* x2) in addition to its actual weight change. A lighter object may no longer be *Heavy* or *Slow*, but it will certainly be more *Clumsy* (trade the Traits), because it's too light to wield effectively. However, you can certainly pick up

objects made lighter, or make something too heavy to move. A heavy car wouldn't be drivable, for instance. A Narrator may be necessary to moderate these Effects, as they can be quite wide-ranging. You can affect only one object at a time, and the Effect lasts for one minute/ conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Matter Association: Reworking a Pattern's associations, you cause it to dissociate from other forms of *Matter*, or to take on special new associations. For instance, you could make a bullet that acts like acid when it hits kevlar, or one that just passes right through kevlar entirely. You can only cause a given Pattern to exhibit one form of dissociation or customized association. Therefore, your sword might pass right through your foe's kevlar vest (and ignore its Traits), but it wouldn't be able to also pass through his metal rifle. The change lasts for one minute/ conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

MIND

Will focuses magic, and thought leads to Pattern, but where does the mind begin? Mages may not know the answer, but many study the secrets of consciousness intently. Even divested of physical form, the Sphere of *Mind* carries potent secrets. A skilled mage can manipulate thoughts, project emotions, command others and even send his awareness reeling through the cosmos to pluck secrets from places where the material body cannot go.

APPRENTICE (BASIC) MIND: SENSE THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS

Even crude mastery of *Mind* improves a mage's skills far beyond human norms. The mage becomes hypersensitive to emotions and mental states, including his own. By focusing his will, he can clear his mind, focus on multiple subjects, channel his thoughts with incredible efficiency and sense the presence of thought nearby.

Mind Empowerment: With a few simple exercises, you clear your thoughts and improve your focus immensely. You can function like a skilled calculator and process information rapidly, enhance your memory and even concentrate on multiple things, allowing you to think about a problem while taking an action. You can carry and use a calculator or notepad to simulate this mental prowess even if your character doesn't have such a device, as long as this Effect is working. With a static Mental Challenge (difficulty of the opponent's Mental Traits), you can see auras, allowing you to sense the emotional state of your subject or tell if he's lying. You gain a one-Trait bonus to resolution of all Mental Challenges. This Effect lasts for one minute/ conflict. If you cast this Effect on someone else, the Effect has a base duration of one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade or gain an additional one-Trait bonus to resolution of Mental Challenges. If you improve your Mental bonus to more than one Trait, you suffer one unhealable and unsoakable level of bashing damage for each time grade of the duration, due to your Pattern's stress of holding an overly charged superhuman capability.

No-Mind: Clearing away your thoughts, you become sensitized to the presence of other minds around you. You can tell if anything within the area has a mental Pattern, and you discern animals from people, determine gender and sense relative positions automatically. If someone uses concealing magics, you can sense the subject if you can win a Mental Challenge against him. Against mental invisibility this Effect lets you spot the subject. Against physical invisibility, you

still can't see the subject (and, therefore, you suffer a penalty of two Traits and a forced retest when striking), but you can detect his presence. This Effect sense lasts for the duration of a minute or conflict. You may cast this Effect on another person, in which case the base duration is one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

INITIATE (BASIC) MIND: MENTAL IMPULSE

Now open to the fleeting ways of the mind, the mage can sense and decipher basic surface thoughts. Emotions become clear images, and the feelings of Resonance are visible. By communicating mental patterns, the mage can send emotional impulses or place a strong feeling in an area.

Empathic Projection: You focus and channel your emotions to send one clear emotional impulse to the subject. You must best the subject in a Mental Challenge. If you succeed, you can instill one strong emotion. Doing so can have a variety of effects. The subject may simply feel a clear emotion that you choose to impart, such as hope, fear or anger. This projection is not necessarily a clear message, but it can be enough to let the subject know that you intend something. You can also force the subject to take one reflex action such as a cough, a laugh or a sudden look of panic or sadness. Although this action is little more than a distraction, it can be critical in tense social situations. Finally, you can simply "scream" a strong emotional pulse into the victim's mind, inflicting one health level of bashing damage. *Grades of Success:* Each grade allows you to affect one additional target or add one level of damage.

Psychic Impression: You place a large amount of Resonance on an area, giving it a Resonance Trait of your choice. This Trait must be a duplicate of one Resonance Trait that you have yourself. The Resonance may apply if you cast an appropriate spell, or if someone else in the area does so, and it causes the emotion invested to seem to have weight in the locale. The place will hold the emotion that you project into it, and even normal people who enter the area can sense it. You should have a Narrator place a special Resonance card at the entryways to the room that you invest. The Effect typically lasts for one scene/hour. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

DISCIPLE (INTERMEDIATE) MIND: MENTAL LINK

The mage can now enter the sublime levels of the mind, probing deep into the subconscious. Beyond the layers of surface thought are symbols and concepts. Altering or playing with these concepts allows the mage to communicate without regard for the barriers of language, send thoughts, dive into dreams or discern the meanings behind various languages.

Probe Thoughts: By besting a subject in a Mental Challenge, you can penetrate his thoughts and bore into the subject's memory or senses. You can demand that the subject relay to you a minute or conflict's worth of memory or sensory information. As you probe for thoughts, they come to the fore of the subject's mind unbidden, so the victim may be aware that something is amiss, even if he can't defend himself. A probe of this sort takes a full turn, and it garners one piece of information or allows you to ask one question that the subject must answer truthfully to the best of his belief. If a subject doesn't honestly know something or is wrong, you get that information with no way to verify it. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to ask an additional question.

Telepathy: True thought-transmission lets the mage send and receive impulses and ideas stripped beyond language. You can exercise **Telepathy** to engage in silent communication. (Put two fingers to your temple to indicate the use of **Telepathy**.) Unless someone else uses **Telepathy**, this conversation can't be overheard, although someone using **No-Mind** will be aware that it is taking place, and someone who uses **Probe Thoughts** on you or your target will realize that **Telepathy** is in effect. If you try to send a thought or engage in a conversation with an unwilling subject, you must best him in a Mental Challenge. Subjects are unwilling by default, since it requires actual consent and concentration to lower one's mental defenses. This Effect allows you to communicate for one minute/ conflict freely. You may instead choose to send a blast of telepathic energy, which inflicts two health levels of bashing damage on a successful Mental Challenge. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to add one additional subject to the telepathic linkage or extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Adept (Intermediate) Mind: Control Conscious Mind

Not only can the mage read thoughts and decipher languages, he can implant his own thoughts and impress his behaviors upon a subject. The mage can invade a mind and overtake it or use her own thoughts to shield it.
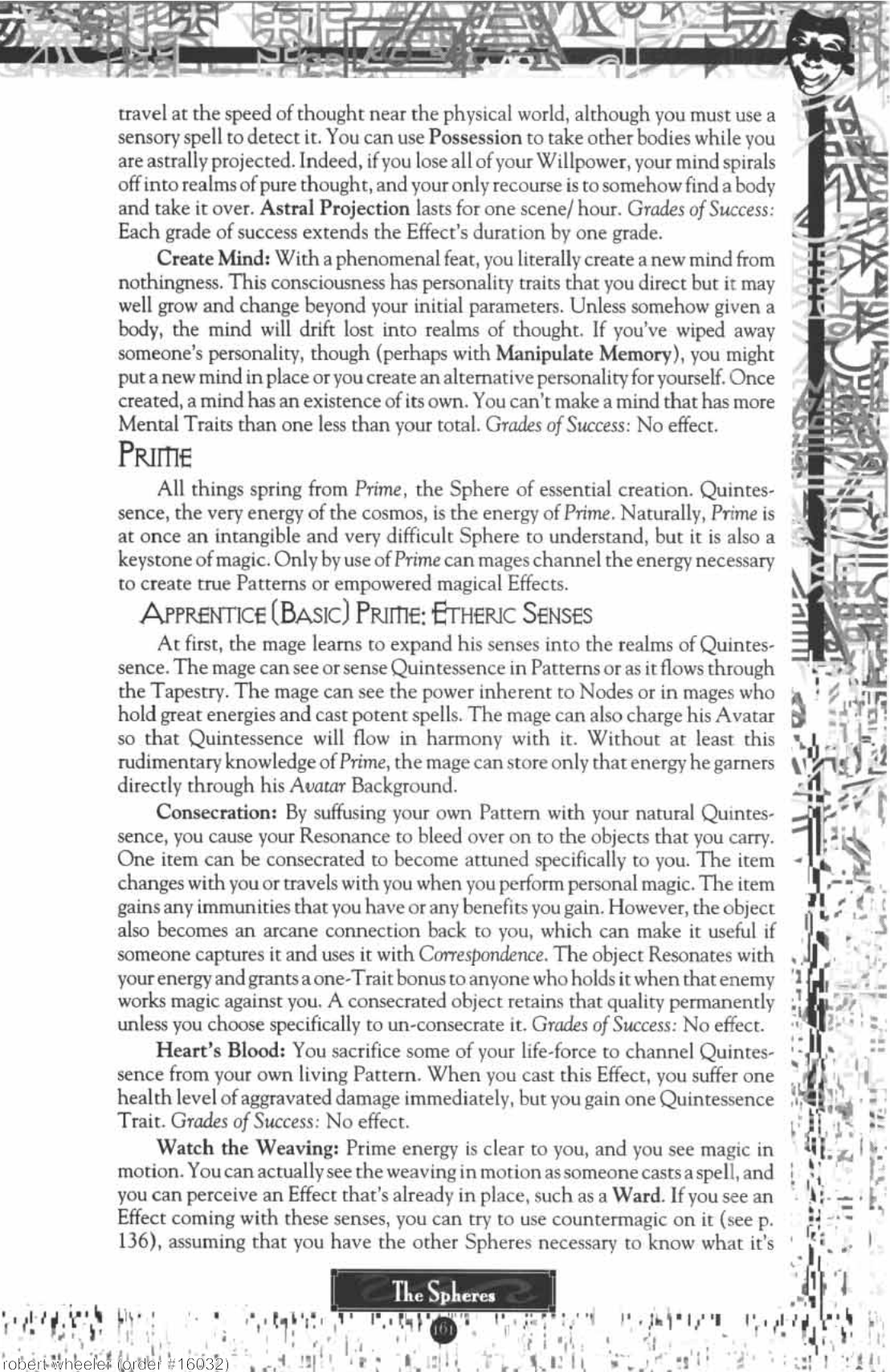
Manipulate Memory: You force your thoughts into the subject's subconscious mind and rewrite his memories. You can describe to the subject the memory that you implant. Doing so takes only a turn and a Mental Challenge, but you can overwrite the subject's memory with anything you can imagine, no matter how bizarre or surreal, or you can simply erase the memories forever. You can affect up to one minute's or conflict's worth of memory. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the length of memory that you can manipulate by one duration grade.

Possession: If you can defeat an opponent in a Mental Challenge after casting this Effect, you overlay his thoughts and force your own into the victim's mind. In game terms, your body becomes comatose but you take control of the victim. You direct the victim's body to move and react as you desire, although the subject will not violate his Nature or commit a blatantly self-destructive act. You can choose to take partial control (causing the subject's arm to flail about unnaturally, for instance), or you can override the victim's mind (in which case he even thinks that the thoughts are his own, which may in turn lead to him thinking he's crazy). This Effect lasts for one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success extends the Effect's duration by one grade.

Master (Advanced) Mind: Forge Psyche

The Master of Mind magic can reshape mental processes and even create or guide them from scratch. The mage can untether his psyche to journey in realms of mental strangeness, send his consciousness to other planes or even wipe out or change the personalities of others.

Astral Projection: You travel out of your body, which becomes comatose, and send your consciousness forth to roam on its own. You use Mental Traits for combat and Willpower in place of health while in this form. Effects that sense consciousness will detect your thoughts, but you are otherwise intangible and bodiless. Casting magic may be difficult without your foci, but you can return to your body at will unless you're somehow trapped or lost. By spending a Willpower Trait, you may manifest as a ghostly image for one turn. You can

travel at the speed of thought near the physical world, although you must use a sensory spell to detect it. You can use **Possession** to take other bodies while you are astrally projected. Indeed, if you lose all of your Willpower, your mind spirals off into realms of pure thought, and your only recourse is to somehow find a body and take it over. **Astral Projection** lasts for one scene/ hour. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success extends the Effect's duration by one grade.

Create Mind: With a phenomenal feat, you literally create a new mind from nothingness. This consciousness has personality traits that you direct but it may well grow and change beyond your initial parameters. Unless somehow given a body, the mind will drift lost into realms of thought. If you've wiped away someone's personality, though (perhaps with **Manipulate Memory**), you might put a new mind in place or you create an alternative personality for yourself. Once created, a mind has an existence of its own. You can't make a mind that has more Mental Traits than one less than your total. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Prime

All things spring from *Prime*, the Sphere of essential creation. Quintessence, the very energy of the cosmos, is the energy of *Prime*. Naturally, *Prime* is at once an intangible and very difficult Sphere to understand, but it is also a keystone of magic. Only by use of *Prime* can mages channel the energy necessary to create true Patterns or empowered magical Effects.

Apprentice (Basic) Prime: Etheric Senses

At first, the mage learns to expand his senses into the realms of Quintessence. The mage can see or sense Quintessence in Patterns or as it flows through the Tapestry. The mage can see the power inherent to Nodes or in mages who hold great energies and cast potent spells. The mage can also charge his Avatar so that Quintessence will flow in harmony with it. Without at least this rudimentary knowledge of *Prime*, the mage can store only that energy he garners directly through his *Avatar* Background.

Consecration: By suffusing your own Pattern with your natural Quintessence, you cause your Resonance to bleed over on to the objects that you carry. One item can be consecrated to become attuned specifically to you. The item changes with you or travels with you when you perform personal magic. The item gains any immunities that you have or any benefits you gain. However, the object also becomes an arcane connection back to you, which can make it useful if someone captures it and uses it with *Correspondence*. The object Resonates with your energy and grants a one-Trait bonus to anyone who holds it when that enemy works magic against you. A consecrated object retains that quality permanently unless you choose specifically to un-consecrate it. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Heart's Blood: You sacrifice some of your life-force to channel Quintessence from your own living Pattern. When you cast this Effect, you suffer one health level of aggravated damage immediately, but you gain one Quintessence Trait. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Watch the Weaving: Prime energy is clear to you, and you see magic in motion. You can actually see the weaving in motion as someone casts a spell, and you can perceive an Effect that's already in place, such as a **Ward**. If you see an Effect coming with these senses, you can try to use countermagic on it (see p. 136), assuming that you have the other Spheres necessary to know what it's

doing. These senses last for one minute/ conflict. You can grant these senses to someone else, in which case they last for one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success grants the Effect an extra grade of duration.

INITIATE (BASIC) PRIME: WEAVE ODYLLIC FORCE

Tiny diversions and whorls of *Prime* energy help to nudge the Tapestry in conjunction with the mage's will. The mage can empower a weapon with mystic energy so that it inflicts damage directly to a Pattern, or he may even create a shining eldritch weapon or bolt. Quintessence stored in items can be turned to magical purposes, making enchanted items. The mage can even use Quintessence to create entirely new Patterns with other Spheres, essentially making something whole from nothingness.

Body of Light: By weaving a little bit of *Prime* energy into a mirror of your Pattern, you create an etheric body that can house your psyche or soul. This **Body of Light** gives you a form when you travel in astral realms or send your psyche with messages. This body can be sensed with Prime (**Watch the Weaving**), and it shields your psyche from harm while you are in other realms of thought. A **Body of Light** lasts as long as you are projecting your consciousness elsewhere, and it allows you to use your Quintessence to absorb damage (instead of taking it straight to Willpower). *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Enchant Weapon: A reweaving and reinforcing of *Prime* energy causes a structure to gain etheric power. The object can become a potent weapon that strikes true to the very Pattern of an enemy. You can also enchant an object or armor thus so that it has a spiritual and astral form. When you do so, you can claim its Traits even against a spirit or an astral attacker (or use it in conjunction with your **Body of Light** while you travel to spiritual and mental realms). An enchanted weapon inflicts aggravated damage. Using this Effect costs one Trait of Quintessence, and it lasts for one minute/ conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Holy Stroke: With a blast of pure *Prime*, you stab deep into an enemy's Pattern. This attack manifests as a bolt of light or a weapon of glowing energy. Creating such a manifestation costs one Trait of Quintessence. The etheric weapon inflicts one level of aggravated damage per strike. A bolt of *Prime* fires as a ranged magical attack, while a *Prime* hand weapon can be used in place of a physical blade or bludgeon. If you manifest an actual *Prime* hand weapon, it remains for one minute/ conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade for a *Prime* hand weapon.

DISCIPLE (INTERMEDIATE) PRIME: CHANNEL QUINTESSENCE

The mage can redirect Quintessence easily and shape its many forms. The mage can draw Quintessence from various sources, trade it freely and even turn magical power sources into enchanted items. Even living beings can be enchanted. Their Quintessential energies become infused with strength to strike directly at other Patterns.

Bond of Blood: Without this rote, you can't draw Quintessence forth from Nodes or Tass, nor can you give it to other mages or power sources. With each use of this power, you can channel a Trait of Quintessence. Each such transfer takes a turn and an Effect. A mage who doesn't have at least Apprentice-level *Prime* can't store more Traits than his *Avatar* Background, though.

Often this Effect takes the form of passing around a cup or sharing a drink of some sort to symbolize the transfer of power, or anointing an object. The mage can also take the Quintessence from an object as it's destroyed and channel a tiny trickle into an Effect. Making a sacrifice of some sort in conjunction with this magic lets the mage then spend one free Quintessence Trait on an Effect cast immediately thereafter. Once the transfer is done, it doesn't reverse or disappear. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to transfer one additional Quintessence Trait in a turn, although you cannot transfer more than your *Avatar* rating.

Enchant Life: Just like the **Enchant Weapon** Effect, you can spend a Quintessence Trait to strengthen a Pattern. The individual so enchanted can score aggravated damage with unarmed attacks, and he can strike spirits or other ephemera. This Effect lasts for one minute/conflict. You may cast it on someone else, in which case it lasts for a turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Lambs to the Slaughter: With the proper rituals and observances, you can gain power from a sacrifice. Doing so takes some real work, so you can't just sacrifice something and expect to gain Quintessence. However, if you have a raised and cared for sacrificial lamb, a piece of ceremonial jewelry or a similar item properly, you can draw Quintessence from its sacred nature. You must use an item that's been raised carefully and invested with the proper energies. Typically, a Narrator or Storyteller will have to approve such an item (or animal) before play and give you a special card for it; you can't just buy a sacrificial lamb at the grocery store. When you destroy the item or sacrifice the animal, you gain one Quintessence Trait for each Trait or health level that it has, to a maximum of your *Avatar* rating. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Adept (Intermediate) Prime: Sublimate Quintessence

As the name implies, an Adept can perform acts of sublime manipulation with Quintessence. The Adept can create magical items, even investing them with permanent power if he is skilled and determined enough. Simple unliving objects can be turned into reservoirs of Quintessence, and even concentrated into a permanent battery. The mage can even release the Quintessence that is stored in material nonliving objects in order to send it back to the Tapestry. Lastly, the mage can tap into deep reservoirs of Quintessence to garner additional energy, even outside places of power.

Create Talismans and Artifacts: A Talisman is a mystical device with Arete that has been invested with a tiny portion of a mage's will. An Artifact is an item that has the ability to invoke certain magical Effects, or that has been permanently magically enchanted. The mage must reweave the Pattern of the item in question, investing it with strong *Prime* energy to reinforce the desired magical works. The creation of such a device, although theoretically possible at this level of power, is ultimately up to the discretion of the Storyteller. Such a creation can't be done in a single turn. It's a heroic working to be accomplished over several stories, often with associated knowledge of other Spheres required to place the enchantments on the item. You can also make a Soulgem, which is a Periapt (an item that stores Quintessence as a battery) that can be used only by you. *Grades of Success:* Typically, you must perform an extensive ritual if you're going to finish the Effect. Only a Storyteller can approve the permanent creation of a magical item.

Flames of Purification: This rote takes its name from the Celestial Chorus' version of the spell, in which ghostly fire illumines the subject while banishing it from existence. You release the *Prime* energy from a Pattern and cause it to fade from reality. You can attack an object at range. If you succeed, you evaporate one of its Traits or health levels with aggravated damage. Doing so can turn the object eventually into nothingness, returning the Pattern to the Tapestry. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to inflict one additional level of damage or drain one additional Trait from the target.

Wellspring: When you find a place where the Resonance matches up with your own Resonance Traits, you can pull out some of that energy to refresh your own Pattern. You open yourself to the magical emotions and regain your energies. Generally, the place must have a very strong Resonance already. A place with three or more Resonance Traits of its own would apply, like a haunted graveyard, a mathematical lecture hall dating to antiquity or an ancient fountain where lovers congregate. If the place has any Resonance Traits that match your own, you can gain one Trait of Quintessence for each matching Resonance Trait. Note that this applies only if the area has naturally occurring Resonance. You can't use *Mind* magic to place Resonance on an area and then hope to gain energy from it. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

ᴍᴀsᴛᴇʀ (Aᴅᴠᴀɴᴄᴇᴅ) Pʀɪᴍᴇ: Aʟᴛᴇʀ Qᴜɪɴᴛᴇssᴇɴᴛɪᴀʟ Fʟᴏᴡ

The Masters of *Prime* hold some of the most potent of magical secrets, namely the very secrets of magical energy itself. Such a Master can not only redirect *Prime* energy, but he can summon forth Quintessence or even suffuse any sort of Pattern with permanent energies designed to give it magical powers. Quintessence can be pulled forth even from living Patterns, dispersing them to the Tapestry. The mage can also use Quintessence as a bulwark against Paradox, negating the force of Paradox with the very strength of the cosmos.

Fount of Paradise: You exert a turn of concentration to reseat your Pattern with respect to the Tellurian. If you succeed, you refresh the power of your *Avatar* immediately. You regain one Trait of Quintessence instantly. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success grants an additional Trait of Quintessence, up to the limit of your *Avatar* rating.

Paradox Ward: With Quintessential energy, you smooth out the worst ripples of Paradox and enhance your magical Effects. You need only cast this Effect and spend one Trait of Quintessence in the turn before casting a subsequent Effect. The resultant Effect garners one less Trait of Paradox. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to set one extra Quintessence Trait against prospective Paradox.

Master's Enchantment: As a Master, you can enchant even living beings with magical powers, or create a living form of Tass (magical fruits, empowered pets and the like). Much like creating an Artifact or Talisman, this Effect is a matter for the Storyteller's adjudication. This rote is listed solely to note that such magics are possible at this level of power, even if they're not easy. *Grades of Success:* Typically you must use a long-term ritual to finish an enchantment of this nature.

Sᴘɪʀɪᴛ

Reflected in myriad mirror worlds are the realms of *Spirit.* The *Spirit* realm holds ephemeral counterparts to objects, creatures and places. The entities that flit about often serve as perfected ideals of some concept, while emotions play

such a strong part that they shape the very landscape. The realms of *Spirit* encompass every hope, fear or ideal of humanity, and much more besides.

Mages who intend to deal with *Spirit* have a daunting task ahead. Travel into the spirit realms became difficult long ago. In the modern age it's nigh-deadly. An unprepared mage who travels into the Umbra may well injure or kill himself. Even those who are cautious learn quickly that the Umbra is a volatile place, ever-changing and too large to be mapped or cataloged, no matter how much mages might try. Only those heroes who would risk forays into the unknown through perilous gates dare to walk the Umbra itself.

Even without traveling to the Umbra, though, a mage with command of *Spirit* has potent power. Spirits themselves manifest in a multitude of forms, and an experienced mage can coax, cajole and deal with many of them. Since a spirit's power does not stem from vulgar magics, the entity can often create mystical Effects that might be beyond the capabilities or daring of the mage. This property of the Sphere allows a mage a great deal of flexibility, for the many spirit allies of a diplomatic mage can provide a great deal of variety in their assistance.

A mage who crosses into the Umbra, or who reaches through to affect a spirit there, must suffer the effects of the Avatar Storm. This hazard causes one level of aggravated damage for every two Arete Traits the mage has (rounded up).

Apprentice (Basic) Spirit: Spirit Senses

As with other rudimentary magics, the first thing a mage learns to do with *Spirit* is to sense the spirit world. The mage can see spirits and visualize the landscape of nearby spirit planes. If he is looking into the Umbra, the mage sees a twilight world that seems like a vibrant reflection of the physical, with subtle changes reflecting Resonance. If he is looking in the Shadowlands of the dead, the mage sees the decrepit afterlife that holds only decaying memories of things that were.

Detect Possession: Some spirits have the ability to take over hosts. With this simple Effect, you can determine whether a spirit has done so. You simply scrutinize a subject for a turn, and you can tell immediately if the individual is somehow possessed or influenced by a spirit. You can also tell if a spirit has cast its powers over a person, be it for protection or cursing. This detection sense lasts for one minute/ conflict. You may grant this sight to someone else, in which case it lasts for a turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Spirit Sight: You allow your material perceptions to fade into the background as you extend your awareness into the spirit worlds. With these senses active, you see what transpires across the Gauntlet, and you can watch the passage of spirits and ghosts. This sense lasts for one minute/ conflict. You can grant this sense to someone else, in which case it lasts for one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Initiate (Basic) Spirit: Touch Spirit

The mage can extend his natural touch and capabilities briefly into the spirit world. Doing so can be as simple as a shout or as complex as translocating a hand to pick up a spiritual object or strike at a spirit. Of course, spirits can strike back while the mage coexists thus.

Call Spirit: You translate your voice across the Gauntlet and into the spirit world. In this fashion, you can speak to spirits or just put out a general call for

spirits to heed you. Although there's no guarantee of attendance, spirits do tend to find people interesting, and they may flock to find out more about the unusual human who talks to them. You can use a Social Challenge to convince a spirit to come to you, although it may not necessarily manifest physically or come to your aid. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

The Spirit's Caress: A quick touch sends your reach through the Gauntlet (and the Avatar Storm) to touch the other side. You might just pat a spirit on the head, or you could strike at it with all the might of your physical body. By this means, you can threaten a spirit or perhaps even combat it and banish it. The juxtaposition of spirit and flesh lasts for one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

DISCIPLE (INTERMEDIATE) SPIRIT: PIERCE GAUNTLET

The Gauntlet itself ceases to be so much of a problem for the Disciple. The Avatar Storm remains a danger, true, but the mage can now interact fully with spirits, awaken the spiritual properties of a place or even cross over into the Umbra itself.

Awaken the Inanimate: Spiritual mages believe that every item has a spirit associated with it. You can awaken these spirits, rousing them temporarily from dormancy, to empower the item or to have them answer your questions. The older the item, and the more Resonance it has, the stronger the spirit is. In general, you can awaken an item's spirit and ask it one question. Have a Narrator answer your single question from the item's point of view, so a knife would be able to describe who it's killed or a stand of grass would tell who trampled it. Most often, the spirit falls back into slumber immediately thereafter, although some powerful items may have active and aware spirits already. Such items tend to have personalities of their own, and they may occasionally behave quirkily or fail depending on who's using them and how they're treated. *Grades of Success:* If the Storyteller agrees, you may awaken particularly powerful spirits in old items with this rite, and they may have powers beyond simply answering your queries. Such feats take many grades of success.

Stepping Sideways: By focusing on some symbolic journey, such as diving into a pool of water or entering a dark cave, you cross the barrier from material to spirit. You suffer the usual injury for the Avatar Storm, but you translocate physically from the material plane to the Umbra or vice versa. Once there, you can wander about at will, although you must either find a natural gate or use this Effect again to leave. Living creatures stand out against the spirit world. They have not belonged in such places for millennia. Once you cross, you exist physically in the other location. You don't step back at some point automatically unless you cast an Effect to do so. *Grades of Success:* Each grade allows you to bring another being with you.

ADEPT (INTERMEDIATE) SPIRIT: REND AND REPAIR GAUNTLET

To protect against hostile spirits, the mage can influence the Gauntlet, turning it into a trap to keep spirits away. The mage can alter locations to his whims in the Umbra, and he can build specific wards to keep out spiritual intruders. The Gauntlet can be rent to allow many people passage, or to loose spirits and demons upon the world.

Affix Gauntlet: You can manipulate the Gauntlet to create traps, whorls, strong points and wards. If you best a spirit in a Social Challenge, you can hedge it out of a place, force it into a body or object, or simply trap it in once place. This Effect lasts for one scene/hour. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success increases the Effect's duration by one grade.

Breach the Gauntlet: This Effect works like **Stepping Sideways**, but you create a free-standing gate. Anyone can travel through this gate to pass between worlds (with the usual trouble of the Avatar Storm). You literally bring the spirit and the material together for a short time. This gate stands open for one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Master (Advanced) Spirit: Forge Ephemera

The most skilled *Spirit* mages can create their own spirit servants, break through the Gauntlet to worlds beyond and even design entire realms by shaping spirit energy to their whims. The mage can sense the Avatar and, it's rumored, even destroy it. The mage's defenses protect his spirit, even if he journeys into the great beyond of the Deep Umbra or other alien places.

Break the Dreamshell: Far-ranging mages discover a second layer that keeps mages inside the Umbral confines of the solar system. To escape to the Deep Umbra, the layer of chaos and uncertain primordialism, the mage must break through that layer. Doing so requires mastery of *Spirit*, for the mage cannot survive beyond with any skill less. Fortunately there's no Avatar Storm to contend with at the layer of the Dreamshell. You just cast this Effect when you reach the edge of the spirit horizon, and you cross into the spiritual deeps. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to affect another person.

Deep Umbra Travel: You shield yourself against the rigors of the Deeps. Most creatures die out in the unformed void, but you can travel there (if you would ever decide or desire to do so). This Effect protects you for one scene/ hour. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade.

Time

The inexorable march of time counts out the seconds, days, years and millennia until the end of the Tapestry. But does it truly ever end? Or is all time just a recursion of histories and a group of moments with nothing more than arbitrary causality making them discrete? Mages who study *Time* recognize that the flow of time itself is mutable, and that it's not nearly so hard and fast as people often believe.

Science and magic alike balk at actual time travel, but limited alterations of such a sort seem possible occasionally. Still, the mechanics of doing so are mysterious and perhaps even more dangerous than spirit travel. The clever mage restricts his use of *Time* to scrying and to the occasional boost of his reaction speed. Those who actually walk the halls of time report time-policing entities, strange temporal beasts, time anomalies and the like, if they return at all.

Apprentice (Basic) Time: Time Sense

The beginning *Time* student can measure time with uncanny accuracy. He can determine time to a second, measure the duration of other Effects and notice distortions in the time-stream.

Perfect Time: One simple casting tells you the time to the nearest second. This measure reflects your subjective time with respect to the world. If you are in sped-up time, for instance, you know exactly how long you've been "gone," what the ratio of time flow is and what the equivalent time is back in the real time flow. These senses last for one conflict/ minute. You may cast this sense on someone else, in which case it lasts a turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success adds one grade to the Effect's duration.

Time Sense: You can spot temporal anomalies, things moving through the time-stream and warps in time due to strong magic. Although such manifestations are rare, you can detect them with this spell if you suspect one. A sufficiently powerful Effect is obvious even if it's some time off. These senses last for one conflict/ minute. You may cast this sense on someone else, in which case it lasts a turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade or to affect one other person.

Initiate (Basic) Time: Time Sight

Scrying is, of course, a limited and uncertain art. Still, many mages hope to reap at least a limited insight into the future. With some rudimentary time magic, doing so becomes possible. The mage may send her senses back or forward, hoping for a glimpse of destiny. She may also muddy the waters by messing randomly with the time-stream, all the better to keep other *Time* users out.

Divinations: You gain a limited insight into the future or past. If you look into the past, you should ask a Narrator or Storyteller to provide you with information about some significant past event in the area of your casting. If you look into the future, you gain one free retest that you can hold for the duration of the story. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Time Wards: You just muck around in *Time* and cause difficulty for those who would time-travel to you or spy on you. This Effect works just like a **Ward** (see p. 144), except that it shields against *Time* instead of *Correspondence*. *Grades of Success:* See **Ward**, p. 144.

Disciple (Intermediate) Time: Time Manipulation

Time doesn't take well to manipulation, but the Disciple can pull off minor feats. Perhaps the mage changes the timeline to reflect a better situation from a friend, or just dilates and contracts time to make things speed up or slow down. A skilled mage can even rewind time a little, making things happen over again.

Distort Time: You distort time around one person for a turn in a small location. The subject either gains or loses one action for the turn. *Grades of Success:* Each success scored allows you to affect another person.

Time Warp: One of the more obnoxious powers, a mage can rewind time for someone who's already taken a turn and cause the person to take that turn over again. Therefore, the direct consequences of that action didn't happen to that character. Indirect matters (a wound from a different enemy, for instance) probably remain. You can pick who redoes the turn. The former action is invalidated and the latter used. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Adept (Intermediate) Time: Time Determinism

No longer limited to manipulations, the mage can stop time, slow it to a crawl or change its perceived speed to a race. Objects can be held in stasis for later, and so can spells. The mage simply prepares the Effect and the other spell in question, then the Effect triggers when the condition is met.

Contingent Effect: You set up a contingency in advance for some condition that might come to pass. When it does, it fires off another spell that you cast just after your **Contingent Effect** rote. You can hold multiple spells thus, and doing so is a good way to spend a long ritual preparing a deadly spell for later. Of course,

if you hold too many spells, you'll suffer severe penalties. Also note that *Prime* senses can detect the held Effect. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Programmed Event: You freeze time around an object. Until some event comes to pass, that object remains frozen. For instance, a cup might hover in the air, waiting to be touched by a red-headed Verbena. After that occurs, the object returns to normal time. Most often, this Effect is used to preserve some Artifact or trap. This Effect lasts for one scene/ hour. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Master (Advanced) Time: Time Travel

The true Master steps laterally outside of time and moves along the temporal axis. Such journeys can take the mage far to the future or past. These journeys are among the most dangerous that a mage can take, for the weight of Paradox tends to multiply when someone affects the far past or future.

Sidestep Time: Having immunized yourself to time, you continue to act while everyone in 15 paces plus three paces per Arete Trait is immobilized. To you, the world seems frozen. Of course, you cannot physically interact with anything that's frozen in null-time. You gain one free turn to act at the end of your normal turn, and nobody may react to you (although you cannot injure them either). *Grades of success:* No effect.

Time Travel: The penultimate expression of mystic will carries the mage into the future or past. If you shunt the mage into the past, it's largely one-way; you can't just bop into the Dark Ages and then back out in the hotel. Similarly, if you send a mage to the future, then it's up to the game to catch up to that future (if it ever happens). The exact destination is up to the mage, but the details rely on the Storyteller. *Grades of Success:* No effect.

Sample Rotes and Effects

All right, you've got a list of various Spheres and potential ideas. Now, how does your mage do something pretty straightforward like turn invisible, deflect bullets or fly? The sample rotes and Effects included here should cover many of these bases, giving you a frame of reference from which to draw. If you want to do something that's not described, talk it over with your Storyteller and make a new rote for it. These rotes are guidelines, but they offer some direction.

Note also that some of the sample rotes here use conjunctional magic. You can use those types of Effects only if your Storyteller allows them as per the optional rule on p. 144. Some have multiple forms for casting. If a rote can happen in multiple ways (like a simple "damage enemy" rote, which could use *Forces* or *Entropy* or any number of other Spheres), each variant is a separate rote. In some cases, you may find other Sphere combinations to make a given rote. Doing so is fine as long as the Storyteller approves of them.

Animate the Dead: Initiate (Basic) *Spirit.* You call out to a minor spirit and cause it to inhabit a corpse and direct it. With a successful Social Challenge, you convince the spirit to reanimate the corpse for a scene/ hour. The corpse is obviously dead, and it has no memories or personality unless you provide them through other Sphere Effects. Such a zombie has health levels just like an uninjured person, but it suffers no wound penalties. If it is reduced to Dead, the corpse is too damaged to continue, and the spirit leaves. You could also use a Social Challenge with a reversed rote to banish a spirit from an undead creature of this sort. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success extends the Effect's duration by one grade or allows you to animate an additional corpse.

Block Magical Energy: Initiate (Basic) *Prime*. You shield an area or object (but not a person) so that Quintessence flowing through it can't be touched. Nobody can draw Quintessence from the target. This Effect lasts for one minute/conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success extends the Effect's duration by one grade.

Create Normal Item: Initiate (Basic) *Matter* and Initiate (Basic) *Prime*. You create an object from nothingness, touching you and not transposing any other item or creature. The item can be up to the volume of a one-foot cube, so a sword (long and thin) or a sheaf of paper is doable, but a car is not. You must use Disciple (Intermediate) *Matter* to create something that is not one homogenous substance and Adept (Intermediate) *Matter* to create a rare or complex element. You must use Master (Advanced) *Matter* to make radioactive materials or other similarly strange matter. The item exists for one minute/conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to extend the Effect's duration by one grade or to double the created volume.

Decrepify: Adept (Intermediate) *Entropy*. You cause the opponent's body to turn upon itself, age and suffer from disease and mischance. The subject takes one health level of damage if you can touch him or make a successful ranged attack with an appropriate challenge. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success affects one additional target or causes one additional health level of damage.

Deflect Bullets: Initiate (Basic) *Forces*. You alter the velocity of incoming attacks so that they veer away from you. You gain one extra health level in defense against kinetic attacks (raw energy attacks still affect you normally). Or you can use Disciple-level (Intermediate) *Matter*. You cause the air around you to deflect incoming attacks, granting you one extra health level. The Effect lasts for one minute/conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success extends the Effect's duration by one grade or allows you to affect one other person. The *Forces* version gives you one extra health level of defense.

Enhance Weapon: Disciple (Intermediate) *Forces* and Initiate (Basic) *Prime*. You cause a weapon to strike on its next attack with an elemental attack in addition to its normal blow. Doing so causes one extra health level of damage. (It's not as efficient as just hurling raw *Forces* because you must enchant a separate object.) If you enchant yourself so that your unarmed attacks have elemental damage, this Effect causes two health levels of damage or one health level with a special effect. This Effect lasts for one minute/conflict or until it's used up. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to enchant an additional weapon.

Fly: Initiate (Basic) *Forces*. You shield yourself against gravity and redirect kinetic energy (from motion) to push you in a desired direction. You can fly at normal speed (three steps per turn). Alternatively, you can use Disciple (Intermediate) *Forces* to shield yourself and change other forces (like heat or light) into kinetic energy so that you can fly. You move four steps per turn instead of three. You can also use Disciple (Intermediate) *Forces* in conjunction with Initiate (Basic) *Prime* to shield yourself from gravity and create kinetic energy from nothingness. You can move four steps per turn instead of three. The Effect lasts for one minute/conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success extends the Effect's duration by one grade or allows you to affect one other person.

Heal Wounds: Initiate (Basic) *Life* on yourself; Disciple (Intermediate) *Life* on another. You heal one health level of damage. If the damage is aggravated, the Effect is vulgar automatically. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success heals an additional health level of damage.

Hurl Elemental Attacks: Disciple (Intermediate) *Forces* and Initiate (Basic) *Prime*. You conjure fire, lightning or similar forces from nothingness and strike your foe. The attack scores two health levels of damage or inflicts one health level with a special effect (stun, freeze, as appropriate to the element). Each element is a separate rote, and it must be approved individually by the Storyteller so that its special effects are defined. If you use Master (Advanced) *Forces*, you may inflict an extra health level of damage. You must make a challenge of your Mental Traits against the target's Physical Traits to hit. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success allows you to inflict one extra health level of damage or affect one additional target.

Improve Senses: Initiate (Basic) *Life*. You cause your senses to reach double human norms. You can hear whispered conversations or spot tiny writings. Even when someone's concealed supernaturally, you can use a Mental Challenge to note that something's amiss and spot the target. Point to your eye or ear to indicate preternatural sight or hearing. (If you're doing something that requires touch or taste, then your actions should make as much obvious.) This Effect lasts for one minute/conflict. You may cast this Effect on someone else, in which case the duration is one turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success grants the Effect one extra grade of duration.

Influence Emotions: Initiate (Basic) *Mind*. You project emotions that influence someone's reactions. You can cause someone to become friendly or non-hostile, or change his reaction to something. You project one change with this Effect. You must best the target in a Social Challenge. *Grades of Success:* No additional effect.

Multiple Action: Initiate (Basic) *Life* or Disciple (Intermediate) *Time*. You either speed up your natural reflexes, or you literally compress time around yourself. You gain one extra action in your next turn. (This action cannot be a magical action, although existing Effects persist.) *Grades of Success:* If you use *Time* (only), each grade of success grants one additional action or allows you to affect one other subject.

Paralyze Opponent: Initiate (Basic) *Forces* or Disciple (Adept) *Life* or Disciple (Adept) *Matter*. You cause the enemy's motion to redirect so that his body doesn't move, or you paralyze his body, or you just solidify air around him. If you best the subject in a challenge of your Mental versus his Physical Traits, you freeze him in place for a turn. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success extends the Effect's duration by one turn or allows you to affect one additional target.

Psychic Attack: Initiate (Basic) *Mind*. You pierce the subject's mind with psychic force. Doing so inflicts one level of bashing damage if you best the subject in a Mental Challenge. If you use Disciple (Intermediate) *Mind*, this Effect scores two levels of damage; with Master (Advanced) *Mind*, it's three. This Effect doesn't affect normal inanimate objects, but anything with a mind (animal, computer with a created mind, etc.) can be affected. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success inflicts an additional level of damage or affects an additional target.

Sense Lies: Initiate (Basic) *Mind*. You listen to something that someone says while you watch the target in person. You cast this Effect and make a Social Challenge. If successful, you determine whether the last thing that the subject said was a lie, although you do not necessarily know the truth. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success extends the Effect's duration one grade. With one grade of success, the duration is one turn. For one grade of success, you may also cast the Effect on someone else.

Turn Invisible: Disciple (Intermediate) *Mind*. You cause people not to realize that you are there. Cross your arms in front of your chest with your hands flat to indicate that you're invisible. An individual with *Mind* magic or with some level of

enhanced senses may make a Mental Challenge to recognize that you're there. This challenge has a one-Trait difference for each full class of power variance. That is, if you have Intermediate *Mind* but someone challenges with only a Basic power, then you gain a one-Trait bonus to the challenge resolution. You may also create the Effect with Initiate (Basic) *Forces* or Disciple (Intermediate) *Life*. You bend light around yourself so that you can't be seen, or cause your body to become transparent to light. You may still be challenged by anyone with the appropriate heightened perceptions. Anyone using *Correspondence* senses, *Mind* senses or the like realizes that you're there but physically invisible. If you make someone else invisible with *Life*, you must use the Adept (Intermediate) level to do so. This Effect lasts for one minute/ conflict. *Grades of Success:* Each grade of success extends the Effect's duration by one grade or allows you to affect an additional target.

PARADOX

Paradox is not well understood, but it's perhaps one of the most feared (and most common) problems mages suffer. When a mage exerts the force of magic to change the world in spectacular ways, he violates the accepted nature of reality — people can't really turn invisible or change lead into gold! — and a Paradox results. Often, the result ranges from inconvenient side-effects to disaster.

Paradox isn't a sentient force that's out to get mages. Rather, it's the backlash of universal forces against the meddling and manipulation of the Awakened. It doesn't play favorites or hunt mages down. It simply strikes — often in some form of fatigue or injury as the mage's spell goes awry — when a mage tries to rewrite the Tapestry. After all, the Tapestry is so complex that no mortal could ever anticipate its response to manipulations completely.

Paradox most often strikes when a mage performs vulgar magic. The force of the mage striving to overcome static reality causes a Backlash or warping of magic. With some difficult spells, the mage might really screw up and be damned. Paradox can result as the mage fails spectacularly at some enchantment.

PARADOX ACCUMULATION

You garner Paradox when you work a vulgar Effect, or when you fail an Effect miserably.

• If you cast a vulgar Effect, you gain one Paradox Trait for the highest Sphere level invoked. Therefore, casting a vulgar Disciple-level Effect garners three Paradox.

• If Sleepers watched your vulgar Effect, you get an extra Paradox Trait. Lucky you.

• If you cast and fail an Effect that has a base difficulty of twice or more of your Arete Traits, you botch it. A botched coincidental Effect gains one Paradox Trait per highest Sphere level. A botched vulgar Effect, gains that amount plus one more. A botched vulgar Effect with Sleeper witnesses gives a mage two Paradox Traits per level of the highest Sphere plus two more on top of that.

As you accumulate Paradox, it may destroy your Quintessence Traits. If your Paradox + Quintessence total exceeds 20 Traits, then replace Quintessence with Paradox so that the total never exceeds 20.

STAVING OFF DISASTER

Usually, Paradox strikes immediately, causing discomfort or injury to the mage. However, you can delay this accumulation by spending a Trait of Willpower. If you do so, the Paradox holds until the end of the scene or hour, whichever comes first

(mark it on your sheet). All Paradox you have gained in that time adds up. However, you suffer the Backlash of all the accumulated Paradox at the end of that time.

BACKLASH

Usually when you garner Paradox, it snaps and injures you. You may become fatigued as a result of your spell (suffering bashing damage), or you may actually be injured from a wash of uncontrolled forces. In rare cases, this damage might even kill the caster. Make a Simple Test each time you gain Paradox Traits. If you win or tie, it backlashes immediately. If you lose, it stays with your Pattern and simmers… for now.

The damage of a backlash depends on the amount of Paradox you've garnered. Typically, a Backlash fires off all of your accumulated Paradox Traits. So if you're sitting on a lot of Paradox, you could be in trouble. If you've suffered one to 10 Traits of Paradox, take half that many levels (rounded up) of bashing damage (to a limit of Mortally Wounded). If you've suffered 11 to 20 Traits of Paradox, subtract 10, halve (rounded up) and suffer that many levels of lethal damage (again, to a limit of Mortally Wounded). If you've suffered 21 or more Traits of Paradox (what were you *doing?!?*), subtract 20, halve (rounded up) and suffer that many levels of aggravated damage. And this time, it can kill you.

PARADOX SPIRITS

Occasionally, a mage's gross violation of reality draws down some sort of offended force. These beings manifest to punish the mage for hubris, and perhaps to force the mage to learn something from his errors.

PARADOX FLAWS (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if you have a Paradox Judge and enough Narrators to go around, or if you use the card system explained here.

Since magic is a dynamic force, so is Paradox. When a mage pushes and the cosmos pushes back, sometimes it does something weird.

A Paradox Flaw is a hindrance that manifests as a result of the mage's spell. Perhaps the mage's attempt to create flames causes his own clothes to catch fire, or his scrying spell renders him blind temporarily. The Effect can be random, and it is almost always detrimental.

If you have a Paradox Judge, several Narrators and a good player base, you can assign Paradox Flaws at whim. The more Paradox Traits Backlash, the more dangerous and significant the Flaw is. This system requires careful arbitration, and it can get clumsy if lots of magic flies around and requires constant arbitration in many places.

You might also use Paradox cards. Have your Paradox Judge come up with a stack of random detrimental or strange Paradox Effects. Hand out five cards to each player. Then, when a mage suffers a Paradox Backlash, have the player draw a card from someone else's shuffled hand, and give a card in return. The mage suffers the Effect written on the drawn card. Since it's someone else's card, he never knows what'll happen. The Paradox Judge can also wander about with the remainder of the deck, just to make sure that people aren't always in the clear. You'll want to drop in new cards or change some every few sessions, just to keep people on their toes.

If the Paradox Judge feels that it's appropriate, a mage may suffer a visit from a Paradox spirit. Such a spirit typically manifests in a form appropriate to the magic used (such as a hovering flame for *Forces* or an old man for *Time*) and wreaks havoc upon the unfortunate with its powers. Some can materialize physically. Others simply hamper the mage's Effects or create nuisance effects of their own. The most dangerous may actually kill a mage or carry her off to some distant Paradox Realm.

There's no hard-and-fast rule for a Paradox spirit. In general, a Paradox spirit should have Traits equivalent to the mage, scaled up if the Paradox was large. For a Paradox Backlash over 10 Traits, the spirit might have twice the Traits of the mage. For a Paradox Backlash of 20 or more Traits, the spirit will probably have quadruple the mage's power level and be nigh-unstoppable.

Paradox spirits are typically immune to the Sphere that was used to cause the Paradox that drew their attention. That is, if a mage botches a *Forces* spell horribly and a Paradox spirit appears, it's probably immune to *Forces*. Furthermore, a Paradox spirit cannot be summoned, commanded or banished with *Spirit* magic.

QUIET

Since mages recognize the mutable vision of reality, it's possible for them to become lost in a world of their own creation. Sometimes it's difficult to separate truth from fancy or magic from the mundane. In severe cases when a mage's senses are overcome, she withdraws from reality and becomes lost in her own magical world. Although some might mistake this state for insanity, mages recognize it as the victim's mind being overcome with the grandeur of the Tapestry and the power of possibility. Such a state is called Quiet.

A mage in Quiet sees or hears things that aren't there, becomes obsessed or withdrawn or otherwise suffers a shift in personality. Quiets don't strike with any

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PARADOX REALMS (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if you have preparation time to set up extra locales outside the normal game venue, and you have enough Narrators to spare one for a player who winds up in a Paradox Realm.

When a mage moves titanic forces about and garners subsequently large Paradox, it's possible that the willworker may be shunted into a different dimension — a realm with characteristics similar to the magics used. Channeling a great thunderstorm, for instance, may tear the fabric of reality badly enough to catapult a mage into a realm of storms and lightning.

As with Paradox spirits, the use of Paradox Realms depends upon the whims of the Paradox Judge. You should set up some Paradox Realms in advance. Have a room set aside and a Narrator who can run the mage in the strange location. Generally, the mage discovers that the realm has strange rules of magic. Most forms of magic, aside from the Sphere used, won't work there. Often the realm itself seems like a puzzle. The mage might have to convert thunder and lightning into silence and darkness, for instance, to destroy a realm of storms, or he might have to untwist space in a bizarre *Correspondence* Paradox Realm. Once the mage manages to figure out this puzzle and solve it, he returns to the material world (usually where he left).

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predictable regularity. Rather, they tend to result from extremely bad Paradox Backlashes or magical trauma. It's up to a Storyteller to determine when a mage falls into Quiet. Generally, Quiet causes some roleplaying difficulties, since the character falls into a state of heightened emotional disturbance in keeping with the mage's individual Resonance Traits. In some cases, a mage winds up in a mindscape, an internal vision that pits the mage against his fears or delusions. For such an event, the Storyteller and Avatar Guide should work together to craft an appropriate side-game in advance.

A mage struck into Quiet suffers problems based on the amount of Paradox energy that backlashed and put him there. The type of Quiet depends upon the mage's highest Resonance Trait. High Dynamism leads to Madness, high Stasis leads to excessive Clarity, and high Entropy leads to Jhor. With one to three Paradox Traits, the mage typically suffers from a minor hindrance or Negative Trait. As the Paradox Backlash size increases, so too does the severity of the problem. All of the problems are cumulative as well. As long as the mage remains in Quiet, he suffers from a severe set of disorders.

With one to three Paradox Traits in the Quiet, the mage suffers from doubled Negative Traits due to Resonance. Therefore, for instance, the mage's Negative Trait of *Clumsy* that comes from his Dynamic Resonance would become *Clumsy* x2.

With four to six Paradox Traits in the Quiet, the mage suffers from a derangement. The mage tends to see things that aren't there, and he has trouble responding to the surroundings. With too much Dynamic Resonance, this derangement comes as hallucinations. With too much Stasis, it is a compulsion. With too much Entropy, it manifests as intense paranoia. This derangement is primarily a roleplaying hindrance. Players who ignore it should be penalized accordingly by losing their Experience Trait for the session.

With seven to 10 Paradox Traits in the Quiet, the mage spawns random Hobgoblins.

With 11 or more Paradox Traits in the Quiet, the mage enters a mindscape.

COPING WITH QUIET

By focusing and concentrating intently, a mage can attempt to break through Quiet-induced problems. He has no guarantee of success, but the mage might be able to bring his attention back to the real world with effort.

Spend a Willpower Trait and win or tie a Simple Test. If you succeed, you discharge one Trait of the Paradox, and you manage to avoid the effects of the Quiet for the rest of the scene or hour, whichever comes first. If this test reduces the severity of your Quiet, then that reduction takes effect immediately. You may be able to fight down a Quiet-induced derangement, for instance. You can make this test only once per scene.

Barring the successful use of Willpower, a Quiet reduces in severity by one Trait every session. Yes, a mage could be in Quiet for a long time if he does not fight it off.

HOBGOBLINS

Severe Quiets sometimes make raw, creative forces seep from the mage's subconscious. As his mind wanders and sees things that aren't there, the mage's power gives form to these hallucinations. Or are they real things that simply chose this time to appear? Whatever the case, the hobgoblins are very real manifestations of the mage's delusions.

A mage typically manifests one hobgoblin for each Trait of Paradox that went into the Quiet above six. With seven Paradox Traits blown into a Quiet, the mage suffers one Hobgoblin. With eight Traits, he suffers two, and so on. Hobgoblins should be moderated by an Avatar Guide or Paradox Judge so that they reflect the mage's inner turmoil and magical difficulties.

Hobgoblins may take the forms of people, creatures or items. Most often, they have a form appropriate to the Quiet in question. For an episode of Madness, they could literally be little goblins or nonsensical furniture. With Clarity, they manifest as machine-voices or freakish technological aberrations. With Jhor, hobgoblins could be small demons, imps or perhaps weapons or implements of torture.

A hobgoblin is very real, and it doesn't suffer from Paradox or Unbelief. Rather, it's spawned from the mage's own magical powers. Unless a hobgoblin is patently paranormal, it resembles a normal thing in all ways. No simple means exists with which to tell a hobgoblin from reality, and a mage already suffering from hallucinations has a very tough time of it. Hobgoblins tend to stick around and haunt the mage for an entire game session, although they can be killed or broken before then.

Although no simple Traits exist for a hobgoblin, run with a few simple animals or items. You don't need to get wild, and hobgoblins don't often manifest as *HUGE KILLER BEASTIES!* More likely, a hobgoblin will run around and vex the mage or cause social problems, and perhaps play to some of the mage's personal fears.

If a mage manages to snap out of his Quiet, hobgoblins or their remnants vanish like melting snow.

MINDSCAPES

In very severe Quiets, a mage's consciousness retreats into the shell of his mind to battle with Paradox and the Avatar. The mage runs through a gauntlet of symbolism and surreality in an attempt to come to grips with his state, best his Resonance and escape to sanity once more.

While in a mindscape, a mage is catatonic. With Disciple level *Mind* magic, others can enter the mindscape to help or hinder the trapped mage. By spending a Willpower Trait and winning or tying a Simple Test, the mage can communicate one spoken sentence into the physical world. Otherwise, the mage is on his own.

Craft a mindscape like you would a Seeking. Grab some Narrators and the Avatar Guide, then throw a few trials or puzzles at the mage. The character must puzzle through the bizarre scenery to reach the waking world once more. Indeed, the mage might not even realize immediately that he's in a mindscape.

If a mage or visitor is knocked unconscious or killed in a mindscape, the hapless victim lapses into a coma and awakens only at the Storyteller's discretion.

Fortunately, when a mage fights through a mindscape, he discharges all of his accumulated Paradox Traits in the process.

EFFECT AND FOCUS

Although a mage creates magic through will, it's the belief in a focus that shapes such magic. The mage lets a focus determine her spell and give it shape. In turn, she believes that the focus channels her will to empower the magic. Although a focus isn't really necessary to work magic, most mages only understand their magics in terms of the foci that they use — at least until they master their magic and become enlightened enough to recognize the power of will over reality.

When you shape an Effect, your mage generally needs to use a focus. Doing so takes the form of chanting, brandishing an object of power, mixing a substance and applying it, manipulating energy through song and dance or whatever else the mage believes is necessary to work magic. In game terms, you'll use various trappings and Abilities to work your spells.

Each Tradition description lists various foci that are appropriate. A mage uses these foci to direct magic. For instance, a Hermetic mage may chant in Enochian, inscribe a complex geometric form or call upon angelic intervention in order to conjure flames. A Verbena could do the same with a paean to ancient gods, an offering of blood to the elements or howling a song that sparks fiery energies. A Virtual Adept might use a computer to manipulate local electrical fields or generate a laser for the same effect.

You can use any focus from your Tradition to shape an Effect. You need to narrate the use of that focus, explaining what you're doing and how it causes the magic to happen. You'll probably want to brush up on a little theory just to make it convincing. Read some books on computer science if you're playing a Virtual Adept, check out some philosophy and religion for Celestial Choristers and so on. Of course, you should never actually act out a dangerous behavior or brandish something like a weapon. Merely describe what you are doing in such a case. However, if you can roleplay the use of a focus (by actually singing, for instance, or making complex gestures with an item card), then you should do so as long as you won't draw negative attention from people who aren't playing. (No sense convincing onlookers that you're engaged in some sort of real-world occult conspiracy.)

Note also that using a focus isn't just a roleplaying tool or a hindrance. It can really boost your capabilities with magic. See "Abilities Enhancing Magic," on p. 135.

UNIQUE AND SPECIALTY FOCI
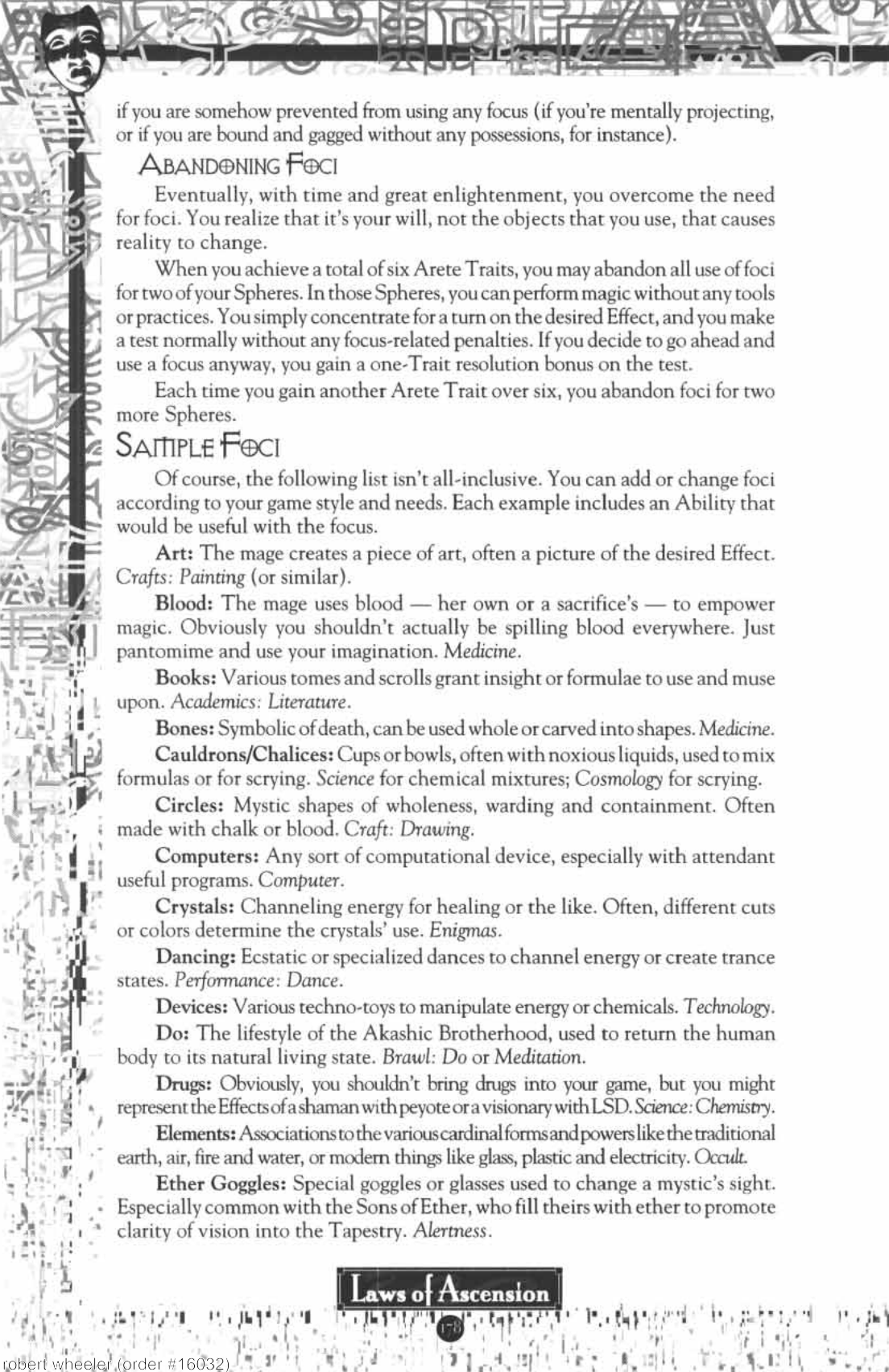
You have a specialty focus for each Sphere, a focus with which you're particularly good. If you can find a way to work that focus into the magic, then you get a one-Trait bonus on your Arete Trait total for the resolution of such challenges. For instance, if your Hermetic mage uses Enochian chants to summon *Forces* magic, then you get a one-Trait bonus any time you chant when casting a *Forces* spell. You could still inscribe a sigil with your staff (say, if you were rendered mute), but you wouldn't get the bonus, simply because your mage isn't as good with that combination of Sphere and focus.

In some cases, you'll have a unique focus. You can decide, for instance, that you don't just perform your Akashic *Spirit* magic with your sword, but specifically with the Chinese broadsword you inherited from your grandfather. When using a unique focus, you gain a one-Trait additional bonus on resolving your magical casting. However, if you ever lose the focus, you're in trouble. You can't use that Sphere at all without the unique focus unless you manage to either surpass it, gain enough Arete to no longer need it or gain a new focus to replace it (at a cost of one Experience Trait per level in the Sphere).

SURPASSING A FOCUS

You can perform magic without a focus, but it's very difficult to do so. Your mage concentrates on the desired Effect, then channels his will with all of his might. If he's lucky, he may succeed in performing magic without the use of the focus.

You must spend a Willpower Trait immediately. When you do, you make your usual magical test, but you do so at a three-Trait difficulty penalty for Arete purposes, so you're much more likely to fail. However, this system allows you to perform magic

if you are somehow prevented from using any focus (if you're mentally projecting, or if you are bound and gagged without any possessions, for instance).

ABANDONING FOCI

Eventually, with time and great enlightenment, you overcome the need for foci. You realize that it's your will, not the objects that you use, that causes reality to change.

When you achieve a total of six Arete Traits, you may abandon all use of foci for two of your Spheres. In those Spheres, you can perform magic without any tools or practices. You simply concentrate for a turn on the desired Effect, and you make a test normally without any focus-related penalties. If you decide to go ahead and use a focus anyway, you gain a one-Trait resolution bonus on the test.

Each time you gain another Arete Trait over six, you abandon foci for two more Spheres.

SAMPLE FOCI

Of course, the following list isn't all-inclusive. You can add or change foci according to your game style and needs. Each example includes an Ability that would be useful with the focus.

Art: The mage creates a piece of art, often a picture of the desired Effect. *Crafts: Painting* (or similar).

Blood: The mage uses blood — her own or a sacrifice's — to empower magic. Obviously you shouldn't actually be spilling blood everywhere. Just pantomime and use your imagination. *Medicine.*

Books: Various tomes and scrolls grant insight or formulae to use and muse upon. *Academics: Literature.*

Bones: Symbolic of death, can be used whole or carved into shapes. *Medicine.*

Cauldrons/Chalices: Cups or bowls, often with noxious liquids, used to mix formulas or for scrying. *Science* for chemical mixtures; *Cosmology* for scrying.

Circles: Mystic shapes of wholeness, warding and containment. Often made with chalk or blood. *Craft: Drawing.*

Computers: Any sort of computational device, especially with attendant useful programs. *Computer.*

Crystals: Channeling energy for healing or the like. Often, different cuts or colors determine the crystals' use. *Enigmas.*

Dancing: Ecstatic or specialized dances to channel energy or create trance states. *Performance: Dance.*

Devices: Various techno-toys to manipulate energy or chemicals. *Technology.*

Do: The lifestyle of the Akashic Brotherhood, used to return the human body to its natural living state. *Brawl: Do* or *Meditation.*

Drugs: Obviously, you shouldn't bring drugs into your game, but you might represent the Effects of a shaman with peyote or a visionary with LSD. *Science: Chemistry.*

Elements: Associations to the various cardinal forms and powers like the traditional earth, air, fire and water, or modern things like glass, plastic and electricity. *Occult.*

Ether Goggles: Special goggles or glasses used to change a mystic's sight. Especially common with the Sons of Ether, who fill theirs with ether to promote clarity of vision into the Tapestry. *Alertness.*

Feather: Representative of flight, freedom and the life of beasts of the air. Often used in conjunction with spirits, as well. *Animal Ken.*

Fire: A small flame symbolic of destruction or creation, light or inspiration. *Occult.*

Formula: A mathematical equation or scientific formula that "proves" the mage's hypothesis. *Science.*

Herbs: Mixtures of plants, seeds, roots and fruits that grant properties when sprinkled, smoked, eaten or mixed in a poultice or potion. *Medicine.*

Holy Symbol: A representation of higher power, and the cosmic forces that the mage invokes. *Cosmology.*

Incense: Used for smoke, clouding of vision, scent or altering consciousness to see reality as the mage desires instead of as it is. *Meditation.*

Language: The power of symbols and sounds that are given special meaning. *Linguistics.*

Music: For trance, for inspiration or artistic work, either by listening to or creating music. *Performance* for an appropriate musical instrument or talent.

Network: A group of computers set up to share information and processing power. A way of communicating and sharing knowledge. *Computer.*

Ordeal: A painful task that the mage must accomplish, like self-inflicted injury, branding or torture. *Survival.*

Pure Water: To wash away iniquity or to refresh the mage's mind. *Meditation.*

Purification: Part of a ritual to purify the mage's spirit, mind and body for the working of miracles. *Etiquette.*

Ritual Sacrifice: The destruction or slaying of something of value in order to gain favor or appease spirits. *Occult.*

Runes: Mystical sigils carved on a surface to attract or ward against certain powers. *Occult.*

Scientific Meters and Probes: Little gadgets that measure various scientific qualities. *Science.*

Sex: We hope you're not doing this in live-action games, especially in public…. Used to make a tie between people or to heighten awareness. *Athletics.*

Song: The message of a song may carry magic, or the sound of the music or even its chorus with others. *Expression.*

Tarot Cards and Ouija Boards: Ubiquitous tools of modern occultists, often used for divination and spirit workings. *Occult.*

Treatments: Body piercings, oils, moxa burning, special baths… stuff that seeps magic into the body. *Medicine.*

Toys: Return to childhood, or symbols that represent more advanced tools. *Expression.*

Vehicles: Specialized automobiles or aircraft, even spaceships, with build-in enhancements. *Drive.*

Wands: Pointing tools, standards for focusing energy and (if some pundits are to be believed) symbols of phallic power. *Occult.*

Weapon: A sword, ritual knife or similar device, often used in battle or bloodletting but also as a symbol of authority. *Melee* for hand weapons, *Athletics* for thrown weapons, *Firearms* for guns.

The Spheres

Gathered in Florence's car, the group of willworkers debated their next course of action. The very nature of reality had been altered all over the city because the area's Quintessence had been contaminated somehow. The impossible, the mythical and the mundane had all begun to happen simultaneously, in ways that few could understand. Even though they were now aware of the problem, the willworkers themselves could hardly quantify it.

"We need to put things back in balance," David said. "While we may want a reality greater than the static, what's going on right now is too dangerous. It's too much chaos."

"Yeah, and it's spreading," Tiernan said. "What's next? Griffins snatching people up and eating them in the streets? No thanks."

Florence shushed them with a wave of her hand. "The world isn't supposed to work under this sort of stress, anyway. The friction between these divergent realities is rubbing holes in the very Tapestry of creation itself. We need to separate the divergent strands before they start to unravel one another."

"What about weaving them together instead?" Tiernan asked with a sudden, hungry look. "They're not inherently destructive; they're just abrasive. If something can rub a hole in Creation, the kind of energy it would take must be incredible."

"And uncontrollable," David said with a disgusted look.

"Maybe." Tiernan muttered.

"We'll find out soon enough," Florence said, bringing the car to a stop. "The source of the contamination is in there."

At first, the place seemed harmless enough. It was an old office building near the heart of downtown that had been bought out by some research firm. To Florence's sensors, though, the area positively radiated trouble. Lights fluctuated wildly on one of her devices, and another one let out a low, constant hum in intensity as the car got closer.

"Uh... what exactly does that box read?" Tiernan asked, indicating the noisy device. Before their eyes, the building in front of them was covered in thick vines that became crystalline webs. A dark, ophidian shape launched itself from an aerie on the roof and disappeared. An instant later, the building looked perfectly normal again.

"Uncontrolled Quintessential energy," Florence said as they got out of the car. "A warping and twisting of underlying natural laws. We need to hurry and get the rules back in place."

David nodded and jogged to the door of the structure. Finding it locked, he looked once over his shoulder, then stood perfectly still and took several deep breaths. He moved his right hand slowly through a series of circles, then exhaled sharply and drove his hand into the door next to the jamb. The lock bolt snapped in half, and the door swung open.

"We'd best take care of this before someone else decides to," he added, looking at his unmarked knuckles. The three of them went inside.

CHAPTER FIVE: RULES, SYSTEMS AND DRAMA

Rules are an integral part of any game. They define what characters can and cannot do. Yet rules are necessary only to govern the outcome of a confrontation when one does occur. Still, the primary focus of this game is to tell a good story, and the rules facilitate that focus. Rules just give you a framework to make sure that everyone is treated fairly. They're not ironclad dogma, they're just ideas to help you run a smoother, more entertaining game.

CHALLENGES
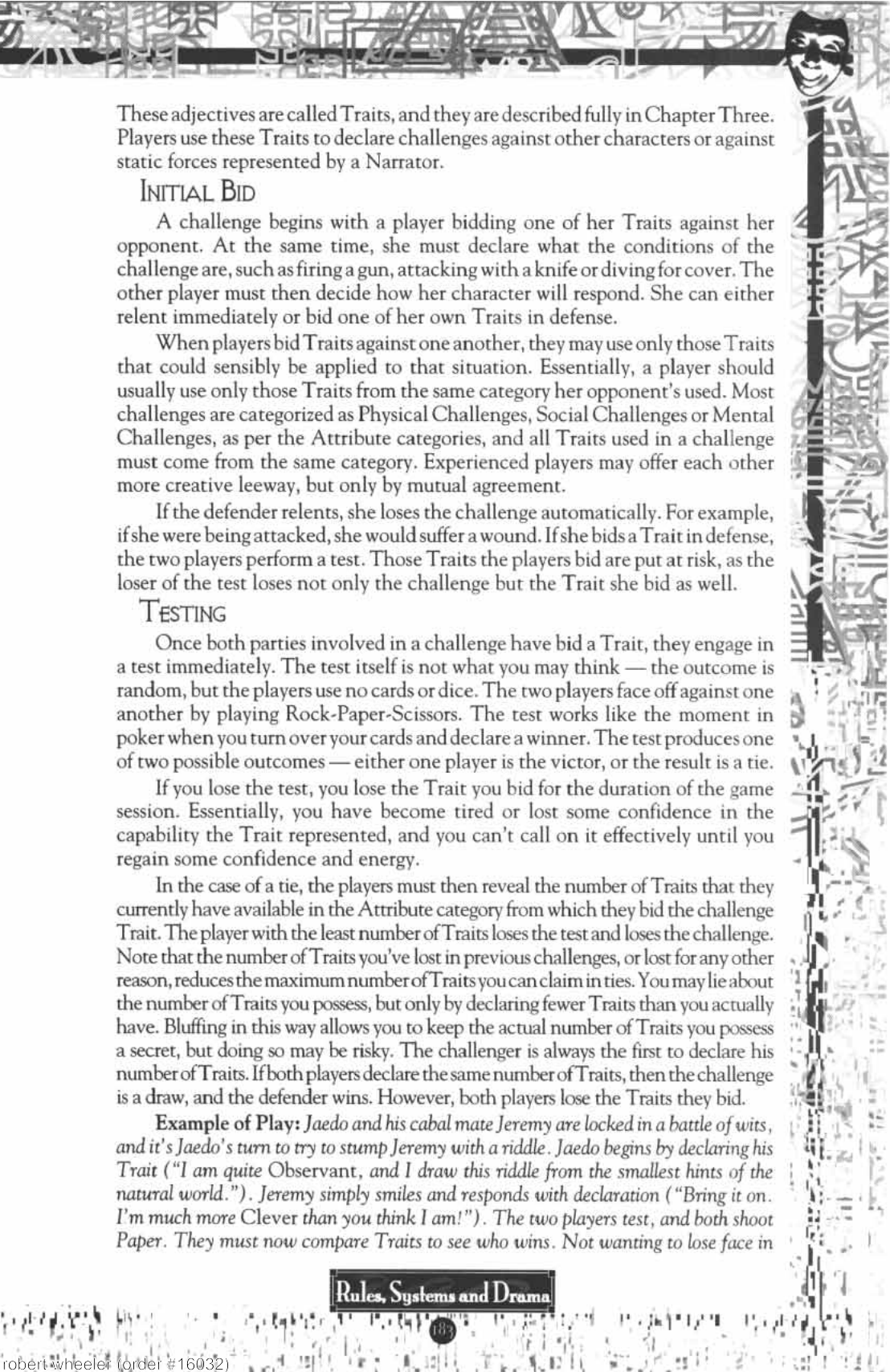
From time to time, two or more players will engage in a conflict that cannot be resolved through roleplaying alone. This sort of face-off is called a challenge, and it requires a simple system of conflict resolution. The system detailed in this chapter allows for the resolution of such conflicts efficiently and quickly. In most cases, a Narrator does not even need to be present when a challenge is played.

Roleplaying does not necessarily have to end when a challenge begins. In fact, roleplaying becomes more important than ever if players intend to enjoy a confrontation and avoid out-of-game disputes. Experienced players can integrate a challenge into their roleplaying so seamlessly that outsiders don't even know that anything unusual is going on. At the players' option, they can use special hand signals to indicate when certain Traits and powers are being employed.

In order for this system to work, players need to work together. They have to educate each other on the rules and agree on what Traits can be used in a challenge. Compromise and cooperation are the bywords of this game. Arguments over whether or not a particular Trait is appropriate to bid wreck both the momentum and the mood of the game.

USING TRAITS

Before you can begin to learn how challenges work, you must first understand what defines a character's capabilities. Each character is created with a number of adjectives that describe and define that person as an individual.

These adjectives are called Traits, and they are described fully in Chapter Three. Players use these Traits to declare challenges against other characters or against static forces represented by a Narrator.

INITIAL BID

A challenge begins with a player bidding one of her Traits against her opponent. At the same time, she must declare what the conditions of the challenge are, such as firing a gun, attacking with a knife or diving for cover. The other player must then decide how her character will respond. She can either relent immediately or bid one of her own Traits in defense.

When players bid Traits against one another, they may use only those Traits that could sensibly be applied to that situation. Essentially, a player should usually use only those Traits from the same category her opponent's used. Most challenges are categorized as Physical Challenges, Social Challenges or Mental Challenges, as per the Attribute categories, and all Traits used in a challenge must come from the same category. Experienced players may offer each other more creative leeway, but only by mutual agreement.

If the defender relents, she loses the challenge automatically. For example, if she were being attacked, she would suffer a wound. If she bids a Trait in defense, the two players perform a test. Those Traits the players bid are put at risk, as the loser of the test loses not only the challenge but the Trait she bid as well.

TESTING

Once both parties involved in a challenge have bid a Trait, they engage in a test immediately. The test itself is not what you may think — the outcome is random, but the players use no cards or dice. The two players face off against one another by playing Rock-Paper-Scissors. The test works like the moment in poker when you turn over your cards and declare a winner. The test produces one of two possible outcomes — either one player is the victor, or the result is a tie.

If you lose the test, you lose the Trait you bid for the duration of the game session. Essentially, you have become tired or lost some confidence in the capability the Trait represented, and you can't call on it effectively until you regain some confidence and energy.

In the case of a tie, the players must then reveal the number of Traits that they currently have available in the Attribute category from which they bid the challenge Trait. The player with the least number of Traits loses the test and loses the challenge. Note that the number of Traits you've lost in previous challenges, or lost for any other reason, reduces the maximum number of Traits you can claim in ties. You may lie about the number of Traits you possess, but only by declaring fewer Traits than you actually have. Bluffing in this way allows you to keep the actual number of Traits you possess a secret, but doing so may be risky. The challenger is always the first to declare his number of Traits. If both players declare the same number of Traits, then the challenge is a draw, and the defender wins. However, both players lose the Traits they bid.

Example of Play: *Jaedo and his cabal mate Jeremy are locked in a battle of wits, and it's Jaedo's turn to try to stump Jeremy with a riddle. Jaedo begins by declaring his Trait ("I am quite Observant, and I draw this riddle from the smallest hints of the natural world."). Jeremy simply smiles and responds with declaration ("Bring it on. I'm much more Clever than you think I am!"). The two players test, and both shoot Paper. They must now compare Traits to see who wins. Not wanting to lose face in*

this contest, Jaedo declares all eight Mental Traits that he has, and it pays off. Jeremy's total is currently only seven. Triumphant, the Akashic allows himself a small inner smile as he watches the Cultist struggle with his arcane riddle.

ROCK-PAPER-SCISSORS

What we mean by Rock-Paper-Scissors is the following: You and another person face off and show one of three hand gestures on the count of three. "Rock" is a basic fist. "Paper" is just a flat hand. "Scissors" is a fist with your index and middle finger sticking out. You then compare the two gestures the players showed to determine the winner. Rock crushes Scissors. Scissors cut Paper. Paper covers Rock. Showing identical gestures is a tie. Certain advanced powers allow some characters to use gestures other than Rock, Paper and Scissors. Before players can use those special gestures in a test, however, they must explain what they are and how they are used.

ADJUDICATION

If you are uncertain about the rules or the conditions of a challenge, you need to find a Narrator to make a judgment. However, you should always try to remain in character while you look for one. If you can, work problems out with other players involved in the challenge, so as to avoid any interruption in the progress of the story. If you do not know the correct application of a certain rule, it could be better to wing it rather than interrupt the flow of the game.

It should be noted that a challenger who fails on a Social or Mental Challenge must wait at least five out-of-game minutes before repeating the failed challenge. (Time spent arguing over the results of the previous challenge does not count toward those five minutes. You can't hold up the game by protesting a ruling with a Narrator for four minutes and 58 seconds, then drop your argument and say, "Oh look, time's up.") This rule applies to supernatural powers that use Mental or Social Challenges, unless they specify otherwise. For instance, a character cannot continue attempting one *Mind* rote after another on a single victim until he finally succeeds. This stricture does not include trials that a character fails but then redeems through retests or overbids. Retests and overbids occur before the five-minute time limit starts.

COMPLICATIONS

A challenge can become more complicated in a number of ways. The preceding basic rules are enough to resolve most disputes, but the following rules add a few bells and whistles.

NEGATIVE TRAITS

Many characters have Negative Traits that an opponent can use against them. During the initial bid of any challenge, after each player has bid one Trait, a player can call out a Negative Trait that he believes his opponent possesses. If the player does indeed possess that Negative Trait, he must bid an additional Trait in order to continue the challenge (although the player who guessed the Negative Trait does not have to increase his own bid). If a player does not possess the Negative Trait his opponent calls out, his opponent must risk an additional Trait. You may call out as many Negative Traits as you wish during the initial bid phase of a challenge, as long as you can pay the price for being wrong. You should also have some valid, in-game reason to list an opponent's Negative Traits in the first place. It is very cheap to rattle off a long list of possible Negative Traits randomly just to see which guesses stick.

If you figure out more of your opponent's Negative Traits in a challenge than he has regular Traits to cover them, then he loses the challenge automatically. The same works in reverse, however, if you do not have additional Traits remaining to match incorrect Negative Trait guesses.

Example of Play: *Blink is attempting to convince Leigh, a wary Verbena Initiate, to join her on a potentially dangerous reconnaissance mission. The clever Hollower begins by appealing to some common ties ("I've been nothing but Friendly to you so far, so why don't you return the favor this once?"). Leigh still isn't quite ready to go along yet ("I'm too Commanding to be given orders so easily."). Needing some extra leverage, Blink ups the ante by suggesting that Leigh has the Negative Trait Callous ("What, are you so Callous that you'll ignore a genuine call for help like this?"). If Leigh did indeed possess that Negative Trait, she would have to risk an additional Social Trait to continue the challenge. However, luck isn't on Blink's side, and Leigh doesn't have that Negative Trait. Having underestimated her ally's capabilities, Blink will now have to add a Trait to her bid to continue the challenge.*

It can be risky to bid Negative Traits, but if you're sure about what you're doing, you can raise the stakes for your opponent considerably. You can even raise them to the point where your opponent relents rather than risking additional Traits.

⊕VERBIDDING

Overbidding is the system by which powerful characters may prevail in a challenge, even if they lose the initial test. Justin the Master with 12 Mental Traits should be able to crush Sam the Initiate who has only three. This system is designed to make that possible.

Once a test has been made, the loser has the option of calling for an overbid. In order to call an overbid, you must risk a new Trait, though, since the original one has already been lost. At this point, the two players must reveal the number of applicable Traits they possess in the appropriate Attribute category, starting with the player who called for the overbid. If that player has double the number of Traits as his opponent in that category, he may attempt another test. (The person who won the original challenge and is now being overbid against does not have to risk another Trait.) As in a tie, either player may state a number of Traits less than the actual number he has in order to keep his true power secret. Overbidding can be dangerous, though, unless you are confident in your estimation of your opponent's abilities.

Example of Play: *Stefan DeChase is trying to fast-talk Randall, a reluctant ally, into following the course of action he's suggesting. The unlikely Chorister begins with a classic rapid-fire barrage ("My words are so fast and Beguiling you have no choice but let me go."). However, Randall isn't buying into it ("I'm too Dignified to let a few quick phrases sway me like that"). They test, and Stefan loses. However, reckoning he has more social aptitude than his scholarly friend, Stefan declares an overbid ("I'm so Witty, you don't know what hit you!"). He then announces all 10 of his Social Traits. Randall admits that he has only four, so they test again. Stefan wins this time, and he wins the overall challenge, even though he still loses the original Trait he bid. Now a slightly befuddled Randall is beginning to see the wisdom of following his friend's words after all.*

STATIC CHALLENGES

Sometimes, you have to undergo challenges against a Narrator rather than against another player. For example, a scholar may use a Static Mental Challenge with the *Occult* Ability to dig up an obscure bit of lore in a vast library. In

such circumstances, you bid a Trait that would be appropriate to the challenge, then perform a test against the Narrator. Before the test, the Narrator decides on the difficulty of the task that you are attempting. This number determines how many Traits you are bidding against in the event of a tie. The test proceeds exactly as it would if you were testing against another character. Of course, you may attempt to overbid in a Static Challenge, but beware, because the Narrator can overbid as well. The number of Traits attached to the challenge should represent the difficulty and danger inherent in the challenge.

Sometimes Narrators may leave notes on objects, such as books, doors or magical items that indicate the type of challenges that must be won to achieve a specific effect with that object (such as deciphering a tome or hot-wiring a car).

SIMPLE TESTS

Simple Tests determine whether you can do something successfully when you face no real opposition. Simple Tests are often used when casting rotes or other Effects. Most Simple Tests do not require you to risk or bid Traits, although some may.

When a Simple Test is called for, you simply play Rock-Paper-Scissors against a Narrator. In most cases, the player succeeds if he wins or ties. In some cases, though, it may be necessary for the player to win in order to receive any benefit from the challenge.

RETESTS

Certain Traits allow a character to retest a challenge he has failed. A retest allows a character to ignore the results of the first test and test again for a new result. Players usually gain retests through Abilities, but other Traits may also provide them as well. Generally, expending one level of an appropriate Ability allows for one retest.

Multiple retests are possible on a single challenge, but each retest must come from a different source. A character who is trying to hit someone with a sword may retest his Physical Challenge once using a level of *Melee*. However, he may not gain multiple retests with the *Melee* Ability on the same challenge, even if he has multiple levels on the Ability.

A character who is capable of matching the conditions of the retest may cancel an opponent's retest. If a player uses *Brawl* to retest a failed Physical Challenge to punch his foe, his foe may expend a level of *Dodge* to block the retest and force the attacker to accept the results of the original test.

Example of Play: *Jean Gris is attempting to subdue Brother Grizzly, a Dreamspeaker ally who is possessed by a terrifying spirit. Jean first tries to gain some time ("I knock your legs out from under you with a* Dexterous *sweep"). In response, the spirit riding the other mage causes him to simply strike out ("I crush your leg with a* Brutal *stomp"). They test, and Jean loses. However, the Euthanatos is an accomplished fighter, so he calls for a retest ("I am too skilled at* Brawl *to lose so easily!"). They test again, and Jean wins. Brother Grizzly topples to the ground, buying the Euthanatos a few extra seconds to decide on a new tactic.*

Later on, Jean Gris confronts his mentor Harlequin about the elder mage's involvement in a series of suspicious deaths. Words come to blows before long, and Jean attacks with a dagger ("With a strike as Quick *as lightning, I cut you with my knife!"). Harlequin chooses to simply get out of the way ("With one* Lithe *motion I sidestep your clumsy attack"). They test, and Jean loses. He attempts to retest immediately ("All these years of* Melee *training have given me more skill than that!"). However,*

CHALLENGE SPEEDS (OPTIONAL RULE)

This rule works only if you trust your players not to misuse the information revealed from Trait totals for speed in the subsequent challenges of each turn.

Since multiple challenges can occur simultaneously during any given fight, the Narrator occasionally needs some means of determining who acts first and who acts last. Each person involved in a given turn should check the current number of Traits he has that are appropriate to the action he wishes to attempt. Whoever has the highest number of appropriate Traits gets to go first. A character punching someone would count his Physical Traits, while a character casting a spell would probably count her Mental Traits. If an action does not require any sort of Trait challenge, it occurs last in the turn. As with overbidding, you may declare fewer Traits than you possess if you wish. Characters with equal numbers of Traits perform their actions simultaneously, although the Narrator may simply choose one to act first for resolution purposes.

Sometimes a character with a high number of Traits will attack a character with fewer Traits, who will then decide to strike back. In this case, the character with fewer Traits resolves his action in the same test as the faster character, but he loses the ability to take any other aggressive action for the turn in doing so.

This rule can occasionally cause as much confusion as it's trying to solve, and the Narrator may choose to apply it only when there is a debate or other critical need to establish who's going first.

Example of Play: *Davis is locked in battle with Vandermere, a cunning sorcerer. Since he's losing the fight, Vandermere decides to attempt to flee the scene. He declares that he's using his action to activate a magical wand and fly away. That same turn, however, Davis' ally, Kelli, announces that she's throwing her enchanted knives at Vandermere. Davis has three Mental Traits and Vandermere has four Mental Traits left, but Kelli has seven Physical Traits.*

Kelli tests first, and she succeeds, inflicting a wound on the evil wizard. Enraged at such insolence, Vandermere counterattacks with a hidden weapon of his own. He tests against Kelli and loses. Now, not only has he failed to injure his foe, but counterattacking has taken up his action for the turn as well. He'll have to wait until next turn if he wants to try to escape again. What's more, Davis gets to take his action at last, and the Orphan declares that he's aiming both of his Desert Eagles at the rogue sorcerer….

Harlequin blocks the retest with Dodge ("Ha! You're still too slow. I can Dodge strikes like that in my sleep!"). Since Harlequin blocked the retest, the results of the original test stand. So far, Jean has lost one Quick Attribute Trait and one Melee Trait, whereas Harlequin has used only one Dodge Trait. Jean is now off-balance and an easy target for his teacher's counterattack.

RELENTING

A player may choose to acquiesce and admit defeat in a challenge at any time before he performs the actual test. Characters who relent lose the challenge automatically, but they do not lose any Traits, even if they bid one before relenting. They also help the game flow along more smoothly than extended Rock-Paper-Scissors matches do. Thank them for being so conscientious.

Bonus Traits

Certain weapons and special powers grant a character bonus Traits during a challenge. You may add these extra Traits to a character's total when resolving a tie or overbid involving that weapon or special Ability.

Order of Challenges

Typically, all challenges activate simultaneously in a turn. If you absolutely must have an order of precedence, have a Narrator pick one character at random and then proceed clockwise around the group, arbitrating each successive challenge.

The Mob Scene

It's a fact of life that a large group of characters will decide to mix it up sooner or later. Group challenges can seem intimidating even to experienced Narrators and Storytellers. These rules are designed to streamline the resolution process, rather than letting the situation devolve into endless matches of Rock-Paper-Scissors.

First of all, find out who is challenging whom. The easiest way to do so is to count to three and have everyone point to the person they wish to target that turn. If no one is being challenged by more than one person, then let the challenges proceed normally.

If several characters challenge one target, or one character tries to challenge multiple opponents at once, resolve it in the following manner. First deal with groups in the order of largest to smallest, just for ease of play. Each attacker must bid an appropriate Trait as normal for the challenge. Logistics put a limit of up to five characters attacking another character at once.

Next, the lone character must bid enough Traits to counter every opponent in the group. If he does not have enough Traits, he must relent to those opponents whose bids he cannot meet. (He may choose which opponents he relents to, though.) Resolve those relented challenges first, because the defender may succumb before the rest of the group can act.

After the bidding and relenting phase, the defender and his attackers engage in one simultaneous test. The defender compares his sign to each of the attacker's signs and applies the appropriate results. If the defending character throws Scissors and his four attackers throw Rock, Scissors, Paper and Paper, the defender loses to the first challenger, ties with the second (which he will resolve like any other tie) and beats the last two. The defenders and attackers lose any Traits they have bid in a lost test. If the defender in the previous example had bid one Trait against every attacker, he would have lost one Trait to the first attacker, and an additional Trait if he lost the tie as well.

Once the tests have been made, you resolve them in the standard order of actions and initiative. However, unless the defender has a special power that allows him to take multiple actions, he may attempt to injure only one of his attackers, and it must be one who lost a challenge against him. If none of the attackers lose, the defender simply suffers the results of their actions. It is possible for a defender to lose Traits to the first attackers and then lose a tie to an attacker later in the same mob challenge because of those Traits he lost.

When the defender in a mob challenge uses Abilities or other powers to gain retests, treat each attacker's challenge as a separate test. Therefore, a defender would need to spend five *Melee* Traits in order to retest against five attackers in one melee combat challenge.

TIME

Time in **Mind's Eye Theatre** works as it does in real life. It moves forward inexorably. For the most part, every action plays out in real time, and players are expected to stay in character unless they have a rules question.

A player should never drop character when interacting with other players. Doing so ruins the atmosphere for everyone involved. Players may talk through challenges, but a character is always considered to be active in the game. If a player needs to take a break, he should inform a Narrator. That player should not interact with any of the other players while he is out of character.

The only other exception to this in-character rule is when a Narrator calls for a timeout. This call may be necessary to resolve a dispute or change the scene if the story calls for it. When a Narrator calls "Timeout!", all players within hearing distance must stop whatever they are doing until the Narrator calls out, "Resume" or "Game on!" Timeouts should be kept to a minimum, though, since they interrupt the flow of the story.

CHRONICLES, STORIES, SESSIONS AND SCENES

Mind's Eye Theatre time breaks down into five major allotments: chronicles, stories, sessions, scenes and turns. A chronicle is a series of smaller stories that are all connected somehow, and which may take months or even years to complete. Each complete plot line within the chronicle is called a story. A session is one actual night of play, although Storytellers may define a session as one night of game time if the action ends *in media res* at the end of the previous game. (Since many characters regain spent Traits between sessions, this distinction can be important.) Finally, a scene is the time it takes to resolve the action in one location. Once the characters shift locations, the scene has ended. If a session will be taking place entirely at one location, a scene can then be defined as roughly one hour.

CONFLICTS
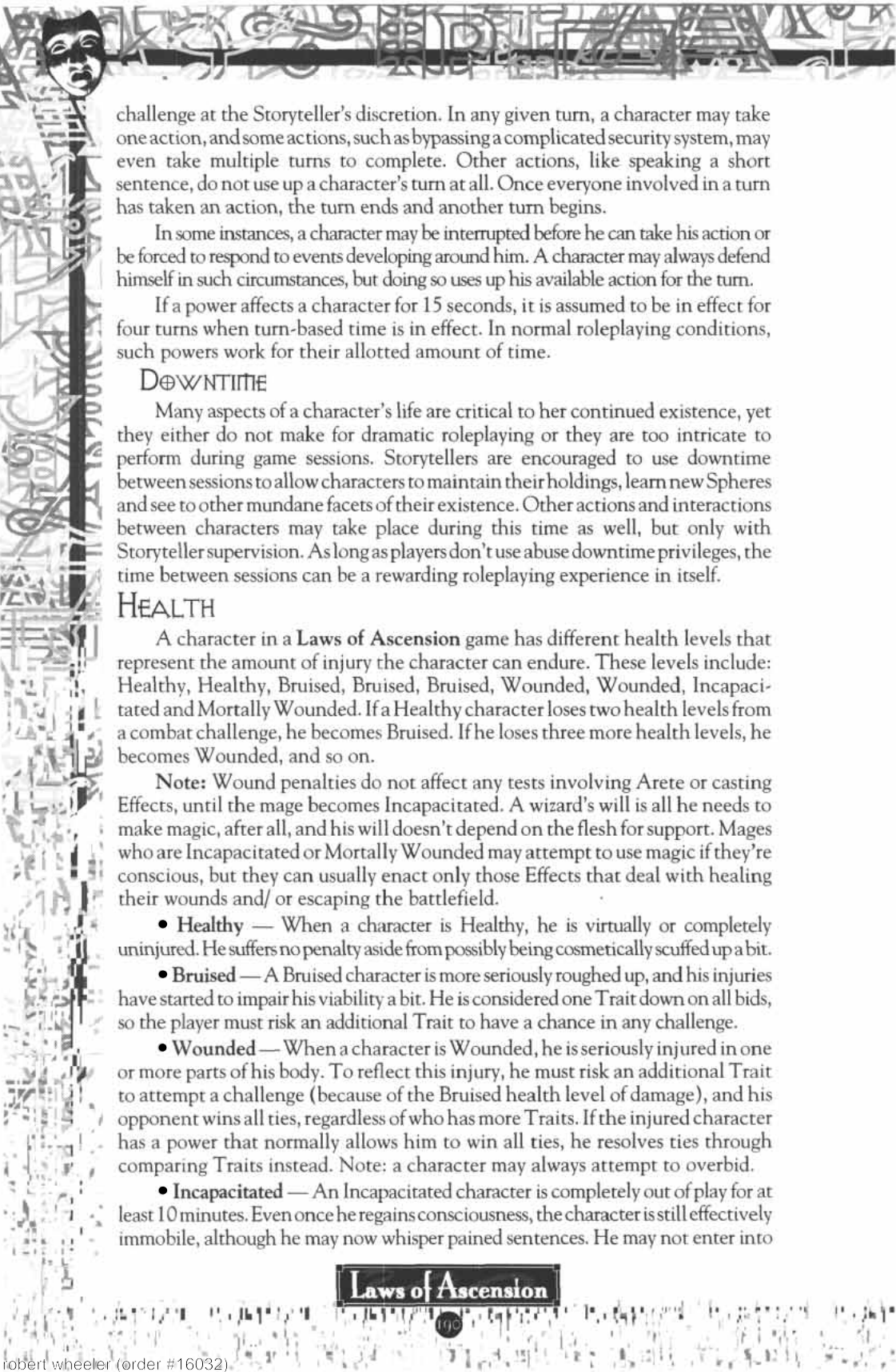
In many cases, a scene breaks down into a series of smaller actions that all happen in a given location within a short span of time. If you're fighting several groups of Nephandic minions in the local abandoned lot at midnight, that's all one scene. However, you're taking up a little time as you defeat each group and charge the next. There is not time enough to represent a change of scene, even though the action usually takes several turns. Just fighting a single minion can take a dozen turns in itself. One series of challenges against a single opposing force comprises a conflict.

In roleplaying time, a conflict equals roughly a minute. Therefore, if you spend several challenges besting a foe, hacking a computer system or crawling through an air duct, that's one conflict. The conflict really exists as an arbitrary time measure for some powers. If a power lasts for a conflict, it remains in effect for the series of contiguous challenges against an opposing group or obstacle, and it ends as soon as the challenges end.

(Note that you can't just wait in reserve during an ongoing conflict as your friend gets beaten down, only to jump in one turn later, claiming that it's a new conflict and that the enemy's powers have all expired. The opponent hasn't moved, and your arrival has put only a small pause in the action. You're still engaged in the same conflict.)

TURNS

Turns are the discrete blocks of time, that make up conflicts and scenes. Turns last approximately three seconds, but this measure may vary from challenge to

challenge at the Storyteller's discretion. In any given turn, a character may take one action, and some actions, such as bypassing a complicated security system, may even take multiple turns to complete. Other actions, like speaking a short sentence, do not use up a character's turn at all. Once everyone involved in a turn has taken an action, the turn ends and another turn begins.

In some instances, a character may be interrupted before he can take his action or be forced to respond to events developing around him. A character may always defend himself in such circumstances, but doing so uses up his available action for the turn.

If a power affects a character for 15 seconds, it is assumed to be in effect for four turns when turn-based time is in effect. In normal roleplaying conditions, such powers work for their allotted amount of time.

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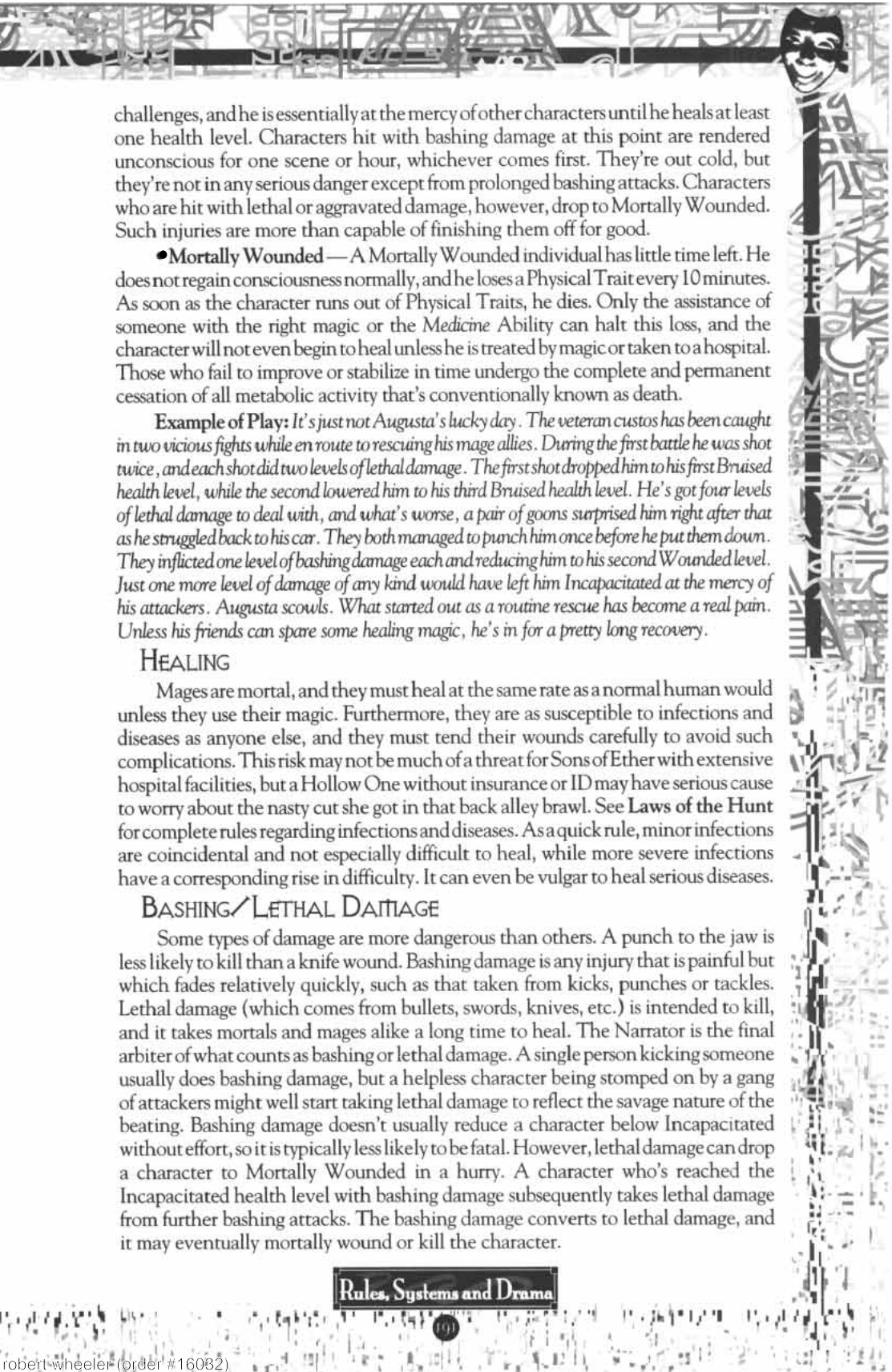
Many aspects of a character's life are critical to her continued existence, yet they either do not make for dramatic roleplaying or they are too intricate to perform during game sessions. Storytellers are encouraged to use downtime between sessions to allow characters to maintain their holdings, learn new Spheres and see to other mundane facets of their existence. Other actions and interactions between characters may take place during this time as well, but only with Storyteller supervision. As long as players don't use abuse downtime privileges, the time between sessions can be a rewarding roleplaying experience in itself.

HEALTH

A character in a **Laws of Ascension** game has different health levels that represent the amount of injury the character can endure. These levels include: Healthy, Healthy, Bruised, Bruised, Bruised, Wounded, Wounded, Incapacitated and Mortally Wounded. If a Healthy character loses two health levels from a combat challenge, he becomes Bruised. If he loses three more health levels, he becomes Wounded, and so on.

Note: Wound penalties do not affect any tests involving Arete or casting Effects, until the mage becomes Incapacitated. A wizard's will is all he needs to make magic, after all, and his will doesn't depend on the flesh for support. Mages who are Incapacitated or Mortally Wounded may attempt to use magic if they're conscious, but they can usually enact only those Effects that deal with healing their wounds and/ or escaping the battlefield.

● **Healthy** — When a character is Healthy, he is virtually or completely uninjured. He suffers no penalty aside from possibly being cosmetically scuffed up a bit.

● **Bruised** — A Bruised character is more seriously roughed up, and his injuries have started to impair his viability a bit. He is considered one Trait down on all bids, so the player must risk an additional Trait to have a chance in any challenge.

● **Wounded** — When a character is Wounded, he is seriously injured in one or more parts of his body. To reflect this injury, he must risk an additional Trait to attempt a challenge (because of the Bruised health level of damage), and his opponent wins all ties, regardless of who has more Traits. If the injured character has a power that normally allows him to win all ties, he resolves ties through comparing Traits instead. Note: a character may always attempt to overbid.

● **Incapacitated** — An Incapacitated character is completely out of play for at least 10 minutes. Even once he regains consciousness, the character is still effectively immobile, although he may now whisper pained sentences. He may not enter into

challenges, and he is essentially at the mercy of other characters until he heals at least one health level. Characters hit with bashing damage at this point are rendered unconscious for one scene or hour, whichever comes first. They're out cold, but they're not in any serious danger except from prolonged bashing attacks. Characters who are hit with lethal or aggravated damage, however, drop to Mortally Wounded. Such injuries are more than capable of finishing them off for good.

●**Mortally Wounded** — A Mortally Wounded individual has little time left. He does not regain consciousness normally, and he loses a Physical Trait every 10 minutes. As soon as the character runs out of Physical Traits, he dies. Only the assistance of someone with the right magic or the *Medicine* Ability can halt this loss, and the character will not even begin to heal unless he is treated by magic or taken to a hospital. Those who fail to improve or stabilize in time undergo the complete and permanent cessation of all metabolic activity that's conventionally known as death.

Example of Play: *It's just not Augusta's lucky day. The veteran custos has been caught in two vicious fights while en route to rescuing his mage allies. During the first battle he was shot twice, and each shot did two levels of lethal damage. The first shot dropped him to his first Bruised health level, while the second lowered him to his third Bruised health level. He's got four levels of lethal damage to deal with, and what's worse, a pair of goons surprised him right after that as he struggled back to his car. They both managed to punch him once before he put them down. They inflicted one level of bashing damage each and reducing him to his second Wounded level. Just one more level of damage of any kind would have left him Incapacitated at the mercy of his attackers. Augusta scowls. What started out as a routine rescue has become a real pain. Unless his friends can spare some healing magic, he's in for a pretty long recovery.*

HEALING

Mages are mortal, and they must heal at the same rate as a normal human would unless they use their magic. Furthermore, they are as susceptible to infections and diseases as anyone else, and they must tend their wounds carefully to avoid such complications. This risk may not be much of a threat for Sons of Ether with extensive hospital facilities, but a Hollow One without insurance or ID may have serious cause to worry about the nasty cut she got in that back alley brawl. See **Laws of the Hunt** for complete rules regarding infections and diseases. As a quick rule, minor infections are coincidental and not especially difficult to heal, while more severe infections have a corresponding rise in difficulty. It can even be vulgar to heal serious diseases.

BASHING/LETHAL DAMAGE

Some types of damage are more dangerous than others. A punch to the jaw is less likely to kill than a knife wound. Bashing damage is any injury that is painful but which fades relatively quickly, such as that taken from kicks, punches or tackles. Lethal damage (which comes from bullets, swords, knives, etc.) is intended to kill, and it takes mortals and mages alike a long time to heal. The Narrator is the final arbiter of what counts as bashing or lethal damage. A single person kicking someone usually does bashing damage, but a helpless character being stomped on by a gang of attackers might well start taking lethal damage to reflect the savage nature of the beating. Bashing damage doesn't usually reduce a character below Incapacitated without effort, so it is typically less likely to be fatal. However, lethal damage can drop a character to Mortally Wounded in a hurry. A character who's reached the Incapacitated health level with bashing damage subsequently takes lethal damage from further bashing attacks. The bashing damage converts to lethal damage, and it may eventually mortally wound or kill the character.

Bashing wounds heal fairly quickly, and they are often coincidental to heal if the character is clever enough. ("I think she bruised my jaw, but I'll live.") Lethal wounds take longer to heal, and they may either be coincidental or vulgar to heal, depending on the type of injury and the circumstances around it. For example, people may accept that an herbal poultice applied speedily, might stop bleeding or help deaden pain in the case of something like a knife wound, but they are unlikely to believe in the same cure if the character has been shot. Likewise, a more technologically inclined wizard might be able to sway a modern crowd with a quick story about adrenaline shots and cutting-edge anti-coagulants, but he would be out of luck in a peasant village where society doesn't recognize such technology.

As a rule of thumb, however, it is coincidental to heal bashing damage, and it is coincidental to heal lethal damage if you do so out of sight of Sleepers. It is usually vulgar to heal lethal damage in front of them. If a character cannot or will not use magic to treat her injuries, she heals according to the following chart. Natural healing is a slow process, and it assumes that the character is getting plenty of bed rest and maintaining a low level of activity.

RECOVERY TIMES

Injury Level	Bashing/Lethal
Bruised to Healthy •	One hour/day
Wounded to Bruised	One day/week
Incapacitated to Wounded	One week/month
Mortally Wounded*	Two months
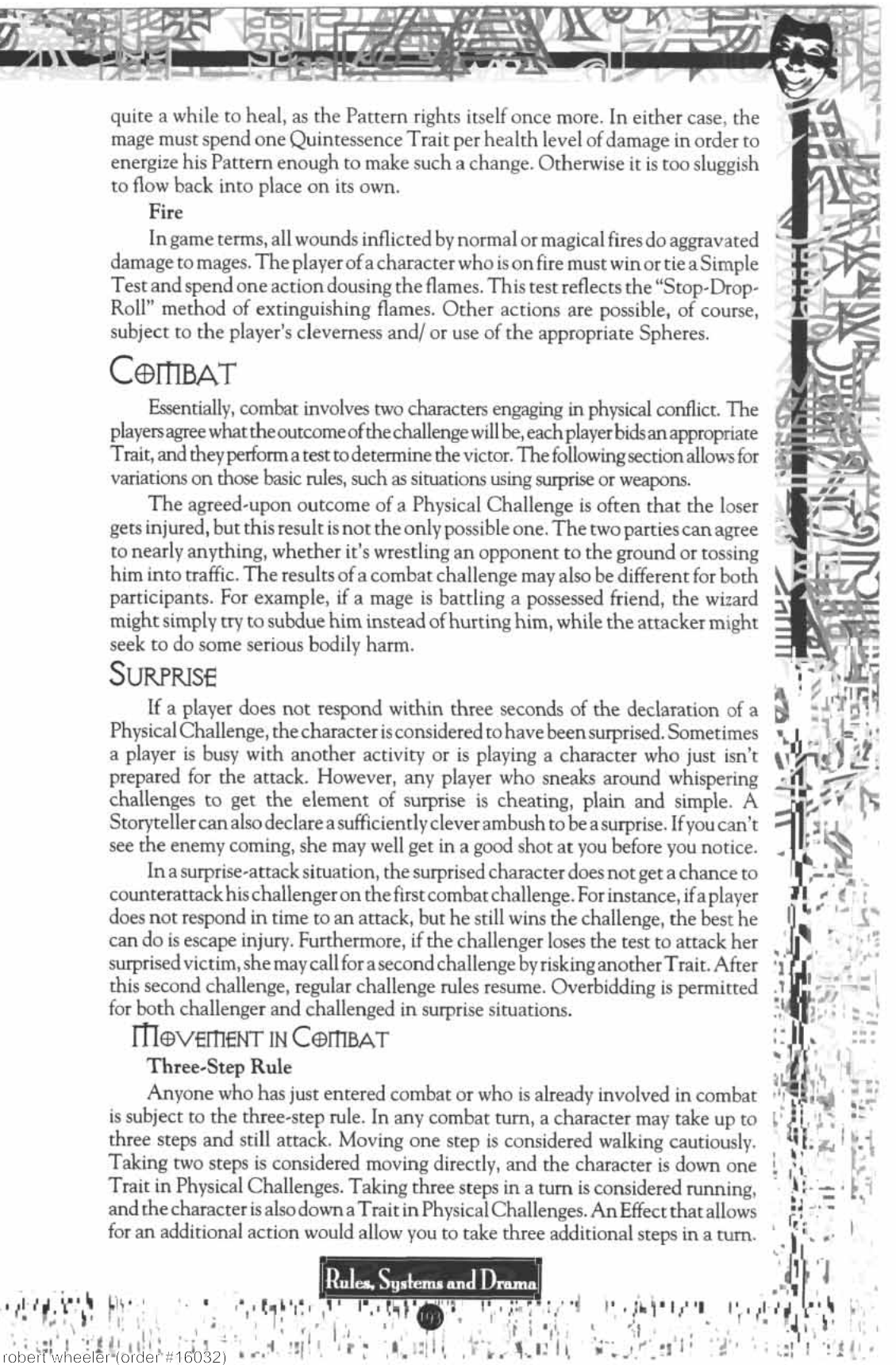
*Unless characters at this health level go to a hospital, they heal only by magic or the Storyteller's discretion. Most will gain a Negative Physical Trait of some kind from the experience (such as *Delicate*, *Decrepit*, *Lame*).

These times are cumulative, so a character at the second Wounded level from lethal damage takes two weeks and two days to completely recover: one week per Wounded level, plus a day each to heal the Bruised levels. Likewise, a character who takes the same amount of bashing damage would take two days, two hours to heal back to normal, reflecting the less serious nature of most bashing damage. Is it any wonder many mages put great stock in quick-fix healing rotes and other Effects?

AGGRAVATED WOUNDS

Wounds that go beyond the normal bounds of even most magical healing powers are called aggravated wounds. Such wounds are caused by injury from fire, magical weapons, vulgar magic Effects — especially those charged with Quintessence — or from the teeth and claws of a supernatural creature. A Narrator can also deem any other sufficiently severe injury to be aggravated, depending on the circumstances. It is always vulgar to heal aggravated damage, no matter what. If a characters leaves his wounds to heal normally (that is, with time and bed rest), those wounds heal at the same rate as lethal damage.

Aggravated wounds reflect injuries so deep they have scarred an individual's very Pattern, so an equally dramatic (i.e., vulgar) use of magic is required if one wants to set them right in a hurry. Even on their own, aggravated wounds take

quite a while to heal, as the Pattern rights itself once more. In either case, the mage must spend one Quintessence Trait per health level of damage in order to energize his Pattern enough to make such a change. Otherwise it is too sluggish to flow back into place on its own.

Fire

In game terms, all wounds inflicted by normal or magical fires do aggravated damage to mages. The player of a character who is on fire must win or tie a Simple Test and spend one action dousing the flames. This test reflects the "Stop-Drop-Roll" method of extinguishing flames. Other actions are possible, of course, subject to the player's cleverness and/ or use of the appropriate Spheres.

Combat

Essentially, combat involves two characters engaging in physical conflict. The players agree what the outcome of the challenge will be, each player bids an appropriate Trait, and they perform a test to determine the victor. The following section allows for variations on those basic rules, such as situations using surprise or weapons.

The agreed-upon outcome of a Physical Challenge is often that the loser gets injured, but this result is not the only possible one. The two parties can agree to nearly anything, whether it's wrestling an opponent to the ground or tossing him into traffic. The results of a combat challenge may also be different for both participants. For example, if a mage is battling a possessed friend, the wizard might simply try to subdue him instead of hurting him, while the attacker might seek to do some serious bodily harm.

Surprise

If a player does not respond within three seconds of the declaration of a Physical Challenge, the character is considered to have been surprised. Sometimes a player is busy with another activity or is playing a character who just isn't prepared for the attack. However, any player who sneaks around whispering challenges to get the element of surprise is cheating, plain and simple. A Storyteller can also declare a sufficiently clever ambush to be a surprise. If you can't see the enemy coming, she may well get in a good shot at you before you notice.

In a surprise-attack situation, the surprised character does not get a chance to counterattack his challenger on the first combat challenge. For instance, if a player does not respond in time to an attack, but he still wins the challenge, the best he can do is escape injury. Furthermore, if the challenger loses the test to attack her surprised victim, she may call for a second challenge by risking another Trait. After this second challenge, regular challenge rules resume. Overbidding is permitted for both challenger and challenged in surprise situations.

Movement in Combat

Three-Step Rule

Anyone who has just entered combat or who is already involved in combat is subject to the three-step rule. In any combat turn, a character may take up to three steps and still attack. Moving one step is considered walking cautiously. Taking two steps is considered moving directly, and the character is down one Trait in Physical Challenges. Taking three steps in a turn is considered running, and the character is also down a Trait in Physical Challenges. An Effect that allows for an additional action would allow you to take three additional steps in a turn.

Fair Escape

Fair Escape is a simple rule that allows players to escape from potentially dangerous in-game situations without actually bounding over furniture or diving out of windows. This rule also allows players to avoid combat without going through cumbersome challenges to see if they can get away.

When you use this rule, you can call "Fair Escape!" any time you notice the approach of another player with whom you do not wish to interact. Once you call for a Fair Escape, you may leave the area without being pursued. There are several guidelines that must be followed when using this rule, however:

• You may not use the Fair Escape rule if the person approaching is within conversational distance. In such cases, you must initiate a challenge in order to flee. Use common sense in places where a great deal of ambient noise reduces one's conversational distance.

• Situations that involve ranged weapons or an ambush in which all exits have been blocked or the target is surrounded can negate the use of Fair Escape. Again, use common sense.

• A character using invisibility or Effects with similar results may employ a Fair Escape at any time before a challenge has been initiated, unless someone with some form of magical perception spots him. (Note: Many Apprentice Sphere Effects are capable of granting magical perception. However, the mage cannot simply cycle through all of his Apprentice-level Sphere Effects in order to detect an invisible foe. If a character gives him the slip in one challenge, he remains fooled for the nonce.)

• Characters with supernatural speed — such as that which is granted by the *Time* Sphere — may gain a Fair Escape by activating their speed before a challenge is initiated. If two characters use supernatural speed, whoever uses the highest level of supernatural speed wins, and all ties go to the fleeing party. Therefore, a character with only a Disciple's grasp of the *Time* Sphere who uses an Effect to increase his speed cannot get away from a vampiric foe who uses Advanced *Celerity*.
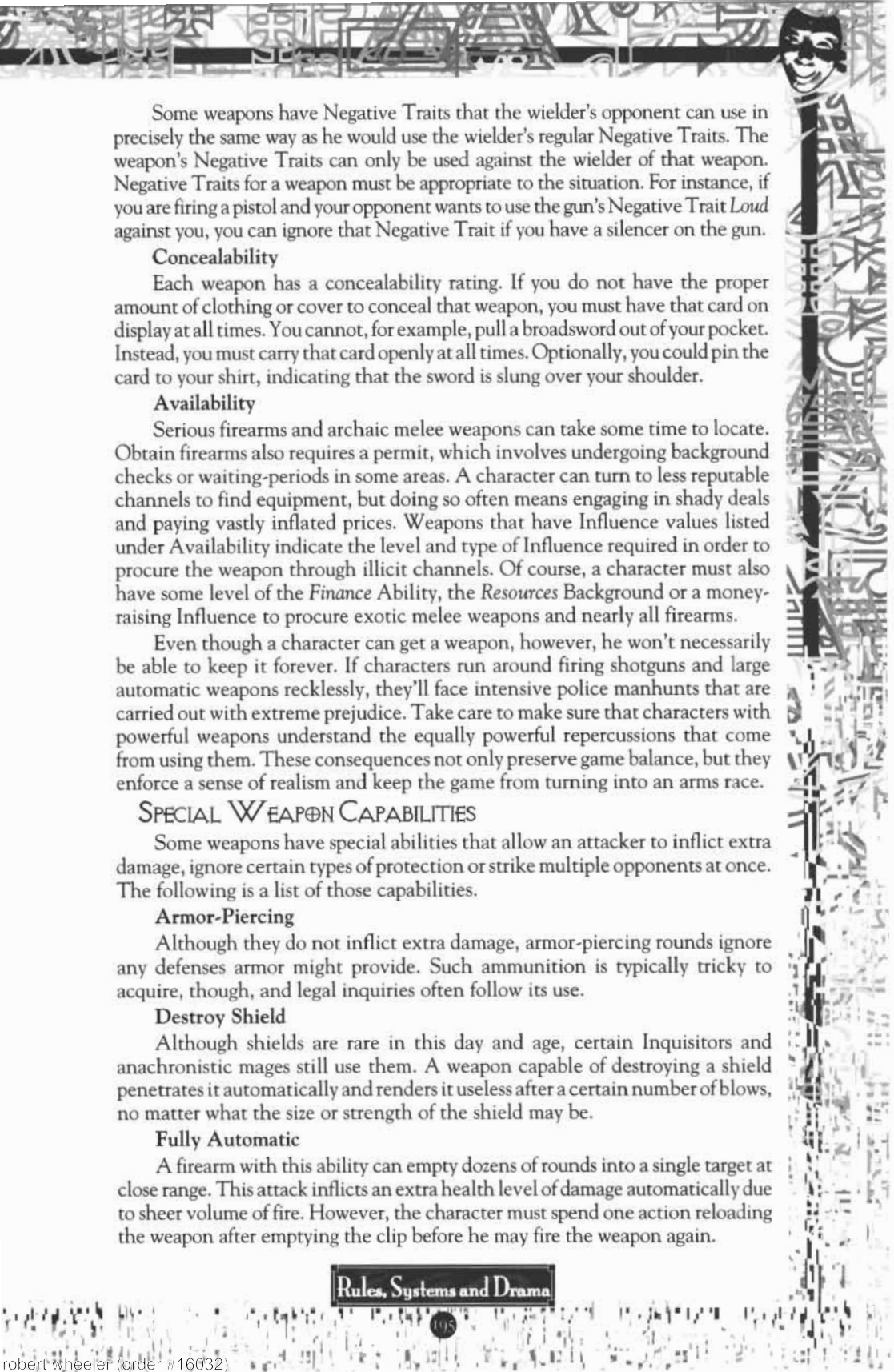
These rules should hasten play, not complicate it. Always try to employ common sense when using Fair Escape. (As a rule of thumb, if it takes several minutes to explain why a Fair Escape would be justified, it probably isn't.)

Weapons

For obvious reasons, no real weapons are ever allowed in **Mind's Eye Theatre** games. Even nonfunctional props are forbidden if they can be mistaken for weapons. This system does not use weapon props of any kind, nor are players required (or allowed) to actually strike one another when simulating combat. Instead, characters should use weapon cards that display the Traits and pertinent details of a particular weapon.

A weapon gives its wielder extra Traits for combat or other appropriate challenges. Sometimes this advantage is offset by a disadvantage in terms of a Negative Trait. Each weapon has one to six extra Traits that may apply to any challenge in which the weapon is employed. These Traits cannot be used as an initial bid, however. Instead, they add to the user's total when she is comparing Traits in the event of a tie or an overbid. In addition, some weapons have special properties, such as causing extra levels of damage or affecting more than one target at a time.

Weapon cards specify the statistics and capacities of each weapon, and carrying them allows other players to see that you actually possess a weapon. When you have a weapon card in your hand, you are considered to be holding the weapon.

Some weapons have Negative Traits that the wielder's opponent can use in precisely the same way as he would use the wielder's regular Negative Traits. The weapon's Negative Traits can only be used against the wielder of that weapon. Negative Traits for a weapon must be appropriate to the situation. For instance, if you are firing a pistol and your opponent wants to use the gun's Negative Trait *Loud* against you, you can ignore that Negative Trait if you have a silencer on the gun.

Concealability

Each weapon has a concealability rating. If you do not have the proper amount of clothing or cover to conceal that weapon, you must have that card on display at all times. You cannot, for example, pull a broadsword out of your pocket. Instead, you must carry that card openly at all times. Optionally, you could pin the card to your shirt, indicating that the sword is slung over your shoulder.

Availability

Serious firearms and archaic melee weapons can take some time to locate. Obtain firearms also requires a permit, which involves undergoing background checks or waiting-periods in some areas. A character can turn to less reputable channels to find equipment, but doing so often means engaging in shady deals and paying vastly inflated prices. Weapons that have Influence values listed under Availability indicate the level and type of Influence required in order to procure the weapon through illicit channels. Of course, a character must also have some level of the *Finance* Ability, the *Resources* Background or a money-raising Influence to procure exotic melee weapons and nearly all firearms.

Even though a character can get a weapon, however, he won't necessarily be able to keep it forever. If characters run around firing shotguns and large automatic weapons recklessly, they'll face intensive police manhunts that are carried out with extreme prejudice. Take care to make sure that characters with powerful weapons understand the equally powerful repercussions that come from using them. These consequences not only preserve game balance, but they enforce a sense of realism and keep the game from turning into an arms race.

Special Weapon Capabilities

Some weapons have special abilities that allow an attacker to inflict extra damage, ignore certain types of protection or strike multiple opponents at once. The following is a list of those capabilities.

Armor-Piercing

Although they do not inflict extra damage, armor-piercing rounds ignore any defenses armor might provide. Such ammunition is typically tricky to acquire, though, and legal inquiries often follow its use.

Destroy Shield

Although shields are rare in this day and age, certain Inquisitors and anachronistic mages still use them. A weapon capable of destroying a shield penetrates it automatically and renders it useless after a certain number of blows, no matter what the size or strength of the shield may be.

Fully Automatic

A firearm with this ability can empty dozens of rounds into a single target at close range. This attack inflicts an extra health level of damage automatically due to sheer volume of fire. However, the character must spend one action reloading the weapon after emptying the clip before he may fire the weapon again.

High-Caliber

Firearms of particularly high caliber can cause crippling wounds with only a few shots. When a high-caliber weapon hits a target, the attacker should make a Simple Test immediately. A win indicates that the target suffers an additional health level of damage from the shot.

Incendiary

Burning weapons cause aggravated wounds to just about anything. Some incendiary weapons, such as flame-throwers or molotov cocktails, burn the target with streams or explosions of fire. Others such as incendiary rounds ("hot loads") burn the target with superheated ammunition.

Mass-Trauma

Certain weapons are so powerful that they inflict massive damage on a target by literally tearing away large portions of flesh. Such weapons score an extra health level of damage automatically when used appropriately.

Speed

Fast weapons can preempt an opponent's attack, allowing the attacker with the speedier weapon to strike and do his damage first. A character must have the *Melee* Ability to use this special weapon capability, and he must be attacking or otherwise actively using the weapon in order to gain this benefit. Fast weapons gain a preemptive strike only against opponents in hand-to-hand or melee combat, and the enemy must have a weapon that is *Slow*, *Heavy* or *Clumsy*.

Since many attack challenges are resolved simultaneously for ease of play, this ability is not always very useful. However, if the Storyteller opts to allow each attacker to test individually, this ability gives characters with fast weapons an advantage. It also allows a character with a fast weapon to preempt someone who's attacking a friend in order to block the attack, disarm the attacker or strike the attacker first.

Spray

The weapon can strike several targets at once, as noted under the weapon's specific parameters. The shooter makes one test against all the targets simultaneously. Each target who fails the test suffers the weapon's damage, while each target who succeeds avoids the weapon's damage. The shooter risks only the Traits required to test against each member of the group, and he loses Traits only if any of the defenders wins the test.

BIDDING WEAPON TRAITS

During a normal hand-to-hand fight, characters bid Physical Traits against their opponents' Physical Traits. However, a character may use his Mental Traits instead if he is using firearms. If his opponent is also using a firearm, she bids Mental Traits as well. If the opponent is not using a firearm and is merely trying to dodge, she uses her Physical Traits. This instance is one of the few in which Traits associated with different Attributes may be used against one another.

WEAPON EXAMPLES

MELEE WEAPONS

Knife/Dagger — These easily concealed weapons are very common, they're lightning fast in the hands of a skilled user, and they can also be used as ranged weapons if a character uses his *Athletics* Ability properly. Popular with many mages, they often function as magical foci as well.

Bonus Traits: 1

Negative Traits: *Short*

Concealability: Pocket

Damage: One lethal health level

Availability: Any

Special Ability: *Speed*: In close combat against any weapon that has the Negative Traits: *Clumsy, Heavy* or *Slow*, the knife-fighter gains the option to preempt the opponent's attacks and strike first in any turn, as long as he has the *Melee* Ability.

Broken Bottle — A good example of a weapon made from scratch.

Bonus Traits: 1

Negative Traits: *Fragile*

Concealability: Vest (ouch!)

Damage: One lethal health level

Availability: Any

Cane/Club/Ax — These common weapons cover anything from chair legs to walking sticks to hand axes to tonfa. Canes and clubs bludgeon while axes cut, but the essential function is the same. And although they fell out of fashion with most mortals a century ago, canes remain quite in vogue with many Hermetics, as well as more than a few Hollow Ones. Most canes are more fashionable than practical, although metal or especially stout wooden ones may still make suitable weapons at the Narrator's discretion.

Bonus Traits: Cane: 1, Club: 2, Ax: 3

Negative Traits: *Clumsy*. Many canes have *Fragile* as well.

Concealability: Trench coat

Damage: Cane/Club — One bashing health level; Ax — Two lethal health levels

Availability: Any, though especially ornate canes can be quite expensive.

Special Ability: Ax: *Destroy Shield*. Axes render shields useless after three blows.

Nunchaku — There are actually thousands of variations on the nunchaku concept: The *manriki-gusari, sa tjat joen* and the *kawanaga* are but a few of the better-known examples. Weapons of this type deliver their damage primarily through crushing force delivered by lightning-fast strikes. Some are bladed, while others are nothing more than a humble length of wood and chain. However, they are all considered to have the same basic characteristics for game purposes.

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Short*

Concealability: Jacket

Damage: One lethal health level

Availability: Any

Special Ability: *Speed*: In close combat against any weapon that has the Negative Traits: *Clumsy, Heavy* or *Slow*, the nunchaku wielder gains the option to preempt the opponent's attacks and strike first in any turn, as long as he has the *Melee* Ability.

Staff/Spear — These classic weapons of the wandering mystic are still popular with many Akashic Brothers, Verbena and other martial enthusiasts. Staves are cheap and easy to make, and they tend to attract less attention than many other melee weapons do. Plus, they are extremely dangerous in the hands of a skilled user.

Spears are much the same as staves, but they have a blade at one or both ends, and they inflict an impressive amount of damage with slashing or piercing attacks.

Bonus Traits: 3

Negative Traits: Staff: *Clumsy*. Spear: *Clumsy*, *Heavy*

Concealability: Nope.

Damage: Staff — Two bashing health levels; Spear — Three lethal health levels

Availability: Any martial-arts store, although spears are usually a lot more expensive to purchase than staves, and carrying one is a lot harder to justify to inquisitive authority figures.

Fencing Blades — Not too many mages rely on the fencing weapons of yesteryear. Foils and rapiers just aren't as popular as symbols of magic, and the practice fencing foils lack much real effectiveness. Those mages who practice combat fencing are more likely to use a heavy French foil, a Spanish or Italian rapier, or a German schlager. These weapons are thicker and more deadly than the modern sport tools with which most people are familiar. This category also includes the katana, simply because using a katana relies more on speed than on strength. Most katana are crafted by hand. While mass-produced versions exist, they are substantially inferior to their pure cousins.

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Fragile*

Concealability: Trench coat

Damage: One lethal health level

Availability: Any. A fencing foil tends to attract less police attention than an ornamental saber, especially if the character is wearing or carrying fencing gear. Hand-crafted katana are typically heirlooms of great value, and their owners guard them closely. In other words, you cannot simply walk into a store and buy one. If you do find someone to sell you a genuine katana, it will be expensive.

Special Ability: *Speed*: In close combat against any weapon that has the Negative Traits: *Clumsy*, *Heavy* or *Slow*, the fencer gains the option to preempt the opponent's attacks and strike first in any turn, as long as he has the *Melee* Ability.

Shortsword — The gladius, scuta, jiann and similar weapons make up the class of shortswords. They are bladed weapons a foot and a half or so in length, that are made primarily for thrusting. Such blades are not very common in the modern age, and they aren't as popular as magical tools as broadswords or knives. They can be effective weapons in a pinch, though.

Bonus Traits: 2
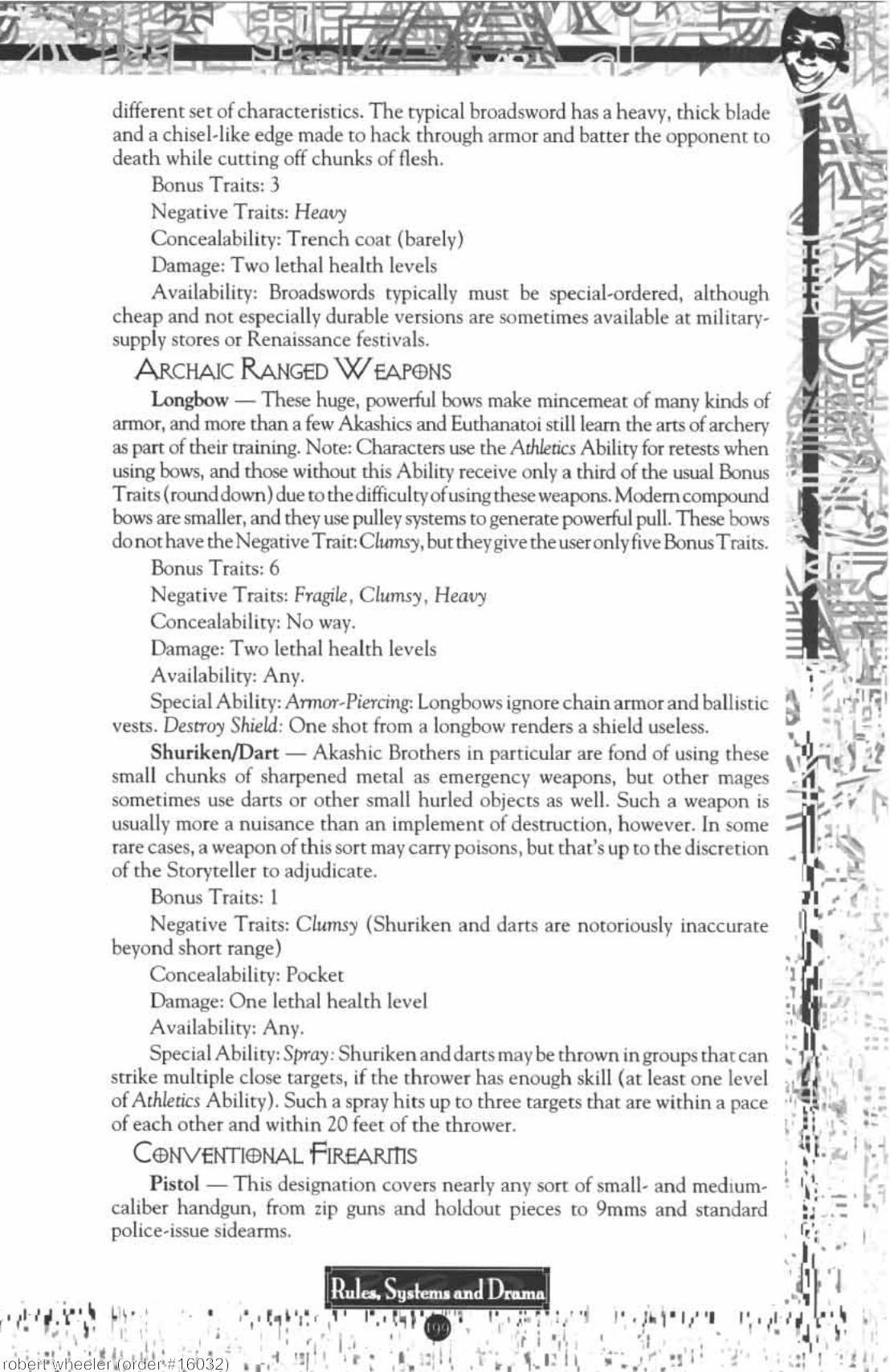
Negative Traits: *Short*

Concealability: Trench coat

Damage: One lethal health level

Availability: Any. Shortswords don't rely as much on blade strength as broadswords, so even replicas tend to be useful for a few strikes.

Broadsword — Perhaps the most archetypal form of wizardly weaponry, swords have long been the focus of powerful magics. Even unenchanted blades can go a long way toward evening the odds in a fight. This category of weapon covers every blade of medium length, from Western broadswords to scimitars. The only exception is the katana, whose crafting practices give it a slightly

different set of characteristics. The typical broadsword has a heavy, thick blade and a chisel-like edge made to hack through armor and batter the opponent to death while cutting off chunks of flesh.

Bonus Traits: 3

Negative Traits: *Heavy*

Concealability: Trench coat (barely)

Damage: Two lethal health levels

Availability: Broadswords typically must be special-ordered, although cheap and not especially durable versions are sometimes available at military-supply stores or Renaissance festivals.

Archaic Ranged Weapons

Longbow — These huge, powerful bows make mincemeat of many kinds of armor, and more than a few Akashics and Euthanatoi still learn the arts of archery as part of their training. Note: Characters use the *Athletics* Ability for retests when using bows, and those without this Ability receive only a third of the usual Bonus Traits (round down) due to the difficulty of using these weapons. Modern compound bows are smaller, and they use pulley systems to generate powerful pull. These bows do not have the Negative Trait: *Clumsy*, but they give the user only five Bonus Traits.

Bonus Traits: 6

Negative Traits: *Fragile, Clumsy, Heavy*

Concealability: No way.

Damage: Two lethal health levels

Availability: Any.

Special Ability: *Armor-Piercing*: Longbows ignore chain armor and ballistic vests. *Destroy Shield*: One shot from a longbow renders a shield useless.

Shuriken/Dart — Akashic Brothers in particular are fond of using these small chunks of sharpened metal as emergency weapons, but other mages sometimes use darts or other small hurled objects as well. Such a weapon is usually more a nuisance than an implement of destruction, however. In some rare cases, a weapon of this sort may carry poisons, but that's up to the discretion of the Storyteller to adjudicate.

Bonus Traits: 1

Negative Traits: *Clumsy* (Shuriken and darts are notoriously inaccurate beyond short range)

Concealability: Pocket

Damage: One lethal health level

Availability: Any.

Special Ability: *Spray*: Shuriken and darts may be thrown in groups that can strike multiple close targets, if the thrower has enough skill (at least one level of *Athletics* Ability). Such a spray hits up to three targets that are within a pace of each other and within 20 feet of the thrower.

Conventional Firearms

Pistol — This designation covers nearly any sort of small- and medium-caliber handgun, from zip guns and holdout pieces to 9mms and standard police-issue sidearms.

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Loud*

Concealability: Pocket

Damage: Two lethal health levels

Availability: Any, if registered. *Police* 4, *Street* 3 or *Underworld* 2 otherwise.

Heavy Pistol — This designation covers the monsters of the handgun range, from the Desert Eagle to a .454 Cassull. These tremendous guns use high-caliber ammunition to punch large holes in their targets.

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Loud*

Concealability: Jacket

Damage: Two lethal health levels

Availability: Any, if registered. *Police* 4, *Street* 4 or *Underworld* 3 otherwise.

Special Ability: *High-Caliber*: Make a Simple Test after a successful challenge to shoot a target. Winning the Simple Test indicates that the target takes an extra level of damage.

Rifle — Favored by many hunters and snipers.

Bonus Traits: 3

Negative Traits: *Loud*

Concealability: None.

Damage: Two lethal health levels

Availability: Any, if registered. *Police* 4, *Street* 4 or *Underworld* 3 otherwise.

Special Ability: *High-Caliber*: Rifles may be loaded with high-caliber ammunition. Note that the character must acquire such ammunition specifically to gain this benefit. It is not included automatically when using a rifle.

Shotgun — This powerful weapon fires a spray of pellets, making it fairly easy to hit one's target.

Bonus Traits: 3

Negative Traits: *Loud*

Concealability: None

Damage: Two lethal health levels

Availability: Any, if registered. *Police* 4, *Street* 4 or *Underworld* 3 otherwise.

Special Ability: *Spray*: A shotgun may affect up to three targets if they are standing immediately next to each other and they are farther than 20 feet from the person firing the shotgun. This capability remains in effect only if the shotgun is loaded with pellets, not slugs. *Mass-Trauma*: A shotgun can cause an extra health level of damage to a single target standing within five feet.

Submachine Gun — These weapons are very powerful, and they fire a large number of bullets very quickly, which makes them the favorites in situations where accuracy isn't as important as hitting a large number of targets at the same time. The law requires that these guns be sold as non-automatic weapons, with only single-shot capability, but a use of the *Technology* Ability can convert them to fully automatic fire.

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Loud*

Concealability: Jacket

Damage: Two lethal health levels

Availability: Any, if registered and non-automatic. *Police* 4, *Street* 4 or *Underworld* 3 otherwise.

Special Ability: *Spray*: A submachine gun may affect up to five targets if they're standing immediately next to each other and they are farther than 10 feet from the person firing the gun. *Fully Automatic*: A submachine gun inflicts an additional health level of damage if the shooter empties the entire clip into a target standing no more than five feet away.

Chain Gun — The dreaded signature weapon of the cyborg HIT Mark, these full-blown assault cannons fire a disgusting amount of bullets at great speed and shred anything caught in their path. Unless one is willing to use some serious vulgar magic, however, they cannot be carted around willy-nilly. Conventional chain guns are heavy and hard to control, and they require a tripod mount and sometimes even a second person to operate properly. Also, authorities will stop at nothing to track down characters who sport this kind of firepower.

Bonus Traits: 5

Negative Traits: *Loud, Clumsy*

Concealability: None, although HIT Marks may due to magical enhancement.

Damage: Three lethal health levels

Availability: Only through military or Technocratic channels.

Special Ability: *Spray*: A chain gun may affect up to five targets if they're standing immediately next to each other and they are farther than 10 feet from the person firing the gun. *Fully Automatic*: A chain gun inflicts an additional health level of damage if the entire turn of fire is emptied into a target standing no more than five feet away.

Technomagical Weapons

Below are the statistics for two basic technomagical weapons. Remember that the difference between these weapons and using, say, *Forces* or *Matter* Effects to do the same thing is that Sleepers can use these weapons as well as mages. They run on Quintessence batteries, so one needs no magical knowledge to use them. However, non-mages cannot fix, recharge, alter or otherwise tinker with these weapons since they lack the enlightenment to truly understand how they work.

Laser Pistol — Although it's not exactly standard Technocratic issue yet, this category serves as a catch-all for not only laser pistols but other similar outlandish firearms, including sonic disrupters, disintegration rays or other such sci-fi weapons.

Bonus Traits: 2

Negative Traits: *Clumsy, Loud*

Concealability: Jacket

Damage: Two aggravated health levels

Clip: 10 Quintessence Traits (one Trait per shot)

Availability: Only Technocracy agents or others with access to sufficiently enlightened science (such as some Etherites and their acolytes) can have this weapon.

Special Ability: *Armor-Piercing*: Laser pistols completely ignore all conventional armor. Only magical Effects or Primium armor can help one soak the damage from a laser blast.

Plasma Thrower — Heaven help us! These monsters of Enlightened Science are impossibly vulgar to wield, and it requires a hideous amount of Quintessence to keep one in operation, but they do put tremendous holes in things very quickly. They fire a bolt of superheated plasma at their target, reducing it to melted goo in seconds. They can also be configured to fire a solid stream of plasma that's capable of dousing multiple targets at once, although doing so drains the weapon's power supply very quickly.

Bonus Traits: 6

Negative Traits: *Clumsy, Heavy, Loud*

Concealability: Uh-huh. Sure. Keep dreaming.

Damage: Three aggravated health levels

Clip: Six Quintessence Traits (one Trait per shot, or three Traits for each plasma stream fired)

Availability: No! Even most senior Technocrats have trouble getting their hands on one of these things, and they do so only if they can justify the need for extreme force in dealing with a very specific threat. And as soon as that threat is dealt with, you better believe this thing is going back into storage, or some very ill-tempered operatives will be dispatched to recover both weapon and wielder without mercy or delay. Before anyone asks, very few Etherites or other Tradition folks have access to such weapons of total destruction either. Those who like to trot them out to deal with their problems will be facing gangs of ticked off Paradox spirits and/ or Technocracy agents in no time.

Special Ability: *Spray:* A plasma thrower may affect up to five targets if they're standing immediately next to each other and they are further than 10 feet from the person firing the weapon. *Incendiary:* Targets injured by a plasma thrower are being melted rapidly. *Mass-Trauma:* Plasma melts away whole sections of the body and inflicts an extra health level of damage on a single target standing within five feet of the shooter.

ARMOR

Since it stops incoming damage, armor effectively grants a character extra health levels. These health levels are lost before the character himself suffers any damage in combat. Of course, armor does not stop all attacks. A bulletproof vest does little good for a character whose DNA is being scrambled by *Life* magic, for instance.

Different types of armor can absorb different amounts of punishment before losing their effectiveness. It should be noted, however, that armor that has lost all its health levels is not necessarily completely destroyed. Instead, it has been temporarily rendered useless. Of course, some attacks may destroy armor beyond repair. Fixing armor requires the proper tools and a Static Physical Challenge with the appropriately specialized *Craft* Ability.

Armor has two different traits for game purposes. Health levels indicate how many levels of damage the armor can absorb before it needs to be repaired. Negative Traits are the drawbacks a wearer gains for donning a particular type of armor.

Chain armor — This category covers most medium levels of metal armor, including scale and brigandine. True chain armor is quite rare in the modern age, but some hunters of the supernatural keep a suit on hand, as does the occasional Chorister or Akashic Brother.

PRImIum ARmΦR

One special type of protection exists for mages — armor forged from the special anti-magical alloy known as Primium. Characters wearing Primium armor may add the number of health levels of protection it provides to their Traits for the purposes of resolving ties and overbids when resisting all magical Effects. Furthermore, Primium armor may soak physically based rotes such as *Forces* blasts or *Matter* strikes normally, although *Mind* Effects and other less direct rotes may still be effective. Many high-level Technocracy agents have access to some kind of Primium armor, and it is an increasingly common component of cyborgs and other artificial operatives. Likewise, a few Sons of Ether use its secrets to construct exoskeletons or guardian robots and the Celestial Chorus knows of a few suits of Primium plate mail from the time of the Crusades. Primium armor is otherwise identical to mundane armor forged in the same form. Primium chain mail, for instance, has the same number of health levels and Negative Traits as regular chain mail. Remember, though, that Primium is metal, so it lends itself more naturally to archaic forms of armor. However, integrating Primium plating into modern armor is becoming more common.

Primium armor is extremely difficult and expensive to produce, even for the Technocracy, so its use is typically granted only for especially dangerous field work. Among the Traditions it is even more rare, and those who own Primium armor guard it closely. After all, one cannot simply walk into a magic store and pick up more of the stuff.

Storytellers should make sure to maintain game balance when including Primium armor in their chronicles. As the occasional rude surprise or heroic implement, it's fine, but if the players start joking about how every squad of Technocracy goons has Primium vests, something's wrong. This stuff is the pinnacle of magical metallurgy, so treat it accordingly.

Health levels: 2

Negative Traits: *Heavy*

Availability: Any. Chain armor must generally be custom made, and it can cost upward of $500 or more.

Plate armor — Extremely expensive and hard to come by, these ornate suits of interlocking metal plates provide excellent protection at the cost of a great deal of mobility.

Health levels: 3

Negative Traits: *Heavy, Clumsy*

Availability: Any. Plate mail must generally be custom-ordered, and it can cost upward of $3000 or more.

Ballistic ("bulletproof") vest — This basic level of protection shields the wearer from some dangers, and it doesn't attract the same kind of attention that more archaic or complicated forms of armor are bound to bring.

Health levels: 2

Negative Traits: *Heavy*

Availability: *Police* 4 or *Underworld* 3

Rules, Systems and Drama

Reinforced armor ("riot gear") — As the favored type of armor for military personnel and law enforcement officers expecting especially dangerous situations, these full-body suits provide excellent protection. They even stop many types of small arms fire. They are impossible to conceal, however, and they attract a great deal of attention.

Health levels: 3

Negative Traits: *Heavy, Clumsy*

Availability: *Police* 5 or *Underworld* 4

TECHNOMAGICAL ARMOR

In rare cases, the Technocracy outfits its agents with specially designed technomagical armor. The examples listed here are just a couple of items. Many more varieties exist.

Silksteel suit — Men in Black never seem to become ruffled in combat, and this is why. These specially enhanced black suits absorb damage almost as well as ballistic armor.

Health levels: 1

Negative Traits: None

Availability: Technocracy operatives only.

Special Ability: *Fire-Retardant:* The silksteel suit doesn't catch on fire. Attacks that would normally cause the subject to burn over successive turns can still cause damage, but the fire goes out automatically.

Magnetic shield — Like a laser pistol, a magnetic shield powered with Quintessence can be used by just about anyone. The shield radiates from a small band worn on the wrist and makes a circle about a foot across that repels attacks from just about any source. The strength of the field deflects even fire or unarmed attacks. However, each attack weakens the shield a little more until the device must be recharged by a qualified technician.

Health levels: 2 per attack

Negative Traits: None

Power: 10 Quintessence, using 1 per health level absorbed from each attack

Availability: Technocracy operatives only.

RANGED COMBAT

Many weapons allow a character to stand at a distance from a target and engage him in combat. In such situations, the character must still go over to the target (after shouting "Bang!" or "Twang!") and engage in a challenge.

If a character has surprised her opponent, she has the option of calling for a second test, even if she loses the first test. Once the second challenge is called, play continues as normal. If the target has no ranged weapon with which to return fire, he cannot counterattack his attacker until he closes the distance.

If the target is aware of the attack before it happens, and he has a ranged weapon of his own, he is not considered surprised for the first attack. He may shoot back right away, and challenges are resolved normally.

Characters using the *Athletics* Ability to throw projectiles like knives or axes fall under the same rules for regular ranged combat, including cover. Questions of range should not be a problem, but if it becomes an issue use common sense. Also, don't forget to make allowances for things like characters whose strength or range has been enhanced with various Effects.

Cover

Fighting with ranged weapons allows combatants to stand some distance apart. Therefore, participants in a ranged combat can also dive for cover. When resolving each ranged combat challenge, each combatant can present one Trait of cover to add to his total number of Traits. These cover Traits may not be used as an initial bid in the challenge, but they do add to a player's total in the event of a tie or an overbid. This cover can take the form of whatever obstacles are around and within reach, but don't actually dive for them. A Narrator might be required to describe what cover is around, unless the combatants can agree on what cover is available.

If cover is extensive, it may be worth more than one Trait. The number of Traits available for cover is left for challengers to agree on, or for a Narrator to decree. Hiding behind a boulder, for example, might be worth two Traits, while hiding behind a thin wooden fence might count as just one. If one combatant goes completely under cover (he cannot be seen at all and he is thoroughly protected), he cannot be hit. The attacker must change position to get a clear shot.

Melee and Brawling

Melee fighting can occur only when two parties are within weapon's reach of each other. Characters using melee weapons often have access to special abilities if they also possess the *Melee* Ability. For example, a trained character using a fencing foil can take advantage of his weapon's speed when fighting a character wielding an ax.

Brawling can occur only when two characters are within arm's length of each other. Characters engaged in a brawl may use unarmed combat techniques on each other, including trips, kicks, punches, wrestling holds and throws. However, all brawling tests result in one health level of bashing damage regardless of the description, unless the character possesses some supernatural power or other ability that specifically allows for extra damage.

Specialized Fighting Styles

Buying a specialized fighting style under the *Melee* or *Brawl* Ability allows you to describe how your character moves in order to justify retests, and it adds a certain flair to your attacks and defenses. However, doing so does not allow you to do extra damage or specific injuries. The only exception is the Akashic Brotherhood's specialty *Do*, which allows the attacker to inflict lethal damage unarmed.

Two-Gun Mojo

It's possible to use more than one weapon at a time in combat, although it's quite tricky. Just performing a task with the wrong hand detracts from your chance of success. Compounding matters by doing something else with the other hand doesn't help.

For the purposes of simplicity, it's usually easiest to assume that the character has the same-handedness as the player. Furthermore, these rules do not apply to common uses of both hands, such as typing, playing a musical instrument or working a craft.

When performing tasks with the off hand, you suffer a two-Trait penalty. Therefore, you must bid a total of three Traits to initiate the challenge, and you have a lower chance of success.

When you specialize in a fighting style, you can choose *Two-Weapon Combat* or *Florentine* for your specialty. Doing so negates one penalty Trait from your attacks with the specified form of combat. Therefore, instead of bidding two Traits

with your primary hand and three with your off hand, you would bid one for your primary hand and two Traits for your off hand. Developing such a specialty should take months of training. Also, remember to use common sense about the weapons that can be employed in this manner. Using two pistols or even two broadswords is within the realm of possibility (this is a game, after all). Using two shotguns or two spears at the same time, however, is out of the question.

When using both hands, you get only one extra action, regardless of *Time* Effects or similar speed-altering powers, and you split your actions equally between both hands. If you use a *Time* rote that's good for two extra actions, and you're using both hands, you get your normal action, your two *Time* actions and your extra hand action, for a total of four actions. You would then split up those actions between each hand. If you took an action or two to do other things, you'd split the remainder evenly. Any leftover actions are applied to your primary hand automatically.

CONTESTS OF WILL

Contests of will, in which two rivals try to dominate each other without coming to blows (or rotes), are actually a fairly common occurrence in mage society. The idea is to force one's rival to back down before a real conflict actually arises. Success in a contest of wills is determined in one of two ways. First, it is highly recommended that this action be roleplayed out rather than resorting to the rules. In this case, if one of the players relents while roleplaying this contest, his opponent is the winner.

If a quick result is needed, or if neither of the players relents, a Social Challenge can determine the victor instead. Remember, though, that a contest of wills is supposed to be a moment of dramatic tension, not simply a chance to show off one's social prowess.
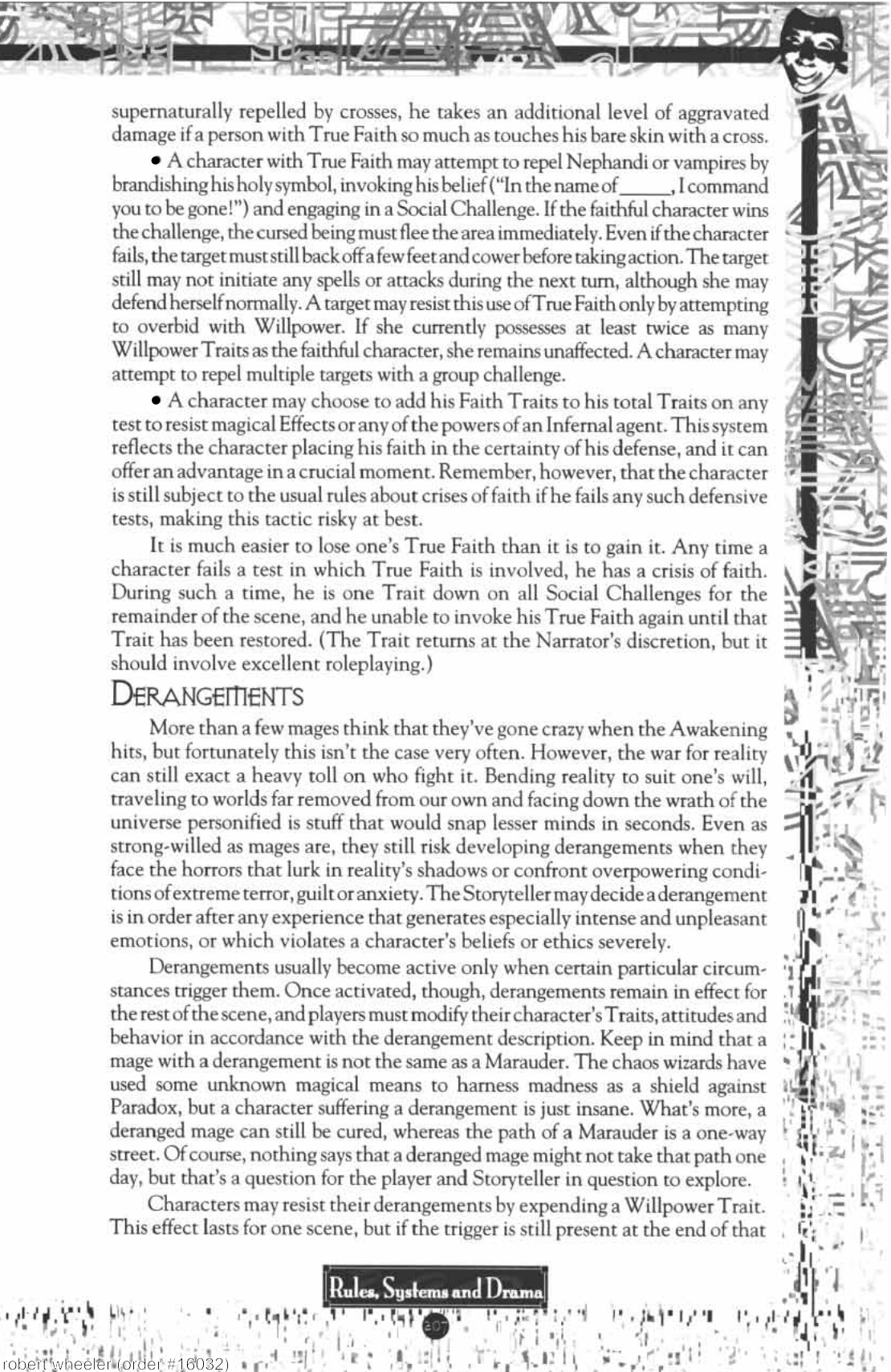
TRUE FAITH

True Faith is the belief in a power, entity, consciousness or purpose that is greater than oneself. As such, it is not limited to any particular religion. Even mages can have it, but even so, they must be of the most pure character. Only the truly selfless, caring, compassionate and courageous have a chance at possessing True Faith, and it's not a certainty even then.

True Faith is also a potent weapon against Infernal agents such as the Nephandi or the undead, and it can drive them from the area or even turn back their powers if the faith in question is strong enough. Members of the Celestial Chorus tend to be the most common wizards with True Faith (if it can be said to be common at all, that is), but it is not limited to them. Verbena, Dreamspeakers, Akashics, Cultists and even Euthanatoi have all been known to display True Faith as well. Technomancers' faith in science tends to preclude such superstitious beliefs, but even so, it is not impossible for them to have it. It is simply much less likely.

Characters may improve their degree of faith only with exceptional roleplaying and explicit Storyteller approval. The game uses for True Faith are covered exhaustively in **Laws of the Hunt**, but some basic rules for Faith are included here.

- By brandishing his holy symbol, the bearer gains the Social Trait: *Intimidating* when repelling Nephandi or the undead. If someone uses it to strike such a supernatural creature, a holy symbol grants the extra Physical Traits *Burning* and *Searing*, and it inflicts one level of aggravated damage. If a target is

supernaturally repelled by crosses, he takes an additional level of aggravated damage if a person with True Faith so much as touches his bare skin with a cross.

• A character with True Faith may attempt to repel Nephandi or vampires by brandishing his holy symbol, invoking his belief ("In the name of _____, I command you to be gone!") and engaging in a Social Challenge. If the faithful character wins the challenge, the cursed being must flee the area immediately. Even if the character fails, the target must still back off a few feet and cower before taking action. The target still may not initiate any spells or attacks during the next turn, although she may defend herself normally. A target may resist this use of True Faith only by attempting to overbid with Willpower. If she currently possesses at least twice as many Willpower Traits as the faithful character, she remains unaffected. A character may attempt to repel multiple targets with a group challenge.

• A character may choose to add his Faith Traits to his total Traits on any test to resist magical Effects or any of the powers of an Infernal agent. This system reflects the character placing his faith in the certainty of his defense, and it can offer an advantage in a crucial moment. Remember, however, that the character is still subject to the usual rules about crises of faith if he fails any such defensive tests, making this tactic risky at best.

It is much easier to lose one's True Faith than it is to gain it. Any time a character fails a test in which True Faith is involved, he has a crisis of faith. During such a time, he is one Trait down on all Social Challenges for the remainder of the scene, and he unable to invoke his True Faith again until that Trait has been restored. (The Trait returns at the Narrator's discretion, but it should involve excellent roleplaying.)

DERANGEMENTS

More than a few mages think that they've gone crazy when the Awakening hits, but fortunately this isn't the case very often. However, the war for reality can still exact a heavy toll on who fight it. Bending reality to suit one's will, traveling to worlds far removed from our own and facing down the wrath of the universe personified is stuff that would snap lesser minds in seconds. Even as strong-willed as mages are, they still risk developing derangements when they face the horrors that lurk in reality's shadows or confront overpowering conditions of extreme terror, guilt or anxiety. The Storyteller may decide a derangement is in order after any experience that generates especially intense and unpleasant emotions, or which violates a character's beliefs or ethics severely.

Derangements usually become active only when certain particular circumstances trigger them. Once activated, though, derangements remain in effect for the rest of the scene, and players must modify their character's Traits, attitudes and behavior in accordance with the derangement description. Keep in mind that a mage with a derangement is not the same as a Marauder. The chaos wizards have used some unknown magical means to harness madness as a shield against Paradox, but a character suffering a derangement is just insane. What's more, a deranged mage can still be cured, whereas the path of a Marauder is a one-way street. Of course, nothing says that a deranged mage might not take that path one day, but that's a question for the player and Storyteller in question to explore.

Characters may resist their derangements by expending a Willpower Trait. This effect lasts for one scene, but if the trigger is still present at the end of that

time, the character must spend another Willpower Trait. In the case of particularly intense mental stress, Narrators may rule that a Static Willpower Challenge or additional Willpower Traits are required. It is up to the Storyteller to determine what amount of time and Willpower is required to cure a derangement, and such cures are best left to thoughtful and involved roleplaying rather than a simple Trait expenditure.

Finally, remember that experiencing derangements are different from entering Quiet. While both conditions may sometimes cause similar effects in mages, one stems from a Paradox Backlash, while the other is the result of more mundane disturbance. A truly unlucky wizard might suffer from both conditions at once, or a prolonged Quiet might create some permanent derangement, but the conditions are intrinsically different.

Note: Nothing about the way a deranged person acts is funny or arbitrary. The insane character is only reacting to the stimuli that he perceives to be real. As far as he knows, his behavior is perfectly normal. Players should also never forget that the **Mind's Eye Theatre** rules of safety still apply when roleplaying derangements. Roleplaying *Crimson Rage* is fine, but smashing the scenery or yelling in public places is against the rules and obnoxious (not to mention frightening to people who aren't playing the game). Don't do it.

Bulimia

Bulimic characters salve their guilt and insecurity by overindulging in activities that comfort them (such as eating). Characters with this affliction will gorge themselves as much as possible under stress then purge their systems drastically. At the Narrator's discretion, the character may overindulge in other pleasurable activities — sex, dancing, even Quintessence — but such alterations should be uncommon, and they should be justified in the character's history.

Crimson Rage

A character with this derangement experiences unprovoked fits of anger due to pent-up feelings of helplessness and inadequacy. Most such fits are triggered by failure to overcome some obstacle, or being confronted by a specific type of situation (such as pain, emotional distress or romantic failure). The player should work with the Narrator to determine what triggers his character's derangement. Whenever this derangement is active, the character gains the Negative Traits: *Violent x2* and *Impatient*, and the player should roleplay the fury as well as possible within the **Mind's Eye Theatre** rules of safety.

Fugue

Characters suffering this affliction react to stress by adopting a specific set of behaviors. In the process, they suffer blackouts or periods of memory loss. When confronted by extreme stress, the character must win a Static Willpower Challenge. If he fails, the character blacks out and the player must roleplay the character's trancelike state. Otherwise, control of the character passes to a Narrator for a scene, who dictates the actions the character takes in order to remove the stress. At the end of the fugue, the character comes to his rightful senses with no memory of his fugue actions.

Hysteria

Characters with this derangement are unable to control their emotions properly when subjected to stress or pressure. They become vulnerable to wild

mood swings and fits of intense violence against the source of their discomfort. The mage must make a Willpower test against five Traits any time such stress is present. If she fails, she is two Traits down on all Social tests due to her wildly fluctuating moods, and she gains the Negative Trait: *Violent* as well. In addition, this derangement activates automatically whenever the mage fails in a particularly stressful or important challenge. (Narrators have final say on what classifies as such a dramatic failure.)

Manic-Depression

This derangement causes a character to suffer devastating mood swings. Whenever the character fails to achieve a personal goal, she must win a Static Willpower Challenge or fall into a depressive state for a number of scenes determined by the Narrator. While depressed, the character's Willpower Traits are considered halved (round down, minimum one) for purposes of Trait comparison, and she may not use Effects to raise her Physical Traits or otherwise lighten her mood. After that, she enters a period of highly upbeat energy and excitement, in which she pursues her goals obsessively for a number of scenes equal to the time she spent in depression. During this manic time, she has the Negative Trait: *Impatient* x2.

Megalomania

These individuals have made power the focus of their existence, and they characters must always be the most potent individuals in their environment. Where the power stems from is irrelevant as long as they are dominant. They believe that other people are divided into two classes: lesser beings and beings elevated beyond their worth. Due to their supreme confidence, mages with this derangement are considered one Trait up on all Willpower tests while their derangement is active. However, they must also make a Willpower test (difficulty six Traits) to resist any opportunity to put people in their place or reprimand any contentious upstarts who dare to presume beyond their station during that time. Although megalomaniacs play for keeps, the actions they take against others in this state need not be mindlessly violent. However, they are typically vicious in the extreme. They are designed to humiliate the offender and exalt the mage's standing in the eyes of others.

Multiple Personalities

A character with this derangement has suffered mental anguish so severe that his mind reacted by creating additional personas. Each personality is relevant to the trauma that caused it, and the player should work with the Storyteller to determine each personality's Nature and what triggers a particular one to rise to the surface. When a personality is triggered, it assumes control until the conditions it was created to deal with have passed. Characters can manifest different Abilities and even Spheres for each personality, however, all such Traits must still be purchased normally. What a personality believes it can do is often very different from what it is actually capable of. Any such arrangements must be worked out with the Storyteller.

Obsessive/Compulsive

Characters suffering from this derangement are driven to control their environment. Obsessive characters keep one aspect of their life constant, be it personal cleanliness or simply keeping things quiet. Compulsive characters perform specific actions or sets of actions, such as washing their hands constantly or always saying lengthy prayers after touching another person. Obsessive/ compulsive characters are one Trait up to resist any *Mind* Effects or any other attempts to coerce them to give up their set behaviors, but they attack anyone who tries to prevent them from adhering

to their derangement. They need not try to kill the target, but they will inflict as much harm as is necessary to allow them to indulge in their derangement once again. If no clear individual is the source of their frustration, then the nearest person at hand will suffice. Failing that, the scenery or even the character himself is in for a world of hurt.

Paranoia

Paranoid beings believe that all their woes and suffering stem from a malicious external source. Many afflicted beings come up with intricate theories about just who is against them and why. Those they suspect of being against them are often subject to swift and brutal violence. Paranoid characters trust no one, not even family members or close friends, and they have a difficult time interacting with others. They are one Trait down on all Social Challenges while their derangement is active, and they suffer from the Negative Traits: *Violent* and *Condescending*.

Regression

Characters suffering from this affliction avoid facing responsibilities or consequences by retreating to a younger state of mind in which they feel that less will be required of them. They may alternate between times of whimsy and temper tantrums, but they will always seek to put a more powerful individual between them and whatever is plaguing them. Victims of this derangement are two Traits down on all Mental Challenges.

Schizophrenia

Individuals with this derangement have had their psyche fractured by terrible, unresolved inner conflicts. Most people conceive of this disorder when they think about insanity. Victims might imagine anything from the relatively harmless delusion that they're walking a goldfish on a leash, to the more sinister conviction that they must cut out their children's eyes to keep them from being tainted by the evil on television. Even still, this disorder is anything but arbitrary. The player should work with the Storyteller to determine a general set of behaviors relevant to the original trauma. Mages with this derangement are unpredictable and dangerous. In situations where their inner conflict flares up, they must retest any kind of challenge to retain self-control that they win. (If they win that retest, they do not have to retest again, though.) Furthermore, they are two Traits down on all Willpower-related tests.

TRADITION POLITICS

Life is like high school, only with money.

— Frank Zappa

Many young mages assume that enlightenment will bring about tolerance, understanding and an end to the kind of petty politics that runs rampant in the mundane world. Unfortunately, such isn't usually the case. Mages are as famous for their egos as their abilities, and feuds can last decades or even centuries as one group of mages tries to assert its dominance or its paradigm over another. Even within a Tradition, various cliques and factions vie for recognition and control of resources. Mages who don't mind what they say or who they say it to can quickly find themselves outcasts.

THE COUNCIL OF NINE

Once, the Traditions had a dream of unity, in which all mages would work together to achieve Ascension and restore the Mythic Ages to humanity. At the pinnacle of this dream stood the Council of Nine, a collection of the wisest and

most powerful mages of each Tradition who would oversee everyone's efforts and provide a neutral ground for the exchange of ideas and settling of grievances. Sheltered in a Realm known simply as Horizon, the Council met for several centuries, weathering the worst times on Earth and encouraging the bursts of creativity and invention that kept magic alive as the Technocratic Union spread across the globe. As the Hermetics and their numerologists well know, nine is a number that represents the highest synthesis of power.

Destiny can be cruel, however, for a combination of political infighting and a crippling invasion have recently brought the Council crashing down. Nothing has been heard from Horizon since the Avatar Storm began and the Gauntlet strengthened. Even many Masters on Earth disappeared or fled to seek refuge from a world that balked at their magical presence.

As a result, the Traditions are left without much of their senior leadership, and the mages of Earth have begun adjusting to the reality of those changes. Some hotheads have responded by pointing fingers and laying blame, which has only increased the tension between Traditions. Other mages are searching desperately for some way of contacting the surviving Councilors. Many of those mages who remain have simply given up in disgust or despair, thinking that this is just one more sign that the Technocracy has finally triumphed after all.

Many, but not all.

A few dedicated souls still strive to keep the Council's dream of unity alive. They work in ways large and small to foster fellowship and cooperation between the Traditions and to douse the divisive flames that threaten to consume what remains of the grand design. Theirs is perhaps the most difficult and least certain path of all those that lie before the Awakened, but those who follow it draw from a deep well of strength indeed. Sometimes it seems that they alone remember what the Traditions ultimately stand for:
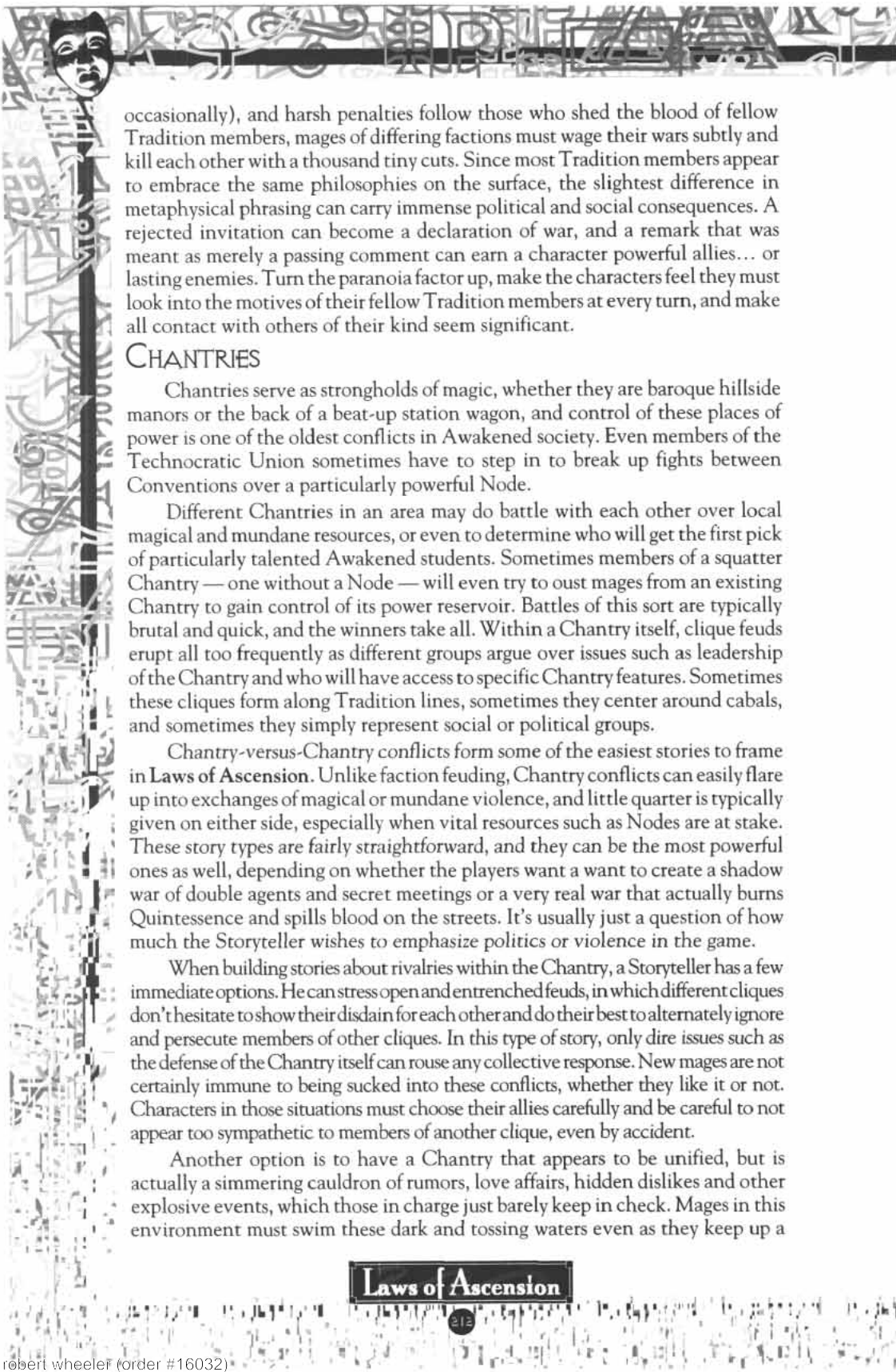
Hope.

FACTIONS

As individualistic as many mages are, it's no surprise that different camps and cliques within each Tradition have long struggled to establish their own interpretation of how to uphold the Tradition's goals. What's more, the modern age of division and isolation has opened many of these old wounds once again and created more than a few new schisms.

An Apprentice who follows one mentor may find himself snubbed by others of his Tradition, and he not have the slightest clue as to why until much later on in his training. Likewise, those who fail to espouse the "correct" doctrine may find themselves unable to gain access to Chantries, Nodes, mentors, libraries or other Tradition resources, depending on who controls these assets and how they feel about a character's metaphysical viewpoint. Some Traditions are more lenient than others when it comes to tolerating members of other factions, but most mages have an opinion on the matter of factional alliance, even if they don't choose to act on it. As some seasoned faction players say, choosing not to be on a team is really a team of its own, and no one gets to just sit on the sidelines.

Storytelling disputes between factions is perhaps the ultimate exploration of delicate alliances, double entendres and the well-timed snub. Since outright battle is strictly frowned upon by all Traditions (although it does still happen

occasionally), and harsh penalties follow those who shed the blood of fellow Tradition members, mages of differing factions must wage their wars subtly and kill each other with a thousand tiny cuts. Since most Tradition members appear to embrace the same philosophies on the surface, the slightest difference in metaphysical phrasing can carry immense political and social consequences. A rejected invitation can become a declaration of war, and a remark that was meant as merely a passing comment can earn a character powerful allies... or lasting enemies. Turn the paranoia factor up, make the characters feel they must look into the motives of their fellow Tradition members at every turn, and make all contact with others of their kind seem significant.

CHANTRIES

Chantries serve as strongholds of magic, whether they are baroque hillside manors or the back of a beat-up station wagon, and control of these places of power is one of the oldest conflicts in Awakened society. Even members of the Technocratic Union sometimes have to step in to break up fights between Conventions over a particularly powerful Node.

Different Chantries in an area may do battle with each other over local magical and mundane resources, or even to determine who will get the first pick of particularly talented Awakened students. Sometimes members of a squatter Chantry — one without a Node — will even try to oust mages from an existing Chantry to gain control of its power reservoir. Battles of this sort are typically brutal and quick, and the winners take all. Within a Chantry itself, clique feuds erupt all too frequently as different groups argue over issues such as leadership of the Chantry and who will have access to specific Chantry features. Sometimes these cliques form along Tradition lines, sometimes they center around cabals, and sometimes they simply represent social or political groups.

Chantry-versus-Chantry conflicts form some of the easiest stories to frame in **Laws of Ascension**. Unlike faction feuding, Chantry conflicts can easily flare up into exchanges of magical or mundane violence, and little quarter is typically given on either side, especially when vital resources such as Nodes are at stake. These story types are fairly straightforward, and they can be the most powerful ones as well, depending on whether the players want a want to create a shadow war of double agents and secret meetings or a very real war that actually burns Quintessence and spills blood on the streets. It's usually just a question of how much the Storyteller wishes to emphasize politics or violence in the game.

When building stories about rivalries within the Chantry, a Storyteller has a few immediate options. He can stress open and entrenched feuds, in which different cliques don't hesitate to show their disdain for each other and do their best to alternately ignore and persecute members of other cliques. In this type of story, only dire issues such as the defense of the Chantry itself can rouse any collective response. New mages are not certainly immune to being sucked into these conflicts, whether they like it or not. Characters in those situations must choose their allies carefully and be careful to not appear too sympathetic to members of another clique, even by accident.

Another option is to have a Chantry that appears to be unified, but is actually a simmering cauldron of rumors, love affairs, hidden dislikes and other explosive events, which those in charge just barely keep in check. Mages in this environment must swim these dark and tossing waters even as they keep up a

facade of friendliness to everyone, and they must remember that making friends, cutting deals or even just falling in love can have dire consequences.

CABALS

A mage's cabal is often the only real family she has left. The people in her cabal are the only ones who understand her new life, face her problems with her, and who she can count on to back her up when she needs it most. Even if the cabal formed out of a more pragmatic concern — such as mutual protection or advancing some collective interest — and not due to any particular ties of friendship, the members of a cabal know that they can trust and depend on each other.

Cabals used to be composed of members of one Tradition, but this trend broke down in the last century. Faced with the Avatar Storm and the end of the Ascension War, most modern mages are glad for any company they can find. Of course, even the tightest cabals can still fall victim to the same problems that groups of friends or associates do in everyday life. Jealousy, ambition, romantic fallout, petty feuds, buried grudges or even simple differences of opinion can all stir up divisive conflict within a particular cabal.

Since they tend to form these groups on their own, the basic interactions of the players naturally generate many cabal-oriented plot lines, as different cabals come into conflict and members' attitudes change over time. Those players or Storytellers looking for additional motivation or ways to approach stories about cabal conflicts should think about that original battleground of personal association: high school. Remember how the different cliques used to butt heads, often over the smallest and stupidest things? Think about how your own circle of friends always seems to have some crisis or another going on, be it a love triangle, two people who aren't speaking to one another or some other interpersonal turmoil. Keep that social dynamic in mind and extrapolate from it the behaviors of cosmically enlightened folks with gigantic egos who are waging a largely one-sided and desperate battle against the ultimate symbol of authority. From that perspective, it's not hard to see how conflicts can arise between or within cabals.

RANK AND REPUTATION

When the Council of Nine formed, one of the first initiatives that the Order of Hermes took on was to establish a standard system of ranks and titles, so that mages would have a universal means of recognizing magical accomplishment. Mages tend to be rather highly competitive by nature, so keeping up a strong public image is a point of both pride and necessity for many wizards.

Reputation is the game measure of a mage's standing among others of her kind, and it is measured in Traits. It usually stems from a proven level of magical accomplishment, although it can also be a function of holding some official position in the magical community, such as a Chantry head or faction leader. A mage may also gain Reputation Traits by being influential in a city's business community, pulling off impressive magical feats, foiling the plots of rival groups or by simply catching the right eyes at the right time.

Anyone taken into a Tradition immediately receives the Trait: *Accepted*. Those without this Trait cannot be subject to Tradition justice save for the most serious crimes, but they also cannot expect aid, shelter or even civil treatment from proper Tradition mages either. Different Traits are bestowed at each rank, as shown in the following chart.

Rules, Systems and Drama

RANK AND REPUTATION

Rank	Reputation Trait
Apprentice	*Accepted*
Initiate	*Devoted*
Disciple	*Promising*
Adept	*Respected*
Master	*Visionary*
Archmage	*Enlightened*

A character who has earned both the Apprentice and Initiate levels of a Sphere qualifies as an Initiate. She becomes a Disciple when she earns the first Disciple level in a Sphere, and she becomes an Adept when she earns the first Adept level in a Sphere, and so on. A character can earn each Reputation Trait only once, upon attaining that level of mastery of a Sphere for the first time. Therefore, if a character earns *Promising* for his advancement in the *Life* Sphere, he will not earn it again if he demonstrates the same degree of mastery over the *Prime* Sphere. He has already proven that he possesses that level of enlightenment.

Troupes should feel free to invent Reputation Traits to suit their own stories and the deeds of the characters receiving the Traits. For example, a mage who turns back a terrifying Nephandi assault might earn a Trait like *Fearless* or *Noble*. A Chantry leader might be considered *Trusted* or *Revered* by the local cabals, and a wizard who establishes a homeless shelter to give hope to the downtrodden might receive one such as *Wise* or *Understanding*.

Here are some common uses of Reputation:

• You may add your Reputation Traits to your Social Traits during an applicable Social Challenge. (Note: You may not do so in casting a magical Effect unless the Storyteller specifically approves of such usage in advance.) You must announce such a usage before resolving the challenge, however, since the target can choose to ignore your Reputation and force you to rely on your normal Social Traits. Since most Reputation Traits derive from accomplishments rather than social acclaim, such a snub is a serious insult in Awakened society. Even if he wins the challenge, the offending character can expect lasting enmity and possibly even some form of formal punishment. Someone who ignores the Reputation Traits a bully is using to intimidate him might get away without too much trouble, but a mage who disregards another's Reputation for no good reason can expect some serious consequences.

• Reputation is a measure of a character's creditability, as well as the general regard her opinion receives in magical circles. In any formal debate between two characters that pits one mage's word against another, in which no clear resolution presents itself, Reputation is the tie-breaking factor. In all such cases, the character with the most Reputation Traits is the one whose word is more likely to be accepted. However, those who get caught making false charges and relying on their Reputation Traits to save them lose face quickly and usually suffer other punishments as well. Reputation is also typically the deciding factor in determining which plan of action a cabal or Chantry takes when multiple valid plans are on the table and there's no other way to determine which one to pick.

- One character may give Reputation Traits to another to show his favor, although the individual to which he gives the Reputation Trait must return it immediately upon the asking. This system is the basis for scenes in which lowly characters get by guards or gain audience with a powerful being because they're acting on behalf of a more respected character. However, if the bearer loses this Trait in a challenge, it is gone for the duration of the story, so be careful about whom you support. You can use loaned Reputation Traits exactly as you would use your own, but you can give only one Trait of Reputation to any one person in this fashion.

- Anyone may remove Reputation Traits from characters of a lower rank than themselves at a cost of one Reputation Trait per Trait to be removed. Removing Reputation Traits also involves performing an appropriate smear campaign in character. Only mages of the same Tradition may remove a character's *Accepted* Trait. Removing Reputation Traits is a costly but effective way of showing one's disdain for a less experienced wizard and letting him know who really runs the show.

- Alternatively, a group of characters of lower rank can remove the Reputation Traits of someone higher up the ladder than them, provided that they all have more Reputation Traits between them than their target has. *Accepted* Traits do not count toward this total, unless all of the characters are of the same Tradition as their target. This system provides younger mages a way to fight back when more experienced wizards try to rule them through force of Reputation alone. They had best beware their own success, though. No mage is going to suffer in silence as a bunch of young upstarts give his image a black eye.

- Reputation Traits cannot be granted by any particular system of game mechanics. A mage must earn these Traits through great deeds, honorable conduct and exemplary actions in pursuit of their Tradition's goals. Character input figures into the process as a measure of public opinion and approval, but only the Storyteller gives out Reputation Traits. Reputations are fragile things that are hard to build and all too easy to lose, so mages who play the status game had best be ready for a long and difficult road. Even still, the potential rewards are worth the effort for those who pursue them.

- Orphans, Hollow Ones and other Disparates begin with no Reputation Traits, and they cannot gain any from Tradition mages. On the flip side, they suffer no tangible consequences if they choose to ignore the Reputation Traits of a Tradition mage either. They might actually gain respect in the eyes of their fellows for a well-timed snub of this nature. Of course, they must still watch out for any revenge plans the slighted mage might be cooking up, because being shown up by a lowly Orphan really sticks in a Tradition mage's craw.

- At the Storyteller's discretion, Hollowers and others like them may receive Reputation Traits in regard to their own kind, which function just like normal Reputation Traits in every way. However, they never apply to Tradition mages, just as Tradition Reputation Traits do not apply to them. The social games the Disparates play can be just as vicious as any Tradition politics, and this system adds another level to games with a substantial Orphan presence.

TRADITION JUSTICE

Even though the Council has fallen, a system of justice still exists among the Traditions, and mages who violate that system's laws can expect to be brought before some sort of formal tribunal eventually. Considering the magical and mundane resources a gathering of mages can bring to bear, it is usually not

terribly difficult to ascertain a subject's guilt or innocence. *Mind* and *Time* rotes are common investigative measures, not mention highly effective ones, although all of the other Spheres and a host of mundane Abilities can play a part as well. Resisting the use of investigative rotes performed by a tribunal is usually considered an admission of guilt, unless the accused can prove that some foul play might occur during or as a result of their use. Suffice it to say, however, there are seldom many doubts as to the veracity of these verdicts, so most mages accept the punishments that are handed down, however sorrowful it may be to do so.

When it comes to crimes themselves, each Tradition has its own particular notions of what counts as a crime, and they police their own on such subjective matters. (See the Tradition descriptions in Chapter Two for a general idea of what they do and do not find acceptable.) However, there are some crimes that all Traditions recognize, and they will go to great lengths to punish those who commit them. The type of punishment depends on the severity of the crime of which a mage is found guilty, and it can be anything from temporary ostracism to a permanent mark of shame to the destruction of an offender's very Avatar.

Certámen

Two mages who exhaust normal channels of resolving a dispute sometimes turn to certámen, a wizard's duel that pits the mages' skill with their Spheres against each other. Certámen is traditionally performed with at least one witness who acts as a judge, and it is almost always non-lethal. Indeed, it was invented as an alternative to the blood feuds that were too popular in darker times. To avoid Paradox, certámen is almost always performed in a Chantry, although Hollowers and others without many mystical resources occasionally practice so-called "gutter certámen" in back alleys and smoky clubs. Within a proper certámen circle, however, mages have free rein to conjure all manner of Effects, since certámen never incurs Paradox. The ultimate goal of a certámen is simple: You do not attack your opponent directly, you destroy his reservoir of Quintessence Traits.

To this end, each mage uses his Spheres to form a gladius, an aegis, and a locus. The gladius is the attacking Sphere that the mage uses to launch his assaults on his opponent's Quintessence. The aegis is his defensive Sphere, and it governs how he must attempt to thwart his opponent's strikes. The locus is the Sphere that represents the mage's Quintessence Traits. A mage may switch which Sphere he is using for any one of those three purposes at any time, but doing so takes up his action for the turn. In addition, a given Sphere cannot be used for more than one of these purposes at a time. Finally, for each successful attack that slips past an opponent's defenses, the attacker destroys one of his foe's Quintessence Traits, and the first person to destroy all of his opponent's Quintessence is the winner. As part of the certámen oath, the loser is expected to accept defeat graciously and live by it.

Running certámen is primarily a descriptive exercise, based on the Spheres each mage is using. For example, an attacker using a *Forces* gladius may declare that she is manifesting it as a bolt of flame and lashing out at her foe, while her opponent (using *Matter* as his aegis) declares that he is conjuring a wall of water to douse her flames, and so on. Certámen can be over in seconds or hours, but it is seldom dull to watch. Regardless of what dramatically descriptive forms they take, though, all strikes, blocks and dodges are resolved like normal magical tests and retests using the Spheres involved. The order of challenges likewise proceeds normally.

Storytellers should emphasize the wits and ingenuity of the mages involved over strict systems as much as they can, however, and possibly even offer bonus Traits or other benefits to players whose attacks or defenses are particularly clever. Certámen is supposed to be a battle of wits and magical prowess, not a showcase for brute force and Trait-stacking.

Ostracism

A form of collective shaming, ostracism is the typical punishment for those found guilty of spilling secrets unwittingly, disrespecting an elder mage, wasting Quintessence on unnecessary magic, harming or manipulating Sleepers for no good reason, feuding with a fellow cabal or Chantry member for petty reasons or other lapses of judgment that are not necessarily especially dangerous, but which still warrant a substantive punishment of some kind. Ostracized mages get the proverbial "silent treatment" from their fellows for a proscribed number of days or even weeks. During this period they are also denied further instruction by their mentors or access to libraries or other magical resources, in order to give them more time to think about their crime. They may also be required to perform menial tasks to teach them proper humility. While they will not be denied aid in an emergency, this otherwise total loss of personal contact often proves very effective at ensuring that the offender doesn't repeat his mistake. This is the most common form of punishment in most **Laws of Ascension** games.

Branding

More serious crimes may get an offender branded, permanently marked by magic for all to see. Branded mages lose all Reputation Traits, they are removed from any leadership position they might have held, and they can be banished from the area. Some may even be declared Errants by their Tradition if the crime is serious enough.

In addition, they are two Traits down on all Social Challenges with mages who know their status (which is usually obvious, either to mundane sight or *Prime* magic). Breaking solemn oaths, leaking secrets intentionally (as long as no deaths arose from them), attacking another mage without provocation, wantonly killing one abusing Sleepers, destroying a Wonder or committing other clearly intentional acts that represent a serious disregard for the lives and trust of other mages are all potentially worthy of branding. Brands cannot be removed without a great amount of effort, and word of the offender's deeds usually travels quickly enough to make removal of the actual mark a moot point anyway. This punishment should be rather infrequent in most games, since it usually means that a character must depart the chronicle. When it is necessary, the Storyteller should ensure that it is enforced, or the attitude toward Tradition justice will quickly become too relaxed.

Death

Mages who commit depraved acts such as rape or kidnapping, who betray a Node or Chantry to enemy forces, who spy on and/or betray fellow Tradition mages for any reason, or whose deliberate actions of any kind bring death or serious injury to other mages are usually sentenced to death. These kinds of crimes stain souls, spread needless misery and set back the efforts at Ascension that lie at the heart of all Tradition activities, and that simply cannot be tolerated. Even if the mage did not specifically intend to end someone's life (say, he leaked secrets to someone who later utilized that knowledge to kill another mage), he may still be sentenced to death, since he knew that the original act was wrong and went ahead with it anyway.

The penalty of death is still not a common sentence, but most mages aren't in the least bit squeamish about enforcing it when it's called for. Many still consider themselves at war, after all, and one cannot afford to be undermined from within during a war. Obviously, both death and Gilgul should never be used lightly in a chronicle, since they put an end to a character once and for all. Storytellers should make sure that these punishments are not applied inappropriately.

Gilgul

Mages who commit the most irredeemably foul, vile, and unspeakable acts of murder, betrayal and corruption are sentenced to Gilgul — the destruction of the Avatar itself. This punishment prevents the mage from being reincarnated and destroys any magical talent the subject might have, so it is performed only when it is determined that there's absolutely no chance to redeem a particular mage, in this lifetime or any other. Most of the time, such an immense pronouncement is reserved for the Nephandi, since their blasphemous ways leave an indelible taint on the souls they touch. Unfortunately, even untainted mages are capable of performing hideous acts without any outside help at all.

Naturally, no mage will submit willingly to such a punishment, so offenders are usually restrained physically and magically before the sentence is carried out. Once the ritual is completed, the accused is either released (often after being mind-wiped as well) or executed, depending again on the overall severity of his crimes. Some criminals are deemed too dangerous to live, even after such a terrible punishment, while others are let free, to live out the rest of their lives as a broken shell. It's anybody's guess as to which fate is worse.

Welcome to the Cosmos!
The Spirit Worlds

A noted Master of the *Spirit* Sphere once said: "Taking the first step beyond is always the hardest. After that, it's just a question of where you want to go." Indeed, new mages often wonder exactly how vast the cosmos must be after getting just a glimpse of the worlds that have opened up to them. *Where do our dreams come from?* They ask. *Where do they go? What happens when we die? Is there an end out there somewhere, a point which even we can't go past? Where do all these spirits come from, anyway?*

While the answers to those and countless other such questions encompass an incredible amount of information, mages have come up with a few quick ways to explain the various levels of reality. In actuality, the spirit worlds are not nearly so neatly divided or explored as these terms might suggest. The spirit worlds, also known as the Umbra, are forever in flux, which confounds even the best efforts to map them in the conventional sense. These terms still serve as a general reference so that different mages can understand each other and what the other is referring to. Take this advice and information to heart, but take it with a grain of salt as well.

The Spirit Keeper

In games with a preponderance of spirits and Umbral travel, you may want to assign a Spirit Keeper. The role of Spirit Keeper is a special Narrator position designed specifically to track the Gauntlet ratings, maintain records of spirits, check out rules for rote Effects in the Umbra and so on. The Spirit Keeper essentially functions as a special Storyteller to handle all things spirit-related. Keep handy a folder of information about the local spirit world, important Umbral

Realms and some common spirits that mages might meet. The Spirit Keeper can run plots and resolve conflicts based on this information, thereby easing the Storyteller's load and providing a deeper knowledge of the subject matter.

Magic In the Umbra

As a general rule of thumb, most magic isn't vulgar in the Umbra because reality is more flexible there. Certain Effects are still always vulgar, however, no matter where you go. Some of those Effects include performing Gilgul, healing aggravated wounds or various permanent Effects such as body alteration or creating a Realm. The Storyteller is the final arbiter of what is or isn't vulgar in the Umbra. He and the Spirit Keeper should take care that players with access to the spirit world respect its hazards, rather than simply using it as a cheap way of casting powerful magic without repercussions. Note also that even if a mage casts a vulgar Effect in the Umbra to avoid the Paradox, sending it into the real world may still be Paradoxical. Doing so may also cause the Effect to erode due to Unbelief.

It should also be noted that different levels of the Umbra have their own house rules as the mage travels farther from Earth. For example, *Entropy* Effects are never vulgar in the decaying Dark Umbra, but creating some form of pure, untainted matter would be incredibly vulgar there, since it goes against the Underworld's paradigm. Mages should take care to mind their surroundings, especially when paying a house call on a particularly powerful or nasty spirit, lest they receive an unpleasant surprise from Paradox when they try to cast powerful magical Effects. If possible, the Storyteller and Spirit Keeper should decide what types of Effects are vulgar within a given Realm in advance so as to maintain consistency.

The Tellurian

The Tellurian is what would be more conventionally known as the universe. Anything that can be dreamed of or described has the potential to exist, and it quite possibly does already exist somewhere in the Tellurian, even if we haven't found it yet. Everything is part of the Tellurian in one way or another.

The Tapestry

Despite what mages like to say, even they can't conceive of the Tellurian in its purest state. There's simply too much for even them to process effectively. Therefore, mages use the common metaphor of the Tapestry to represent reality. Every possibility or dream is a thread that is woven into the skein of reality. Mages have the talent to re-weave the threads as they desire, and thus to shape possibilities to their own ends.

Of course, yanking on the threads of reality is dangerous. Too much stress on a particular thread will snap it, and an untrained mage might get tangled up in a snarl. That's a cute way of explaining what happens when a mage suffers a Paradox Backlash, but it also serves to teach an important lesson. Care must be taken not to alter the Tapestry too much at once, or else… well, no one really knows, but it can't be good. In fact, it might just end reality as we know it. Mages can't simply pull out the heavy-duty Effects and slug it out with the Technocracy. Not only would Paradox eat everyone for lunch, but the damage to the Tapestry would most likely be irrevocable.

Into the Storm

The first obstacle any mage must overcome is the Gauntlet, the metaphysical barrier that separates Earth from the spirit realms. In recent years, the Gauntlet has thickened as static reality cools and Sleepers reject the spiritual

DON'T PANIC!

If the Umbra seems too vast and confusing at first, take a deep breath and keep these few things in mind. First of all, most mages on Earth either can't or won't cross the Gauntlet, due to the debilitating effects of the Avatar Storm. Second, unless the mage is truly skilled or foolhardy, he will limit most of his excursions to the Penumbra, so you can focus your attentions there for the most part. Third, those mages who do wish to venture deeper into the spirit worlds will most likely have to make extensive preparations to muster the necessary magical strength, which gives you time to prepare a suitable environment and story line for them to encounter. Finally, the spirit worlds are highly mutable, so whatever interpretation of them you choose to use in your game is just as right as any other.

Granted, the Restless Dead probably shouldn't be cavorting around the faerie Dreaming without a good explanation, but you should be fine as long as you remember the general descriptions that follow. Just make sure that the trip is always memorable, no matter what. If the players start commenting lightly on how the Umbra just looks like Earth with a blue light on, something's wrong. However, if they all start whispering unbidden while traveling the Dark Umbra, or tell other characters about Umbral journeys in excited and wondering tones, you're doing it right.

worlds, but it could still be crossed. Now, however, it exacts a painful toll from those who try to breach it. Characters who cross the Gauntlet take an automatic level of aggravated damage, and they are one Trait down on all challenges for the next 10 minutes due to dizziness, headache and nausea.

Spirit scholars point to a phenomenon known as the Avatar Storm as the source of this new problem, although they are currently at a loss at how the damage might be repaired. Supposedly, the Avatar Storm is mix of a tremendous maelstrom of souls in the Dark Umbra, and the aftermath of the recent destruction of an incredibly powerful being by the Technocracy. The resulting clash of forces created a backlash that at once thickened the Gauntlet and added a layer of Avatar shards on top of it, making travel and even communication across it a hazardous process for the unwary. As of the present, there's no telling when or if the Storm will subside, but given reality's current trend toward stasis, such a prospect seems unfortunately distant.

Of course, this barrier doesn't exist just to keep humans from leaving their little playground — it also serves to keep out the Really Nasty Things that would like nothing better than to hop over to Earth and snack on some souls. Therefore, as unpleasant as it may be now, the Gauntlet serves a vital purpose. Without it, Earth would be open to the depredations of the denizens of the outer Realms, and the magic unleashed here would have even more dire repercussions on the Tapestry than they already do.

Aside from taking damage from the Avatar Storm, a mage must fight to penetrate the Gauntlet itself. In places of magic and mystery, the Gauntlet is often low. Powerful Nodes, mystic caves and the like have passages that lie close to the spirit world. Conversely, the Gauntlet is usually high in Technocratically controlled areas like science labs and dense cities, in order to keep out wandering spirits and monsters.

Laws of Ascension

The Gauntlet typically has a rating from one to 10. Instead of challenging the Gauntlet directly, the mage creates a usual *Spirit* magic Effect, and the strength of the Gauntlet affects the ease of the spell. For each point that the Gauntlet is lower than five, the mage gains a one-Trait bonus on the test to breach the Gauntlet (from either side). For each point that the Gauntlet is above six, a mage suffers a one-Trait penalty instead.

GAUNTLET RATINGS	
Area	**Gauntlet**
Science lab	9
Inner city	8
Most places	7
Rural countryside	6
Deep wilderness	5
Typical Node	4
Powerful Node	3
Greatest Nodes	2

PENUMBRA

Crossing the Gauntlet lands the mage in the Penumbra, the world that exists just beyond perception but always rings true in the heart. The Penumbra is a reflection of the Earth, so many of the same landmarks and other features are still there. However, while the mundane world shows how things appear, the Penumbra focuses emotional resonance and shows how things really are. A garbage dump on Earth appears as a seething heap of corruption in the Penumbra. A playground looks like a swirl of laughter and bright, playful colors. Deep woods become even more looming and mysterious. Likewise, a particularly sneaky person might take on slightly weasel- or snake-like features, while a pure soul glows with a faint inner light.

Things with particularly strong emotional resonance sometimes even survive in the Penumbra beyond the destruction of their mundane form. For example, a house that served as a powerful site of dark magic might still sit brooding on the hillside beyond the Gauntlet, even though it's no more than a crumbling foundation in the normal world. Lastly, spirits of all kinds frequently pass through the Penumbra on their way to other destinations, so a polite and observant mage can gather much information if she knows where to look and whom to ask.

Be warned, however, that the shapechangers are known to travel the Penumbra often as well, and they do not take kindly to outsiders.

THE NEAR UMBRA

Countless Realms wait one step beyond the Penumbra, if a mage is wise and brave enough to make the journey. A brief description of each of the most important areas follows.

Mages filled with intellectual curiosity sometimes travel to the *Astral Umbra*, or the world of ideas. Like the Penumbra, it is a reflection of the world, but it emphasizes and amplifies rationality instead of emotion, drawing the abstract concepts and meanings out of things. Needless to say, many of the things

one might find here are highly symbolic, wrapped in layers of enigma and metaphors. Spiritual aspirants had best be ready to do some serious studying before they uncover the truths they seek. Theoretically, however, the answer to any question in the universe can be found here, so many mages attempt to journey here at one point or another.

Decaying, disturbing and just generally depressing, the *Dark Umbra* is where the spirits of the dead wind up. It too is a reflection of the normal world, but it is an ashen, crumbling one, filled with rotting cities and infested with unhappy souls unable to move on to their ultimate reward. Mages who travel here had best be careful, for the Restless Dead envy the vitality of visitors, and they do their best to destroy it.

Daydreams, fantasies and fears all come from somewhere as well, and mages usually call that place the *Dream Lands*. These lands are a reflection of Earth as well, but it is one seen through the twin lenses of whimsy and nightmare. Fantastic castles rise out of the suburban sprawl, unicorns saunter down city streets, and unspeakable monsters wait to ambush the unwary. This Realm is the home of the faeries, and they guard it jealously. Mages typically cannot enter the Dream Lands unless they are faerie kin, they are accompanied by one of the Fair Folk, or they are powerful and foolish enough to barge in without an invitation.

Of course, not everything is a reflection of the mundane world. Sometimes reality collects in strange pocket Realms, or a powerful mage takes a portion of the Umbra and shapes it to her own particular desires. These places reflect the wishes of their creators, so the rules of reality are different there.

The Edge of Reality

The Horizon

If the Near Umbra represents everything that can be imagined, the Horizon is the limit of that imagination and the cutting edge of reality. Mages have sculpted custom Realms out there, where their own visions of reality are dominant and their own magic is always coincidental. Horizon used to be the major battleground of the Ascension War, and Archmages threw tremendous amounts of magic at each other in a struggle for dominance.

Since the Gauntlet strengthened, however, the Horizon has largely been cut off from Earth and robbed of much of its importance. Not only does this rift make communication with the old Masters difficult, it has also cut down on the Quintessence flow from Earth. That being the case, many Horizon Realms are starting to unravel since their owners are unable to supply the necessary energy to keep them alive.

At this rate, it may not be long before the Horizon comes crashing down, and who knows what effects that might have…?

Over the Edge

The Deep Umbra

It's hard to say what lies beyond the limits of human imagination, because only the most powerful or insane mages have traveled there. Only Masters and Oracles have much of a chance of surviving out there, and even they have trouble dealing with some of the forces at work beyond the Horizon. At present, nobody can say with any certainty what might lie beyond. One might

find alternate Earths, a world of intelligent crystals, a universe ruled by giant badgers or even stranger things.

It's also entirely possible — as some mages have suggested — that what's out there is something Man Was Not Meant to Know. With the Horizon crumbling and reality stagnating, however, this speculation may become more than an academic exercise all too soon.

The Umbra In Play

Having looked at the risks that even a simple crossing of the Gauntlet entails, many mages (and more than a few Storytellers) may ask themselves: Why bother? After all, the Ascension War is over and the real action's here on earth, right? Well, yes and no. The following are some quick hints and potential story hooks for Storytellers who wish to incorporate the Umbra into their games:

Curiosity: If mages were the stay-at-home types, they'd still be Sleeping. Acquisition and use of the *Spirit* Sphere, discovery of a powerful gateway, the search for answers to a difficult problem or even just a need to know what lurks under the surface of reality can all spark Umbral stories. A great deal of information exists in the Umbra that can't be gained anywhere else, not to mention an endless source of mysteries for interested players.

Paradigm: Another obvious motivating factor for the use of the Umbra in play is that many mages' paradigms incorporate some of it on a regular basis. Most Dreamspeakers communicate with spirits regularly, and they may travel to the homes of their ethereal cousins to beg aid, do battle or return favors. Hermetic wizards frequently invoke spirits in all kinds of rotes, and they may travel to the Otherworlds for tutelage or out of obligation. More than a few Hollow Ones begin their careers with a Ouija board, and they may be tempted by wraithly contacts into glimpsing the afterlife firsthand. (Not that this idea is a particularly good one, but most Hollowers have no idea of the real risks.) Don't let one mage's paradigm overshadow the rest of the game, though. Involving the Umbra in every story when only one or two mages are capable there gets boring fast. Use the Umbra as a rich, intriguing side-setting for those skilled in its ways.

Diplomacy: Perhaps one or more of the mages are ambassadors to the local spirit courts. Some Celestial Chorus members take the "emissaries of Heaven" role seriously, after all, and many Euthanatos Chantries offer aid and recompense to the Restless Dead so as to avoid incurring their wrath during the course of their duties. A mage with faerie blood might be called upon to make amends for a unwitting slight against the Fair Folk, while a mage with shapechanger kin might seek to make peace between his cabal and the local werewolves. The mage might even be an envoy to or from Horizon, trying re-establish communication and guidance between the two worlds.

Necessity: The Mother of All Plot Hooks, necessity can drag the characters into Umbral stories whether they're ready or not. Just make sure that the players don't feel like you're jerking them around. Perhaps a Nephandus or Marauder arrives from beyond the Gauntlet and begins wrecking havoc, and the mages must follow their fleeing enemy to ensure that he's been finished off. A lovestruck faerie might steal away a character's friend or lover, beginning a classic rescue tale. An Umbral breach might open up during a particularly vicious magical duel, sucking unlucky characters into the Otherworlds. The characters

might even be cornered by some powerful foe who leaves them with no choice but to flee into the Umbra and take their chances there. Countless other scenarios can achieve the same result, but the ultimate goal remains the same: The mages have no choice but to suck it up and deal with the Umbra — *now!*

SPIRITS

Spirits are puzzling entities that exist in the Umbra as manifestations of various principles, forces or ideas. Sometimes they seem almost human, while they elude any sort of coherent classification at others. All that mages can say with certainty is that many, many types of spirits are out there, and that they have a multitude of potential powers. Therefore, spirits can be potent allies if a mage is properly respectful.

Spirits rarely appear in the material world — the Gauntlet makes doing so very difficult. However, they do find mages (and other living creatures that can interact with them) extremely interesting. As such, any mage who travels into the Umbra is likely to run into a spirit at some point.

SPIRIT CREATION

While some mages try to classify spirits, it's difficult to pigeonhole them all. Spirits seem to have their own hierarchy, although not all spirits fit into it.

In game terms, a spirit may rank anywhere from a minor entity to a godlike being, and it's up to the Spirit Keeper to assign it powers and traits as appropriate. A minor spirit may be little better than an animal with three or four Traits in each Attribute category, a Trait of Quintessence and one Initiate-level power. A divine entity, on the other hand, may have 20 or more Traits in each Attribute, a similar amount of Quintessence and a full range of Disciple-, Adept- and Master-level powers. The spirit's exact powers and capabilities depend upon the needs of the story, though. There's no formula to catch all spirits, and a mage can't simply look at a spirit and say, "Oh, that spirit has only two powers and six points of Quintessence." Spirits are mysterious entities and potential adversaries or allies, not collections of numbers.

SPIRIT TRAITS

Spirits don't have normal Traits, unless they create or possess a material body. A spirit uses its Rage (instead of Physical Traits) to attack, its Gnosis instead of Mental or Social Traits, and its Charms to perform magical (Paradox-free) effects. A spirit also typically has a pool of Power to enhance its Charms and fuel its existence. Such Power is inherent to the spirit, and it cannot be stolen from it.

Spirits often have a few Abilities, and they may even have some Negative Traits, as appropriate to their purpose.

SAMPLE SPIRITS

The two sample spirits here simply provide some ideas on what spirits might be able to do in your games.

MINOR SPIRIT OF FIRE

The minor spirit of fire appears as a small, flickering flame in various shades of red, yellow, orange and blue. It has only limited awareness, since it exists simply to burn. While it's too small to be very threatening to most

creatures, it can set objects alight in the Umbra (or in the physical world if someone brings it across the Gauntlet with *Spirit* magic), and it can act as a sort of guiding light for a mage in the Penumbra.

Power: 5

Charms: *Airt Sense:* The spirit of fire can sense Umbral pathways, and it can navigate easily through most parts of the Penumbra.

Rage: 3

Gnosis: 2

Abilities: *Brawl, Cosmology, Dodge*

DEMON OF WAR

Typical of the ranks of lesser demons, the demon of war is a spirit hungry for violence and conflict. It likes to sow dissent among groups, and it draws strength from sparking great carnage and battle when it gets the chance.

Power: 15

Charms: *Airt Sense:* The demon of war can sense Umbral pathways and navigate easily through most parts of the Penumbra. *Materialize:* The demon of war can test its Gnosis against the Gauntlet in order to appear in the physical world. Doing so costs it a point of Power for each hour it remains, so it usually materializes only when someone offers it a sacrifice to help it stay.

Rage: 10

Gnosis: 7

Abilities: *Brawl* x3, *Intimidation* x3, *Melee* x3

The trio proceeded cautiously through the building's gray, sterile hallways. David, moved carefully, seemingly alert to any possible sounds or signs of movement. Tiernan hung back while Florence continued to survey her strange devices, which increased in their insistence that trouble lay ahead.

"Stop," David said suddenly, his hand upraised. Tiernan could see that the air shimmered about the Akashic's fingers. Clearly the martial artist expected trouble, and he had readied himself just in case. Tiernan had never actually seen an Akashic Brother fight before, but he knew that their deadly, magically empowered arts, could lay low nearly any foe with only a single solid strike or two.

As the group stopped, David cocked his head. Silence throbbed in the air until they noticed the sounds of whispered voices somewhere down the hall. The Akashic listened carefully, head canted slightly to one side. Florence turned off her buzzing device. Tiernan rummaged through his pockets and came up with a handful of feathers and a small bag. He murmured a few words into the mouth of the bag and stuck the feathers behind one ear.

David turned with a particularly unhappy look on his face. "What's that smell?" he whispered.

"Not so loud," Tiernan breathed with a wince. "And it's nothing you need bother with. Just let me listen."

Down the hall, voices argued. "Try lowering the modulation," a nervous tenor suggested. "We can't," an alto replied. "If we slow it down too much, it crystallizes." "If you leave it at that frequency, it'll keep throwing off probability problems," the tenor countered. "I told you not to initiate the procedure without observing the proper protocols. I have to report this to Control."

David and Tiernan looked over to Florence. She whispered, "Sounds like a Technocratic experiment has gone awry. Typical."

"What sort of experiment?" David asked quietly.

Florence shook her head and frowned. "I can't tell just from the side effects."

"So what do we do?" David continued.

"We get in there and shut down their equipment," Tiernan said.

Raising an eyebrow (but not her voice), Florence regarded Tiernan levelly. "Oh really? You can't even figure out a transistor. How do you propose to fix this?"

David made a cutting motion with his hand. "What we need to do is stay somewhere quiet — like that office over there — and wait for them to vacate. We'll see what we can do once they're gone."

The group moved stealthily to the nearby empty office, and David shut the door quietly behind them. When he turned around, Florence had seated herself behind a computer terminal on the desk in the office. Tiernan took up a chair and propped his feet on the desk.

"Come back here," the alto called in the hallway as two sets of footsteps passed the group's hiding place. "You're just as responsible for this as I am."

The voices and the footsteps receded down the hall toward the front door.

"I have an idea," Florence said as she fiddled with the computer absently. "They probably didn't leave any important information on this computer, but I bet I can get into records on the building and maybe the project. That'll give me an idea of what to look up later, while you two check out what's in that room down the hall."

Tiernan and David looked at each other, and Tiernan stood up.

"Let's get to it, then."

CHAPTER SIX: STORYTELLING

The craft of Storytelling can be difficult, time-consuming and frustrating. Arbitrating a game and fashioning a memorable tale takes a lot of work. However, it's also a job with great rewards. The enjoyment of a superlative story, the satisfaction of a fantasy made manifest and the gratitude of the many players who participate make all the effort worthwhile. If you're willing to take on the burdens of storytelling, read on and learn from the advice and help compiled here. **Laws of Ascension** especially requires a great deal of set-up work, so read through all of this chapter and prepare appropriately.
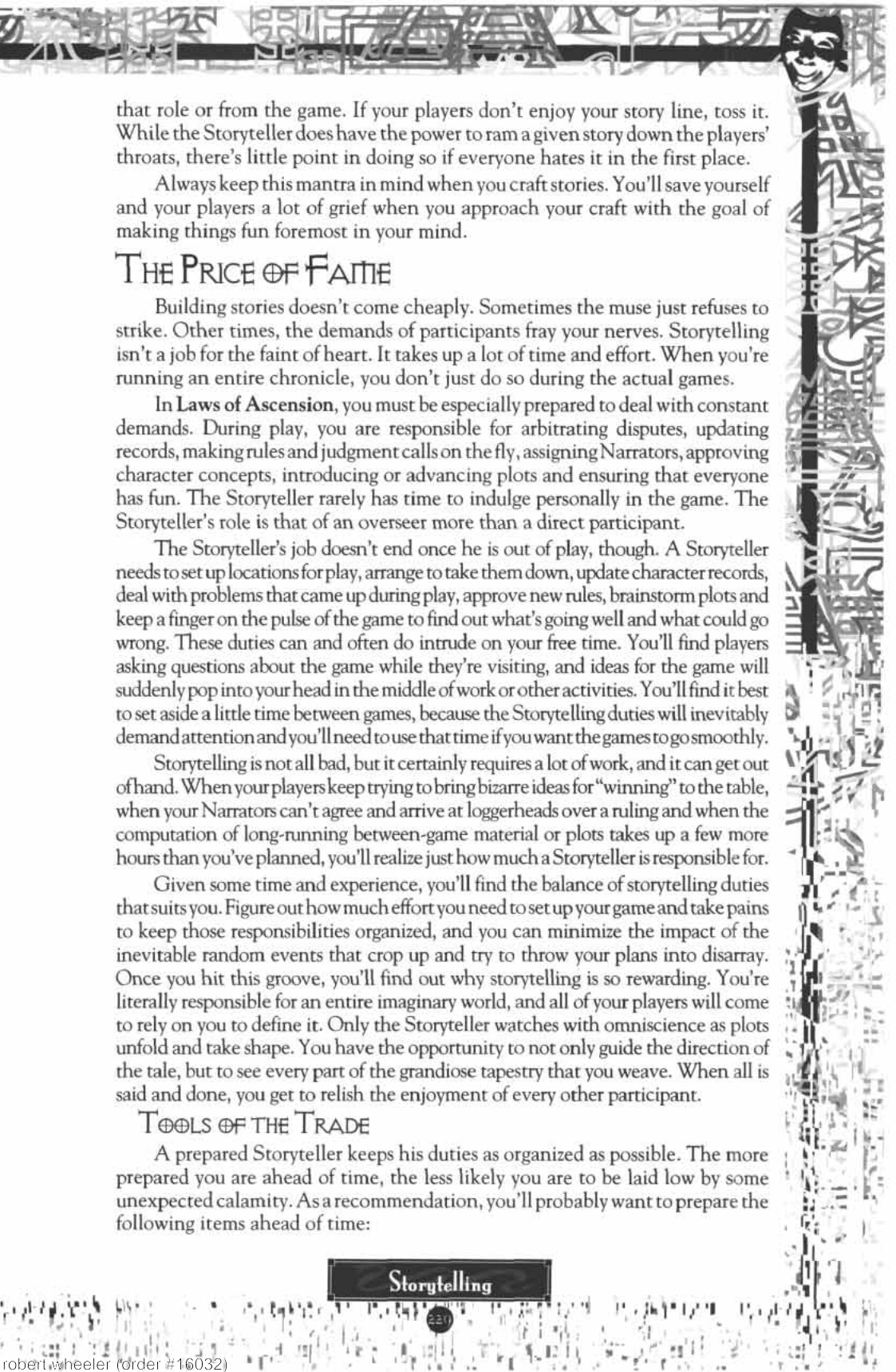
The first watchword for a **Laws of Ascension** Storyteller is preparation. A lot can go awry in the course of a reality-bending, Realm-hopping story, and it's the Storyteller's job to head off problems and keep the game moving. With that in mind, be sure to not only heed the advice of this chapter, but also to take a few notes on how these Storytelling elements can apply to your games specifically.

Before we get into the nitty-gritty of making stories, though, let's get one thing out of the way:

The purpose of the game is to have fun.

You remember that rule from waaay back in the beginning, right? If people aren't having fun, something's wrong. If a rule impedes your game, it needs to change or disappear. The Storyteller's ultimate responsibility is to ensure that everyone has a good time, so you must learn to throw out or change anything that gets in the way. You may find yourself tweaking rules, bending character concepts and tossing out story ideas to do so — nothing is sacred when it comes down to whether or not the game is enjoyable.

If a rule makes the game less fun, change it. It doesn't matter that the Master level of the Sphere of Cheese allows one player to win the game and ruin everything for everyone else. That player needs to fit the game's overall needs. If a character concept skews the game, it's time to change it. Your player may want to play a combat munchkin who revels in the bloodshed of other players' characters, but when that character causes hard feelings or starts killing off too many characters for people to have fun, it's time to remove the character from

that role or from the game. If your players don't enjoy your story line, toss it. While the Storyteller does have the power to ram a given story down the players' throats, there's little point in doing so if everyone hates it in the first place.

Always keep this mantra in mind when you craft stories. You'll save yourself and your players a lot of grief when you approach your craft with the goal of making things fun foremost in your mind.

The Price of Fame

Building stories doesn't come cheaply. Sometimes the muse just refuses to strike. Other times, the demands of participants fray your nerves. Storytelling isn't a job for the faint of heart. It takes up a lot of time and effort. When you're running an entire chronicle, you don't just do so during the actual games.

In **Laws of Ascension**, you must be especially prepared to deal with constant demands. During play, you are responsible for arbitrating disputes, updating records, making rules and judgment calls on the fly, assigning Narrators, approving character concepts, introducing or advancing plots and ensuring that everyone has fun. The Storyteller rarely has time to indulge personally in the game. The Storyteller's role is that of an overseer more than a direct participant.

The Storyteller's job doesn't end once he is out of play, though. A Storyteller needs to set up locations for play, arrange to take them down, update character records, deal with problems that came up during play, approve new rules, brainstorm plots and keep a finger on the pulse of the game to find out what's going well and what could go wrong. These duties can and often do intrude on your free time. You'll find players asking questions about the game while they're visiting, and ideas for the game will suddenly pop into your head in the middle of work or other activities. You'll find it best to set aside a little time between games, because the Storytelling duties will inevitably demand attention and you'll need to use that time if you want the games to go smoothly.

Storytelling is not all bad, but it certainly requires a lot of work, and it can get out of hand. When your players keep trying to bring bizarre ideas for "winning" to the table, when your Narrators can't agree and arrive at loggerheads over a ruling and when the computation of long-running between-game material or plots takes up a few more hours than you've planned, you'll realize just how much a Storyteller is responsible for.

Given some time and experience, you'll find the balance of storytelling duties that suits you. Figure out how much effort you need to set up your game and take pains to keep those responsibilities organized, and you can minimize the impact of the inevitable random events that crop up and try to throw your plans into disarray. Once you hit this groove, you'll find out why storytelling is so rewarding. You're literally responsible for an entire imaginary world, and all of your players will come to rely on you to define it. Only the Storyteller watches with omniscience as plots unfold and take shape. You have the opportunity to not only guide the direction of the tale, but to see every part of the grandiose tapestry that you weave. When all is said and done, you get to relish the enjoyment of every other participant.

Tools of the Trade

A prepared Storyteller keeps his duties as organized as possible. The more prepared you are ahead of time, the less likely you are to be laid low by some unexpected calamity. As a recommendation, you'll probably want to prepare the following items ahead of time:

• A complete folder of players' characters. The players will inevitably need copies of their character records, and you'll want to be able to reference them between games. If you don't have them stored on a computer file, keep your own folder of photocopies in addition to the sheets the players use during the game.

• A notebook of plots. Keep notes on who's doing what to whom, what groups and cabals are active in what areas and where you see the story going. Jot down potential ideas so that you can move a plot in whatever direction seems most entertaining instead of railroading the story. Plus, if you're suddenly struck with inspiration, you can write down a new idea here and refer Narrators to it (or give them copies) so that they know what you're thinking.

• Item cards. Keep a small box full of index cards with item names and stats on them, listed one item (knife) or group of similar items (handful of coins) to a card. Jot down a quick description of what the item looks like, what Traits it has and what game effects it produces, then sign the card. That way, those who want to use an item need the appropriate card. And since the card has your signature (or some other distinctive mark), it won't be as easy to forge. If you really want to go all the way, you can print up the cards on a computer, then laminate them so that they'll be tough and reusable instead of getting crumpled up in someone's pocket.
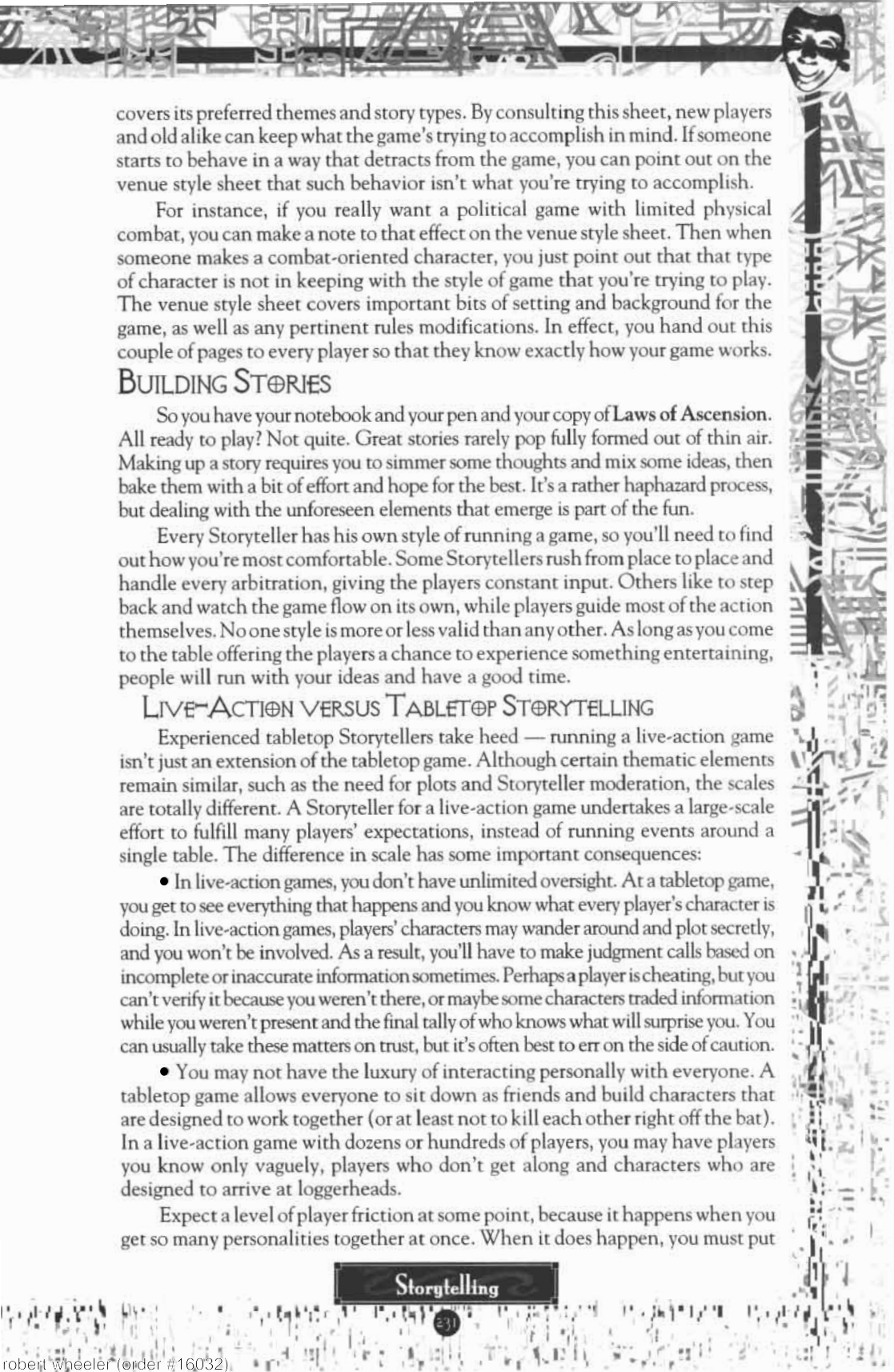
• Nametags. Although you don't need nametags for every player, you will probably want to pass out nametags to differentiate Narrators and to indicate certain possessions that a character is carrying or wearing. For instance, if someone's wearing body armor, then not only do you want the player to have an item card for it, you want the player to wear that card somewhere easily visible. A nametag holder makes a perfect place to hold an item card of this sort. The same is true if, say, a person has a strange physical feature or he is under a visible magical Effect.

• Effect cards. Instead of stopping the game to look up how each rote works, give the players cards that describe their rotes. Making up all the Effect cards in advance is time-consuming, but it saves you effort later during the game, since you can just ask a player to pull out the card for his rote when he casts an Effect. Plus, you know that if a player doesn't have a given card for an Effect he wants to create, then he's fast-casting a rote he doesn't know, or he's out of luck.

• Paradox cards. Depending upon how you decide to handle Paradox, you may or may not use Paradox cards. If you do, make them up ahead of time so that you don't have to try to approve Paradox effects in the middle of play. Plus, these cards help you assign appropriate Paradox effects fairly. You can pass the cards out randomly to the players (as per the Paradox card system in Chapter Four), or you can just have a Paradox Judge deal with them specifically (as described later in this chapter).

• Event synopsis sheet. After each game event, you will want to make up a little note sheet of what happened, what's important to know and what's going on. You will especially want to do so in games with a mobile venue. That is, if your game is supposedly taking place in Paris, France while you're really in Ponca, Nebraska, you'll want to make a note of that fact on your event sheet. You can note rule updates or changes and big public events on the sheet, so that each player can pick up a copy at the start of play and know immediately the sorts of things that his character would reasonably be aware of.

• A venue style sheet. Most players agree that everyone should follow a coherent set of pre-arranged rules, so why should the story be any different? Essentially, a venue style sheet describes the basic premise of the game and

covers its preferred themes and story types. By consulting this sheet, new players and old alike can keep what the game's trying to accomplish in mind. If someone starts to behave in a way that detracts from the game, you can point out on the venue style sheet that such behavior isn't what you're trying to accomplish.

For instance, if you really want a political game with limited physical combat, you can make a note to that effect on the venue style sheet. Then when someone makes a combat-oriented character, you just point out that that type of character is not in keeping with the style of game that you're trying to play. The venue style sheet covers important bits of setting and background for the game, as well as any pertinent rules modifications. In effect, you hand out this couple of pages to every player so that they know exactly how your game works.

BUILDING STORIES

So you have your notebook and your pen and your copy of **Laws of Ascension**. All ready to play? Not quite. Great stories rarely pop fully formed out of thin air. Making up a story requires you to simmer some thoughts and mix some ideas, then bake them with a bit of effort and hope for the best. It's a rather haphazard process, but dealing with the unforeseen elements that emerge is part of the fun.

Every Storyteller has his own style of running a game, so you'll need to find out how you're most comfortable. Some Storytellers rush from place to place and handle every arbitration, giving the players constant input. Others like to step back and watch the game flow on its own, while players guide most of the action themselves. No one style is more or less valid than any other. As long as you come to the table offering the players a chance to experience something entertaining, people will run with your ideas and have a good time.

LIVE-ACTION VERSUS TABLETOP STORYTELLING

Experienced tabletop Storytellers take heed — running a live-action game isn't just an extension of the tabletop game. Although certain thematic elements remain similar, such as the need for plots and Storyteller moderation, the scales are totally different. A Storyteller for a live-action game undertakes a large-scale effort to fulfill many players' expectations, instead of running events around a single table. The difference in scale has some important consequences:

• In live-action games, you don't have unlimited oversight. At a tabletop game, you get to see everything that happens and you know what every player's character is doing. In live-action games, players' characters may wander around and plot secretly, and you won't be involved. As a result, you'll have to make judgment calls based on incomplete or inaccurate information sometimes. Perhaps a player is cheating, but you can't verify it because you weren't there, or maybe some characters traded information while you weren't present and the final tally of who knows what will surprise you. You can usually take these matters on trust, but it's often best to err on the side of caution.

• You may not have the luxury of interacting personally with everyone. A tabletop game allows everyone to sit down as friends and build characters that are designed to work together (or at least not to kill each other right off the bat). In a live-action game with dozens or hundreds of players, you may have players you know only vaguely, players who don't get along and characters who are designed to arrive at loggerheads.

Expect a level of player friction at some point, because it happens when you get so many personalities together at once. When it does happen, you must put

up the appearance of being fair and even-handed so that nobody feels like someone else is treated preferentially, and you must be a diplomat and disciplinarian in addition to all of your other roles. You must exercise the fact that your authority is absolute for your game. You have the right to eject a problem player and make calls based on personal judgment because you're trying to build a game fairly for everyone to have fun, not a story centered around one hero.

- Speaking of centric games, the characters find themselves in the middle of events in tabletop play, and they face down the Storyteller's antagonists. In live-action games, the enemies may often be other players' characters, and no player's character is guaranteed a plot's spotlight. Inevitably, you'll have to soothe hard feelings between players who come into conflict, and you'll need to keep an eye out for the unfortunates who become bored or get run roughshod over by more talkative or aggressive players. If you're fortunate, you'll recruit some players to be Narrators and play the main antagonists. For some players, though there's no satisfaction like beating down another player's character or solving a juicy plot in order to reap the rewards themselves.

- A subtler level of problem lies in character balance. For a tabletop group of a half-dozen people, you can usually introduce new characters with a minimum of fuss and tweak their starting power levels to fit them into the game. In a large, long-running live-action game, you'll have some powerful characters and some who have just been created, and you'll want to make sure that everyone starts off on an even keel.

Unfortunately, you'll run into situations where old-characters dominate the game and new players feel that they can't participate or accomplish anything meaningful. A couple of solutions to this problem exist, although none are really easy to swallow. First, you can slow long-term characters' rate of advancement. If, for instance, you charge an extra Experience Trait for every advancement the player makes after his character has earned his first 25 or 50 Traits, you'll subtly slow older characters' improvement. You can stack this modifier if necessary to slow down really old characters even more, and to prevent your group from having one multi-Sphere Master running around blasting everything.

Second, you can "cap out" or retire old and powerful characters. You do so by halting character advancement at 100 Experience Traits or requiring characters to go out of play when they reach this level of experience. This requirement leaves a sour taste in many players' mouths, though, because it undercuts their sense of accomplishment.

Third, you can intervene with the game's natural flow in order to promote overall fun. You can go to the powerful characters' players beforehand and say, "Hey, guys, I'd like you to keep your hands off this one plot. It's for the new people." Give them something big to face down with all their Traits while leaving the new characters a few minor ordeals that would be a snap for the old-timers.

KEY STORY INGREDIENTS

Now that you know a few things to watch out for, you're ready to drop together some ingredients and mix your own story. When you put some ingredients into play, players will take them and make their own little creations, adding to the overall experience. Try a few different mixes. Very few story ideas are exclusive. You can have many story elements or few, and you can mix and match to your heart's content.

Theme

The theme is the organizing principle of your story. It's the unifying one- or two-word description of what your story is about on its most basic level. It is the question that your story answers as it plays out, and it's the means by which you convey the tale's ideas and messages. You'll need a theme if you want to create a story with a coherent direction and recognizable elements instead of just a mish-mash of ideas.

The theme is the foundation of all the other parts of the story, and it influences the plot, mood and setting. Each choice you make in building your story helps accentuate your hidden theme, and the theme becomes clear through the exploration of common elements in each part of the story. The theme is not terribly complex in and of itself, though. Rather, it's a basic element that guides your thought on plots and places that can be tied together to share one deeper meaning.

Your **Laws of Ascension** games may use any combination of the following themes:

Change — Is change inevitable, or do some things remain eternal? How do people adapt to uncontrolled or unwanted change? Is it better to enforce change from without or to let it spring from within?

Enlightenment — What steps and paths lead to true enlightenment? What is enlightenment, anyway? Is enlightenment exclusive of material effort, or does it acknowledge worldliness? Is it even a worthwhile goal at all?

Hope — Does hope even exist in the World of Darkness? Who and what can bring hope? Is hope itself just a sham designed to lead on the gullible, or can there really be something better? What hopes and dreams most drive humanity to excel?

Morality — Who or what determines morality? Who are the keepers of morals and ethics? Are these social constructs even necessary? What morals (if any) transcend individuals, cities, nations, worlds?

Order — Do people function better in an orderly fashion, or do the constraints of order take away too much? Is there an order to the universe at all? Who are the keepers of order, and who decides what's conducive to order?

Exploration — What frontiers remain today? Are there limits and places to which people shouldn't go? How far will people go in search of something new, different or better? Does exploration of the external have less merit than internal exploration? Is it better to explore old ways in a new context or to explore new ways entirely?

Hubris — Do mages go too far when they bend reality? Are there really things that humans shouldn't do? Railing against the gods (and Paradox) is risky, but is it too much? Even so, how much should humans be content with? Is there no choice but to reach for the heavens?

Mood

Your story's mood carries emotional undertones. When your players step into the game, they should feel that mood through the props, settings and events that you choose. Just like a movie that spawns powerful emotions, your story's mood causes the players to feel specific things. Again, mood is a subtle, hidden element that's best described through the game's events instead of spoken aloud. Let the mood shine through in the feelings the story evokes.

A story's mood may change with the pace of the tale or remain fairly constant. Typically, it's a short description of emotion. Your story might be despairing and sad, or feverish and furious. Moods aren't always mutually exclusive, but some moods do contrast. Often, it's best to focus on one or two

moods at a time, just to keep them strong. Too many swings of emotion cause the mood to become diluted.

Some moods you can play with include, but are not limited to:

Sadness — Perhaps your game focuses on loss, dashed hope or ennui. The characters face the depths of despair, in how much magic has left the world and in the inevitable trials of humanity.

Active — The chronicle is frenetic. Things are always happening, the world is moving forward, and characters must be fast on their feet to keep up. Everyone feels like there's no time to take a breath, and matters career forward constantly. This type of game can be exciting or terrifying, but it's always in motion.

Mystery — With the many trials that mages face, especially given the dearth of good teachers and old Masters, many become confused by the diversity of the mystical world. The characters don't know what to expect. Puzzling spirits and insoluble natural phenomena face them. The characters may be certain of their own capabilities, but the world itself seems too grand to comprehend in its entirety.

Anger — In an angry world, everyone's pissed off at something. The Traditions are mad at the Technocracy for quashing magic. The Technocrats are mad at the Traditions for slowing progress. The masses are mad at everyone for jerking them around and giving them a mediocre world. Tempers flare easily, and everyone has a grudge. Violence seems right around the corner, and tragedy results when tempers erupt. The setting is bright and splashed with red and yellow reminders of the fire lurking just beneath.

Passion — Mages believe so strongly about things that they literally change the world with those beliefs. Everyone holds something dear, be it a loved one, a philosophy or a treasured heritage. Play up the conflict of passions. Reason falls by the wayside as people follow their hearts. Settings seem romantic or brooding, designed to evoke deep emotions.

PLOT

While the theme and mood provide underlying foundation for a story, the plot is really the story itself. It's the thread of material and imagination that unravels to reveal a long tale. Your plots encompass who's doing what, where the important stuff resides and what's going to happen come hell or high water. In short, it's the record of events that come together to tell a coherent story.

Your game needs a couple of good plots to hold it together. On one hand, you want to tell an engrossing story and give the characters a chance to grow over months of time, unfolding all their richness of their lives slowly. On the other hand, some things happen so suddenly and twist lives around so profoundly that they can't last more than an instant. Both are valid and necessary angles of plot. For players who like to puzzle out problems and toy with recurring villains, elements and problems, long-running plots fit the bill. Other players find long-term plots confusing or boring. For them you interject the occasional short-term plot that's designed to keep things moving and to show that sometimes the world upends in fast and strange ways.

You can dig up plot ideas just about anywhere. Whatever causes conflict or curiosity is ripe for use in a plot. Take a quaint or interesting story from a novel, a movie, a television show, even a bit of history or current events. Put your own spin on it and stir it up with a couple of other elements from dissimilar plots. File off the serial numbers, plop the characters in as the protagonists (or antagonists), and run.

Remember that you can leave elements of plots dangling as well. You needn't specify the outcome of every plot angle exactly. Indeed, you might want to see which direction the players head with something and then decide on the fly how you want to resolve the plot. Like a murder mystery, there might be many possible solutions, only one of which becomes apparent in the end.

Some simple ideas for plots (from which you can spring off your own stories) include:

The Search for Knowledge — Young up-and-coming mages need to hone their skills and master the Spheres if they're to survive and make a change in the world. Therefore, a traveler or recently discovered book or artifact offers the promise of knowledge, if only the mages will solve some problem or travel to some place. The mages must exercise their current knowledge in order to reach the next pinnacle and eventually acquire access to some tutor that imparts new knowledge.

The Meeting of Minds — Several mages come together to trade wisdom and make diplomatic overtures. Perhaps a few have access to a Node, and they want to trade that power for use of the library another group holds. Maybe some mages need to end hostilities, or resolve a conflict over influence on some part of the city. Perhaps the mages need to bring new apprentices up to speed and establish a united front against opposition. Regardless, it's a job for wits, social skills and political maneuvering.

Ascension War — Although most mages recognize that opening the entire world to magic all at once is probably futile, wars over ideology remain. Some Technocrats continue to hunt mages, while some mages believe that the Sleepers can be freed to make their own destiny only if the Technocrats are overthrown. Marauders follow their own twisted agendas, and they often come into conflict with other mages. And everyone hates the Nephandi. But who'll win? The characters must marshal resources and find allies if they're to survive, especially if it's an unwanted conflict thrust upon them.

Lost and Bygone — Some strange phenomenon or creature appears in the city. Although it's elusive, it holds the promise of some magical power. Perhaps it must draw its energy from somewhere, or it's a sign that an important magical event has occurred. The characters try to track it down and figure out why it appeared, how it came to be and perhaps how to turn it to their advantage.

SETTING

When you've figured out your plot, theme and the like, you can decide on a setting. Your setting is just the backdrop, the locale in which everything happens. Often this locale will be pretty mundane. Your local coffee shop or nightclub will do, for instance. However, you can go wild if you have private access to an area. Maybe your players are subtle enough to actually play the game in a mall during the day, although we don't recommend trying it. The local constabulary tends to get nervous when you do "magic" in public. More likely, you have access to a friend's house or a rented building. You can use the setting to showcase the exact elements that you want.

Toss in materials that'll help get across the feel for your setting. For instance, you may decide that you want your game (held in a friend's basement) to actually take place in a great Chantry. Decorate the site with some simple plastic statues or books that help to give an ambience of wisdom. Look back at your moods and themes too. For a fast-paced, violent and hectic game, you'll want to decorate with bright colors and things like statues of gladiators or paintings from wars. A more subdued and romantic game calls for soft, warm coloration, dim lighting

and more simple cloths and drapes. The setting itself influences how your players feel, which in turn helps you provide a given theme and mood.

Remember that your setting isn't just limited to our modern world and time. Although many mages recognize the importance of the here-and-now, of having to make a difference on Earth and fighting to survive in day-to-day living, quite a few mages also jaunt off to strange hidden lands or even spirit worlds. Perhaps your game takes place in a realm of fantasy or a spaceship crewed by Sons of Ether. You can also experiment with different periods of history. You might try playing mages who work with the Cult of Mercury in old Rome (see **Dead Magic**) or Renaissance mages in the ages of discovery and exploration.

PACING

Once a plot comes crashing to a premature conclusion or a group of players manages to sit on a story arc for an entire night and reduce it to boredom, you'll recognize the value of pacing. On the Storyteller end, your pacing needs to be ultimately flexible. There's no way around it. Sometimes players surprise you with an incredible plan that solves your month-long story arc, and sometimes they just miss all the hooks.

Pacing often bows to mood and theme. If you're running a very action-oriented game, you will want to pace things quickly. Characters appear, do things and disappear. Events flash-fry, and players must react quickly. In a more sedate game, you might leave events dangling for a little while. Give players the chance to grab on to something if it interests them, even if it takes a little while to notice. Don't force it, though. If your plot hangs out to dry for three months and nobody cares, it may be time to move on.

Another important part of pacing is judging your players. For instance, you might have a plot that starts up only when some people use a specific set of investigative skills or magics on a game element. If your players are more bang-up types, they may not try the cerebral approach immediately. You'll need to pace appropriately, leaving enough clues for them to follow. If you have very cautious players, you'll have to be careful about pushing them into action, lest they find themselves overwhelmed. Remember, the idea isn't to have plots that totally stump the players or run them over. It's to introduce story elements that the players can have fun with.

The real key to mastering pacing is to become adaptable on the fly. In the middle of a game, some player will inevitably pull off some magical Effect you didn't foresee. The answer is not to shoot it down or panic, but to adapt to the situation. Check your cribbed notes on plot (You did write down plot notes, right?) and see where you're planning to go, then make a ruling on the spot. Be prepared to throw out an angle that isn't working, and realize that sometimes the players will do things out of order like confronting the adversaries before acquiring the Really Big Guns. Be prepared to spin things. In the aforementioned case, you might want to fiddle with the adversaries' Traits, depending on whether you want them to be defeated or just to trounce the players a little.

If you find your game lagging, try to pick up the pace. Having players who have too much to do is usually better than having nothing to do. People come to the game to do something, after all. If matters lag, consider tossing in another character, a clue, a new element or anything to keep things moving. You'll have to work to keep up, of course, but you didn't think Storytelling was entirely easy, did you?

STORY CONSIDERATIONS

Your story considerations simply offer possible boundaries to the story itself. You can't encompass *everything*, so you need to have some limits. The story considerations basically determine how much wiggle room you'll give.

SCALE

A game might just be a half-dozen friends in one room for an evening, or 200 conventioneers running around a hotel for three days and nights. Your game's scale can and will change as players come and go, settings expand and your plots demand new directions. That's okay. Your only real limit is how much you can logistically handle.

You can influence your game's scale actively by doing things like recruiting new players or putting a cap on the number of players you allow in the game. If you don't want more than, say, 20 players, just stop accepting new characters at that point. Similarly, if you feel that the game hasn't hit critical mass, send your players out to find friends and relatives who want to join in.

Scale is important primarily to two things: how much you can handle, and how much your plot can bear. As a Storyteller, you have to arbitrate a load of work already. If you have too many players, your game becomes unmanageable. You'll want to recruit Narrators from your player base. A good ratio is one Narrator for every five to 10 players. You might even require that every player spend some time as a Narrator every few games, just to make sure that you have enough Narrators and antagonist characters. On the plot side, your stories may suffer if too many people become involved. Thirty-eight destructive mages converging on one foe can wreck that angle, while too few mages might not have the skills to muster to solve a specific plot. Your plots should to some degree be driven by scale, to make sure that you have stories that everyone has a chance to participate in. If you have more people, you'll want to have more Narrators and more plots, naturally.

Remember also that it's generally a bad idea to hang all of a plot on one hook. Regardless of the size of your game, you should have multiple threads of resolution. If you rely on one specific individual to resolve a plot, you may find yourself out of luck if the player doesn't show up or the character disappears. Your scale dictates the flexibility of response your plots require. The more players involved, the more you'll want to leave options for yourself so that a plot can be handled in many ways.

SCOPE

While scale relates to the actual size of the physical game, scope is a bit more intangible. The scope covers how far the characters can stray. It is essentially, the illusion of free will that you give the players.

The players and characters always act under some constraints. Whether he's limited by game rules or the particular plots in motion, a character can do only so much. However, your decisions of scope can have a great effect on what a character can do with. Will you allow characters to travel anywhere in the world, or do you decide to limit such travel artificially for the sake of the game? Do you intend to limit the powers of magic a bit more? Can your characters actually affect the outcome of world-shaking plots, or are they limited to more modest goals? The scope of play is the level at which the characters' actions have an effect.

Scope tends to vary with the game's length and size. If you're running a short convention game, you just need a couple of locations and a few plots. Sure, the characters' actions may change the world, but they don't need to fly out to Belize

or Saturn or whatnot unless the plot demands. For that reason, you'll close off some routes artificially by giving subtle hints like, "You sure you want to do that? It has little bearing on the game" or not-so-subtle ones like, "You probably shouldn't go there because we're not prepared to run that."

Player Input

Don't forget to ask your players what they think. Running a game shouldn't be a vanity affair. Check with your players and find out what they want from the game. They will certainly let you know what they want to do to have fun. Take it with a grain of salt. If you vote on everything, you'll find the players voting in all the powers and benefits they want. If you at least pay attention to what they're saying, though, you can compromise.

A good idea is to have a section for player input on sheets at the end of each game. Let the players write down their input and thoughts (anonymously, if they like). Some good things to ask about include:

- What sort of venue do you want — what moods and themes do you enjoy?
- What plots do you enjoy?
- Do you want to play in low-power, gritty games or high-power, spiritual exploration games?
- Do you prefer a focus on characterization, story or setting?
- Do you want more focus on philosophical meandering or more action?

The Stages

Wacky *Time* magic notwithstanding, most good stories follow a predictable format. The plot shouldn't be transparent, but rather, discrete stages should mark the boundaries of the story's parts. Just as some mages measure events in cycles mirroring the seasons, so too do stories often follow a cycle of growth and conclusion.
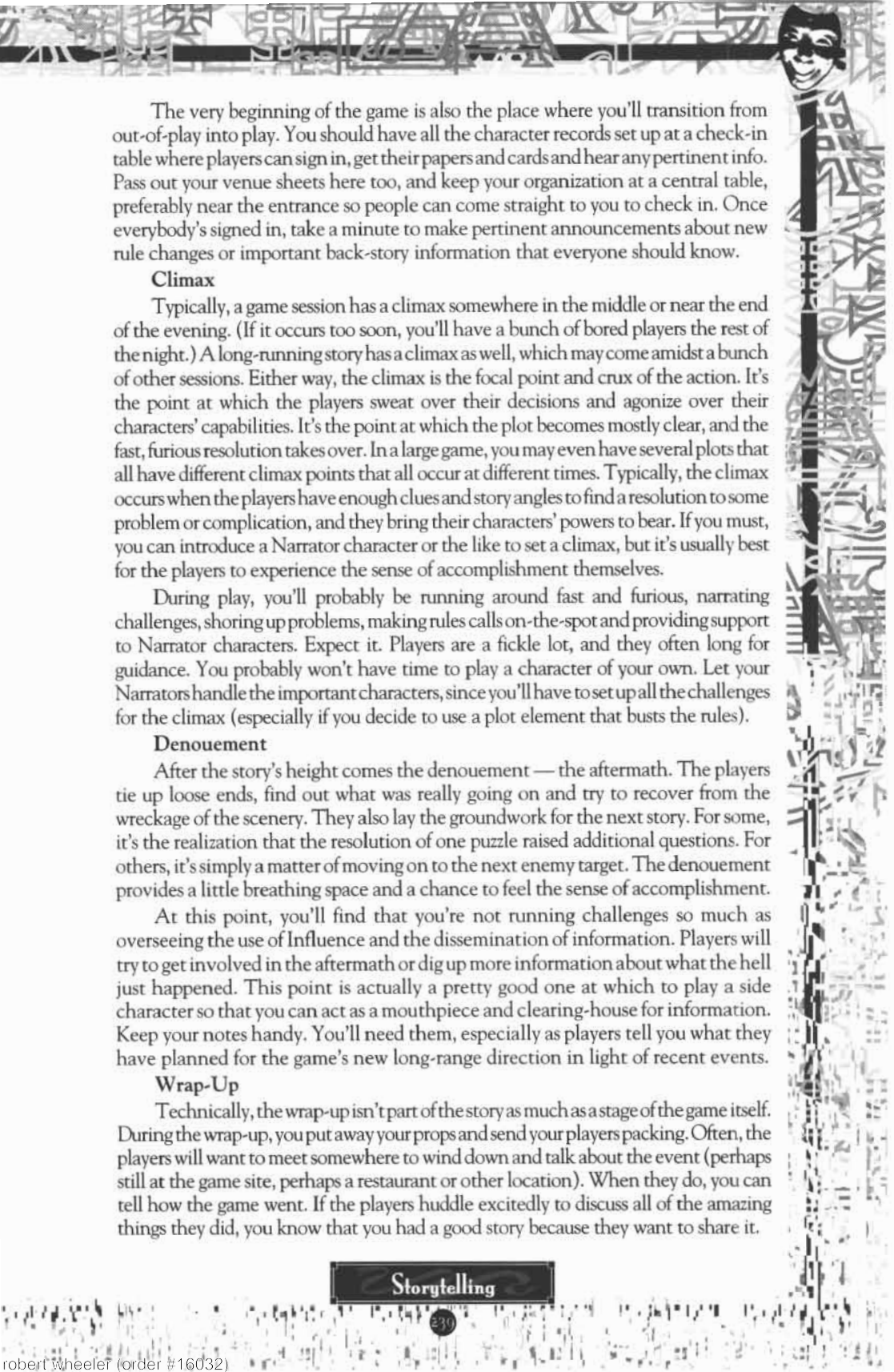
Preparation

Remember everything we talked about before? While preparation isn't part of the story *per se*, it's everything you need to do first to make sure that you can tell the story. Set up your Narrator characters, make sure that your props are in place, double-check all of your cards and folders of paperwork, and go over your plot notes one last time. Have your sign-in sheet and venue sheet ready, and prepare for the deluge of game-hungry players.

Game logistics will take up your prep time a few hours before game completely. Don't just anticipate it, expect it. Devote your time to making the game go, because you won't get anything else done. Even if you take a breather, a Narrator or player will inevitably show up with a question or problem. As a rule of thumb, anticipate a good two hours of set-up time right before the game. Take more if you need to make copies of your papers, new item cards and the like.

Opening

A bunch of mages standing around wondering what's going on doesn't make for a compelling new story, but a good back-story, a reason for everyone to show up and a little fanfare or conflict does. Be sure to kick off your story with an announcement or event that explains why everyone's present. Maybe it's as grandiose as ambassadors calling mages for miles around to meet and discuss the fate of the Traditions, or it's as simple as an auction or will-reading that brings everyone together. Start off with something to get people involved immediately.

The very beginning of the game is also the place where you'll transition from out-of-play into play. You should have all the character records set up at a check-in table where players can sign in, get their papers and cards and hear any pertinent info. Pass out your venue sheets here too, and keep your organization at a central table, preferably near the entrance so people can come straight to you to check in. Once everybody's signed in, take a minute to make pertinent announcements about new rule changes or important back-story information that everyone should know.

Climax

Typically, a game session has a climax somewhere in the middle or near the end of the evening. (If it occurs too soon, you'll have a bunch of bored players the rest of the night.) A long-running story has a climax as well, which may come amidst a bunch of other sessions. Either way, the climax is the focal point and crux of the action. It's the point at which the players sweat over their decisions and agonize over their characters' capabilities. It's the point at which the plot becomes mostly clear, and the fast, furious resolution takes over. In a large game, you may even have several plots that all have different climax points that all occur at different times. Typically, the climax occurs when the players have enough clues and story angles to find a resolution to some problem or complication, and they bring their characters' powers to bear. If you must, you can introduce a Narrator character or the like to set a climax, but it's usually best for the players to experience the sense of accomplishment themselves.

During play, you'll probably be running around fast and furious, narrating challenges, shoring up problems, making rules calls on-the-spot and providing support to Narrator characters. Expect it. Players are a fickle lot, and they often long for guidance. You probably won't have time to play a character of your own. Let your Narrators handle the important characters, since you'll have to set up all the challenges for the climax (especially if you decide to use a plot element that busts the rules).

Denouement

After the story's height comes the denouement — the aftermath. The players tie up loose ends, find out what was really going on and try to recover from the wreckage of the scenery. They also lay the groundwork for the next story. For some, it's the realization that the resolution of one puzzle raised additional questions. For others, it's simply a matter of moving on to the next enemy target. The denouement provides a little breathing space and a chance to feel the sense of accomplishment.

At this point, you'll find that you're not running challenges so much as overseeing the use of Influence and the dissemination of information. Players will try to get involved in the aftermath or dig up more information about what the hell just happened. This point is actually a pretty good one at which to play a side character so that you can act as a mouthpiece and clearing-house for information. Keep your notes handy. You'll need them, especially as players tell you what they have planned for the game's new long-range direction in light of recent events.

Wrap-Up

Technically, the wrap-up isn't part of the story as much as a stage of the game itself. During the wrap-up, you put away your props and send your players packing. Often, the players will want to meet somewhere to wind down and talk about the event (perhaps still at the game site, perhaps a restaurant or other location). When they do, you can tell how the game went. If the players huddle excitedly to discuss all of the amazing things they did, you know that you had a good story because they want to share it.

After the game, it's customary to let everyone decompress for a bit. This is a good place to get player feedback and deal with awarding extra experience or bookkeeping. For instance, you should take the time to make notes about your plots while the results remain fresh in your mind.

Plots and Plans

So you have this phenomenal story to tell. Will the players enjoy it? You can't guarantee that they will, but you can pay attention to a few game factors to help. Telling a live-action story is a collaborative effort. Without the players, you have no cast through which to tell the tale. Therefore, you should take steps to involve them in the creation of plots. Sometimes players will surprise you and come up with plots on their own as well. The more that you can tailor your plots to the things that players enjoy, the more fun you'll foster.

Background and History Plots

Remember back when your players made their characters and wrote up histories and lives for them? You know, the part other than the Traits. These histories are wonderful indicators for useful plots. Not only can you use elements of these histories in the game, but you can use them to gauge the sorts of things that the players find interesting. Ideally, a history is rife with everything from the character's first magely mentor to his family and friends to fallings-out in jobs or relationships. Perhaps the character had some passion — like a desire to become a great baseball player — or he failed miserably at some effort. Work these passions into the story. Maybe the mage sponsors or mentors someone who has talents that remind the mage of her past. Perhaps a jilted lover returns for vengeance or reconciliation. You don't have to look far. The lives that these mages had before the Awakening provide ample fodder for stories.

Main Plots

Each main plot dovetails into your overall chronicle or story execution as well as your theme. These plots are the ones that drive the whole chronicle forward and change its face. Typically, a main plot's resolution impacts everyone in the game, or it represents a substantial triumph or defeat.

For instance, you might center a plot on the Technocracy's attempt to establish a high-tech base of operations in the city. Mages with Influence will start to feel the effects, and their *Contacts* will tell that something's up. Gradually, the Technocracy will make its presence known with agents and manipulations to local government and society. Mages who fight the Technocracy will need to act early to prevent or slow this change. Others may find their activities curtailed or crushed as the Technocracy co-opts city resources. No mage's life will remain unaffected by this policy, no matter what stance the individual takes toward the Technocracy. In such a plot, the consequences of each character's response should have a direct and measurable result on the overall story.

Subplots

Many times, a player will spin off his own little plot or interest. If a Hermetic mage manages to lay his hands on an old tome, for instance, it may help him with his studies but it probably won't affect the course of the whole game. Every mage goes through ups and downs, just like any other person, and these tribulations form small stories of their own.

Often, a character's subplot takes primary importance to the player. A character bent on becoming a Master will probably spend more time (and Experience Traits) on magical development than on the petty squabbles that occupy other mages. These drives aren't necessarily indications that the main plots aren't important, but you should pay attention to them. When a player ignores your main plot to do something else, that's an indication of a need for a subplot.

Some subplots are small and tidy enough to resolve on their own. If two characters argue over ideological differences, for instance, you'll find that they can sit and harangue one another for hours without interference. Indeed, getting in the middle may derail the fun. On the other hand, a character hunting down a specific goal may need a little attention. Trying to find a hated enemy or long-lost treasure usually requires the Storyteller's intervention.

Some subplots turn into major plots without warning, which can be good for you. It means you don't have to do a lot of work, but all the players have something else to involve themselves in. Just make sure that these plots don't overshadow your original game. If a mage's recruitment drive turns into a huge force to overthrow the Technocracy, your careful game of ideology and wonder may turn into a violence-fest. Pay careful attention to subplots. You can nurture them or turn them to your direction if you intervene early. Besides, your plots may well dovetail with the subplots, making a larger and more involved story.

CHARACTER RELATIONS

Mages don't exist in a vacuum. Membership in a Tradition carries with it the camaraderie of other mages. When different Traditions meet, their opinions inevitably loom large in their interpersonal relations. Characters will naturally come to settle into their own patterns of relationships, especially if you encourage a little conflict.

Novice players may have a little trouble with this aspect of the game at first. The "we're all in this together" mentality can quash many interesting debates. To fire matters up, try tossing in a Narrator character with some strong opinions. Let the players debate back and forth, and have a couple of different Narrator mages of different Traditions argue their own points of view, then try to drag in their allies. Hopefully, your players will take the bait and start debating the strengths and weaknesses of their Tradition policies.

Furthermore, mages have families, co-workers, lovers and enemies just like anyone else. Since they deal most with other mages, the other players naturally fill these roles. As long as everyone's comfortable with the separation of in-game and out-of-game motives and there aren't hard feelings between players whose characters dislike one another, this focus makes for good story fodder. A mage might use influence to gain petty revenge against a hated co-worker or sacrifice his ideals to help his family or lover.

CONFLICT, CONFLICT, CONFLICT

As you put together your plots and ideas, remember that conflict is your friend. Although many players are happy to have games of political maneuvering and philosophical debate, it's the clash of ideas and opinions that makes them fun. For some players, overcoming the conflict is what's enjoyable. For others, it's watching how people react to the struggle and how they succeed or fail. Regardless, conflict keeps matters moving.

Don't hesitate to shake things up. Listen to what the players have planned, what they hope for and what they'd like to do. Then, throw some barriers in their

path. Give them problems to overcome. Give them adversaries to hate. Ideally, the players will actually complain a little about the various difficulties of the less-than-ideal world, but they'll be all the more pleased when they finally do overcome their problems and get what they want. Nothing galvanizes players as quickly as establishing some problem that impacts the characters directly.

CREATING THE SETTING

The story's setting will have an immediate, tangible impact on its tone and mood, and it will influence the characters' actions from the very first game session. Your choice of setting and how you detail it can enhance or encumber your plot dramatically, so don't skimp on this element of the story.

FINDING GAME LOCATIONS

The normal people out there (read: those who don't play live-action games) generally frown upon and don't understand such activities, especially in public. For this reason, if nothing else, you'll want a private location to play.

Most troupes won't be able to afford to rent an actual building. If you can, great! Charge a couple bucks to offset costs, and make sure that you are careful not to destroy the scenery. There's no sense getting on peoples' bad sides.

It's more likely, though, that you'll use a friend's house. If you can arrange it, have a couple of different rooms set up. Use one for the main game site, one for the Umbra (if that's important to your game) and one for off-site actions and your little office where you can store records and check people into play.

Regardless of locale, make sure that you're ready to cough up an explanation of what you're doing if necessary. If your friends' family members drop by or a few wandering curious people from the general public spot the game, they may want to know what's going on. If you've been careful not to have too many public displays of "magic" you can usually explain the nature of the game. You may want to have a few papers on hand with a quick description, perhaps as part of your venue style sheet. Don't bother arguing with people about your game, especially local community folks like church leaders and police officers. You may be just enjoying yourselves, but if they feel that the game is threatening, they have the law and the community on their side.

REAL VERSUS IMAGINARY

Obviously, some settings are nigh-impossible to replicate. Most troupes just don't have the money and materials on hand to build an ancient Chantry, a crumbling palace or an entire spirit world. Players suspend their disbelief in magic for the game — and they'll have to suspend a little for the location as well — but the more you can make the location reflect the setting, the more accessible it'll be and the less it'll detract from the game itself.

Naturally you can do only so much with a location. If you're stuck with a downtown coffee shop, there's not too much you can do. You'll have to run with the décor. When you have the opportunity to do your own decorating, use garnishes to set the stage for your game's tone. You can put a map or description on your venue style sheet so that everyone knows what the location's supposed to be like. Try to pick a site or decorate one so that it suits not just the physical description of the location of the game, but also so that it facilitates the moods you want to convey. Brightly lit, cheery restaurants aren't the best place for backroom plotting and treachery, nor do dank alleyways and run-down tenements inspire hope.

Set up to Throw Down

Before you open the game for the evening's play, think about how the setting coheres with the back-story. If your setting is supposed to be a seedy part of town across from a cemetery, for instance, then perhaps mages who use *Spirit* magic will catch occasional glimpses of ghosts, or ghosts may spot them. If you decide that the location's just a short distance from a police department, then the mages will need to be much more careful to avoid attracting attention.

The setting location itself can give you little plot bombs to seed in the area. Each one is a subplot waiting to happen. Just make sure to look over the area in advance and decide what you want to do or how the rest of the world might impact upon it.

Ambiance

Mages move through varied environments, so use little hints to help set the stage. Colors help to set moods. Use bright and hot colors like orange, red and yellow for frenetic games; use purple and blue for more languorous environs. Your trappings provide a hint for the imagination to springboard from. A piece of statuary isn't only a chunk of background scenery, it's a mood piece that tells about the setting based on its style and pose. A sparse room without decoration carries a message just as surely as a lavish one does.

Lighting

The World of Darkness is intrinsically a darker, more shadowy place. Alleys are dangerous with black shade, and clouds loom in the sky with a threat of thunder. While you can't control the weather, you can influence interior lighting. For a moody, sedate game, use blue-colored lights, close the blinds and put dark rugs on the floor to absorb reflection. Vary the lights as the story demands. Perhaps a great magical working causes lights to blow out, or more lights are appropriate for a large meeting. You can use candles or lamps (if you're careful with the flame) to represent a more archaic setting, like the sanctum of an ancient Hermetic. If you're showcasing the Umbra, try dark blue and violet lighting. For the Shadowlands, mix a few dim lights with some blacklight.

Music

Although you must be careful not to allow it to overpower the game, music adds a definite edge. Queue up a CD player in the corner with some soft ambient music, preferably without distracting lyrics, and you'll generate some undertones without much effort. Music has a powerful emotional impact, but it's best when it's subtle. If you have to shout to be heard over the words of the music, it's just distracting.

Different sorts of music are appropriate for different venues. New Age and trance help to convey a mystical feeling, as do traditional instrumental pieces such as folk music. Classical music gives a grandiose, regal bearing, such as might be appropriate for a convocation of Tradition mages. Techno and industrial can accompany Technocrats or certain Tradition technomancers. Darkwave and Gothic music works for Hollow Ones, dealings with ghosts and spirit worlds. So does Native American folk music. Gregorian chants are appropriate for slow, religious proceedings like high ceremonies and churches, while Akashic Brotherhood initiates would relax among Buddhist chants and Taiko drums. You can also use natural sounds (sounds of rain, running water or the like) to simulate the naturalistic impact of groups like the Verbena or the feel of the spirit world meeting the material.

PROPS

The game's props are the final touches you add to the setting. Since players will recognize them and associate them with various memories or moods, the props have a powerful impact — more so if they can be picked up and used by your players.

Stage Props

The stage props are the pieces of art and furniture that help set the scene. These settings range from the mundane to the magnificent. You don't need to spend a lot of money or be a wizard at interior design. Use your pieces to accentuate, not to overburden.

You'll find many useful stage pieces around your own house. A painting or mural in one room can help set a specific tone, or you might bring along some furniture like chairs (very handy since your players probably won't appreciate standing around all night) or lamps into which you can put your colored light bulbs. Drop in a rug or carpet. You can use sheets, drapes or even towels to make wall hangings or to cover an inconvenient window. A bowl of fruit or a vase can add a touch of class to a bare table.

Even if you don't have the props you want at home, you can usually pick some up cheaply. Offer incentives to your players who help out. An Experience Trait award for logistics may be a nice kicker to promote bringing in handy props. Set up a prop list of pieces you want (which will also make a nice checklist when you pack up at the end of a game). You'll find that antique stores and secondhand stores often have some odd knickknacks. These trinkets are especially appropriate for mages, since mages tend to collect odd items reminiscent of specific cultures or historical periods. Therefore, that odd little cherub statue or Aztec mosaic may be just the piece to go with your Celestial Chorus or Dreamspeaker characters.

Small props tend to be more useful than large props, just because they're easy to use. Remember that you'll have to lug the props around to set up your game site. If it takes you longer to set up the props than to play the actual game, it's taking too much effort. A large oaken table may be just the thing you want, but if you can't lug it around and it keeps people from moving around the room, it may not be worth the effort. Accentuate first. Put special lighting near trophy pieces or stick a piece on top of a table or whatnot to draw attention without taking up too much room.

Personal Props

Not every player can spare the investment for all the foci and trappings of a character. As Storyteller, you should facilitate these things by bringing along some personal props of your own. Not only does doing so allow you to showcase the sorts of props you consider good, but it lets you set a standard of what is and isn't acceptable. It also helps players who otherwise wouldn't have the appropriate materials, and it lets you keep a bunch of props on hand with which to supply your Narrator characters.

Like stage props, you should use personal props judiciously. A great gnarled staff is a nifty conversation piece, but it's no good when it's whacking other players and getting caught in doorways. Look for bits of jewelry or clothing, especially in second-hand stores, for cheap accessories that bring out the character's personality. A Euthanatos might look like an average Joe in black clothes, until you add on the necklace of Kali, while a Dreamspeaker could have elaborate feathers, paints, rattles and dream-catchers for a high ritual ceremony.

PLAYING WITH PAPERWORK

As noted before, **Laws of Ascension** tends to be rather setup intensive. You have a lot to keep track of, so you'd better do as much as you can ahead of time.

Still, preparation doesn't obviate the need to keep papers organized during the game as well. A Storyteller might find time to run a character, but more often it'll take all the time and effort to keep the story moving while keeping records current.

BOOKKEEPING

Hard copy is your friend. Many Traits fluctuate wildly in play, so take note as best you can. Obviously you can't track easily the flow of things like Quintessence or every Ability Trait used, but you can take notes on good roleplayers, new rotes learned, plot points that showed up and checklists that you've made. You can keep records during play, then transfer them into your notebook at the close of the game. Keep your books as current as you can. Making sure that you follow up quickly will avoid problems later. You can take advantage of computer databases, palm pilots and the like to make your note-taking easier, but be sure to print everything out with dates too, just in case something happens to the computer records.

CHARACTER RECORDS

Keep copies of every character record for yourself. Doing so serves many purposes. If your players lose their records, you have new copies for them. You can also update character records between games. You can even check to see who has certain Backgrounds, Abilities or Advantages. You can put down notes as the game progresses. If a player earns an Experience Trait or learns a new rote, you can write it down immediately. Then update your database at the end of the game, and you'll keep current.

EXPERIENCE
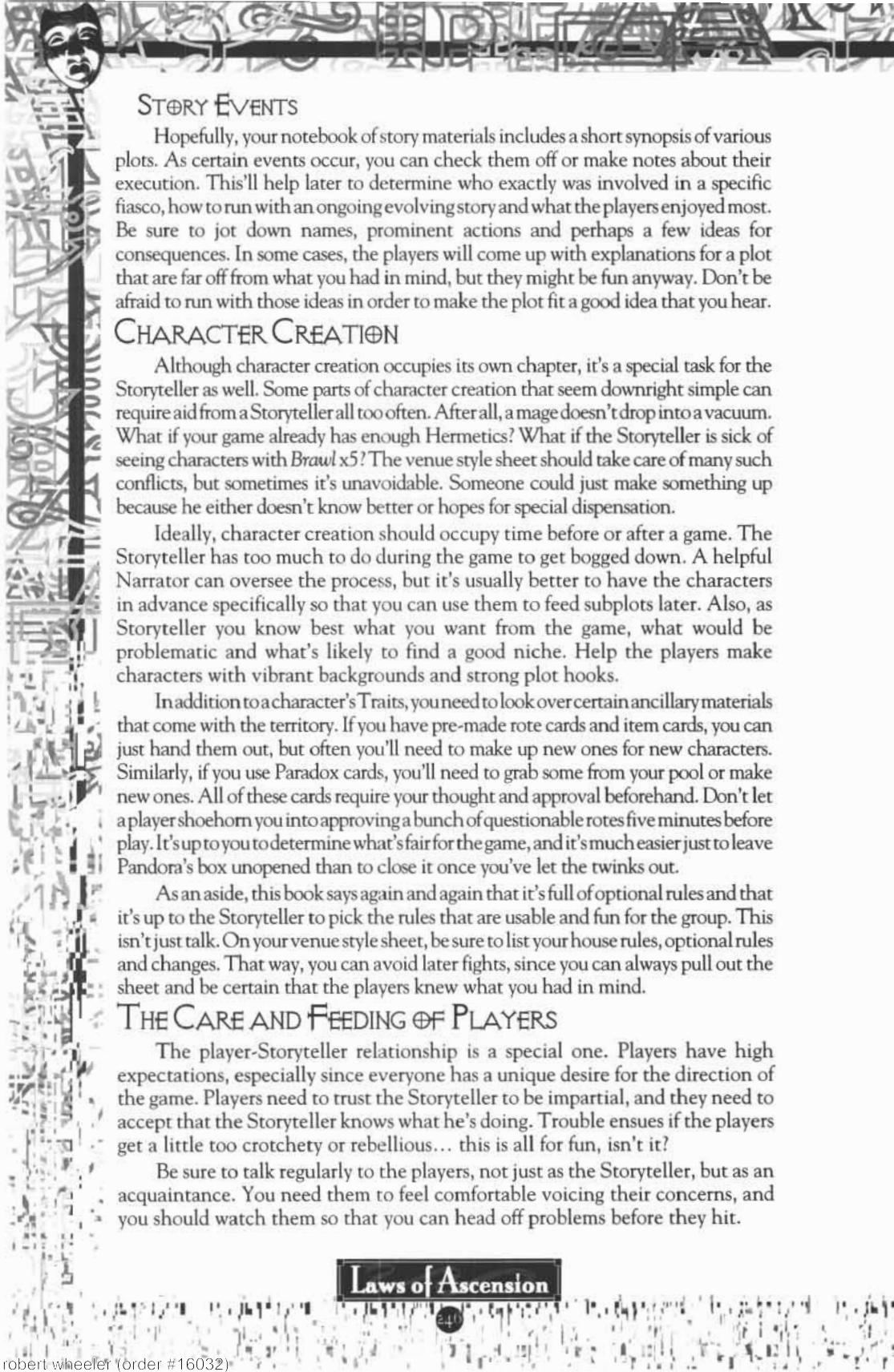
The advancement rate in your game depends a lot on how much experience you award. Typically, you shouldn't award more than two or three Traits in a game session, with four tops for the absolute best roleplay, logistical help and the like. Don't forget that even experience isn't the only measure of advancement. As shown on p. 137, just learning certain Spheres can take a lot of time.

Make sure to keep running tallies of Experience Traits on character records. That way, you know just how much the character needs to advance and how much he's already spent. Plus, the player can calculate on his own and savor the anticipation.

Typically, you should award one Experience Trait for surviving a game session. A strong roleplaying session is worth an extra Trait, and you might award a Trait for a good costume, achieving a specific goal or helping with Narration and logistics. When you give roleplaying bonuses, popular acclaim is a good measure but it's not the only measure. Many good characters don't do their best work in public, and just because someone's funny or intense doesn't mean that others aren't worthy of notice for roleplaying a more sedate character properly.

INFLUENCE

Of all the Backgrounds, Influence is probably the most likely to impact directly on stories and come into direct conflict. Two characters might use opposing Influences to make bids for power. You need to keep careful track of who does what, and when, in order to make sure that Influences clash correctly. If a mage uses *Church* Influence to stop something at the beginning of the game, take a note so that someone later using *Political* Influence to change it winds up properly fighting over the Influence clash. Besides, this clash is more good fodder for subplots and non-lethal player conflict.

STORY EVENTS

Hopefully, your notebook of story materials includes a short synopsis of various plots. As certain events occur, you can check them off or make notes about their execution. This'll help later to determine who exactly was involved in a specific fiasco, how to run with an ongoing evolving story and what the players enjoyed most. Be sure to jot down names, prominent actions and perhaps a few ideas for consequences. In some cases, the players will come up with explanations for a plot that are far off from what you had in mind, but they might be fun anyway. Don't be afraid to run with those ideas in order to make the plot fit a good idea that you hear.

CHARACTER CREATION

Although character creation occupies its own chapter, it's a special task for the Storyteller as well. Some parts of character creation that seem downright simple can require aid from a Storyteller all too often. After all, a mage doesn't drop into a vacuum. What if your game already has enough Hermetics? What if the Storyteller is sick of seeing characters with *Brawl* x5? The venue style sheet should take care of many such conflicts, but sometimes it's unavoidable. Someone could just make something up because he either doesn't know better or hopes for special dispensation.

Ideally, character creation should occupy time before or after a game. The Storyteller has too much to do during the game to get bogged down. A helpful Narrator can oversee the process, but it's usually better to have the characters in advance specifically so that you can use them to feed subplots later. Also, as Storyteller you know best what you want from the game, what would be problematic and what's likely to find a good niche. Help the players make characters with vibrant backgrounds and strong plot hooks.
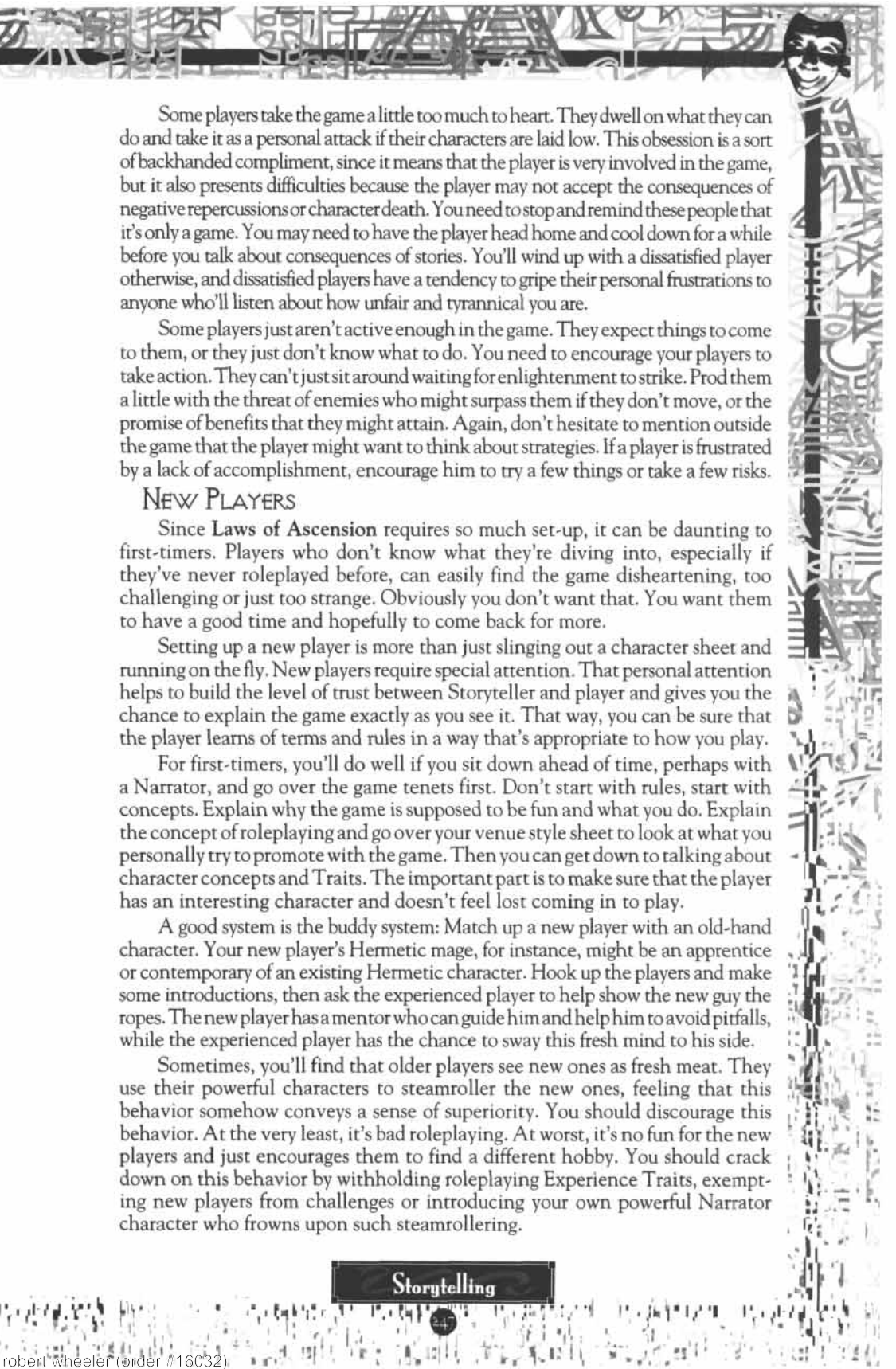
In addition to a character's Traits, you need to look over certain ancillary materials that come with the territory. If you have pre-made rote cards and item cards, you can just hand them out, but often you'll need to make up new ones for new characters. Similarly, if you use Paradox cards, you'll need to grab some from your pool or make new ones. All of these cards require your thought and approval beforehand. Don't let a player shoehorn you into approving a bunch of questionable rotes five minutes before play. It's up to you to determine what's fair for the game, and it's much easier just to leave Pandora's box unopened than to close it once you've let the twinks out.

As an aside, this book says again and again that it's full of optional rules and that it's up to the Storyteller to pick the rules that are usable and fun for the group. This isn't just talk. On your venue style sheet, be sure to list your house rules, optional rules and changes. That way, you can avoid later fights, since you can always pull out the sheet and be certain that the players knew what you had in mind.

THE CARE AND FEEDING OF PLAYERS

The player-Storyteller relationship is a special one. Players have high expectations, especially since everyone has a unique desire for the direction of the game. Players need to trust the Storyteller to be impartial, and they need to accept that the Storyteller knows what he's doing. Trouble ensues if the players get a little too crotchety or rebellious… this is all for fun, isn't it?

Be sure to talk regularly to the players, not just as the Storyteller, but as an acquaintance. You need them to feel comfortable voicing their concerns, and you should watch them so that you can head off problems before they hit.

Some players take the game a little too much to heart. They dwell on what they can do and take it as a personal attack if their characters are laid low. This obsession is a sort of backhanded compliment, since it means that the player is very involved in the game, but it also presents difficulties because the player may not accept the consequences of negative repercussions or character death. You need to stop and remind these people that it's only a game. You may need to have the player head home and cool down for a while before you talk about consequences of stories. You'll wind up with a dissatisfied player otherwise, and dissatisfied players have a tendency to gripe their personal frustrations to anyone who'll listen about how unfair and tyrannical you are.

Some players just aren't active enough in the game. They expect things to come to them, or they just don't know what to do. You need to encourage your players to take action. They can't just sit around waiting for enlightenment to strike. Prod them a little with the threat of enemies who might surpass them if they don't move, or the promise of benefits that they might attain. Again, don't hesitate to mention outside the game that the player might want to think about strategies. If a player is frustrated by a lack of accomplishment, encourage him to try a few things or take a few risks.

NEW PLAYERS

Since **Laws of Ascension** requires so much set-up, it can be daunting to first-timers. Players who don't know what they're diving into, especially if they've never roleplayed before, can easily find the game disheartening, too challenging or just too strange. Obviously you don't want that. You want them to have a good time and hopefully to come back for more.

Setting up a new player is more than just slinging out a character sheet and running on the fly. New players require special attention. That personal attention helps to build the level of trust between Storyteller and player and gives you the chance to explain the game exactly as you see it. That way, you can be sure that the player learns of terms and rules in a way that's appropriate to how you play.

For first-timers, you'll do well if you sit down ahead of time, perhaps with a Narrator, and go over the game tenets first. Don't start with rules, start with concepts. Explain why the game is supposed to be fun and what you do. Explain the concept of roleplaying and go over your venue style sheet to look at what you personally try to promote with the game. Then you can get down to talking about character concepts and Traits. The important part is to make sure that the player has an interesting character and doesn't feel lost coming in to play.

A good system is the buddy system: Match up a new player with an old-hand character. Your new player's Hermetic mage, for instance, might be an apprentice or contemporary of an existing Hermetic character. Hook up the players and make some introductions, then ask the experienced player to help show the new guy the ropes. The new player has a mentor who can guide him and help him to avoid pitfalls, while the experienced player has the chance to sway this fresh mind to his side.

Sometimes, you'll find that older players see new ones as fresh meat. They use their powerful characters to steamroller the new ones, feeling that this behavior somehow conveys a sense of superiority. You should discourage this behavior. At the very least, it's bad roleplaying. At worst, it's no fun for the new players and just encourages them to find a different hobby. You should crack down on this behavior by withholding roleplaying Experience Traits, exempting new players from challenges or introducing your own powerful Narrator character who frowns upon such steamrollering.

Goal-Oriented vs. Story-Oriented Players

While there are as many types of players as there are people, you'll find that a lot of them easily divide into the following two simple categories for game purposes: goal-oriented and story-oriented. Once you figure out which category describes your player, you'll find it easier to accommodate the player's way to enjoy the game.

A goal-oriented player — which usually makes up about 80-90% of the group — relies on achievement and actual measurable steps. These players savor the sense of accomplishment of overcoming adversaries, achieving new levels of power and gaining Traits or treasures. To them, the game may tell a story, but they can win if they advance their agendas and improve their characters' strengths like a protagonist in a popular novel. You'll satisfy these players if you give them things to beat and chances to earn new Traits, better rotes and more powerful Backgrounds or items. Some see the game as an exercise not in storytelling, but in numbers. For these people, the game is about tweaking the rules and running the other players (i.e., competitors) into the ground. These sorts don't often cooperate well when you want to tell a story for everyone. However, goal-orientation isn't all bad. It keeps the player moving forward, and it gives you concrete means to reward them or show success.

A story-oriented player relishes the emotions and ideas evoked by the game. These players don't care if their characters die hideously, languish under a terrible curse or otherwise "lose." Numbers and Traits aren't as important as getting on with the story itself. As in a tragedy where the protagonist dies, goes insane or suffers some other horrible fate, the story-oriented player enjoys the conflicts, feelings and conundrums that face the character, not necessarily the process of beating them. These players often make easy prey for goal-oriented players, because the latter sometimes enjoy defeating other players and the story-oriented players aren't as focused upon Traits and ways to make the rules work to their advantage. However, having story-oriented players along helps build a core of people who want a game experience, not just an exercise in engineering.

Many players fall somewhere between the two extremes. Early game experiences — from sports to board games — usually teach people to play in a goal-oriented mode, to score points and overcome obstacles. Players with more background in theater and literature may be more story-oriented. Ideally you'll want to strike a balance. Goal-oriented players help to advance the game and keep it moving, while story-oriented players provide a good response to the surroundings and play up the drama.

Training Your Players

So you've got a bunch of players, and you want to turn them into a troupe. Doing so takes some work, especially given the different game styles and the introduction of players who don't know how the game is played. How, then, do you train your players to enjoy the game you're running?

To some degree, you just have to be lucky and have good players. If one of your players is hell-bent on running over all of the others in the MageMobile or he wants to design the ritual Effect that'll kill all vampires everywhere, then he is probably missing the point of the storytelling experience. You can hope, you can wheedle and you can try to limit the player to less outrageous outbursts, but you may not be able to change him. That's just the way it is. If a player's too problematic, then you need to get rid of him before he damages the game for everyone else.

However, you can do a little Pavlovian training to nudge your players in the right direction. The roleplaying Experience Trait award is only one such bonus. Those who play their characters well and take a few hits for the story receive a tangible benefit in terms of points. Enforcing consequences for actions is one of the most important things you can do. A lot of things that are technically legal in the rules are just plain bad ideas. You can enforce the social penalties of mages, by branding an offender or even having powerful mages show up to deal with a problem child. Don't hesitate. This sort of punishment proves to a goal-oriented player that screwing around is a losing situation, while a story-oriented player will take this beating in stride and either shape up or drive the character straight into self-destruction.

Rewarding story-crafting is a little harder. Try to cleave to the requirements that add to story building. For instance, insist that players use their Traits to describe their actions narratively. Doing so isn't just Storytelling by fiat, but it encourages the players to think about the appearance of what they're doing and how their characters do it. That's why the Traits are there instead of just numbers, after all. Similarly, if a player doesn't pantomime or describe the actions of foci and casting an Effect, assign a slight penalty to the Arete test. Obviously, the mage isn't bothering to use his enlightened tools.

Most importantly, talk with your players about what you want to accomplish. Sometimes you'll want to ask a player to bend a little for the good of the story. Maybe a mage can kill someone, but he shouldn't for the sake of the story. Good roleplaying doesn't mean following an ironclad concept that straightjackets you into actions that throw the game. It means playing a role to a hilt that's fun, and making sure that it's equally fun for everyone else.

NARRATORS

The Narrators are the friends, confidants and co-conspirators of the Storyteller. While a Narrator usually doesn't have as much say in plots and rules, a Narrator does have the authority to moderate scenes, play special characters for the plot and make judgment calls on the spot. The Narrator serves as a stopgap to address the fact that you can't oversee the whole game at once and that you'll just need a helping hand from time to time.

Obviously there's no real limit to your Narrating staff, except the number of people you can recruit and trust. A Narrator takes on significant responsibilities, so he needs to be someone you'll put stock in. Also, a Narrator needs a decent handle on the rules, just to make sure that all of her judgment calls and moderation flow smoothly. Beyond that, it's upon you to decide on your Narrator staff. A good ratio is one Narrator for every five to 10 players, but it will vary with your own energy and the size of the game. In a game of 20 or fewer people in a small area, you might oversee it yourself, while in a huge convention game, you might want Narrators who specifically administer and coordinate other Narrators.

Since you'll be so busy during the game, you should encourage your players to seek the help of Narrators. For small questions or scenes, a Narrator should do just fine. Of course, the Narrators can come to you if they have trouble, but that should be a last resort. Make sure that your Narrators know what you want from the game so that you don't overrule them later. If you undermine their authority, the players won't go to them for moderation. In turn, don't micromanage. Let the Narrators handle rule decisions and play out important roles.

It's important for your Narrators to wear nametags or otherwise be identified so that people know whom to talk to, and they understand that the kick-ass Master wandering around isn't some player cheating or getting favoritism.

In addition to general rules Narrators and players of your plot characters, you might want to use some specialized Narrators to pick up special needs of the game.

THE AVATAR GUIDE

An Avatar Guide handles narration for all Avatar-driven events. Usually this isn't too much to do. The Narrator just takes care of the interaction of Avatar and mage. Most of the time, this is a simple job of handling the whispers or urges that an Avatar may give to a mage. Rarely, the Avatar Guide will take on the role of an Avatar as it manifests in a dream (or even physically) to guide its patron.

The Avatar Guide's most important role lies in Seekings. When you arrange a Seeking, be sure to have the Avatar Guide along. The Avatar Guide plays the role of the individual Avatar, pushing the mage to enlightenment and making demands. This role is difficult, because the Avatar Guide must understand not only the Avatar's Essence, but the mage's background. Keep the mage's history on file (You did get a history on file from the player, right?) so that the Avatar Guide can reference it. When you sit down to craft a Seeking, bring your Avatar Guide along, so that you can work together and make sure that the Avatar reacts appropriately.

THE PARADOX JUDGE

Sometimes you want a system that encourages a little wild Paradox, but you can't rely on Paradox cards or you don't like using straight damage. In such cases, you rely on a Paradox Judge.

The Paradox Judge has the difficult job of coming up with Paradox Backlashes and events to respond to various magely workings. When a mage gains Paradox, it's up to this Narrator to decide if the Paradox hangs and what effect it takes. The Paradox Judge might have a deck of Paradox cards, or you might trust him to come up with results on the spur of the moment. The Paradox Judge should create or approve Paradox cards in any case, if you use them.

Either way, this position is a difficult one. The Paradox Judge has the thankless task of inflicting hardship on characters, which always draws ire from the players. Furthermore, players will tend to avoid magic specifically when they notice the Paradox Judge around. For this reason, you should consider using walkie-talkies or headsets to communicate, so that the Paradox Judge can make judgment calls from a distance.

THE SPIRIT KEEPER

For games with many spirits or lots of Umbral travel, you'll need a Spirit Keeper. This Narrator handles all matters spiritual, including keeping spirit Traits, tracking important recurring spirits, deciding on Gauntlet levels and classifying Umbral realms.

When a mage summons up a spirit, it's up to the Spirit Keeper to play out that role and make sure that the spirit is duly recorded for future notice. The Spirit Keeper also tracks the notoriety of mages who abuse spirit hospitality, and he decides on the appropriateness of various fetishes. The Spirit Keeper further serves as the final authority on Umbral denizens and characteristics. Therefore, the Spirit Keeper determines what sort of magic is coincidental in the Umbra and what the rules of various Realms are.

DOWNTIMES

Unless you're running a one-shot game, you will have some downtime between episodes. That is, the characters may exist in a sort of perpetual limbo, shelved in your files, but that doesn't mean that they're necessarily without action. Indeed, since there are long stretches of time between games, this time is ripe for the use of long-term actions like Influence, Umbral quests and lengthy ritual magic.

Downtimes cover the stuff that characters do in the space between games. Naturally, there's only so much that you can do in a set amount of time, but you can do more in a downtime period than you can in a few hours of game play. To moderate this time, you should have downtime sheets available for your players. At the end of the game, let your players write down on pieces of paper the sorts of actions that they want to take. Have them prioritize their actions, so that they might get to some but not others. Then, between games, you can figure out what happens and set up responses to hand out with the character records at the beginning of the next game. These opportunities are perfect for using Backgrounds such as *Allies* and Influence so that the character can accomplish tricky or lengthy tasks like securing occult instruction, manipulating the mayor's office or putting a lock down on criminal activity within a few blocks.

When you use downtimes, be sure to set a deadline. You don't need players turning in a downtime a day before the game and demanding results.

Good actions for downtime include:
- Determining where the mage lives and how she survives day-to-day
- Finding out what Nodes the mage visits
- Searching for occult materials or instructors
- Casting lengthy rituals (especially divinations)
- Exercising *Allies* and Influence
- Learning new Spheres

You can also take downtimes through email, if you're so inclined.

TROUBLESHOOTING
PLAYER BOREDOM: "THERE'S NOTHING TO DO IN THIS GAME!"

There's always someone who feels this way. One of the difficulties lies in separating the constant complainers (it happens) from folks with a legitimate difficulty. Problems of this sort can stem from many different difficulties, and they're not necessarily the fault of the Storyteller. Check the following possibilities:

- Is the player pursuing her character's goals actively? Some players are too afraid of losing their characters, or they just don't plan out means to pursue their goals.

- Is the player hoarding information she should be sharing? This is a constant problem. Often, one player will gain some information about a plot, then sit on it to the exclusion of everyone else. If the player isn't sure what to do with it or doesn't want to risk it, then the plot languishes.

- Is the player refusing to interact with other players during games? Sure, some characters may be loners or have social difficulties, but almost everyone has at least *one* acquaintance.

- Did the player miss one or more vital clues? This problem might be a story issue. You should usually have multiple entry points to a plot and provide multiple ways to enter the story from clues or activities.

• Did the player create a full character background? If not, why is the character already in play?

• Is the pace of the game too slow for the player? It's possible that the player just demands a faster pace than you want to play. In such a case, the player needs to decide whether it's worth a little boredom to get to the high points.

• Is the player achieving her character goals too easily? Your player may just be clever, or your plots might not be convoluted and challenging enough.

• Is there something in particular the player dislikes or doesn't understand about the story? Sometimes, the player really wants to play, but he just doesn't like the game you have to offer. In such a case, you don't have much choice if you don't want to change your game. The player just needs to find a game more to his liking.

Even when you go out of your way to introduce plot elements, some players may still become bored. In some cases, it's because the player isn't interested in those elements. Check the character background to see what the player found interesting enough to include there. In other cases, the players feel stampeded when more powerful characters step in. You might consider directing some of the plots straight at the lesser characters, perhaps by introducing them through Narrator characters who go straight to an individual with a targeted plot.

In some cases, you'll have players who just aren't social or are too passive, and they don't become involved in what's going on. The buddy system (see p. 247) is a good helper here, so that a passive player gets dragged along with a more active one. However, if a player is too passive, sometimes there's not much you can do. You can force the player to react to situations, but if the player won't stand up and become involved, then there's no way to force him to have fun.

Too Much Violence: "Not Another Mass Combat!"

Let's face it, some players out there relish conflict, find nothing more enjoyable than beating down the other players' characters and happily count up all their Traits and powers as measures of personal prowess. These twinks, as they're not-so-affectionately known, believe in engineering their characters to beat all comers, taking the lead by bullying and quashing all opposition. Unless a group of players becomes sufficiently motivated to oust them, the twinks may run roughshod over the game, wrecking every person and plot in contact with them. Invariably, they have escape clauses worked out so that they never suffer the consequences of their actions. ("I have *Arcane* x5, so nobody remembers me. And I change my appearance with *Life* magic. Then I kill all of the police officers who were chasing me. After that, I teleport away so that they can't follow, wait two days to heal the Paradox damage, then come back to have my revenge. With +5 Traits from an extended *Life* ritual.")

It may sound cruel, but there's little way around it: Do Not Suffer A Twink To Live. A obsessive goal-oriented player like this causes too much conflict to the rest of the game, especially with the tendency to bully around other players who just want to roleplay and have a good time. You can sometimes keep the twinks occupied with heavy-duty combat. A twink will leap at the chance to crush enemies that he can be sure of defeating (and, conversely, he will flee at the first sign of truly powerful opposition — or opposition targeted against him specifically), all so that he can have another victory under his belt.

However, you can't be expected to spend all of your time moderating combats for one player (or one cabal of twinks). Corner your twink and try to

find out what's motivating him to dominate the game. Many will have some sort of excuse. Puncture that with direct evidence: How many other characters have been killed already? How many times has the game stopped while confused Narrators tried to follow the player's logic for why his Spheres grant unstoppable powers? How many of this player's characters have fought for or demanded positions of leadership and threatened others with a good smacking if they were denied? Suggest that the player re-examine his motives and decide whether he really wants to play so competitively in a game that is cooperative by definition. If the player is just gung-ho about the beat-down, then perhaps he should head to a game that fosters such attitudes a little more. (Conversely, if you enjoy running live-action **Street Fighter**, then go for it. There's nothing wrong with it if everyone's having fun. The only problem comes when many players stop enjoying themselves and start complaining about too much fighting.)

Rant over. On some occasions, you'll run into excess combat because of lemming syndrome. A small fight will break out, and a few bored other players will wander over and want to cycle in. You can curb this effect in a couple of ways. Host the game setting in a locale where such überviolence wouldn't be tolerated (like an important Chantry where Adepts would put a quick stop to it). Or you can just maneuver combats to another room where other characters can't simply drop in. Also remember to enforce some sense of time limits. If a player wanders on over to a combat at the corner of the Quik-Mart, it may well take several turns (at three seconds a turn) for the character to actually arrive on the scene. That should be long enough for the combat to finish before the character actually arrives.

Metagaming:
"Hey, Your Character Can't Possibly Know That!"

Perhaps one of the most pervasive problems in a large-scale format, and one of the most difficult to curb, lies in metagaming. Some players will migrate their out-of-game knowledge into the game. Little snippets of overheard conversation or the like will turn into actions. They may not even use it to rationalize their actions; they simply act according to their meta-knowledge. ("No, I was just wandering into the back room for a smoke, really. I didn't know that you planned to ambush the Master there.")

You should adopt strict in-character policy for your games. As long as your players are in the play locale, they're in play. They're subject to challenges, and anything they say can be used against them, which cuts back marvelously on the supervillain-like gloating. Set aside a room (a kitchen with snacks is a good idea, or a smoking area outside) for out-of-play interactions, but encourage people to stay in character as much as possible.

If you actually catch someone metagaming, punish it quickly and harshly. Don't ever let people migrate their knowledge facetiously into play. It's cheating, plain and simple.

Argumentative Players:
"You Can't Do That To My Character!"

Remember (to quote Deird're Brooks): Story is everything. Obey Your Storyteller.

You must establish your storytelling authority early and firmly. Allow a player one shot at making a position, but if a player argues continually, just say NO. It's up to you to enforce the rules and story of the game. Disruptive players undermine your

authority, it shows disrespect for your game, and it slows things down. After the player's made one point, remind her firmly that you're the final authority, that you have made your decision and that perhaps your ruling is based on factors that the player isn't aware of. (You can't tell them all of your tricks and secret plots.) If the player continues to argue, suggest that she take a little time out-of-play to cool off.

Some players can't deal with the fact that things won't always go their way, or they will just argue with other players. Step in quickly to resolve these disputes. In the former case, you will probably just have to ask the player to leave. Those who can't deal with the fact that the game doesn't always go as they desire can't be allowed to disrupt it for everyone else. In the latter case, you can't let the players disrupt things, but you can step in to clear up a ruling before matters spiral out of hand.

STORYTELLER BURNOUT: "I CAN'T THINK OF ANY MORE STORIES."

The muse doesn't punch a time clock. Sometimes, you just can't come up with something new. When you absolutely have no more inspiration, or when you start seeing the game as a chore, it's time to set it aside.

You may feel like you have a duty to your players to run the game, but consider this: Your first duty is to entertain. If you can't do that, if you are just out of fun things to do, then you should let someone else take up the mantle. There will be other games. You don't have to shoulder this burden forever. Maybe it's time for you to be a player. That way, you too can experience what it's like to play and have a Storyteller whose rules and games styles don't exactly match up with your own. As long as you can back away far enough that you don't try to keep pushing the new Storyteller to doing things your way.

PLAYER CHEATING: "HEY, YOU DIDN'T HAVE THAT SPHERE A FEW MINUTES AGO!"

It's rare, but sometimes a player will make up Traits, grant himself items or use Spheres that his character doesn't possess. Why a character would cheat like this is beyond most of us (You're just cheating yourself of the fun of a good game.) but it happens. You should put a stop to cheating as soon as you find it. Ask the player to leave the game, remove the character from play and try to clean up the ensuing mess. It's no fun for other players when a cheater decides to throw around some imaginary weight.

Sometimes a player will use too much Quintessence or Willpower. You can curb this, and the use of items or rotes that aren't possessed, by using the cards described earlier. If the player doesn't have a card for an object or Trait, the character doesn't have it.

FAILED STORIES: "THIS GAME SUCKS."

Keep a quisling or two among the players to report back to you with the state of satisfaction among the group. Some players won't hesitate to give you a piece of their mind, but others will simply drift quietly away from the game. Sometimes that wonderful plot you came up with just isn't working, and you should pay attention. If nobody enjoys the game, it's time to change gears. Conversely, you will occasionally run into players who gripe whenever they don't feel like the center of attention or get what they want. Some are just griping out of habit, and they stay quiet when they're enjoying themselves.

Don't take game criticism personally. Sure, it's your imagination and your story, but just because some people don't like it doesn't mean that it's without merit. You may just need something different to satisfy the group. Also remember that a story runs on conflict. Players will complain loud and long when they feel like they're given the short end of the stick, but it's overcoming such adversity that gives them a sense of accomplishment and triumph. If a player gripes that the story sucks but the real problem is that the character's in a bad spot, then you may just be in the conflict part of a story cycle, and matters will probably pick up once it's resolved. Also, if a bunch of players dislike a given story element, that dislike is a great motivator for them to get involved and change it in the course of the game. Sure, everyone will bitch if a crazed Master shows up and starts dictating policy, but they'll relish the victory all the more once they beat him or manage to circumvent him and accomplish their own goals anyway.

Favoritism: "You're Only Letting Him Play a Master Because He's Your Boyfriend!"

Although you shouldn't always be fair — life isn't, and neither are Storytellers — you should be impartial. That is, if you shaft a character, it should be on the basis of story elements or just random fate, not because you personally dislike the player. Similarly, you should not give advantages to people just because you like them. You might occasionally want to reward a good player with extra Experience Traits, but do so only sparingly. You may also hand pick certain people for specific roles, if you think that doing so will facilitate the story.

Quash favoritism wherever you find it. First, step back and try to ask yourself if there's any truth to the accusation. If you have a good Narrator who's not just a yes-man, ask for an outside opinion. If you realize that you are actually playing favorites, then you should stop. Chances are, if your relationship with someone is strained over a few imaginary points in a game, then the relationship wasn't that strong to begin with.

On the other hand, if you're not playing favorites, be sure to address the issue. You don't need a growing groundswell of player discontentment just because people think that you're playing favorites and ignoring complaints. Let the players know that they're heard, and explain your actions and considerations.
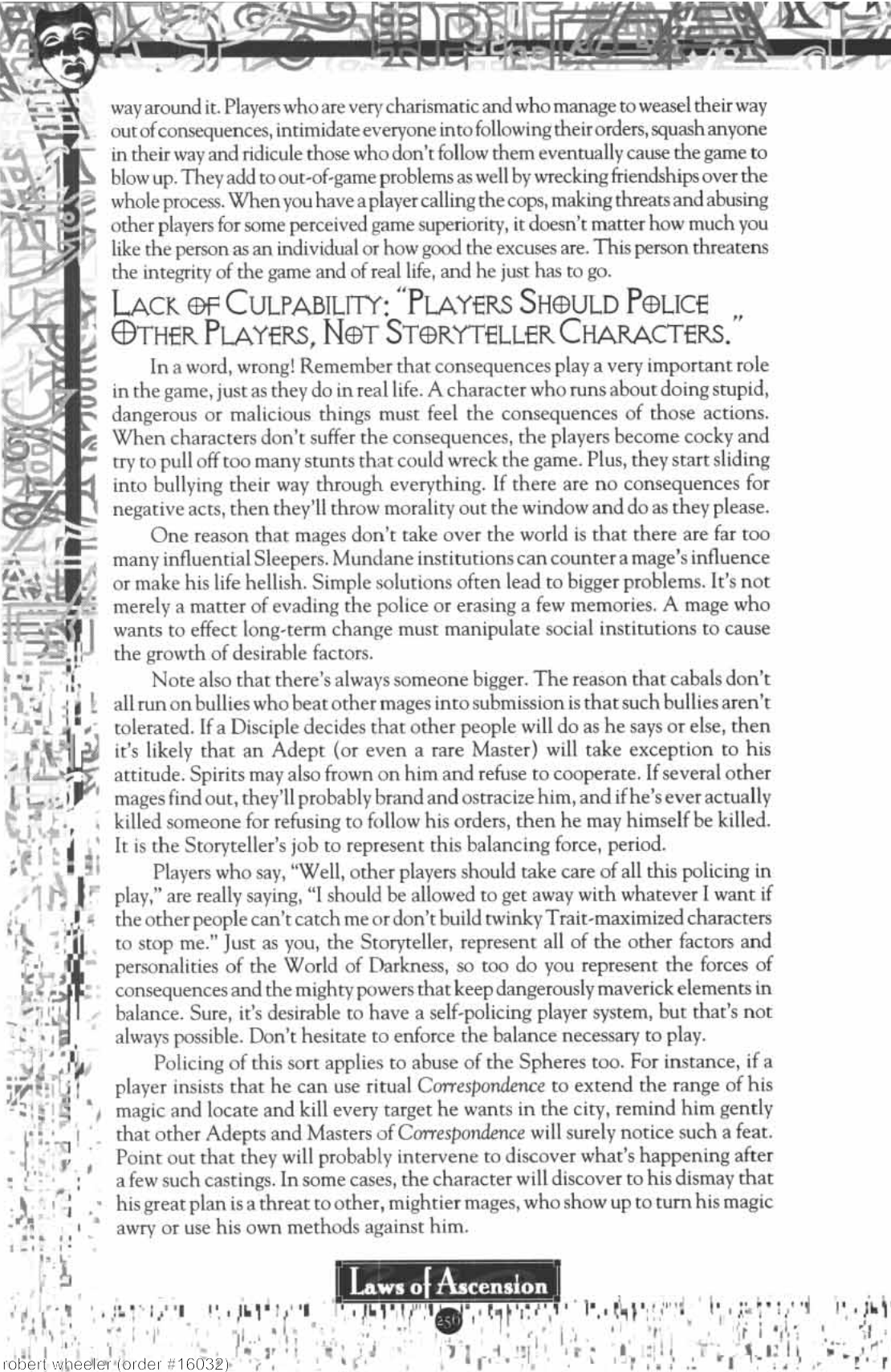
Problem Players: "He's Ruining the Game!"

Some players are just freakishly successful at what they do. This isn't all bad, but if it hoards all the fun plots or stops other people from becoming involved, the game starts to revolve around those players alone, which detracts from other players' fun. In such a situation, you can forge an artificial balance again. Ask the players to step back a little and let some other people have fun too.

In other cases, you run afoul of the twink. Don't hesitate to lay the smack down on players who really cause a problem. A little inter-player conflict is unavoidable, but it shouldn't cause grief or ruin the game. Make sure that there's basis to the accusations first. If it's just one person complaining, then it may be a problem griper or someone who wound up losing out on a plot arc and who's just dissatisfied. If you hear lots of complaints, chances are good that one player is a problem. Deal with it. That's your job.

A tough responsibility of the Storyteller is to deal with problem players whom you otherwise like as people. You may really enjoy hanging out with your friend, and you may respect him a lot, but if he's wrecking the game, he's got to go. There's no

way around it. Players who are very charismatic and who manage to weasel their way out of consequences, intimidate everyone into following their orders, squash anyone in their way and ridicule those who don't follow them eventually cause the game to blow up. They add to out-of-game problems as well by wrecking friendships over the whole process. When you have a player calling the cops, making threats and abusing other players for some perceived game superiority, it doesn't matter how much you like the person as an individual or how good the excuses are. This person threatens the integrity of the game and of real life, and he just has to go.

LACK ⊕F CULPABILITY: "PLAYERS SH⊕ULD P⊕LICE ⊕THER PLAYERS, N⊕T ST⊕RYTELLER CHARACTERS."

In a word, wrong! Remember that consequences play a very important role in the game, just as they do in real life. A character who runs about doing stupid, dangerous or malicious things must feel the consequences of those actions. When characters don't suffer the consequences, the players become cocky and try to pull off too many stunts that could wreck the game. Plus, they start sliding into bullying their way through everything. If there are no consequences for negative acts, then they'll throw morality out the window and do as they please.

One reason that mages don't take over the world is that there are far too many influential Sleepers. Mundane institutions can counter a mage's influence or make his life hellish. Simple solutions often lead to bigger problems. It's not merely a matter of evading the police or erasing a few memories. A mage who wants to effect long-term change must manipulate social institutions to cause the growth of desirable factors.

Note also that there's always someone bigger. The reason that cabals don't all run on bullies who beat other mages into submission is that such bullies aren't tolerated. If a Disciple decides that other people will do as he says or else, then it's likely that an Adept (or even a rare Master) will take exception to his attitude. Spirits may also frown on him and refuse to cooperate. If several other mages find out, they'll probably brand and ostracize him, and if he's ever actually killed someone for refusing to follow his orders, then he may himself be killed. It is the Storyteller's job to represent this balancing force, period.

Players who say, "Well, other players should take care of all this policing in play," are really saying, "I should be allowed to get away with whatever I want if the other people can't catch me or don't build twinky Trait-maximized characters to stop me." Just as you, the Storyteller, represent all of the other factors and personalities of the World of Darkness, so too do you represent the forces of consequences and the mighty powers that keep dangerously maverick elements in balance. Sure, it's desirable to have a self-policing player system, but that's not always possible. Don't hesitate to enforce the balance necessary to play.

Policing of this sort applies to abuse of the Spheres too. For instance, if a player insists that he can use ritual *Correspondence* to extend the range of his magic and locate and kill every target he wants in the city, remind him gently that other Adepts and Masters of *Correspondence* will surely notice such a feat. Point out that they will probably intervene to discover what's happening after a few such castings. In some cases, the character will discover to his dismay that his great plan is a threat to other, mightier mages, who show up to turn his magic awry or use his own methods against him.

CROSSOVER HELL: "OF COURSE I CAN TURN A VAMPIRE INTO A LAWN CHAIR."

To some degree, when you throw together multiple games, like tossing in some **Laws of the Night** with **Laws of Ascension**, you get what you ask for. Each game has a distinct theme and story angle, so they're not meant to be mixed together so much. Generally, one should take the fore, and if other supernatural creatures show up, they're subplots and subordinate angles to the keystone game. But some people want to run crossover games anyway.

As this writer has said before, you can do so if you want. You can also beat your game to death with a stick.

There's a lot of fun to be had in mixing the elements of the World of Darkness. Acknowledging the existence of other supernatural creatures makes for a more perilous game and a more precarious existence, especially since nobody knows who's right and who's wrong. It can also make your game a mess because different rules have different scales, power systems and the like. There's not any way to make a "complete book of crossovers," because there's already so much going on in each separate game that it's nigh-impossible to cover every combination.

So, if you do decide to add multiple game elements together, it's on your head. However, you can do a few things to minimize problems. First, and it may seem obvious, make sure that your power scales are the same. For instance, if you use old rules from **Laws of the Hunt**, you'll discover that the power scales and health scales are different. Your people will be far too fragile unless you use the compressed scale (p. 119) for everyone. Second, watch out for *Super Friends* syndrome. Within five minutes of sticking two venues together, some enterprising group will come up with a way for the two to have some sort of truce or peace treaty. You should be sure to enforce the reasons why various groups don't get along. The Master mage betrays the vampires or the elder werewolf punishes the young upstarts who have the gall to treat defilers of holy sites as buddies.

Don't hesitate to step in directly. Third, consider having Narrators who specialize in each rule set. You may have a Narrator who knows vampires backward and forward, but who doesn't quite grasp the intricacies of the Spheres. Have the vampire players come to that Narrator for questions, and have all of the crossover problems come to you.

Once they were sure that the two Technocrats they'd heard were not on their way back, Tiernan and David crept down the hall. Invisible waves of energy buffeted them, and they could see an eerie light pulsing from one of the rooms in syncopation.

"Any special plans?" Tiernan whispered.

"Survive?" David replied with a grin. He went on ahead confidently and entered the room from which the light emanated. Tiernan gave him the finger then followed.

The room looked like any other lab room David had seen in high school and college. Two black-topped tables dominated the space, and they were surrounded by cabinets and racks of unidentifiable electronic equipment. The table on the left was empty, but the one on the right supported a large metal object that resembled nothing so much as an orrery. A translucent globe with a dark spot in the middle sat atop the spinning device, and it was from that globe that the light (and ostensibly the invisible distortion waves) pulsed.

"That's got to be it," Tiernan said. "I can feel it tearing down the natural order, causing chaos and disruption."

For once, David didn't look doubtful. He approached the strange object with clenched hands that gave off wavering heat contrails.

"Don't touch it!" Tiernan warned him. "If this thing is tainting the flow of Quintessence and making divergent realities slam into each other like Florence thinks, there's no telling what it'll do to one of us."

The Akashic paused. "What about these?" he asked, tapping the Quintessence filter Florence had given him. "Shouldn't they keep us safe?"

"I don't think they're strong enough this close to the thing," Tiernan said. "I think it may even be getting stronger. I feel like it's pulling me in three different directions at once. That spot in the middle's getting darker too."

"So what do we do?"

"Hang on," Tiernan said. "I'll see if I can keep it from getting any worse." He murmured some words in Gaelic and produced from his shirt pocket a small white piece of cloth that held a thick, dry root. He crushed the root in his hand, worked it between his fingers, then sprinkled the dust onto the object. The dust sat atop the globe unceremoniously.

"Are you quite through?" David asked.

"I can jump-kick it if you think that'll help," Tiernan smirked.

"What did you do?" David asked.

"First aid," Tiernan said. "If you want to call it that. I disinfected the wound, but it's a temporary fix. I think I'd better get Florence. Maybe she can figure how to shut this thing down altogether."

"You'd better hurry," David said. "If those Technocrats are leaving, they're going to see what I did to the door and call in security. If they're not leaving, they're going to come running when we turn this thing off."

Tiernan nodded and hurried out the door to find Florence before company arrived.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ALLIES AND ANTAGONISTS

The Traditions came together out of conflict not only with each other, but with other supernatural entities — especially with those who espoused reason over randomness and stasis over creativity. Any mage who walks among the Awakened for long will learn quickly of the other beings that inhabit the World of Darkness.

THE TECHNOCRACY

The Technocracy is chief among the adversaries of the Traditions. This order of philosopher-scientists originated from the paragons of reason in the Renaissance, but it evolved in the modern age into a loose global affiliation of financiers, scientists, doctors, researchers, explorers, engineers and bureaucrats. Now, all Technocrats are dedicated to the goal of removing the vestiges of dangerous randomness, chaos and terror from the world.

Although the Technocracy started with a noble purpose, that purpose fell by the wayside as time marched on. The original founders of the Order of Reason intended to spare mankind the horrors of magical creatures, demons and superstitions by promoting repeatable technologies and gifts that everyone could use. Over the centuries, though, the Union came to espouse the ideas of control and order at any cost. The Technocracy initiated a Pogrom to seek out and destroy "dangerous, deviant, radical elements" like mages and mythical creatures, while taking a shadowy influence over humanity at the same time in an attempt to guide mankind to some scientific apotheosis.

Five Conventions make up the Technocracy, and each one oversees a specific area of scientific endeavor. Unlike the Traditions, though, each Convention upholds the overall science and vision of the Union. The Convention known as Iteration X, is a group that specializes in tool use, machine-man interface and engineering, and it manipulates *Forces*. The New World Order is a shadowy Convention of media representatives and political operatives who influence society using the Sphere of *Mind*. The Progenitors are doctors and

medical technicians who pioneer cloning, genetic engineering and surgery through scientific applications of the *Life* Sphere. The Syndicate is a Convention of financiers and enforcers who spread big business and the power of money by way of a refined sense of the Sphere of *Entropy*. The Void Engineers are hearty explorers who chart the Earth and the depths beyond in space and alternate dimensions through an enlightened understanding of *Correspondence*.

Although Technocrats seem, on the surface, to be highly advanced scientists, they are actually Awakened mages. A Technocrat uses scientific methods and tools to achieve unbelievable results. However, few in the Union would ever pay credence to the notion. In their eyes, they are wholly different from their mystical adversaries.

Technocratic operatives function much like mages, and they even use Spheres, but their foci and justifications for their Effects are always scientific in nature. Because of the strength of their Union, Technocrats can access high levels of Backgrounds and get their hands on advanced scientific equipment. In recent years, Technocrats have hunted Tradition mages with their terrifying coordination and deductive skills, in order to exterminate them or reprogram them.

In addition to Technocratic operatives, the Union employs a small number of high-tech constructs such as cyborgs or bioengineered creatures. These beings are generally Paradoxical by nature, so they suffer Backlashes whenever they perform some vulgar feat due to their enhancements. For instance, a cyborg that opens up its torso to reveal a hidden chain gun is likely to find itself suffering malfunctions because it has such a Paradoxical weapons system. However, such constructs can be eerie and deadly hunters when they pursue Tradition mages.

(To build a HIT Mark cyborg or a similar construct, use normal character creation rules, then presume that the creation is modified to have permanent *Life* alterations to its Physical Traits, implanted heavy armor and perhaps even a technologically concealed miniature chain gun or similar weapon.)

Fortunately for the Traditions, the Technocracy does not exercise complete control over human society. Rather, the Technocrats influence important political and economic decisions subtly, and they release their Enlightened Science to the Masses until it becomes an accepted (and non-Paradoxical) part of the everyday world. With the advent of the Reckoning, however, even the Technocrats have found themselves out of touch with their former leaders. Young Technocrats exhibit a range of personality archetypes from dire villains who seek to stamp out all traces of mysticism and individuality, to lone heroes hoping to empower humanity and make the world safe.

You can build a Technocrat character like any other mage (including Spheres and Arete), but the character should not conceive of the mutable nature of reality like a Tradition mage does. A Technocrat doesn't do magic, he performs advanced procedures and applies Enlightened Science. Technocrats have different cosmetic terminology for many of their devices, procedures and Backgrounds, but they function game mechanically much like the mages of the Traditions.

ΠΑRAUDERS

While most mages dance on the edge of creativity and inspiration, a few tumble over the precipice into wild chaos. Be it from some damage to the Avatar, a mystical curse that strikes the Awakened or a severe Quiet that causes these mages to lose control, none can say with certainty. Regardless, some mages simply cannot deal

with the magical world on even footing. They see monsters and mythical creations everywhere, and they inflict their madness and dynamism on the world without even really trying. These dangerous willworkers are called Marauders.

Marauders come in as many varieties as other mages. Indeed, it's even possible for a normal mage to become a Marauder, although nobody truly understands the circumstances that might cause such a change. A Marauder might seem like a totally normal and competent magician, only to reveal his insanity a day later. Some Marauders slide through multiple personalities and magical styles, while a few are stable and rational, and they would like nothing more than to be free of the chaotic weirdness that their broken Avatars subject them to. Some are completely unable to deal coherently with the real world, and they retreat to the Umbra instead.

A Marauder may have all the powers of a typical mage, and it's rumored that there may even be Marauder Oracles. However, every Marauder exists more or less in a permanent state of Quiet (see p. 174), and every Marauder has a permanent Quiet rating that reflects how deeply afflicted he is. What makes Marauders dangerous and powerful is the fact that they ignore any Paradox Traits they should accumulate from any magic use up to the level of their Quiet rating. For instance, a Marauder with a permanent Quiet of one ignores the first Trait of Paradox from any and every Effect he creates. Marauders with a permanent Quiet rating over five retreat to the Umbra, to represent the fact that they have become incapable of dealing coherently with the real world.
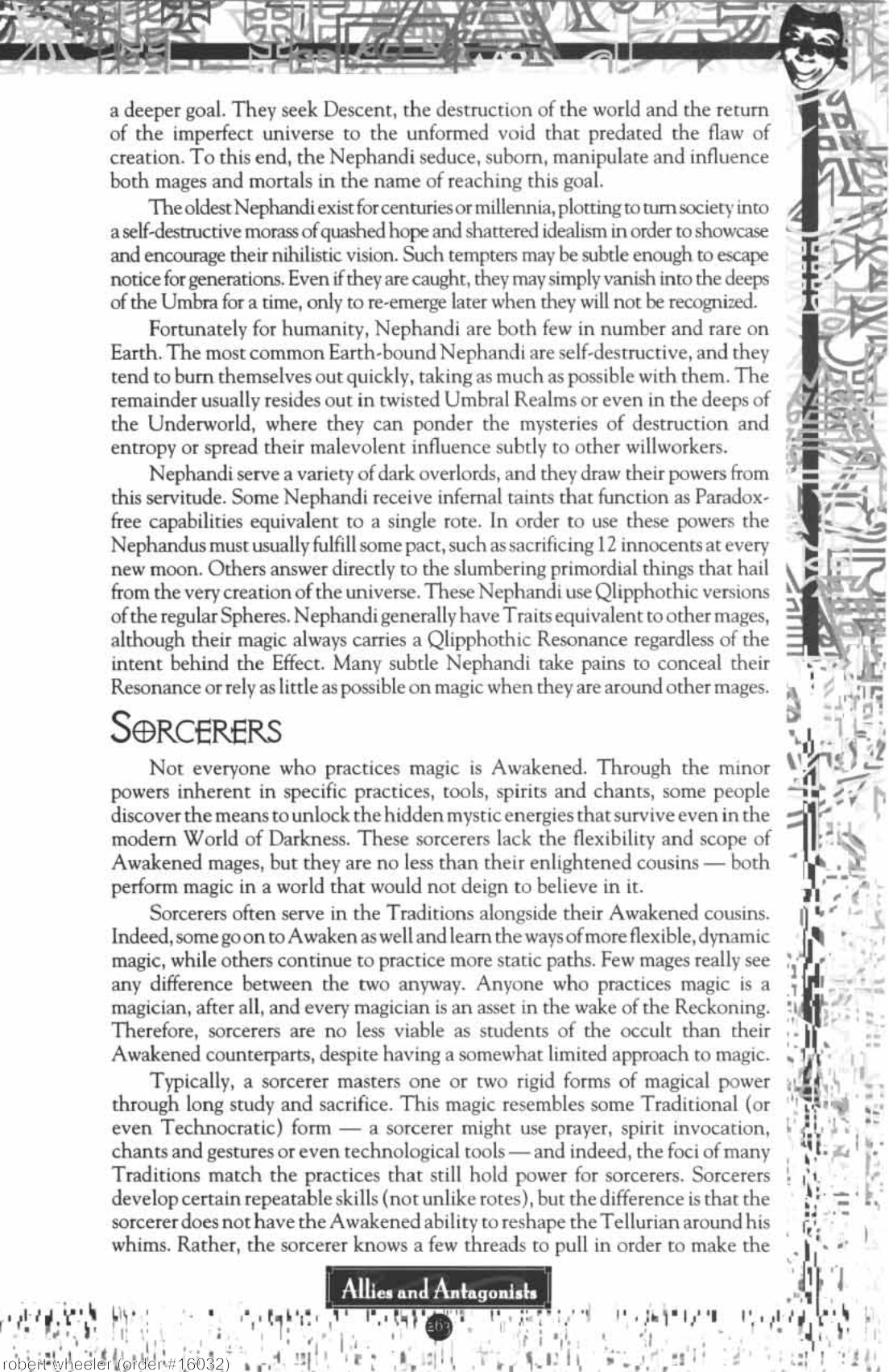
NEPHANDI

The dark mirror of Ascension is the dream of the Nephandi. Each Nephandus is a mage who perverts his Avatar and soul (if the two are truly separate things) in a sacrifice to dark powers. In return, the mage becomes an agent of primordial destructive forces.

Few foes terrify and galvanize mages as much as the Nephandi. In the past, Technocrats and Traditionalists have even worked side-by-side to fight Nephandi menaces. The Nephandi not only wield strange perversions of the Spheres (called Qlipphothic magic), but they give up their senses of conventional morality and Ascension in order to serve the whims of great, malevolent entities that predate mankind. Perhaps foremost on many a mage's thoughts, though, is the realization that any mage can Fall and take the dark path of the Nephandi.

For their part, experienced Nephandi entice naïve or embittered mages with promises of great power and a unity of vision with all who have Fallen before. Of course their way is right, they claim. They follow the wisdom of creatures that were ancient before mankind even existed. Of course the cosmos should end. All things must, and it's only natural that the Nephandi serve as agents to nurse it at its bedside until its demise. Of course there's nothing wrong with demons and utter darkness and death. They've all been around forever, so they must be part of the right and proper cycle of existence. Of course the Nephandi have everyone's real and true best interests at heart, even if nobody realizes it.

The Nephandi come in many grades. Some young and foolish infernalists sell their potential to the outer primordial gods early, then find themselves trapped in a cycle of destructiveness and servitude. Many of these Nephandi revel in their power without consequences, and they becoming simple agents of destruction and vice. The old and truly "enlightened" Nephandi, though, have

a deeper goal. They seek Descent, the destruction of the world and the return of the imperfect universe to the unformed void that predated the flaw of creation. To this end, the Nephandi seduce, suborn, manipulate and influence both mages and mortals in the name of reaching this goal.

The oldest Nephandi exist for centuries or millennia, plotting to turn society into a self-destructive morass of quashed hope and shattered idealism in order to showcase and encourage their nihilistic vision. Such tempters may be subtle enough to escape notice for generations. Even if they are caught, they may simply vanish into the deeps of the Umbra for a time, only to re-emerge later when they will not be recognized.

Fortunately for humanity, Nephandi are both few in number and rare on Earth. The most common Earth-bound Nephandi are self-destructive, and they tend to burn themselves out quickly, taking as much as possible with them. The remainder usually resides out in twisted Umbral Realms or even in the deeps of the Underworld, where they can ponder the mysteries of destruction and entropy or spread their malevolent influence subtly to other willworkers.

Nephandi serve a variety of dark overlords, and they draw their powers from this servitude. Some Nephandi receive infernal taints that function as Paradox-free capabilities equivalent to a single rote. In order to use these powers the Nephandus must usually fulfill some pact, such as sacrificing 12 innocents at every new moon. Others answer directly to the slumbering primordial things that hail from the very creation of the universe. These Nephandi use Qlipphothic versions of the regular Spheres. Nephandi generally have Traits equivalent to other mages, although their magic always carries a Qlipphothic Resonance regardless of the intent behind the Effect. Many subtle Nephandi take pains to conceal their Resonance or rely as little as possible on magic when they are around other mages.

SORCERERS

Not everyone who practices magic is Awakened. Through the minor powers inherent in specific practices, tools, spirits and chants, some people discover the means to unlock the hidden mystic energies that survive even in the modern World of Darkness. These sorcerers lack the flexibility and scope of Awakened mages, but they are no less than their enlightened cousins — both perform magic in a world that would not deign to believe in it.

Sorcerers often serve in the Traditions alongside their Awakened cousins. Indeed, some go on to Awaken as well and learn the ways of more flexible, dynamic magic, while others continue to practice more static paths. Few mages really see any difference between the two anyway. Anyone who practices magic is a magician, after all, and every magician is an asset in the wake of the Reckoning. Therefore, sorcerers are no less viable as students of the occult than their Awakened counterparts, despite having a somewhat limited approach to magic.

Typically, a sorcerer masters one or two rigid forms of magical power through long study and sacrifice. This magic resembles some Traditional (or even Technocratic) form — a sorcerer might use prayer, spirit invocation, chants and gestures or even technological tools — and indeed, the foci of many Traditions match the practices that still hold power for sorcerers. Sorcerers develop certain repeatable skills (not unlike rotes), but the difference is that the sorcerer does not have the Awakened ability to reshape the Tellurian around his whims. Rather, the sorcerer knows a few threads to pull in order to make the

Tapestry react. A sorcerer can rely on only the magic that remains in the world in static forms, not create new and spectacular feats to blaze a visionary trail.

A sorcerer character is essentially a human being with a certain limited understanding of magic. See **Laws of the Hunt** for more information about such characters. A sorcerer has 6/4/3 Attribute Traits, 3 Ability Traits and 3 Backgrounds, plus 7 Free Traits and 5 levels of various magical Paths. A sorcerous Path often resembles a limited application of one Sphere. For instance, a sorcerer could study separate Paths to create fire, manipulate kinetic energy or control light, while an Awakened mage can do all the same and more with *Forces*.

Bygones

Faerie tales and myths regale us with stories of unicorns, dragons and griffins, and most people consider these tales nothing more than pleasant or frightening flights of fancy. Mages know better, however. Such creatures did and do exist, although they are rarer now in the modern age than in their ancient heyday. Because they have long since vanished from Earth to reside in far-off Realms or hidden corners of the world where nobody visits, these beasts are commonly called Bygones.

While vampires, shapeshifters and similar creatures remain hidden among the masses of humanity (perhaps because they so strongly resemble humans), Bygones find the stifling weight of reality disorienting and disabling. Many wither and die under the combined forces of Paradox and Unbelief. Still, a mage might summon such a creature from the depths of the Umbra for a limited time. Such conjurations are difficult to perform, but they can certainly throw an adversary for a loop.
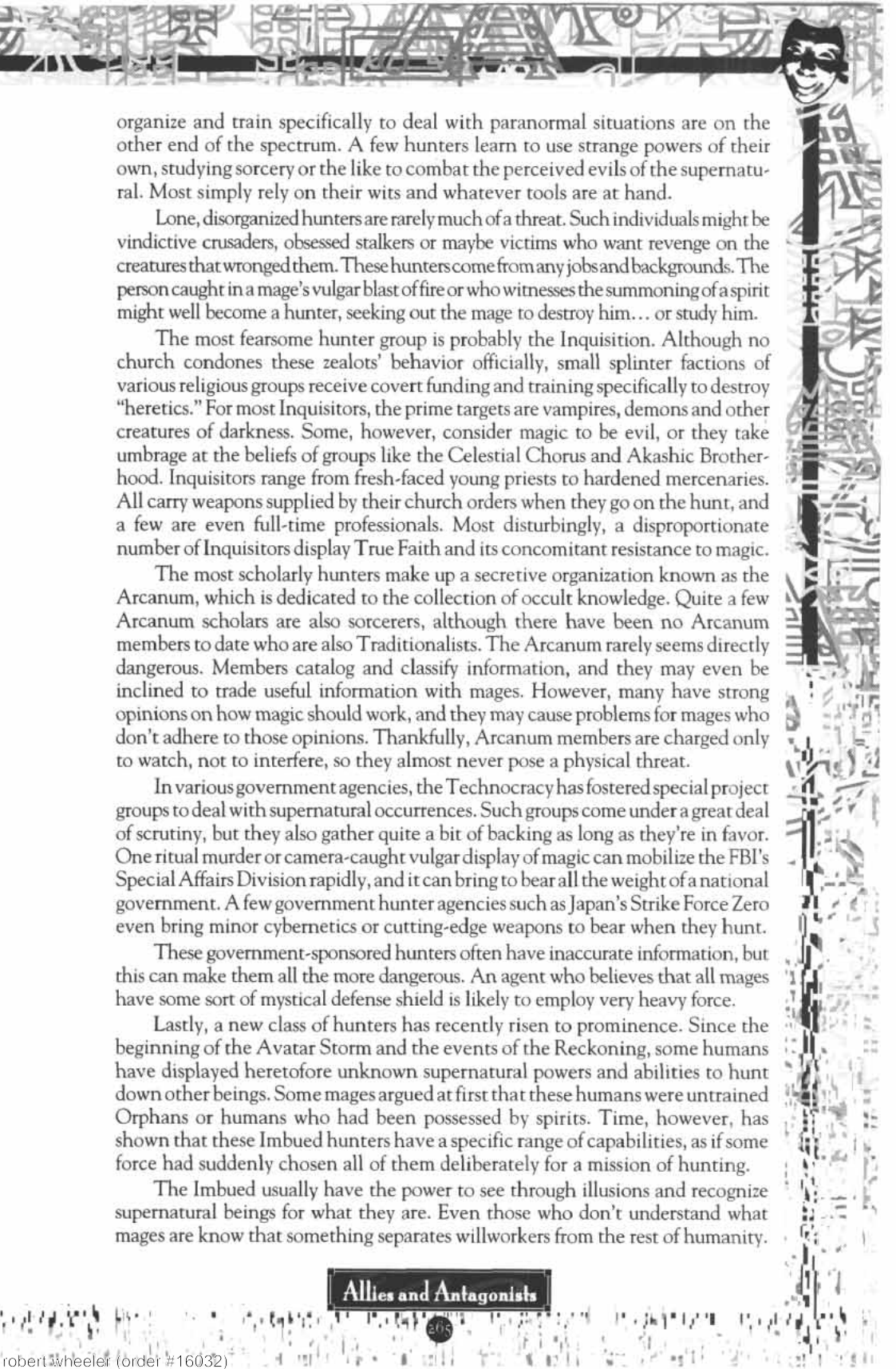
Bygones come in as many forms as there are legends that spawned them, and a Bygone can have whatever Traits someone might expect of it. There are unicorns with horns that heal by touch, dragons that breathe gouts of flame, griffins that fly and sphinxes that whisper mysterious riddles. A sphinx might have strong Attributes and a great deal of the *Enigmas* Ability, while a dragon's magic and skills would best all but the most heroic of humans. A Bygone's powers are innate, and they usually don't cause Paradox, but the existence of the Bygone itself is Paradoxical on Earth. Bygones suffer damage slowly (about a level a day) unless they have magical energy to offset this decay and strengthen their Patterns. For this reason, the few Bygones that do stay on Earth usually lair in Nodes or other places where they can find Quintessence easily.

Some Bygones arise as expressions of urban legends as well. Things like the chupacabra and the dead man with the hook for a hand have their place in dark corners of secluded wilderness or decrepit city areas.

Hunters

Although they are uncommon, some few humans see a threat in the supernatural and decide to take upon themselves the burden of protecting humanity from it. Because of the subtlety of coincidental magic, most careful mages have little to fear from such zealots, but the occasional blast of vulgar magic might attract the attention of just the wrong sort of person.

Hunters come in many varieties. The least dangerous or organized are usually those individuals who have a wrenching, traumatic experience with the supernatural and take up the job. Religious groups and government agencies that

organize and train specifically to deal with paranormal situations are on the other end of the spectrum. A few hunters learn to use strange powers of their own, studying sorcery or the like to combat the perceived evils of the supernatural. Most simply rely on their wits and whatever tools are at hand.

Lone, disorganized hunters are rarely much of a threat. Such individuals might be vindictive crusaders, obsessed stalkers or maybe victims who want revenge on the creatures that wronged them. These hunters come from any jobs and backgrounds. The person caught in a mage's vulgar blast of fire or who witnesses the summoning of a spirit might well become a hunter, seeking out the mage to destroy him… or study him.

The most fearsome hunter group is probably the Inquisition. Although no church condones these zealots' behavior officially, small splinter factions of various religious groups receive covert funding and training specifically to destroy "heretics." For most Inquisitors, the prime targets are vampires, demons and other creatures of darkness. Some, however, consider magic to be evil, or they take umbrage at the beliefs of groups like the Celestial Chorus and Akashic Brotherhood. Inquisitors range from fresh-faced young priests to hardened mercenaries. All carry weapons supplied by their church orders when they go on the hunt, and a few are even full-time professionals. Most disturbingly, a disproportionate number of Inquisitors display True Faith and its concomitant resistance to magic.

The most scholarly hunters make up a secretive organization known as the Arcanum, which is dedicated to the collection of occult knowledge. Quite a few Arcanum scholars are also sorcerers, although there have been no Arcanum members to date who are also Traditionalists. The Arcanum rarely seems directly dangerous. Members catalog and classify information, and they may even be inclined to trade useful information with mages. However, many have strong opinions on how magic should work, and they may cause problems for mages who don't adhere to those opinions. Thankfully, Arcanum members are charged only to watch, not to interfere, so they almost never pose a physical threat.

In various government agencies, the Technocracy has fostered special project groups to deal with supernatural occurrences. Such groups come under a great deal of scrutiny, but they also gather quite a bit of backing as long as they're in favor. One ritual murder or camera-caught vulgar display of magic can mobilize the FBI's Special Affairs Division rapidly, and it can bring to bear all the weight of a national government. A few government hunter agencies such as Japan's Strike Force Zero even bring minor cybernetics or cutting-edge weapons to bear when they hunt.

These government-sponsored hunters often have inaccurate information, but this can make them all the more dangerous. An agent who believes that all mages have some sort of mystical defense shield is likely to employ very heavy force.

Lastly, a new class of hunters has recently risen to prominence. Since the beginning of the Avatar Storm and the events of the Reckoning, some humans have displayed heretofore unknown supernatural powers and abilities to hunt down other beings. Some mages argued at first that these humans were untrained Orphans or humans who had been possessed by spirits. Time, however, has shown that these Imbued hunters have a specific range of capabilities, as if some force had suddenly chosen all of them deliberately for a mission of hunting.

The Imbued usually have the power to see through illusions and recognize supernatural beings for what they are. Even those who don't understand what mages are know that something separates willworkers from the rest of humanity.

While these hunters do also stock up on weapons and tools for their inspired mission, most also have a small array of paranormal Paradox-free powers. They can do anything from healing rapidly to conjuring flame around weapons to halting others in their tracks with a simple spoken phrase. Imbued hunters who survive for a while, however, become more and more likely to go insane. Eventually the hunt consumes them until they can no longer function as normal people.

See **Laws of the Hunt** for creation rules of hunter characters. Most will be normal humans, with 6/4/3 Attributes, 3 Abilities, 3 Backgrounds and 7 Free Traits.

THE UNDEAD

Even though the Technocracy holds to the conceit that it shapes human destiny and the Traditions argue that they're the last bastion of mysticism in a world gone mad, neither one is entirely correct. Other beings do hide among humanity and influence the course of mankind. Chief among these beings are the undead, those who exist for millennia and see humanity itself as prey or a plaything for amusement and personal gain — vampires.

Mages and vampires have coexisted — and in many cases fought — since time immemorial. The willworkers often protect or advance humanity, whether out of altruism or self-interest. Conversely, vampires must feed from humans, and they encourage stasis so as to keep the world familiar. The two lifestyles aren't irreconcilable, but they are usually at odds. Most mages quickly recognize vampires for the bloodsucking predators they are and avoid them. Vampires often see mages as dangerously powerful and either stay away or try to manipulate them.

A vampire survives by feeding on the blood of the living. Some rare ones subsist on animal blood, but human prey is more substantive. The vampire must often indulge in all manner of monstrosity to feed this hunger. Since a vampire is an ambulatory corpse, though, it derives no pleasure or sustenance from food, sex or the like. Only blood and the intellectual satisfactions of social maneuvering and vendettas give the undead any gratification. Emotion and hope die when the vampire becomes what it is, and all that's left is a paranoid predator that fears its own kind or its death at the hands of humans.

However, most vampires still seek out peers to fill their otherwise hollow existence. As a result, they often come across as sensual, charismatic or charming, but this appearance is only a thin veneer. Scratch the surface and only a monster lies beneath. A few vampires try to hang on to their human consciences, but the uncontrollable hungers to which they are heir cause this humanity to drop away with the years. The eldest vampires are little more than amoral cannibals.

Vampires are most important to mages because of the historical *Massasa* War and the fact that one early House of the Order of Hermes turned to vampirism during the Dark Ages. What happened to the mages of this House remains shrouded in mystery, however, because the newly undead magicians hid themselves among the society of the vampires. A century of warfare between the Order and that betrayer House resulted only in many casualties on both sides, leaving mages with little understanding of how vampirism actually works. The most prominent fact that the survivors took away from that war is the horrifying revelation that any mage could become a vampire. All a vampire has to do to pass on his curse is drain a person entirely of blood then feed the corpse some of its undead blood. In a matter of minutes, the recently deceased person will have

become one of the undead himself. Mages who know of the undead fear this fate, for the curse of vampirism destroys the Avatar and with it any ability to work Awakened magic.

Complete rules for vampires appear in **Laws of the Night**. For your games, you can assume the following:

• A vampire uses Blood Traits to fuel its mystical powers and to remain animate. The vampire takes this blood by biting mortals (which causes a sort of supernatural ecstasy so that the subject doesn't resist) and drinking their blood. A Blood Trait can be used to activate a vampire power, to gain a Physical Trait for a scene or to heal a health level of non-aggravated damage.

• Since they're essentially nothing more than dead bodies, bashing damage has little effect on vampires. Furthermore, vampires suffer only bashing damage from bullets. They heal two health levels of bashing damage with one Blood Trait. Vampires don't age, and they rarely suffer from disease or poison. If they are scarred or cosmetically altered one evening, they change back the next night when they rise from slumber.

• A vampire usually has a small array of supernatural powers. Some can command others or influence emotions, much like they're using a *Mind* Effect. Others can grow claws or call upon phenomenal strength, as if they had used a *Life* Effect. Assign a young vampire three rotes; each rote costs one Blood Trait to use. Vampires don't understand or have access to the Spheres, though. Their powers stem from their cursed blood.

• If a wooden stake penetrates a vampire's heart, the unfortunate monster is paralyzed. An attacker can try to stake the vampire deliberately with a sharpened chunk of wood or a spear by winning or tying two Simple Tests after a hit. If the attacker succeeds on both tests, the vampire cannot move or use its powers until the offending weapon is removed.

• Vampires cannot function during the day. Sunlight burns them, and the arrival of the day itself makes them extremely drowsy. As a general rule, vampires sleep all day unless they find themselves under extreme duress. If they are exposed to sunlight, the vampire takes an aggravated level of damage every turn.

• Vampires can turn human beings into their servitors. A vampire simply feeds a living human a bit of its blood, which grants the person some of the vampire's power as well. These subjects are called ghouls, and they are usually fanatically loyal to their masters. Anyone who drinks the blood of a specific vampire three times finds himself mystically compelled to love that creature. A ghoul can refresh its Strength-based Physical Traits once per day at no cost, and it doesn't age as long as it receives vampire blood once per month.

• Since a vampire is a corpse, any spell designed to alter its Pattern must include *Matter* as well as *Life*.

The Changing Breeds

Be they stories of the loup-garou of Europe, the nine-tailed foxes of Japan or the coyote shifters of Native America, tales of men who change into animals (or vice-versa) are ubiquitous throughout the world. In the World of Darkness, such creatures live among humanity and animals alike. They are children of nature and students of spirit, but they are also warriors with fearsome animal prowess and predatory instincts. They are dangerously wild creatures that protect the dwindling natural spaces fervently and possess myriad powers that they inherited from spirits.

Mages know little of the shapeshifters, since dealing with them often proves dangerous. Many shapeshifters consider mages to be arrogant and treacherous, and they attack as soon as they identify a willworker. Even those inclined to speak rather than do battle tend to treat mages with great suspicion. For their part, the mages with the most contact with shapeshifters are those who work outside the cities. Verbena and Dreamspeakers in particular have long-standing ties with the shifters, and those mages who travel the Umbra mention that shapeshifters go into the spirit worlds as well.

Shapeshifters appear to have their own sub-culture, even though many of them coexist with humans. Many seem to venerate the forces of nature religiously and practice some form of shamanism or ancestor-worship. Natural spirits do communicate with the shifters and treat them favorably. Shapeshifters often have both human and animal relatives. Apparently, their families extend into both groups, and some shapeshifters clearly stem more from an animal heritage than from a human one. (Those who do have difficulties with human languages, and they have a hard time understanding and using technology.)

The most knowledgeable Dreamspeakers indicate that although the rare werewolves seem to predominate among shapeshifters, other types of animal shifters also exist, including wild cats, coyotes and ravens. Regardless of its breed, each shapeshifter can take on several forms ranging from human to animal to mixed forms in-between, and they all have various gifts that mimic the Charms of spirits. In their hybrid forms, they terrify normal humans, and they have phenomenal battle capabilities.

Mages who stumble accidentally into the wrong parts of the wilderness may run afoul of hostile shapeshifters. The shifters protect their territory religiously, and they consider their holy sites too sacred for normal humans to profane with their presence. The shifters venerate these natural Nodes, and drive out any mages who would seek their power.

See **Laws of the Wild** for more complete information regarding shapeshifters. For your games, you can assume the following:

- A shapeshifter has three forms: A human form, an animal form and a hybrid battle-form. In battle form, the shifter doubles its normal human Physical Traits. In animal form, the creature has superhuman senses that are equivalent to the enhanced perceptions of Apprentice-level *Life* magic. Changing forms requires one turn. In its battle form, the shifter terrifies normal humans. People flee automatically, and they try to blank out or forget about the experience.

- Shapeshifters heal rapidly. A shifter heals one health level of non-aggravated damage every single turn. However, silver causes aggravated damage to them.

- A shapeshifter can move quickly enough to take two actions per turn in combat.

- A shifter can use various spiritual Gifts to perform magical feats. Give each shifter the equivalent of any three Apprentice-, Initiate- or Disciple-level rotes. Older shifters, or those who are shamans and students of the occult, will have more. Gnosis, the shifter's spiritual wisdom, powers these Gifts. Young shifters may have one to three Gnosis Traits; old, wise shifters have up to 10.

- Shapeshifters can step physically into the Umbra by spending a turn looking into a reflective surface. They can then peek back out by concentrating, and they may step out of any reflective surface back to the material world. They don't suffer from the effects of the Avatar Storm when they cross the Gauntlet, but they don't often go to the same Umbral places that mages frequent.

• Since shapeshifters are creatures of spirit rather than just animals and humans, any magic that would alter a shifter's Pattern must use *Spirit* as well as *Life*.

THE RESTLESS DEAD

Euthanatos have long known that the cycle of life doesn't always let go of a soul easily. Even since before Orpheus' legendary journey into the Underworld, people have seen ghosts and haunts, venerated their ancestors and dwelt on the questions of existence after death. Mages know that life after death is not just speculation — in the World of Darkness, it's often a fact.

Not every person who dies becomes a ghost, but for those with great passion, a need to complete something or an overwhelming drive to survive, death may not be an end. These wraiths inhabit the Underworld or Dark Umbra, a spiritual place of death and decay. They pursue their leftover ambitions there, often looking in on the mortal world or sometimes even seeking a new lease on the life they left behind. Attached by need to old places or people, these haunting memories sometimes intersect with lost passions and occasionally even manifest to experience a moment of life-in-death.

Places like graveyards and abandoned old houses tend to attract ghosts, because the Gauntlet between living and dead is difficult to cross. Few ghosts have the power to manifest in the physical world, so they often hang around in places where death is strong and the barriers are thin. The Reckoning has blown great spiritual storms across the Underworld, and places of sanctuary are rare. Now, wraiths congregate in the few safe havens left for their kind.

Old ghosts often retreat into the depths of the deadlands where they find islands of memory, places that never were and storms that rage over a dark ocean of death. A mage might traipse into these lands once or twice, but traveling the paths of the dead is a heroically foolish journey that is fraught with peril. Perhaps the dead are best left to their own devices…. Certainly the mages who deal with them often commonly learn to regret it.

For more information about wraiths, see **Oblivion**. For your games, you can assume the following:

• Wraiths are typically immaterial. They exist in the Dark Umbra, which reflects the memories of the material world in a dead, decaying state, and it hides others beyond. Wraiths usually can't touch the material world without effort, but they are also immune to most physical attacks.
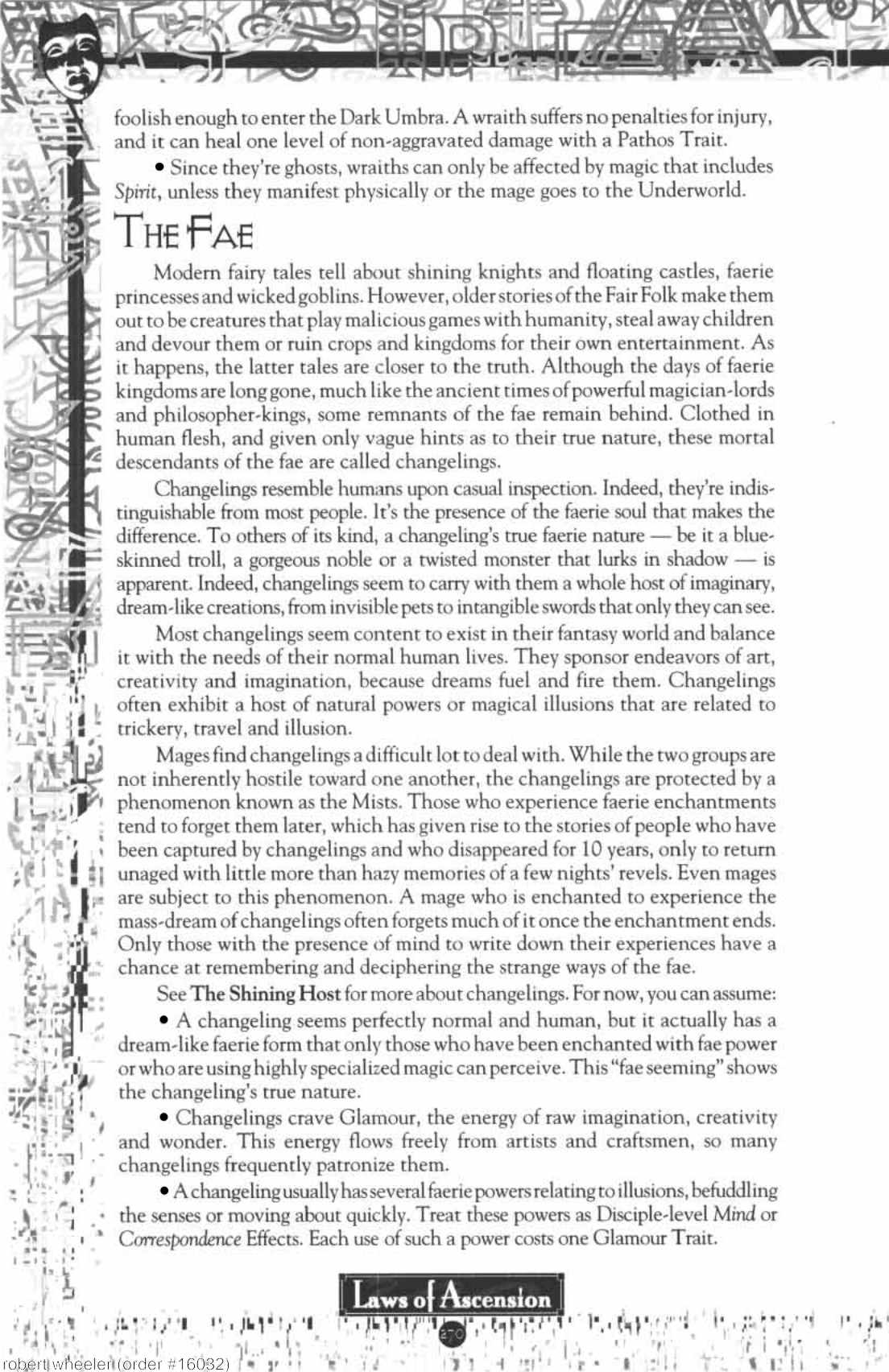
• A wraith's power stems from Pathos, the emotional strength of its memories. Wraiths are drawn to events that mirror their strongest desires, and they gain Pathos from them.

• Wraiths can perform tricks in the material world such as creating sudden chills, making walls drip blood, creating haunting voices, possessing living beings and even materializing briefly. Performing these tricks requires the use of a Pathos Trait, and they function similar to *Mind* possession or hallucination Effects.

• Even if a wraith is damaged with *Spirit* magic or physical attacks while it is materialized, it can only be banished at most. Only aggravated damage (say, from spiritual fire or *Prime*-based attacks) will destroy a wraith permanently. Otherwise, the ghost may be banished for a month, but it will return eventually.

• Wraiths have Traits and health levels like other characters, although they usually can't use their Physical Traits except against each other or against mages

foolish enough to enter the Dark Umbra. A wraith suffers no penalties for injury, and it can heal one level of non-aggravated damage with a Pathos Trait.

• Since they're ghosts, wraiths can only be affected by magic that includes *Spirit*, unless they manifest physically or the mage goes to the Underworld.

THE FAE

Modern fairy tales tell about shining knights and floating castles, faerie princesses and wicked goblins. However, older stories of the Fair Folk make them out to be creatures that play malicious games with humanity, steal away children and devour them or ruin crops and kingdoms for their own entertainment. As it happens, the latter tales are closer to the truth. Although the days of faerie kingdoms are long gone, much like the ancient times of powerful magician-lords and philosopher-kings, some remnants of the fae remain behind. Clothed in human flesh, and given only vague hints as to their true nature, these mortal descendants of the fae are called changelings.

Changelings resemble humans upon casual inspection. Indeed, they're indistinguishable from most people. It's the presence of the faerie soul that makes the difference. To others of its kind, a changeling's true faerie nature — be it a blue-skinned troll, a gorgeous noble or a twisted monster that lurks in shadow — is apparent. Indeed, changelings seem to carry with them a whole host of imaginary, dream-like creations, from invisible pets to intangible swords that only they can see.

Most changelings seem content to exist in their fantasy world and balance it with the needs of their normal human lives. They sponsor endeavors of art, creativity and imagination, because dreams fuel and fire them. Changelings often exhibit a host of natural powers or magical illusions that are related to trickery, travel and illusion.

Mages find changelings a difficult lot to deal with. While the two groups are not inherently hostile toward one another, the changelings are protected by a phenomenon known as the Mists. Those who experience faerie enchantments tend to forget them later, which has given rise to the stories of people who have been captured by changelings and who disappeared for 10 years, only to return unaged with little more than hazy memories of a few nights' revels. Even mages are subject to this phenomenon. A mage who is enchanted to experience the mass-dream of changelings often forgets much of it once the enchantment ends. Only those with the presence of mind to write down their experiences have a chance at remembering and deciphering the strange ways of the fae.

See **The Shining Host** for more about changelings. For now, you can assume:

• A changeling seems perfectly normal and human, but it actually has a dream-like faerie form that only those who have been enchanted with fae power or who are using highly specialized magic can perceive. This "fae seeming" shows the changeling's true nature.

• Changelings crave Glamour, the energy of raw imagination, creativity and wonder. This energy flows freely from artists and craftsmen, so many changelings frequently patronize them.

• A changeling usually has several faerie powers relating to illusions, befuddling the senses or moving about quickly. Treat these powers as Disciple-level *Mind* or *Correspondence* Effects. Each use of such a power costs one Glamour Trait.

• Changelings have Traits and health just like regular human beings. However, their dream-weapons inflict a sort of imaginary damage on one another that is just as effective on other changelings as real weapons are on normal humans. Normal people can neither see nor feel such imaginary weapons, but a changeling who is "killed" by such a weapon falls into a coma and forgets that he is actually a changeling.

• Cold iron — raw, unalloyed, unworked iron — inflicts extreme pain and aggravated wounds on a changeling. If a changeling is killed by a cold iron weapon (often, a crudely worked and ugly thing, that lacks any Glamour), his soul is snuffed forever.

• In some circumstances, changelings can actually step into imaginary dream-worlds, and disappear from the material world. Doing so isn't exactly the same as entering the Umbra, and changelings who "walk the Dreaming" are difficult to follow. They can take paths to many places and to many fantastic imaginary locations, though.

• A changeling suffers when exposed to boredom, stark rationality and the absence of creative, imaginative energy. Technocrats in particular cause this pain to the fae, but excessively regimented, boring, static individuals of any sort can do so as well.

• Changelings can use Glamour to enchant someone briefly, causing that person to see the fae dreamworld and true forms. To do so, the changeling must spend a Trait of Glamour and either touch the intended victim or give the person a gift. The person experiences the changeling world for a scene or hour. At the end of this time, the Mists wipe away memories, leaving only hazy recollections.

• Changelings protect special strongholds called freeholds where they can step into fantasy spaces that adjoin locations in the real world. They collect natural Glamour in freeholds, and they do not age while they remain inside.

• Working magic on changelings is pretty much like working magic on humans, unless the mage wants to affect the imaginary changeling world. Doing so requires Mind and Spirit as well. Plus, most mages will never be able to study changelings well enough to figure out a way to affect the dreamworld because of the Mists.

Merits & Flaws

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Abilities

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Mental

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Social

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Physical

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Rotes

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Spheres

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Backgrounds

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Arete

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Willpower

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□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Quintessence/Paradox

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Resonance

DYNAMIC _____
ENTROPIC _____
STATIC _____

Mind's Eye Theatre
LAWS of ASCENSION

NAME: _____
CHARACTER: _____
CHRONICLE: _____
TRADITION: _____
ESSENCE: _____
CABAL: _____
NATURE: _____
DEMEANOR: _____

INDEX

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MUMMY
The Resurrection

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