

BANISHERS™

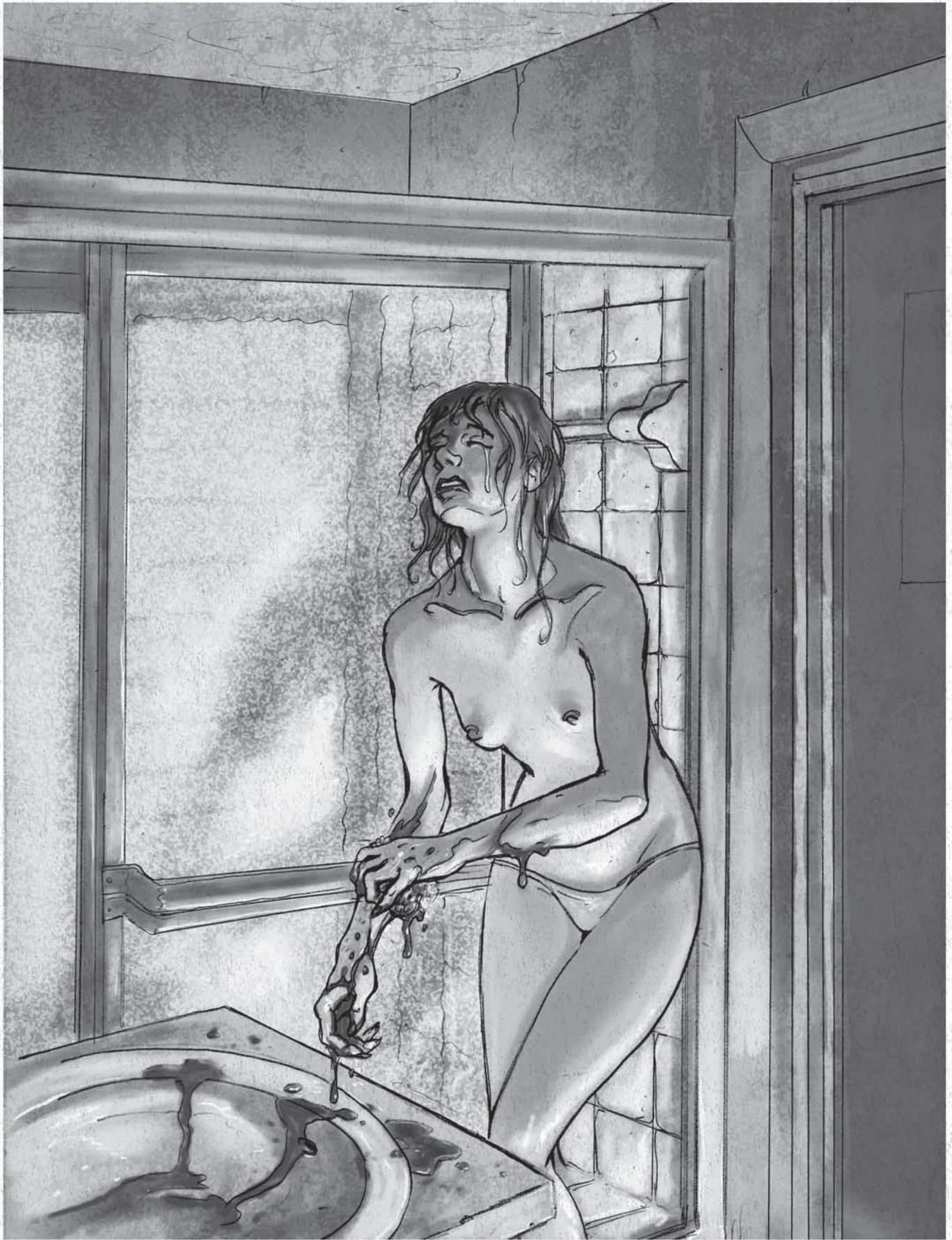
the World of Darkness

MAGE®
THE AWAKENING

BANISHERS™



By Jackie Cassada, Matthew McFarland, John Newman and Malcolm Sheppard



THE MORNING AFTER

Jill washed her hands again. The skin on the backs of her knuckles was getting redder. The red reminded her of blood, so she washed her hands again. She stood at the sink for 10 minutes, then 20, scrubbing, scrubbing, scrubbing.

She washed her arms up to her elbows; she washed her face. She tore off her shirt and unhooked her bra. She pulled down her sweats, kicking off her crocs as she did, and collapsed backwards into the shower. She turned on the water, barely noticing how cold it was, and kept scrubbing.

Her body felt raw. The water, so cold when she got in, turned hot and scalded her skin. It turned red, and in the redness she saw blood, pain and death. She kept scrubbing.

The pain became too much, and she started to cry. She got out of the shower, stumbled to her room and collapsed, dripping, onto the bed.

Jill was sorry, but that wouldn't bring him back. And it didn't change the fact that he had needed to die. But she was sorry, and as she lay there sobbing, she wished for just a moment for the pain to go away.

Some part of her that she didn't want to exist woke up and responded to that wish. That part of her was still connected to a monstrous stone tower in some nameless wasteland, but it responded to her desire and called down sleep. And she slept again. Of the 36 hours since it had happened, she'd slept for more than 24 of them. She didn't dream, or if she did, the dreams were pleasant and innocuous. She would begin the cycle again as soon she woke, the washing, the pain, the blood and the sleep.

Tyrone stood on his balcony looking at his plants. They were healthy and growing. Soon he'd be able to pick the leaves, dry them and cook with them. He looked forward to inviting his new friends over to cook for them.

Could he really do that? he wondered. What would the dinner conversation be like? Would they find anything in common beyond what none of them wanted to say?

Tyrone walked back into his apartment. Upstairs, he heard water running, and figured Jill must be in the shower again. Maybe later he'd go up and knock on her door. They weren't supposed to talk outside of "business," but how could they not? He talked to Jill, and he knew that Jill talked to Sheri sometimes. What would it mean if they kept it to themselves? This was what they were. This was what they all were.

He picked up his cat and held her to his chest. The cat licked his arm hair and nestled against him. Tyrone murmured quietly to the cat, not really using words, and the cat purred back.

"Don't even talk to your pets," they'd been told. "Don't talk to anyone about it. They hear everything eventually, and the only way to stop them is not to say it."

Did they really hear everything? Was his cat reporting back to them? Tyrone had taken this cat from a shelter only a few days before he'd been sent tumbling down a deep pit, waking up in

a jungle crawling with beasts that not only hungered but needed. He'd returned knowing that those beasts looked like people, and he'd been right, but he'd never considered that his cat might be one of them.

"Are you really a cat?" he asked. The cat didn't answer. Tyrone dropped her, and the cat indignantly flopped down on her pillow to groom. Tyrone stared at her for a while, searching for a clue, a hair out of place, a too-human look, something. Knowing for sure, though, would have required using magic. And he wasn't doing that. "Plants grow with rain and sun," he reminded himself.

Sheri lived in the suburbs. She was only 16. She woke up with the sun on her face, and she stretched and smiled, thinking of the day ahead. Summer was dying, and soon she'd be a senior, but for now, she was free.

She rolled out of bed and stumbled toward the kitchen. A note on the fridge reminded her that Dad would be home early tonight and she should mow the lawn. She shrugged. That was an hour at best; plenty of time to do that and still get to the pool or the mall or... do nothing.

Her phone rang, and Sheri's heart skipped a beat. But the ringtone was just the standard one. It wasn't them. She answered — Marty wanted to know if she'd be home later? She would. She hung up.

She stared at the phone. She chanted "forget, forget, forget," but now she was reliving it. The trap, the gunshot, the horrible, bugs-on-skin feeling of Jill's magic. The body. The stink of the Dumpster. The blood on the ground, and that earthy, copper-smell, replaced by simple water as Steven made it all go away.

It all went away.

Sheri opened the fridge and pulled out a bottle of orange juice. It was almost empty. She figured she'd go to the store sometime today. It would be nice to surprise Dad by doing the shopping, and she had time. It was summer, after all.

Steven's nose was bleeding slightly. He sat at the back of the train, watching the world pass him by. He leaned back and slammed his face down against the seat in front of him. He heard people talking nearby, probably wondering about the crazy guy beating himself up, but Steven didn't much care.

He thought it through again. God clearly had no problem with killing. Lots of people died in the Bible, often at God's hands. God indicated which people should die. Sorcerers and fortune-tellers were among them. Why, then, were there so damned many?

Steven looked up the aisle and saw a man reading a book called *God Isn't Great*. "That's why," he said. He glared at the book, and the pages fell out, scattering across the train. The man cursed and tried to gather them up. Steven smiled, but a burst of pain from his mouth made him cry out. As so often happened when he used his own gifts, his teeth were loose and bloodied. He admonished himself for taking pleasure in his actions — the man

wouldn't learn any lesson this way, and Steven risked exposure by using his curse in public.

He leaned back and drove his face forward into the seat, harder than before. His forehead was bleeding now. When he got off this train, he was going to be a mess. And that was fine. Let people think whatever they wanted. It was truly better that they didn't know.

• • •

In the alleyway, a rat poked its nose out from behind the kitchen door of the restaurant. The rat glanced down the alley, saw the shuffling feet of the passersby and darted across the way under the Duempster. The rat smelled food.

The body beneath the Duempster was long cold, but it had food on it. The rat dug into the corpse's pocket and pulled out a cellophane bag of peanuts. The rat sat there and stuffed its cheeks, and then ran off. Other rats from the colony would be here soon, and they would take the rest of the peanuts. The starving ones might remove chunks of flesh, too.

The rats would ignore the gold disc in the corpse's other pocket. It wasn't edible and wouldn't make for good nest material. It was hard metal, etched with a five-pointed star, and it was useless to the rats.

Sadly, it hadn't been much use to the corpse, either. His fingers had never even approached it when they'd come for him. He'd been thinking about getting home and getting his mail. He was expecting a DVD he'd purchased to arrive, and he was trying to get home and catch the mailman going about his deliveries. If he did that, he'd be able to go straight upstairs, order a pizza and watch the movie. If he missed the mailman, the DVD would get sent to the office, because it was too large to fit in the apartment complex's tiny mailboxes. And then he'd have to get his super to open the office, and that was always a pain.

He'd been thinking about this when they'd attacked. He'd been casting a spell to better his chances of getting home at the right time. That might be why he hadn't seen them coming.

• • •

"Another vampire killing, huh, Sean?"

Detective Sean Brennan snuck a hit from his flask. "I just got here, Mike." He fixed the younger cop with a stare. "You talk to your mom today?"

Mike nodded. "Sure. She's expecting you Sunday."

Sean resisted the urge to take another drink. He loved his aunt, but she was the sort of person who believed that God was in His Heaven and all was right with the world. The guy stuffed under the Duempster might have a different take on things. "I'll be there," he said. "What's happening?"

Mike pointed at the body. "Fella from the restaurant went out here chasing a rat and saw something shiny under the Duempster. Bent over to pick it up, saw the stiff."

Sean made a note to avoid this particular restaurant in future. "Any ID?" he called to the crime scene workers.

A woman wearing rubber gloves pulled a wallet out from the stiff's back pocket. "Yeah. Kurt Janney. Lives right up the block."

Sean put on a pair of gloves and motioned for the wallet. The CS woman shrugged and lobbed it. "OK, let's see. State ID, no credit cards, library card, video rental card... five bucks in cash." He shook his head.

"Shit," Mike said.

"Why'd you mention vampires, nutcase?"

Mike shrugged. "Oh, I dunno. Shoved under a Duempster. Isn't that where we found the last one?"

Sean furrowed his brow and thought about it. There had, in fact, been a body shoved under a Duempster several miles from here. The throat had been slashed open, but there wasn't much blood around, which had led some of the officers to joke about a "vampire killer." It had just led Sean to drink, which might have been why he was having trouble remembering the details of the case.

"Officer Brennan?" The CS woman again.

"Yeah, got a TOD?"

"No. This is weird." Always is, thought Sean. "Cause of death is pretty obvious — his throat's torn open. Large blade, not real sharp, cut from behind. His attention was on something else."

"OK. But no time of death?"

"No. Temp and rigor are telling me two different things. Maybe there's a heating vent around here, I don't know. Plus, there should be bloodstains all over this alley."

Sean turned to face her. She was young, probably just out of school. Light skinned, pretty brown eyes and hair done up in those weird little ringlet things. What were they called? Cornrows? Dreadlocks? Her expression was pained, and Sean knew it well. She was starting to get it. Sean fought the urge to offer her a pull from his flask. "Best guess?"

"Between twelve and twenty-four hours, I think. We can probably get more exact with an autopsy."

"Yeah," said Mike, from over Sean's shoulder. "If they do one."

The CS officer looked confused. "If they do one? He's a murder victim, why wouldn't they —"

"Depends who he is," muttered Sean, looking down.

• • •

Captain Millar put down the phone. He stared at the plaques on his wall for a full 10 minutes before picking the phone up again. He hated this.

"This is Captain Millar," he said into the receiver. His voice was dead. He just couldn't muster up the conviction to be his usual warm self when he had to make this kind of call. "You working on Kurt Janney's autopsy?" He waited for the response. He shouldn't have used the victim's name. It might tip someone off, but more important, it stung him to betray the dead like this. "When you finish, the results come straight to me. Thank you."

The door opened. Sean Brennan walked in and sat down in the hard, wooden chair in front of the captain's desk. "Rough day, Cap?" Millar rested his hand on the receiver longer than he needed to. "I'll tell you, Sean, I'm getting to the point that —"

The phone rang. Both men's hearts jumped, but neither of their faces showed it.

"Millar." He listened for a moment. "I'll see what I can do, Officer." He hung up and glanced up at the detective, who was already opening his flask. "You know a CS named Bernice?"

Sean shook his head and took a pull. He handed the flask over to Millar. "Should I?"

"Says she knows you."

"Oh, wait. Black girl?"

"I guess, I don't know. She worked that crime scene this morning, over by that diner with all the rats."

"Shit, everybody know about that but me?" Sean sighed and stretched his leg. His knee was acting up again. "Yeah, I know who you mean. She was..." He trailed off. He'd never tried talking about it out loud before. "She didn't know why he might not get an autopsy."

Millar took a deep breath. He'd never talked about it before, either. "He's getting one."

"But?"

"But I might need to doctor the results a little." He took a pull off the flask and shook it a bit. "That's about out."

"Oh, there's more where that came from." Sean took the flask back and stuck it into his pocket. The two men sat in the office a long time, Sean staring at Millar's nameplate, Millar staring at his plaques again. Finally, Sean said it. "Cap, what are we doing?"

"Huh?"

"We know something's wrong with this. With all of it. We know. Something is out there, and it's killing the people we promised to protect."

Millar dropped his eyes. "Yeah, it is. And it was yesterday, too, and a hundred years ago."

Sean shook his head. "No."

"It was, Sean. Jesus, you must know that. It's been out there, and we just clean up after it." He started to chuckle, but it caught in his throat and he coughed. "You know, I used to think that they made up the cops. Just to help them out. Just to give people the sense that it was all really under control."

"They?"

Millar stood up. "I don't know, Sean. My mom sang songs to four of my sisters when they were pregnant. She said it was to protect their unborn babies so that the Good Folk wouldn't take them when they were born. Little Maeve, my youngest sister?"

Sean winced. He knew what was coming.

"Little Maeve's daughter was four months old when she disappeared. Nothing left in her crib but some weird-looking flowers. This kind of shit happens *all the time*. Yesterday, the day before, tomorrow." Millar opened the door. "Let's go get a beer."

Sean nodded. A beer sounded good, but a bottle of scotch sounded better.

• • •

Bernice took the train home. She sat in the back and stared at the seat in front of her. She was trying not to cry, or scream or something. Kurt Janney was on her mind. She written down everything that was in his pockets and been fascinated by the heavy metal disc with the star on it. Was he a Devil worshipper? One of those pagans like the girl her brother had dated for a while? Jewish — or was that six points on the star?

He was getting an autopsy, but the medical examiner wouldn't let her in to watch. That wasn't standard practice, but there wasn't much she could say about it. Who was this guy? From everything she'd gathered, Kurt Janney was just a dude living in a crappy apartment. She'd hung around and listened to the officers gab about his place, but all they found was a lot of movies, some

empty pizza boxes and notebooks written in "some weird language." As educated as the uniforms were, that language might have been as obscure as, say, French, but she hadn't seen it herself.

It wasn't a mugging. He hadn't been robbed. And, besides, Bernice had worked the scenes of muggings gone bad, and people didn't roll guys like Kurt unless they were crackheads desperate for a fix. Kurt was lean and strong, and his mode of dress made it obvious that he wasn't carrying much cash.

And the wound. Big, deep, jagged, but no blood on his shirt. That wasn't possible. He should have been covered in blood. The ground in front of him should have been covered in —

"Blood." She peered closer at the seat in front of her. That was definitely a bloodstain. She pulled a tissue out of her pocket and dabbed it against the plastic. It was still wet. She looked around the train and saw a young man with a handful of paper. He looked annoyed, but he also looked like he had a long commute. She got up and walked over to him. "Excuse me?"

"Yeah?" The book was *God Isn't Great*. Bernice wrinkled her nose. The man didn't notice. "What?"

"Did you happen to see if someone was sitting back there? I think he might have been hurt."

"Yeah, he got on the same time I did. He got off... what, two stops back."

"You remember what he looked like?"

"You a cop or something?" The man didn't sound scared or defensive. If anything, he sounded relieved. Bernice showed him her ID. "He was white, skinny. Bald, I think. Kept slamming his face against the seat."

"Thank you," said Bernice. She sat down across from him. She wasn't sure what to think, or why this seemed to matter at all. Maybe it was just the blood. "Anything else?" she asked half-heartedly.

The man leaned forward. "Yeah, actually. About the time this book fell apart, I saw him staring at me. And you know, I swear I saw frost form on the window next to him." He tapped the window behind him for as if trying to summon up frost. "Not the right time of year for it, of course, so I don't know what I saw, but that's what it looked like."

Bernice didn't say anything. She was thinking about how far he might have gotten if he'd left the train two stops ago.

• • •

Millar was still in the bar when Sean left. The other officers were buying him drinks. The captain was a fun drunk. Sean wasn't, and so he'd gone from being politely ignored to being completely shunned as he knocked back his scotch.

Sean stumbled out of the bar and down the street. Driving was out of the question. He could barely walk. He waved at a cab, but it didn't stop. "Fuck it, then," he grumbled, and started walking. His apartment was only a mile or so, anyway.

As he walked, it seemed to Sean that the city got darker. It was already after midnight, so it wasn't likely to be true, but that's the way it seemed to him. Shadows were deeper, and he saw people moving, people without faces. *Too much scotch*, he thought.

And then the voice, plain as life. *That's what they want you to think*. His voice, but deeper, calmer. More sober.

Who?

Them. The things you've always known about. They're all around you. They're in the dark, waiting for an invitation, and people invite them in. Every. Single. Day.

Sean started to walk faster. He reached the street, hoping to hail a cab.

But if you do that, the voice inside him said, you'll have to go back to work tomorrow anyway. You'll think this was just the scotch, and you'll have to go back to cleaning up after them.

He stopped. The cab was waiting across the street. He stepped toward it, and then saw the things moving again. *Do they have names?*

They do, Sean. They all have names. They always did, yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Sean walked on. He reached his building, and started climbing the stairs to his apartment. He felt fire in his legs as he climbed, but he kept climbing, ignoring the pain, ignoring the burning, until he reached his door. He tried the knob, but it was locked. He pulled a key out of his pocket — had the key always been gold? — and opened the door.

The things were inside. "It's me," he said, "Sean Brennan."

And with that, the things fled.

• • •

Bernice got off the train and looked for frost on windows. It was ridiculous, of course, but that was crime scene work for you. You found which clues could be followed. Bugs nesting in a corpse. Body temp. Muscle rigor. She found frost on a window and walked down the block. The frost didn't last, but then the sounds began.

The sounds were horrible. They were the sounds that she imagined Kurt Janney must have made as he died. Hideous, gobbling sounds, a throat laid open but with no blood. She followed them from the stop that the man had said the skinny guy had taken, down the block and toward an apartment building.

She followed them up the stairs and to a door at the end of the hall. She listened to the sounds, and when she couldn't quite hear them, she inhaled and the sounds flowed toward her, getting louder and clearer as they did.

"The police found him today," said a male voice. It was deep and gentle. From the inflection, Bernice guessed he was black.

"Oh, shit." Girl's voice. Young. Raspy.

"It doesn't matter." Another girl, this one also young, maybe even a teenager. "They don't look into guys like him, right? Steven, right?"

"Don't use my name." Another male voice. Higher pitched, but mean. "I told you. Don't talk to anyone about this. They're always listening."

Bernice's heart began to beat faster. They were talking about Kurt Janney. She knew it. She stared at the door as if hoping it would disappear. It didn't, but the voices got clearer, as though the door wasn't blocking sound at all.

"I received a vision last night," said the last voice — Steven. "God came to me and told me that we would find another member."

"Who?" asked one of the women. Bernice couldn't tell which one.

"I don't know. I didn't see a person. I saw only light, and I heard the Lord's voice speaking of division and choices. I saw fire and I heard thunder, and then I heard voices of praise." A rustle of movement. "This is the Word."

"Thanks be," they all chorused.

Bernice stood up. She should call the police. She should call backup. She couldn't arrest them. She wasn't armed. She reached into her pocket and took out her cell phone, and entered a text message to Detective Brennan.

"Need help. Found Kurt's killers."

And as an afterthought, she added, "Bernice."

The "send" key flashed gold, just for a moment. She pressed it, and suddenly she could see through the door.

The people inside the room looked over. The door had become transparent. The light no longer stopped when it reached the wood, but passed through it and illuminated the room. Bernice looked through the door and saw them: Steven, just as the man on the train had described him. Two women, one only in her mid-teens, clean, trendy clothes, the other older but skinny as a rail, with bad skin and a haunted look. A black man, muscular, tall, tattoos of vines up and down his arms. They stared at her, and she ran.

She made it outside and stopped under the streetlight. She willed the light to leave her alone... and it did. They ran straight by her and stopped in the mouth of the alleyway. The skinny girl was rubbing her hands together as though washing them, and her nails hurt her, drawing blood. "Steven, what are we —"

"Shut up, Jill." Steven looked around. "Come on." The four of them walked down the street toward the train station.

Bernice, not knowing what else to do, followed. The light obediently stayed away from her, and no one saw her, not the four killers and not any of the other passersby.

• • •

Sean Brennan saw them coming. He ducked into an alleyway and pulled out his gun. They had killed Kurt Janney. He knew it. He knew it because he saw Bernice following them.

But then he looked again. Bernice was... invisible. He wasn't seeing her. He knew she was there, the way he knew where his bed was in the dark. But she wasn't there, not visually. The light seemed to shy away from her, somehow.

Shadows, right?

The voice was back, but this time it wasn't so mysterious. This time Sean Brennan understood the voice and its omission.

He stepped out in front of the people. He still had his gun in hand, but kept it lowered. "Who are you?"

Bernice saw Sean coming and sighed in relief. Sean was a good man. Sean was a good cop. Sean had already radioed for help, she was sure of it. She would be safe, and these people would go to jail.

Steven glanced at the others. The man in front of them was a witch, yes, but somehow... there was something different about him. The other witch was still behind them, of course. Light tricks didn't blind the eyes of God. But two witches, so soon after his vision?

Jill dug her nails deeper into her hand. "Who are you?" she asked back. She wasn't reversing the question. She was just repeating. Language was starting to leave her again. Soon all that would be left was meaning, emotion, intent. Then she could judge this man for what he was.

"Yeah, who are you?" asked Sheri. She didn't have her knife on her. She didn't know what Steven wanted her to do. And Jill

was making bugs crawl on her flesh again. Oh, there were no real bugs, but Sheri could feel their little legs. She grabbed for Tyrone's hand, hoping for a little reassurance.

Tyrone took Sheri's hand and squeezed. If Steven said the word, he'd fight. If his friends were injured, he'd mend them. But Tyrone was frightened. The jungle was back. The jungle was here. There were beasts, but where? Was the man with the gun a beast?

"Police officer," Sean said, but it sound weak and hollow.

"Yes," said Steven, "but who are you, in the eyes of God?"

"I don't know that," said Sean. His eyes fell.

Steven turned sideways and motioned the others back. "Who are you," he repeated, "in God's eyes? Are you the light or the shadow?" He gave a slight nod to Tyrone. Tyrone was good at this, too.

"You the beast," said Tyrone, picking up the cue, "or the hunter?"

Bernice was confused. Sean seemed to understand what was happening. She didn't, and it was starting to scare her. She grabbed for sound, for light, for anything again, but all she managed to do was short out the streetlight above her. A searing pain shot through her stomach, and she dropped to one knee. "What's happening?"

Jill was beyond words now. She saw fearpainselppreservation from the woman and lossgriefefearcourage from the man. She pointed at the woman, and Bernice started to itch. The bugs were on her skin now.

Sheri slipped behind Tyrone and watched the woman as she dug into her flesh. She was glad that Jill had sent the bugs elsewhere. She concentrated on the woman, keeping her slow, keeping her in place. The woman wasn't going to get up again. Steven had to go on faith, but sometimes Sheri just knew.

Tyrone looked at Sean, and nodded. He saw power in Sean's eyes. He chanced a step toward him, and whispered to him in that quiet, calm manner he used with the animals. He didn't use words, just sound, but Sean didn't seem to care. Tyrone wondered why Sean didn't use the power in himself, raise the gun, do something... and then he smelled the scotch. He took Sean's hand and felt his blood, too warm from too much alcohol. He recalled the jungle, the cool waters of the streams, the rains that fell in bright sunlight, and he gave that to Sean.

And Sean, now completely sober, stood there staking at a woman cowering in shadows, writhing in pain and fear. In that woman, he saw them. This was what the voice had meant.

He raised the gun and fired.

Four voices behind him said, "Thanks be."

• • •

"Hell of a thing," said Mike. He sipped his coffee and tried not think about last night. That had been some party. He hadn't even left until after three, and he couldn't remember how he got home. At least he had, though. Bernice hadn't been so lucky.

"Guy from up the street says he heard a gunshot around two this morning," said one of the uniforms. "Some of the other folks in the building did, too."

"What the hell was she doing here, anyway?" Mike glanced over at his cousin.

Sean pulled a bottle of orange juice out of his pocket. "Don't know," he said.

"You on the wagon, Sean?"

"Mm. Yeah." He took a long drink. "Booze makes you blind," he said.

"No question about cause or time," said the examiner. He hadn't known Bernice well, which was probably good. The other crime scene officers were having trouble focusing. "Gunshot to the head, my money says thirty-eight. Close range. Plenty of blood this time, detective."

Sean shook his head. "That's comforting. What time?"

"Between two and four. Her wallet's gone, phone's gone, ring's gone."

Mike took a sip of coffee. "Mugging gone wrong?"

"No reason to think otherwise," said Sean. "When punks want to kill cops, they kill uniforms, not CS." He gestured to two of the younger officers. "Check with the locals and see if anyone was up. See if you can find a paperboy, a hustler, a hooker, someone who might have seen something. See if any of the local hoods are especially agitated today." They walked off, briskly, with purpose. It made Sean sad to waste their time, but there was nothing to do for it. The investigation had to run its course, and then die off. It was the only way to keep the real work going.

"So, you are coming on Sunday, right?"

Sean nodded. "Sure I am." He glanced up the street. A small, gray cat darted into a building. "I might be a little late, though."

"Church?"

"Something like that."



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*Coming Next
for Mage: The Awakening*



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This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. This book contains mature content. Reader discretion is advised.

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INTRODUCTION

*Magicians, who are commonly called witches,
are thus termed on account of the magnitude of their evil deeds.
These are they who by the permission of God disturb the elements,
who drive to distraction the minds of men, such as have lost their trust in God,
and by the terrible power of their evil spells,
without any actual draught or poison, kill human beings.*

— Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, the *Malleus Maleficarum*

There are those who have seen the glories of the Supernal and rejected it. They may bear scars on their soul, relics of abuse that twisted their perception of magic as the most vicious force in an already cruel universe. They may have undergone Awakenings that broke their perceptions, an experience they were not ready for and could not endure. They may have spent time among the orders, learning magic just like their brethren until some event encouraged them to turn against their own. And they may have inherited a legacy of denial and violence through no direct fault of their own.

Whatever the cause of their discontent, they do more than simply withdraw from the practice of magic. They become its enemy. They strike down mages, burn grimoires, smash what Artifacts they can. Their creeds are numerous, but the core choice is always the same: *I will not have this in my world.*

There are none so blind as those who will not see.

The Path of Denial

The Banishers have already seen some attention, in **Sanctum and Sigil**. They deserve more — or at least, that's what this book argues.

One of the more interesting, and potentially frustrating, aspects of the Banishers is that they so frequently have very few traditions of their own. It's easy to see how, say, each Acanthus can draw from a multitude of works on the Lunargent Thorn, or how a mage of the Mysterium inherits a great deal of culture from the order's traditions and history. But Banishers are often self-taught, and very frequently treat older mage

traditions as something that should not be listened to in the slightest. As a result, the Timori are a diverse lot. Similar to all mages, the Banishers are shaped by the events that surrounded their Awakenings and their encounters with other willworkers. Unlike most other mages, Banishers reject the traditions that would otherwise help them become masters of themselves.

As a result, Banishers vary tremendously in their methodologies. It becomes difficult to make general statements about their works and goals (apart from the obvious). A cult driven by religious fervor will have little in common with an atheistic loner who opposes Awakened magic through his own cold logic. This book concerns itself with bringing more potential Banisher "recipes" to the table, making it easier to showcase that diversity and present witch hunters of a wide and varied nature.

In the interest of presenting more options, **Banishers** also offers a few new takes on the witch hunters of the **Mage** setting. What if there's something as yet unrevealed behind the odd, almost epidemic way in which Banishers can awaken in groups? Can the deniers of magic possess magical philosophies? And what are some other ways that a Banisher might manifest?

Theme and Mood

Banishers invoke a theme of violent ignorance. "Man fears what he cannot understand, and attempts to destroy what he fears" is a weathered but not inaccurate axiom. The Banishers are the epitome of this concept. Their understanding of magic is flawed, and from that flawed (often willfully so) understanding arises the de-

sire to harm, destroy and nullify the works of Supernal magic. The irony is that in the World of Darkness, this impulse might actually be directed positively — there are monsters out there that humanity does not understand, and perhaps the human race would be better off if these monsters were exterminated. However, the tragedy of the Banishers is that the good they do may be simply coincidental. In their ignorance and blindness, which is self-imposed as often as not, they cannot truly distinguish between the mage who is a ticking time bomb and the mage who is a healer and builder, a positive force in her environment. Banishers' wills are still their own — but their judgment is flawed, and they choose poorly. Worst of all, Banishers have more of an opportunity for understanding than most, thanks to their Awakenings. For them, ignorance is more of a tragedy than it is for the Sleepers who have less of a choice — and it makes these mages far more dangerous as well.

The legacy of the Timori is rightly named. The mood of a Banisher story usually takes some variation of fear. In the case of the Banishers themselves, fear drives their actions — it stifles and crushes them, grinding away at their human decency. They learn to hate because of fear. Banishers murder other mages because the Timori are afraid of what magic can do, and they even turn on themselves in fits of self-loathing driven by that same dread. And, in turn, the Pentacle mages have learned to fear the Banishers. Pentacle mages cannot argue with the witch hunters, cannot open their eyes to the greater glory of Awakened magic. The Banishers are a source of violence that will not listen to reason, as frightening as the warped logic of a serial killer or the inhuman instinct of a spider.

How to Use This Book

Banishers is largely a book for the Storyteller, meant to offer some depth and diversity to the Timori. The ideas and tools presented here should inspire ways to craft Banisher antagonists that can surprise the players in new ways. This book can also be used to run stories or chronicles with the Banishers playing the role of the protagonists — an antiheroic take on **Mage** at best, but perhaps an interesting dabbling in the mind of the opposition.

Chapter One: The Purpose is an examination of how Banishers come to be — why their Awakenings might go awry, how they recruit or even infect new Banishers, even when established mages turn traitor and walk the Banisher path. Some mechanical notes

on creating Banishers are also present, to aid in creating and customizing new opponents.

Chapter Two: Weapons concerns itself with the spells that Banishers may be prone to use, as well as the Artifacts and imbued items that may have fallen into their hands. Some items reflect their wielders, and in some cases, the wielders reflect the unusual vessels of power that have come into the Banishers' keeping.

Chapter Three: Cults and Cabals details a number of Banisher cabals (and one solo operative) ready to drop into a chronicle and start their hunt. These cabals are as follows:

- *The Bonfire*, a scattered collection of Banisher cells that seek to release the bonds between physical and Supernal through fire.

- *The Carnival of Innocents*, a roaming underground event where the show conceals a sinister creed.

- *Emilio's Last Ride*, a group of nomads in an old bus roaming the American Southwest.

- *The Huntsmen*, a cabal of Thyrsus following a psychopath with a very twisted view on the natural order.

- *The Militant Auditing Division*, an extensive organization of Sleepers and Banishers concealing an ugly agenda under their façade of pseudo-spirituality.

- *Phageans*, a cannibalistic strain of Banisher that arises for reasons the Pentacle mages have yet to fully discover.

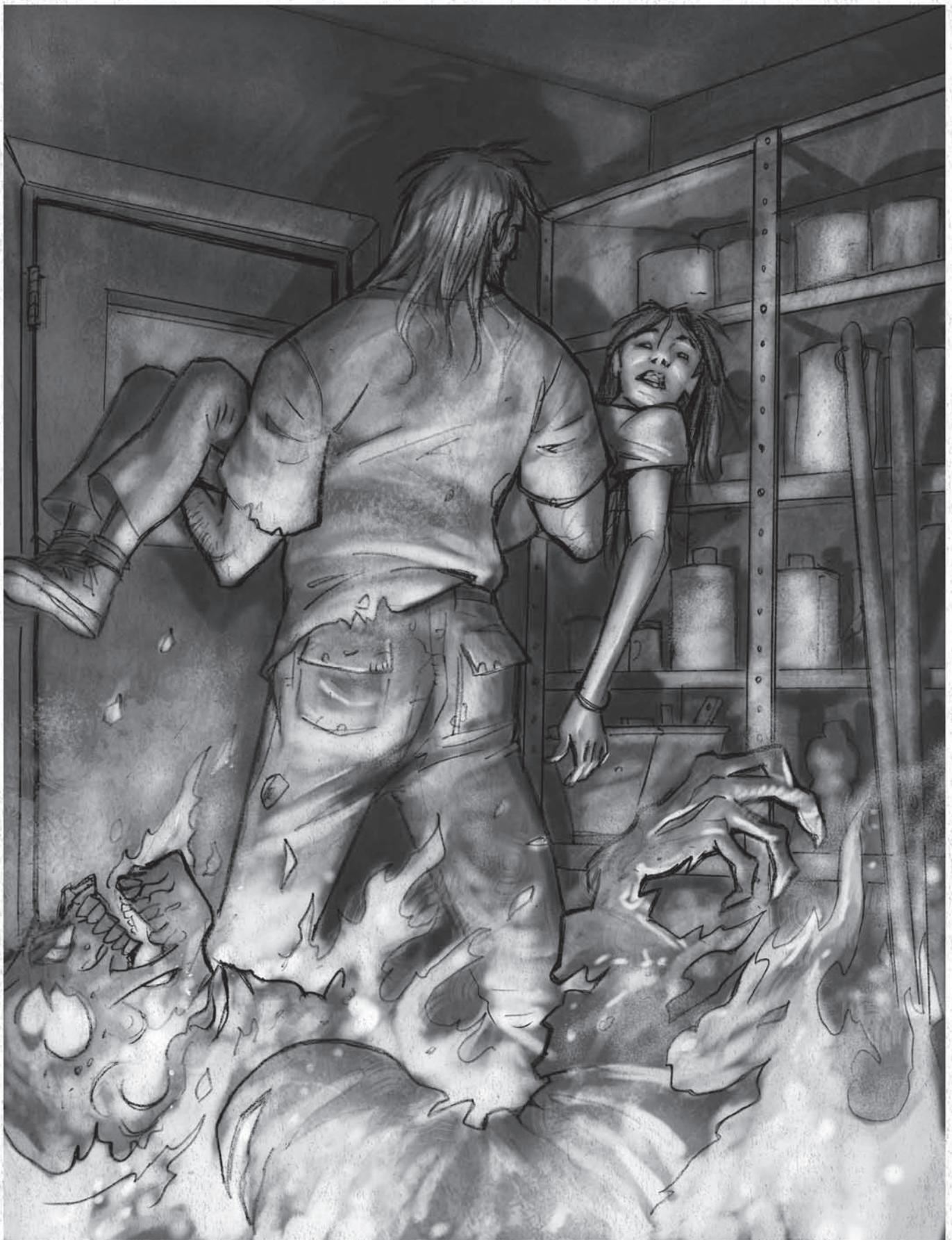
- *The Shepherds*, a militant cult that directly recruits Sleepers to serve as their army in their covert sieges.

- *The Translators*, a group of Banishers who view their work through the lens of alien abduction and resistance.

- *Venus Valley*, a cozy little bed-and-breakfast run by a sweet couple, perfect for mages looking for an idyllic bit of time off. Maybe a very long time.

Chapter Four: Wielding the Witch-Hammer looks at the Banishers a bit more from the inside, on the individual and personal levels. This chapter, like this book, is aimed largely at the Storyteller, but also provides some examination of what might go into a chronicle in which the players play Banishers, setting their antiheroes against the worst offenders of the Pentacle (and, to be honest, against mages who aren't among the worst).

These, then, are the Timori. Those who fear and deny. Enjoy your time among them.



CHAPTER ONE: THE PURPOSE

Nina walked past the man with the sign every morning. The sign said *SATAN'S WORK AROUND US*, and he looked like the kind of person she'd always imagined would carry it. He had ratty clothes, sunken cheeks and patchy hair where he'd been careless shaving. And, every morning, he smiled at her suddenly, like he was snapping out of guard duty at his corner. The smile was so relaxed, so much more normal than what she expected, that it disarmed her fear. She actually said hello to him today, but he didn't say anything back. The smiling time passed. He got back to his duty, and she went to school.

There was a letter on her desk. Somebody had snatched two girls from two different schools over the last month. One girl had been found in a culvert, dead. Nina frowned at the letter, packed it to give to Mom and smiled at the attractive boy two desks down when he smiled at her. He was new, but cute.

The alarm went off between third and fourth period. Nina was late, the last one late, so she was stuck in the hall when the classrooms went into lockdown. She turned on her heel and walked fast, to the stairs and the principal's office, when she saw the man with the sign. They both stopped. She screamed and slid around the corner in the slick hall. The janitor's closet was ajar. She ran in and locked the door, blocking out the sunlight.

She didn't turn the light on. The new boy did. He grabbed her arm with his other hand, which was cold, like a metal fence post in the winter. He yanked her close and with a long nail on his free hand, started gouging something into her arm, very slowly and precisely. Her screams made no noise. He said she was very beautiful, in a voice that made it sound like he was talking about a new car or an animal, and the cold filled her body.

Her vision got spotty and dark, but then there was a flash: orange and warm. Then a cooked meat smell washed in, and she felt bigger, warmer hands lift her up.

Later, she learned the man's name was Neil, and the new boy was an old, old man (and now, a dead man) who needed to do things to people to live. Neil let her sleep on the couch and kept his distance, even when she screamed in the middle of the night. That's when she opened her eyes, saw what the sign really said and knew that she was meant to read it all along.

**Not only does reality resist those who still criticize it,
but it also abandons those who defend it.**
— Jean Baudrillard, “Radical Thought”

Sing, O muse, of the rage of Cassandra that brought countless ills upon the Awakened. This is not a tale of warriors thrashing against the chains of the Lie; nor is it of priest-kings, oracles or idealists. It's not even about traitors who challenged the gods, the folly of hubris or five, fragile Watchtowers, though all play a part. This is the tale of Cassandra: the oracle who knew that Troy would fall, but nobody would believe her.

Every generation has its Cassandras. They see too much, feel too deeply and suffer in the yoke of Supernal power, souls bent under visions of the impossible. Troy is dust, but according to some, the pattern remains, one of a million holograms of a true history that repeats itself through every Fallen Age, when men and women build cities in dim remembrance of the only human city of the lost, true world. But though these cities and nations are idiot monuments to Atlantis, they are *not* Atlantis. Even in the cage, humanity evolves. Cassandras learn. They hate. Cassandras change from vessels to harbingers, no longer content to merely witness the follies of powers that torture them. They act. They punish. They banish.

The Timori

Every mystagogue knows that Atlantean lore is the art of resolving contradictions, balancing archeology with poetry and evidence with the fact of a magical, mutable world. So goes the history of the Timori. The Mysterium studies the Timori closely, hoping to learn how to better contain modern Banishers. One mage reads between the lines of African myth cycles, modifying them according to old runes found in the region, and declares that the Timori were outcasts who attacked the Awakened City with witch-plagues and soul poisons. Another says the Timori were the original inhabitants of the Ocean Spire, half-human and half god, whom the followers of the dragon dreams subdued and imprisoned as slave-prophets in Atlantis's temples.

Drugged dreams, stele, crumbling codices — all have some story to tell of the ancient sect that modern mages translate as *Timori*: “the fearful.”

There are persistent similarities though, recurring colors in the mosaic of myth. First, the Timori did not follow the dragon dreams to Atlantis. Second, they practiced the Art within a separate tradition with its own techniques. Third, they practiced magic cautiously and counseled (and, in some stories, forced) others to do the same, in the hope that once vain works of magic ceased, humanity would close the door on sorcery forever. Last of all, the Timori were objects of scorn in Atlantis. Some say they were killed or exiled, but more sources portray the Timori as outcasts within the walls, permitted to preach and cajole, but denied true influence over the Awakened City.

Many myths contain these common elements, but some stories are more widespread and better supported by Atlantean artifacts. We'll start with the current dominant myth of the Natural Ones.

The Natural Ones

Awakened scholars have long searched for parallel texts from two perspectives: those of the orthodox orders and of the Timori themselves. No complete Atlantean documents survive, but there are fragments that repeat themselves in later texts. Two of these — the quasi-Vedic *Sahaja Sutra* and China's *Classic of the Secret Monarchs* — contain numerous Atlantean echoes. They can be traced back to 300 BCE or earlier.

The standard (if somewhat loose) translation of the *Sahaja Sutra* says:

This is the yoga of Sahaja (nature), formulated in the Buddha (Awakened) mind, before the fall of Tripura (Atlantis), against the impiety and evil miracles of its lords.

Righteous consciousness perceives what is true. It is yoked to pure perception and corrects all deception. De-

filed consciousness imposes error on the true world, after the manner of the kings of Tripura. To change the world without apprehending the truth spreads the poisons of the mind to the Four Continents. It covers them in illusion.

In ancient times, the Sahajiya (natural ones) dwelled among the Tripura lords and their miraculous powers, but although they possessed the refinements of the Buddha mind, they acted only to cast away demons and correct errors. They refused the pleasures of illusion. The Tripura lords persecuted the Sahajiya and, for their sins, attracted the terrible arrow of God.

Banisher Lore and the Awakened Street

The information in this section is not common knowledge, but much of it is accessible to dedicated researchers, especially if they're members of the Mysterium. The average mage knows about as much about the Banishers as Sleepers know about their own terrorists: a sketchy, politically distorted outline. Mages know that Banishers hate them and usually want to kill them for the sake of some fanatical ideology. Most of the Wise have a vague idea that the Banisher cults all have a common root, but most mages couldn't tell you why. Mages often learn that it's better to limit one's understanding to this, because studying the Banishers can give people an opening to accuse them of sympathizing with the enemy.

Banisher studies is a politically sensitive field. Ambitious mages accuse enemies of providing ideological comfort to the Banishers in much the way that Sleepers might say that opponents are "with the terrorists." It's a cheap rhetorical tactic aimed more at marshalling allies than actually convincing anybody that it's true, but it still works. There aren't a lot of mages in the world, so you don't have to go far to find people who've lost Artifacts, family, friends and lovers to the Banishers. Pain and anger always lurk in the background. Players should remember that the Banishers aren't an abstract faraway threat. Maybe your character hasn't lost anyone to them, but in time, she'll meet someone who has.

The Sahaja doctrine cannot be contained by words. The teaching emanates from the perfected mind of a Sahajiya master, so the disciple must know the master's mind to understand the doctrine's essence. Lay followers heed lectures, writings and outer teachings to avoid spreading illusion and evil.

Once persecuted, the Sahajiya abides in the forest and the dust, ever to beg for alms, so that the Buddha mind always serves the common people, never to rule like the Tripura lords.

But the Classic says:

In the reign of Yaodi there were no exoteric emperors. Therefore, outside of the Tianguo (the "Heaven Kingdom" — Atlantis) people were uncivilized and ignorant, and even within the walls the people were tempted by barbarity because they had no rites or traditions to guide them. The school of Yunzi (the "natural master") implored them to return to the darkness. They doused fires and tore off their clothes.

Yaodi commanded that the renegade school be suppressed. He further summoned Yunzi and said, "The people of Tianguo have fire and silk, and it is cruel to lead them back to the original darkness, where people starve and beasts devour them."

Yunzi responded and said, "People in nature do not presume to command fire and animals. They see that the world is greater than their knowledge and act righteously, in awe of that which controls their lives. Fear and moderation makes them wise. In Tianguo, scholars presume to know the entire world and even test the boundary of the sky. Fire and silk make them arrogant; they recreate their flaws in the world and mistake their creations for the true world, which is beyond control and complete perception. Therefore, people should return to nature, fear and moderation."

Yaodi said, "Wisdom cannot be objectively quantified outside of accomplishments. The recluse says he knows bliss in the cave, but who can truly determine that he is happy? But arrows slay dangerous beasts, rituals appease angry spirits and fire brings warmth. These facts are known to all. Therefore, the evidence refutes your teachings."

Thus, Yaodi sentenced Yunzi to be hobbled and that the character "Chu" (fearful) be branded upon his face, so that the people would understand the errors of the renegade school. Yunzi departed for the darkness he desired.

Even though these works were produced thousands of miles apart, mystagogues see enough parallels to assume that both works comment on a single, Atlantean ur-philosophy. This is further supported by oral traditions within the Diamond orders.

THE LOCUST-EATERS: AN ATLANTIAN LEGEND

In that year, the Dragon was one, and with one voice proclaimed that the Celestial Ladder would be built to bind the worlds of gods and men. But the thunderous Voice of the Dragon created an echo, and the echo contained renegade whispers from a cult that stood apart from the Voice, Wings, the Talons and ever-watching Eyes. So Kherem, who cast the very Rune of Rule that bound the mind of Atlantis to decide the matter, summoned his disciple Drakal.

Kherem said, "When two sorcerers quarrel, even unto fire and curse, it celebrates the wills of magi. But when souls defy the Dragon united they defy Atlantis, and must account for their words. There is a dangerous power in defiance. Learn their hearts, apprentice, and provide the stratagem by which we will break them to the Dragon's will." So Drakal listened to his master's mind and the memory of the Rune of Rule. He heard the whispers and, with them, sounds of the sea and leaves in the wind.

He knew that he must go to the borders of Atlantis to confront the renegade voices. He bound the winds to be his staff and soared to the forested First Shelter, where the Dragon Dreamers landed at the dawn of the age. He landed amidst the trees; among them, crude pits and warrens tore into the hills. Surveying the primitive village told him he dealt with the Timori, crude ascetics who had turned their backs on the Awakened City.

A filthy woman, swaying in drunkenness, crept from her tunnel. Drakal went to her. The spun thaumium in his robes folded into armor and he invoked the Secret Flashing Gaze, but she stared back at him with simple, empty fearlessness. "Slave of the Dragon," she said, "Why are you here? You have nothing to learn from us. We have nothing to for you to take."

"I serve Kherem, lord of the Voice," said Drakal. "You Timori spoke within the shared mind when we cast the Rune of Rule. It isn't your way. You abandoned us, but now you intrude upon our council? Explain yourselves."

She smiled. Suddenly, she darted down to a crouch. Drakal was afraid that this might be a mudra and let the storm-staff stir, but it was nothing; she stood up with a fat locust between her fingers and bit its wriggling head off. She nodded at the sound of Drakal's bound winds, laughed and said, "You've served the Voice for so long you can't even recognize human gestures. To hunt, to eat — these are natural things, not assaults upon the All." She spat at his feet, at his arrayed spells. "You cannot even communicate with me without violating the higher worlds.

"We Naturals — Timori, if you prefer — are content to let you chain the world to your desires as long as you harm only each other, but you would snare the All itself in your ladder to the stars. How could we stay silent?"

"You forfeited your power." Drakal scowled, relinquished the Flashing Gaze and dismissed his armor. Things weren't going according to plan. "You broke your staves to live in filth, but now, you demand an audience with the Dragon. One does not presume upon the Awakened City at a whim, but serves it, or accepts a place apart from its light."

"What did we forfeit? The only true power is Awakened perception. We clearly retain that, for we heard your deliberations. Everything else is a trick that cowards use to separate themselves from Creation. You came in finery to lie to me and yourself about your power. You command your clothes: 'I am weak — help me pretend to be strong, to stand tall in a foreign camp.' Yet here I am, standing tall before you, with no devices. I am filthy from work and the hunt, even drunk, because I desired wine, but *I am* these things. I feel every speck of dirt and clumsy step." She snatched another locust. "My stomach is hollow and leads me to know the forest, so that I may eat. I do not command the forest or the world to lie for my pleasure."

Drakal smirked at the lecture and shrugged. The Timori loved their moral posturing and often shouted this nonsense as they left the gates of Atlantis. His shrug dropped into a slouch, and he yawned twice, in slow, lazy exhalations.

Why was he tired? A rune on his chest was supposed to keep him alert. It couldn't be the Timori — they wouldn't "violate" him this way, would they? He laid down and listened to her voice. She bit into the insect, took a deep, smiling breath and said, "You are nothing but a shell of spells wrapped around something that used to be a man. But fear not! We'll make you human again."

Drakal awoke at night beside the last embers of a fire. His spells were gone. His possessions were slag and burnt threads on the ash heap. He jumped up and summoned his power, but at every instant he felt his spells being unwoven by an enemy will. The chilling wind from the nearby ocean stirred his bones, driving him to walk toward Atlantis. He hoped to find a Talon sentry close by, but the spinning stars gave way to the sun, and he saw nothing but trackless woodland.

After a week of walking, Drakal knew sorcery had expanded the forest as surely as it had snuffed out his spells. He drank rainwater that pooled in great, emerald leaves. He didn't eat until the fourth day, when he smashed a mouse with a stone and cooked it in a crudely built, sputtering fire.

After that desperate meal, his unseen captors loosened their grasp. He could invoke the Mage Sight and other simple Awakened senses. The forest showed its secrets to him. He tracked down water by scent and followed the brilliant Life-flames of his prey. He dug a shelter with his bare hands. When he ate wild berries, the sweetness was a flood of pleasure, greater than anything he'd felt at royal feasts. When thorns cut his naked flesh, the pain brought tears unlike anything he'd dared to show Kherem, even in the old days, when the old master beat and insulted him for his apprentice's errors.

Days and nights passed like the blinking of a great, slow eye. He didn't count them. Instead, when he started to see the woman again, Drakal counted time by her appearances. At first she was little more than a passing shadow. Then he saw her squatting at the stream, but when he stepped forward, she strode away, leaving bare footprints in the clay. She never ran; he was simply never close or fast enough to catch up. He Unveiled the world around her, but sensed no sorcery beyond the pervasive power that constrained his magic. She wasn't using spells to escape — only natural skill.

One day he found her sitting in short grass, under the sun. Half a mile out, he saw the smoking sentry brands of Atlantis. The opposing magic was gone, and there was only her, holding out a wineskin. Drakal smelled bitter grapes and earth, felt flushed and firm with desire. No words filled his mind when he took the wine. Purple anointed his mouth. He tasted spice, living land and the edge of the woman's soul. She had no name, but neither did he. His titles and spells were long-dead affectations, and he was Timori. He knew the All, the beautiful cycle of power between the higher and lower worlds, and that all magic must sense and assist its flow — and never twist it to vain, human ends.

So, a year and a day after Drakal went out on his quest, he returned as a living flame, to slay the architects of the Celestial Ladder. Kherem wept for his apprentice, who had been reduced to an animal with a man's soul. As he obliterated Drakal's damaged spirit, Kherem drew forth its memories and carved them into a crystal tablet. The tablet is lost, but the tale of his soul, his torture and the Timori endures.



Conclusions

Mages have examined, compared and debated the authenticity of scattered accounts for all the recorded Fallen Age. Nobody knows the truth, but they've given most Awakened lorekeepers a strong, broad consensus about the historical Timori.

They say the Timori used magic sparingly, out of belief that the implicit order — the "All" of the Supernal and material worlds reveal themselves to quiet, passive, enlightened souls. Like Taoist recluses following *wu wei*, Timori believed that power flowed in accord with moral and metaphysical truth. A true sage yielded to nature in all things. Magic could not be used to improve the world, which was inherently perfect, but only to examine and appreciate the subtle beauty of the cosmos. Anything else injured nature's harmony.

Stories describe Timori (who did not call themselves "fearful," but "natural") throughout the history of Atlantis as subjects of scorn and persecution, outcasts for

daring to oppose magic in a nation wrought by spells. They endured punitive edicts and popular contempt, but couldn't be stamped out for good. The Timori didn't write grimoires or forge enchantments to pass on their traditions. Some scholars don't think the Timori even taught occult techniques. Their doctrine supposedly spread from soul to soul as a wordless, shared understanding. Modern commentaries compare it to *gnosis* in Western esoterica or the "mind seal" of Mahayana Buddhism.

Early Timori either went into exile or were the peaceful gadflies of Atlantean society, but when the Celestial Ladder rose up, the Natural Ones switched to sabotage and violent uprisings. True to their beliefs, they abhorred most magic, but that didn't make them much less dangerous. They apparently made exceptions for spells that "corrected" some kind of previous supernatural interference. Timori could not build Atlantis's towers of glass, but Timori could melt the towers down.

The Fearful Vow

One of the better known Banisher customs is the vow to destroy their own magic after ridding their protectorates of sorcerers, magical artifacts and lingering, local enchantments. This so-called Fearful Vow actually comes from ancient sources and has only entered widespread use in the last century. Modern Banishers are better historians than their forebears. Some even know they're heirs to an ancient tradition, but they interpret their sources through the lens of their cults, religions or personal imaginations. These "Neo-Timori" are dangerous opponents, more willing to learn from their enemies because they accept an Atlantean heritage.

Before the rise of the Celestial Ladder, Timori believed that Knowing and Unveiling magic didn't disturb the All. But legends say that in the last days of Atlantis, the Natural Ones decided that humanity had lost the right to even Awaken. Therefore, all Awakenings in the Fallen World are corrupt. Some educated Banishers believe that the only pure enlightenment comes from an act of divine grace, apart from any Watchtower. Some Banishers say that they're blessed with "divine Awakening," but most don't, because for the vast majority, Awakening is a horrifying experience. Thus, they adopt the Fearful Vow and promise to turn their backs on magic when the war is won.

There are many versions of the vow in circulation, none of which are in the original Atlantean. The most famous is Pseudo-Tertullian's Greek translation, which was itself translated into German, English and French in the early 16th century. It is reproduced below, but it should be noted that modern versions usually customize the vow to suit the Banisher's cult, adding references to God, Dharma, Humanism — whatever the witch hunter believes in.

My transgressions are writ upon the heavens.

My sin is an inestimable weight

and should drag my soul down to the Outer Darkness.

Therefore, I sacrifice all my works to destroy the wickedness of the Fallen Earth,

and when I no longer see the mirror of my transgressions in the world

I will cast my works, my sins and my spirit into the purifying fire.

In the mad days before the Fall, when the Celestial Ladder sang with vibrations from a great war in the heavens, the last princes of the smoldering city said that Timori were no longer even human. Scrolls that purport to tell of Atlantis's final days (only late translations are available) reported strange powers and signs of possession. As with all accounts of the Awakened cities, it's usually impossible to distinguish between genuine accounts, ancient propaganda and "mythic pollution" from Fallen Age civilizations. Students of Awakened history piece together what they can from common threads in many sources.

Other Myths

Despite the majority opinions of the Pentacle (that is, the background and metaphysics described in **Mage: The Awakening**), mages entertain radical differences of opinion about every aspect of Awakened existence. In addition to the aforementioned consensus, there are still broad alternative opinions about the Timori's nature and history. There are mages who think that the Natural Ones were only one branch of Timori, or that the evidence has been misinterpreted. They say that the *Sahaja Sutra* and the *Classic of the Secret Monarchs* describe two different organizations, or that the story of the Locust-Eaters is more parable than

history. The following sections discuss other theories about the Banishers' forebears.

The Custodiae

Certain Guardians of the Veil believe that Timori were the original protectors of the Supernal Realms. A few ancient writings translate the name of a minor Atlantean sect as the Custodiae. The texts say that this cult believed that the Supernal Realms were "pure lands" where the enlightened could dwell after death. Therefore, foolish magic not only imperiled the material realm but disturbed holy Awakened ancestors. It was the equivalent of desecrating a tomb or casting an innocent soul into Hell. The Custodiae were fanatics who disrupted high magical rituals with counterspells and protests. They were called "fearful," but there's no way of knowing whether this refers to the Timori or just calls the cult a pack of cowards. The Visus Draconis suppressed the cult, but absorbed some of its unique lore. *The Mournfull Booke of the Dragon's Eye* says that Custodiae mysteries still lie within the heart of the Guardians of the Veil because the order did not so much disrupt the sect as replace it.

In 1968, a Guardian named Labrys recorded a series of visions in which supposed Ascended Atlanteans told her that each Invisible World has "natural defenders." A partial transcript appears below.

Transcript 12 - 3 - 1967

Labrys: Yes, I hear, I obey . . . (Untranslatable, possible Atlantean)
. . . I can see the Ascended Master! Invisible! Invisible defenders of
the invisible . . . beasts with furious souls for the Shadow Realm . . .
who hate as men. Custodiae? Be not afraid, he says, but they are always
afraid.

Frater P: Stay with us Labrys. Labrys? Georgette! Tell us what the Master
is saying to you about the Custodiae!

Labrys: Demons in the thorns and dreams stay locked up? Never meant to
be. Custodiae though . . . they took our shape, wanted to teach us. But
we strayed. They were supposed to guard and watch the Spire, not us . . .
were there before the dragons even came!

(Sound of glass breaking and a low whine. Frater P. describes poltergeist
activity at this point.)

Frater P: The Atlantean Canon says the island was uninhabited before the dream voyage. Is it wrong?

Labrys: No humans before the dreams, but he says they were there still. Not human! Were not human, but they're still here! Their souls are here! Hidden in humans, hating us, hunting us! Hunting us!

The Labrys Workings are a minor curiosity at best — except for mages who study the Banishers. If the Timori are the Custodiae and the Custodiae were the hidden, pre-human inhabitants of Atlantis, does that mean that Banishers have alien souls? This would explain several elements of the Banisher praxis. How do they gain power so quickly, without formal training? What drives their disparate membership to a single cause? If there's a secret intelligence behind it all, mages face no mad dog at their heels but an ancient, devious enemy.

Prophets

Ecstatic prophets are an established part of Sleeper mythology — so much so that the Awakened suspect that prophets must have existed in Atlantis. In this case, "Prophecy" encompasses more than the secrets of Time and Fate. It is the ability to sense the powers at work behind any phenomenon, even past the limits of extrasensory magic. The Life Arcanum might be able to tell mages about health and biology with great precision, but even the Awakened find it difficult to sense a living thing's place in the greater scheme of things. How does a disease progress from a physical condition to something that radiates spiritual Resonance? How does it affect the emotions of others? Most sorcerers can only answer these questions with complex spells or extended study. The legendary oracles were said to be able to view things holistically instead of in rigid, Arcanum-based categories.

Mages look to the Greek Pythia, Japanese Miko and even modern charismatic Christians as proof of an eternal office. In many belief systems, prophets are born, not made. Formal rituals don't create the power, but channel it into coherent prophecies and a respected office. But despite global legends, support for a specifically Atlantean antecedent is hard to find. Onyx obelisks describe a "sight beyond Awakened sight"; bas-relief pictograms show distorted figures, peering through a triangular gate into a field of alien constellations. Some of these artifacts have been defaced by later hands. Chisels and Forces magic have hewn away

what might have been the prophets' insights. Crude graffiti in pidgin Atlantean, Sanskrit and Linear A Hellenic script contain warnings like "the gods take a payment in blood for every secret."

Some mages believe that the Timori were oracles who detected an impending disaster that the old

The Truth About the Timori

What's the truth? Mages don't know for sure and neither do we, the authors. You know the truth because it's *your* chronicle.

This book and others play with assumptions that aren't backed by confirmed facts because this makes the setting more flexible for individuals. Contrary to what you might expect, it actually adds verisimilitude. Similar to us, mages look at the world through social constructions and personal biases. Unlike us, mages live in a world where matter, energy, minds and spirits change according to their desires. Past masters might have altered the evidence for their own reasons. Mad mages can do this without conscious intent so that the world conforms to their delusions. Some spirits act on the Resonance they devour, changing things to suit human expectations. Atlantis might not even obey the laws of linear time. Does Atlantis exist outside of Fallen time, or on multiple historical tracks? Nobody knows.

On the other hand, note that Timori legends and rumors don't directly contradict each other. This situation exists by design. Timori could have been pastoral outcasts, mad oracles *and* disguised, inhuman protectors of the Ocean Spire, all at the same time. Thus, you don't have to make a decision right away. It's perfectly possible to use this book without knowing who the Timori were. Wait until it's time to delve into the cosmic secrets of your chronicle and use the version of the truth that would entertain your group the most.

Atlanteans, with their compartmentalized, hubristic view of the world, couldn't accept. The mages paint the picture of a distrusted caste whose insights carried them to the edge of madness. As the Celestial Ladder rose, so, too, did the Atlantean population's discontent. The great tower, burned with divine energy, sparking fear in commoners who had little to gain from the great experiment. Supporters of the "prophet theory" say that the mad oracles eventually left their tripods and sacred groves to lead uprisings against the sorcerer-lords. They were branded "fearful ones," and killed or ostracized.

It follows from this theory that modern Banishers might also be natural prophets, capable of mystic insights above and beyond the formulaic methods of Awakened magic. The Free Council especially supports this theory. Some Libertines believe that the Banishers, misguided as they are, represent the last bastion of human potential that hasn't been touched by the taint of Atlantis. They're supposedly the highest point in a continuum that begins with mediums, psychics and "hedge" sorcerers and stretches past Awakened magi to the very gates of the Supernal, where prophets dwell. Libertines who've tried to "educate" Banishers into becoming modern prophets have all failed, sometimes at the expense of human lives, but attempts continue. Believers think that if they succeed, they'll open the door to knowing the interconnected cosmos and its destiny. This time, they won't ignore their prophets' warnings.

How Banishers Are Born

The Banishers are universal to all cultures and historical eras. While some Banishers have Awakened in the company of others, they don't always teach magic consciously. Some Banishers disguise their studies as religious rituals and cult indoctrination. Others don't seem to even pay attention to the mystic arts, but develop their arcane talents still. Furthermore, wiping out a cult doesn't prevent new Banishers from Awakening in the area. If Banisher status is a disease, "infected" agents aren't necessary. There's no essential line of teaching. Mysterium Athenaea have voluminous records of failed attempts to contain the Banisher "contagion."

The San Francisco Experiments

In 1906, the San Francisco Consilium took advantage of post-earthquake chaos to embark one of the

most thorough efforts to eliminate the Banishers ever attempted.

After killing every Banisher in the county, teams of mages eliminated every sympathetic bond or mundane sign they could find. They erased memories, cleansed ley lines, burned paper records and even, at great risk, depopulated the Shadow Realm around known Banisher lairs. But two years later, a man named Walter Vaughan, who had never left the city limits, Awakened as a Banisher. A year after that, he was the leader of a quartet of Awakened "witch hunters" called the Anti-Blasphemy Society.

The experiment was a failure, but the Consilium's agents eventually destroyed the Anti-Blasphemy Society. The Sentinel and his deputies killed every member except for their "secretary," Angela von Richter. They captured her and, under the direction of the Hierarch Anchouros, interrogated her. Anchouros was a Mysterium master who'd spearheaded the original eradication effort, so when the opportunity arose, he made copious notes and diary entries about von Richter. Her case isn't the first attempt to study a captured Banisher, but it's still one of the best documented. Key excerpts are reproduced below.

December 30th, 1910

The chamber contains bans and wards sufficient to barricade an archmage's goetic demon (details attached in the A. V. R. file). It's made of good, solid bricks and is surrounded with packed earth. There's one door, always guarded, made of hardwood with a steel shell. It has few creature comforts, but I hope it's not inhumane. I don't want to punish our prisoner. I'm convinced that A. V. R. suffers from some arcane disease. She's dangerous, but is she responsible for her own actions?

The other Councilors are not of my mind in this, so the examination chamber is more than a little prison. It protects her from them! They say the work is an unreasonable burden on the city. I'm sure that given half a chance, they'd get that Vest Interceptor to kill A. V. R. (horrible man, whoever he is.) They're not the only ones. She's responsible for two dead. In the meeting, I assured them that once I ascertain her state of mind, I will dispense the Hierarch's justice appropriately. I must get the Arrows firmly on side to limit this nonsense.

January 4th, 1911

Complete notes are in the A. V. R. file, as usual. I must get Bertram to make copies for those Welshmen. We've had to take away the curtain we installed for modesty. A. V. R. tried to hang herself behind it. She waited until the guard was a young Obrimos who didn't know how to read her mind. It's interesting the way she took advantage of Watchtower and inexperience. That indicates clever sorcery. I told A. V. R. this when I interviewed her today. She spat in my face.

I asked A. V. R. about her magical tutelage circumspectly after that. She claims that they didn't study any form of magic at all. They learned to identify Atlantean symbols in a haphazard fashion, but they didn't practice the Archaia (A. V. R. did not even know what they were, but did have a rough idea of our Paths), discuss rote techniques or anything of that sort. At no point did her cult ever undertake any activity intended to increase magical prowess. I didn't believe it at first because every member displayed prowess beyond that expected within newly Awakened apprentices, but magical verification confirms that her magic — Banisher magic — does not rely on any known pedagogical model.

January 28th, 1911

A. V. R.'s mental condition has degenerated faster than I had anticipated. Now she needs to be forcibly restrained, fed and washed. I called in an old favor, so Nike came and used certain psychic techniques to give her enough stability and agreeability for the interview. We discussed her Awakening, for which I can find no particular precedent. As you know, an Awakening, personal trauma or spiritual exploration usually precedes Awakenings. Even those we initially classify as mysteries — "susceptionis incognitus" — usually end up having these precursors even if the magus himself does not recognize them.

There was no spiritual revelation or family tradition. I even sent Wyrd to research her genealogy, and he reported no known Awakened

ancestors. Her life was unremarkable. A. V. R. was not even religious at the time (something she still feels guilty about) and only fell in with Vaughan because, in her words, "My father taught me to be kind to vagrants and sick people, and the Reverend looked to be both." She rented him a room in the attic of her house and took her tea with him daily.

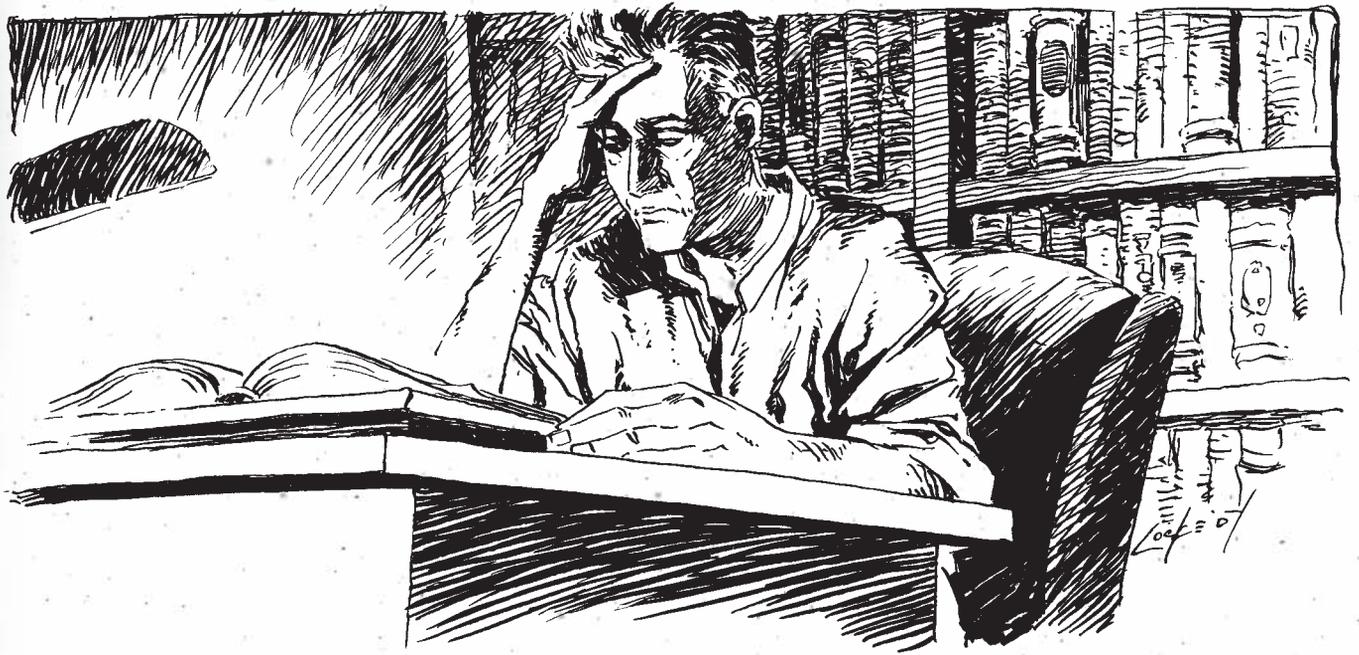
Soon afterward, A. V. R. began to suffer nightmares and what she calls "holy compulsions." She had no interest in the occult, but began to clip newspaper articles about spiritualism, Chinese charms and so forth. After examining her hoard, she'd burn it in her yard. She describes what I interpret as a trance state when she did these things. The act kept away dreams that were focused on demons, religious imagery and symbols she could not decipher (though she said that she later identified one as an Atlantean rune).

This cycle grew more intense over time until, after Vaughan's third month of residence, her personal rituals had grown past powerless trinkets. She found herself compelled to follow certain people at night. I've identified one as our lost citizen, Aten. A. V. R. said the following:

"I knew there was something wrong with this man. I feel no compunctions about using the term 'devil-ridden,' now, though when it occurred to me at the time, I was ashamed. It sounded like something my crazy tenant would say. I didn't know that God was pushing me to stop him. I just followed along until he went to this old door behind the Chinese herbalist's. There was no doorknob, but he brought one. It had these obscene shapes on it, in silver. Just looking at it made me nauseous and angry.

"I remember thinking, 'Angie, you have to decide,' as if I could not, do God's work and ask for his mercy, or I could go home and live with a few nightmares, but the urges would pass. I've learned since that God speaks loudly sometimes, but we always choose for ourselves.

"Well, sir, I chose. I'd brought along a hammer and an old kitchen knife for protection. I used them. I smashed the door and sent him to hell."



A. V. R. later discovered Vaughan had followed her. He helped her burn Aten's body, and together, they founded the cult. If there is a trigger, it seems to be proximity to Vaughan, even though in their time together he apparently never mentioned his own Awakening, and although she often spoke to him about religious matters, she didn't consciously consider their merits until well into her particular madness. I believe that Banishers provoke twisted Awakenings with their presence, but as we know from our previous experiments, exposure isn't necessary. Vaughan Awoke alone.

February 2nd, 1911

This is the end of the experiment. A. V. R. is deathly thin. At some point in the night, she bit off her own tongue. It occurs to me that we have become every bit the evil she believed us to be. We shackled her in a secret cell and subdued her free will with sorcery. Today I had Nike break the walls around her mind to draw forth more information about Vaughan. I must know what makes a man a Banisher when there are no teachers or other influences to guide him.

She didn't know much — only that he'd seen strange things all his life, that he studied them and that in 1907, he'd seen something he called

a "demon," conjured in an elaborate ceremony. He realized he knew how the demon might be summoned, but that he should employ that knowledge to fight against demons and sorcery. She especially remembered him saying, "The world is a shadow cast by Satan, but evil men want to see hellfire for themselves."

Angela said that she decided to become a Banisher. I hope that justifies her fate. I've left her a very sharp razor, and I have no doubt that she will decide to administer unto herself the justice that my Council craves.

Conclusions

Anchouros stepped down from the Hierarch's seat in shame. At the time, his work was viewed as a costly failure for consuming the time and Mana of local mages without coming to any firm conclusions. Time's been kinder to the Mysterium master; his research is now seen as proof that Banisher Awakenings have distinct qualities. They spread from one witch hunter to another, but can also arise spontaneously. Banishers can display impressive magical skills without formal tutelage and without even consciously desiring power.

Some sorcerers are tempted to call it a disease. This opinion is especially prevalent in the Free Council. Libertines sometimes call Banisher traits a "destructive set of magical memes." In other words, the Banisher perspective is infectious psychic disease. Susceptible

people unconsciously adopt the traits, and when such people do Awaken, *must* do so as Banishers.

The problem with this theory can be found in Angela von Richter's testimony. She insisted that she made a conscious decision to become a Banisher. Other Banishers have said similar things. They could have ignored or fought the signs and urges, but at some point, they were forced to take a stand. This is one of many reasons why most mages reject the meme-disease theory. There might be powerful psychic forces pressuring a potential Banisher, but in the end, he decides that magic should die.

Still, there is some dark spark in the human soul that turns a few Awakenings into intolerable torture.

Choices and Consequences

Mage's objective position is that Banishers choose their lot. Mysterious forces may *pressure* potential Banishers, but they still have as much free will as anyone else. Banishers are morally culpable for their actions.

In Sleeper society, powerful social forces and traumatic upbringings pressure people to victimize others, but most murderers and abusers can still tell the difference between right and wrong. The potential for wrongdoing is there, but they choose to cross the line. They might make the decision thoughtlessly, but the moral consequences fall squarely on their own shoulders. Banishers face a similar situation. To a potential Banisher, magic *looks* corrupt and becomes the subject of a creeping obsession, but the person still has the power to judge magic and mages by their works.

Of course, it's possible that Banishers don't really have free will. Maybe *nobody* has free will and they're only the sum of their genes and upbringing, but **Mage** assumes otherwise. Of course, Storytellers could decide that

Banishers really don't have a choice. The meme-disease is just too powerful. If you go this route, Banishers are victims, not villains. Change the tone of your chronicle accordingly.

By default, Banishers symbolize moral failure and a lack of vision: distrust so intense that it denies compassion to an entire class of people (mages and to a lesser extent, other supernatural beings). Change the element of free will and you change the symbolism. It's up to you.

It isn't a cultural phenomenon, because even though stereotypical Banishers use Christian justifications like, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," there are just as many mage-hunters in societies that embrace magic. There are Taoist Banishers who think mages pollute the spiritual landscape but approve of their own religion's explicitly magical (but non-Supernal) rites. Whatever the cause, it's universal.

The Concordance Theory

Decades later, the aged Anchouros drew on history, occult theory and his previous work to develop a comprehensive, hypothetical narrative of the origin and nature of the Banishers. Other mages had explored many of these ideas before, but the end products were scattered throughout Athenaea and caucuses. He aimed to create a comprehensive, standard text.

Before he disappeared in 1955, he sent an untitled concordance of his work to a dozen fellow mystagogues around the world. (There's also a story that he sent a *longer* concordance filled with dangerous secrets to the Guardians of the Veil, but they won't confirm or deny that.) These 12 added their own marginalia and research, creating the *Banisher Concordances*.

Mages from all orders have edited and added to the concordances so that, nowadays, no two are the same. A *Concordance* usually includes descriptions of Banisher tactics, outlines of useful rites and copies of hundreds of source documents, organized around the nucleus of Anchouros's theory. That fills about a thousand pages on its own, so *Concordances* aren't especially portable. Despite the length, however, the model educated mages call the Concordance Theory can be boiled down into these points:

The Timori were Natural Ones and prophets.

Anchouros believed that the Timori were "Natural Ones" of myth *and* prophets — that a capacity for the latter led ancient mages to join the former. The sect believed in passivity and natural cycles. They had a special capacity for sensing the presence of the Supernal in the world and were content to meditate upon it, but thought that actually channeling its power was blasphemy. They opposed Atlantis's rising power because they viewed the cosmos in a holistic fashion. If part of it was thrown out of balance, it would only right itself through a terrible catastrophe.

The Timori passed on their traditions through a supernatural bond.

The Concordance Theory uses Atlantean legendry and modern evidence to support the idea that the



Timori passed on the heart of their teaching without words, detailed theories or grimoires. The ultimate secret lay within the Timori's indescribable sense of the cosmic balance. Over time, teacher and student would enter a psychic and karmic synchronicity. The student shared the teacher's understanding.

People who would have been Timori before the Fall become Banishers when they witness the Abyss.

After the Fall of Atlantis, people with the capacity to become Timori *can't* bear witness to a holistic cosmos, because the cosmos is broken. The Fallen World is a distorted shadow of the distant Supernal Realms, too empty to draw a mystic's rapture. Souls with a "Timori nature" don't have the forceful, ambitious characters of most mages. They can't pierce the Lie to touch the Supernal Realms. Before the Fall, the Supernal was immanent in the world, so this wasn't a problem, but now, there's only one way Timori souls can touch the truth: forcible exposure. That exposure invariably reveals the Abyss.

When a Sleeper with a Timori soul witnesses vulgar magic, he senses something powerful and vivid beyond the veil of matter. His soul opens itself up to receiving that which its nature instinctively understands — and the Abyss pours in. Instead of witnessing a balanced universe, the soul experiences imbalance, mockery, falsity and hatred for everything that exists. Banishers Awaken with souls scarred by the impression that magic is inherently bound to corrupt. They feel an innate revulsion for magic, but also a perverse desire, because in spite of the Abyss, a spell creates a temporary joining of the worlds: the holistic experience his Timori soul was born to desire.

Banishers also Awaken through a corrupted version of the original Timori bond.

If someone with a Timori soul spends enough time with an Awakened Banisher, the one with the Timori soul will eventually achieve spiritual synchronicity with the Banisher. Any mage can hate and betray the rest, but only Banishers feel an inherent revulsion for the Awakened and their works. This spite can't be justified by words alone but by a powerful joining of souls. Mere physical proximity isn't enough, however. The "student" and "teacher" must form a genuine sympathetic bond. If the "student" is truly receptive, she shares the Banisher's horror and becomes a Banisher herself. Anchouros thought that Banishers form cults to extend the bond by focusing power on a shared identity. Based on his studies of Angela von Richter, he believed that a dedicated cult could share magical knowledge unconsciously instead of studying Arcana in a systematic fashion.

Banishers can't Awaken any other way.

Anchouros believed that if a Timori's soul reached beyond the Lie the soul's owner could either Awaken as a Banisher or turn her back on magic completely. There's little evidence for this either way. While there are no reliable accounts of Banisher "rehabilitation," there's also no way to track souls who might have become Banishers but rejected the Mysteries instead. It's a politically troublesome aspect of the theory because it means that the Wise can use it to justify killing Banishers out of hand. After all, they can't be "cured."

Evidence

Banishers have always existed, everywhere. It's a clear sign of some universal principle at work. No mage has ever successfully rehabilitated a Banisher either, indicating an enmity that goes deeper than ordinary fear or ideological differences. It might be as irreversible as the theory claims.

The Concordance Theory also matches evidence drawn from hundreds of sources, providing a consistent explanation for all of the evidence. This applies equally to the ancient Timori and modern Banisher cells. The theory explains phenomena that Anchouros witnessed himself. It explains how Banishers learn the Art without conscious effort and why they Awaken in "outbreaks."

Anchouros found a definite correlation between vulgar magic and Banisher activity. It could be argued that vulgar magic merely brings Banishers out into the open, but he did trace individual Awakenings to witnessing vulgar spells. This confirmed a number of informal traditions that held that Banishers were "born of Paradoxes." Guardians of the Veil find this aspect especially appealing, because it bolsters support for their traditional disdain for the trivial use of vulgar spells.

Flaws

Are there innate, unalterable differences between souls? Some mages believe this question can't be answered, so any theory that depends on such a question is, at best, highly speculative. The idea that some people are fated to either become Banishers or stay Asleep is widely contested, even by mages who support the rest of the theory. There's no way of knowing the truth.

Others question the Concordance Theory's grandiosity, because it tries to explain everything from the ancient Timori to the "infectious" nature of Banisher

Awakenings. Is it all really necessary to explain the Banishers, or does it all come from Anchouros's desire to justify his obsession? But simplicity isn't a virtue among sorcerers because they know for a fact that Occam's Razor is wrong. The occult universe is driven by complex phenomena and invisible entities. It only *looks* simple.

Broken Awakenings: The Spiritual Pathology Theory

Mages who prefer a more intimate theory believe Timori narratives are attempts to shoehorn unrelated groups of ancient and even apocryphal mages into one recurring occult thread. "Timori" is nothing more than a translation of a general Atlantean epithet for political dissidents, eccentrics and the insane. This group *might* include people whom modern mages would identify as Banishers, but taking up a Banisher's mission is ultimately a personal affair, caused by an Awakening gone wrong. The Mysterium formally calls the position the Spiritual Pathology Theory, but most mages just refer to "damaged" or "fearful" Awakenings.

The theory's a popular one because it's easy to grasp and rings true when mages compare it with their own experiences. Awakening is a significant ordeal so the average sorcerer can easily imagine it going awry. Furthermore, there's room for the theory because nobody really knows what happens to people who "fail" their Awakening trials. After all, the society of the Wise has an inherent selection bias because it's composed only of people who crossed the threshold and accepted their power. The theory also attracts supporters because it lays the blame for being a Banisher squarely at the feet of the Banishers themselves. Virtually every mage who's had to deal with Banishers despises them. Why would mages support a sympathetic explanation? Typical arguments for the Spiritual Pathology Theory cover the following points:

Banishers begin their Awakenings like any other mage.

Banishers Awaken just like everyone else. Their souls climb the same Watchtowers, and Banishers encounter the same mix of personal and occult symbolism. The fact that most Banishers describe their Awakenings as an involuntary experience is not because it's any different from anyone else's but because people whose Awakenings go wrong are more likely to be blind to early signs of spiritual change. They have tripped and fallen into enlightenment and can't see the way out, because they never saw they way *in*.

Banishers are tested and found wanting.

Awakenings include conflicts and conundrums. Moral questions, logic problems, physical ordeals and other challenges await people according to their own spiritual needs. Banishers don't completely reject their own Awakenings at first (otherwise, they wouldn't Awaken at all), but some aspect proves to be too much for Banishers to handle. They can't face the truths buried within their own souls, or revelations about the nature of reality clash with beliefs they refuse to abandon. Whatever the cause, they make critical mistakes. They ignore spirit guides, fail riddles and profane altars constructed within their own souls. As a result, they write distorted versions of their names on the Watchtowers. These marks represent a Banisher's fears and mistakes instead of the highest expression of her spirit.

Banishers' magic causes them spiritual torment.

A Banisher believes that magic is sinful for no reason other than his spells reflect his own sins. They cross the Abyss through a broken name: the essence of the Banisher's personal failings. To a Banisher, channeling magical power invokes a revolting sensation. It changes from spell to spell and Banisher to Banisher, but could include nausea, recall of past traumas and even psychotic fugues.

When a spiritually healthy mage concentrates on a spell's Imago, she takes refuge in the name on her Watchtower. The name represents the sorcerer at her finest and presupposes the ability to perform wonders, prevail over doubt and change the world. A Banisher weaves his failings into an Imago; his Watchtower name is responsive only to unhealthy emotions because these are the links of a chain that connects him to the higher world. This also explains why Banishers assume that sorcerers are immoral. A Banisher will find it easiest to cast spells when he's consumed by rage, fear, shame and other emotions that typically trigger immoral acts. More than one witch hunter is on a mission of penitence after casting spells in anger, killing a lover or ruining a friend's life. Banishers must assume that *all* magic works this way — that all mages draw forth power by recalling their dark urges and failures, and all spells contain the same foul Resonance as a Banisher's own.

Banishers' actions arise from ignorance and transferred self-hatred.

Banishers assume that magic is as painful for other mages as it is for Banishers and must be an evil force. Mages who appear to be at peace with Supernal ener-

gies are obviously so depraved that they're incapable of feeling remorse for their (presumed) crimes. Banishers have only their own broken perspectives to work from — how could they believe otherwise?

The theory says that there's no small amount of envy involved. They hate normal mages for being able to harness Awakening without fear. Deep down inside, Banishers *must* know that it all comes from their own inadequacies. They want to eliminate the sorcerers whose very existence lays bare the fact that every Banisher is essentially a half-mad failure.

Evidence

The most compelling evidence there is for Spiritual Pathology is that Banishers do, one and all, describe Awakening as a disturbing event. They never describe the sense of bliss, inner peace or satisfaction that most new sorcerers usually experience after climbing the Watchtower. Even mages who complete the darkest mystery plays feel at least a selfish sense of empowerment after Awakening, but Banishers never do.

For instance, a Banisher and an Adamantine Arrow both experience Awakenings in which they're cast into some Astral hell. The Arrow fights his way past demons to salvation, pledging his life to serve the angels he finds at the end of his quest. The Banisher endures a subjective lifetime of torture instead. He escapes only by agreeing to do Satan's work and signing a contract in blood. Afterward, the Banisher feels guilty for what he's done and asks God for forgiveness, but feels no response. The Devil felt real, but God felt as distant as a fleeting fancy.

The theory is also accurate when it comes to describing how Banishers experience spellcasting. Captured Banishers have said they return to a tormented scene from their Awakening when they cast spells, or that they must visualize a past moral transgression. Some even say that their magic comes from demons that whisper in their minds. They must appease or overpower the demons to cast spells. A few have reported nothing specific but have been wracked with psychosomatic illnesses.

Flaws

Banishers have remarkably consistent core behaviors — too consistent for an explanation that depends on an intensely personal experience. Every Awakening is unique, including those that feature failure and disturbing motifs. It seems to stretch credulity to say that every single one would result in a Banisher's obses-

sions. Adherents say that the Mad represent another variety of the same spiritual disease. Banishers might be nothing more than a subset of the Mad, but in that case, why do Banishers stand apart as a bloc, with cults and common goals?

Banisher cults are problematic in other ways. If Banishers hate and envy other mages, why don't they attack each other as frequently as they do Pentacle sorcerers? Banishers fight each other over wealth, love and envy, but they rarely group their own in with the enemy. Banishers might band together under a shared philosophy, but as they rarely trust what other mages have to say about themselves, why would Banishers believe each other?

Unwitting Servants

Some mages think that the Banishers unknowingly serve Exarchs or Abyssal entities. There isn't much scholarship to support the idea; sorcerers are more likely to talk about it at a party than before a council of mystagogues. The idea isn't held in high esteem, but that hasn't killed it because Banishers have, at times, cooperated with the Seers of the Throne and Abyss-worshipping cults.

Adherents believe that their enemies intervene in Banisher Awakenings, spiritually "programming" Banishers to hate magic and recognize each other. Some think that Timori mythology is irrelevant; others believe the legends are false. They exist to deceive mages and push Banishers under a common banner. The theory has many variations, but they usually fit in the following categories:

Banishers serve the lords of the Abyss.

Banishers serve the Abyss to sweep away anyone capable of defeating the Void, once it breaks through to material reality. Mages can bind, dismiss and destroy Abyssal beings, making them primary targets. The Abyss creates Banishers by flooding their Awakenings with terror and corruption.

Banishers serve the Exarchs.

The Exarchs use the Banishers to complement Seers of the Throne. Seers hide and regulate magic to benefit their masters, and Banishers destroy whatever goes astray. The Banishers also keep the Seers occupied with the Fallen World, lest they look up in envy at the Exarchs' Supernal fastnesses. The Exarchs add subconscious directives to Banisher Awakenings, forever compelling them to hate the Awakened and their works.

Banishers serve the Abyss and the Exarchs.

A few mages say that Abyssal entities and Exarchs both exploit a common vulnerability in a mage's soul journey. At some point during Awakening, it's possible to twist a Banisher's soul. Banishers aren't programmed with specific marching orders, but their condition furthers the agendas of both powers.

Evidence

There's scant evidence of a link between the Banishers and the Exarchs. The Seers of the Throne are especially talented at staying out of the Banishers' line of fire. Seers have even directed witch hunters to Pentacle targets. This doesn't prove anything more than the fact that the Seers of the Throne are especially skilled social manipulators. Nevertheless, Banishers are effective wardens of the Lie. Their hate for magic serves the Exarchs' agenda so effectively that some believe that they made the existence of Banishers a supernatural law, woven into the structure of the Fallen World.

Evidence for a link between Banishers and the Abyss is also hard to come by, but the fact that Banishers seem to multiply in the presence of Paradoxes and Abyssal incursions leads many to believe that Banishers' twisted Awakenings are extensions of the Abyss. Perhaps they belong to some "anti-Watchtower" with an inherent antipathy for magic. There have been Banishers who've served the Lords from Beyond, too, though this may only show that witch hunters are as susceptible to temptation as other mages.

Flaws

Banishers hunt Seers and Scelesti as ardently as other Awakened. Worse yet, Banishers view the world with a sense of distrust that makes them poor servants of any conspiracy. They know that magical power infests secret places and high offices, enslaving normal people to its charms and torments. Banishers hate that. Banishers aren't immune to corruption, but unlike the Scelesti, Seers of the Throne or their toadies, cultists and dupes, magic itself holds no mystique for Banishers. It's an evil force that needs to be destroyed. A demon might seduce a Banisher with promises of "fighting fire with fire," but the idea of using magic to become powerful, wealthy, healthy or sexually satisfied is so repellent to Banishers that the world's occult tempters can't take Banishers in with the usual methods.

Becoming a Banisher

A mage's Awakening can be terrifying, awe-inspiring or even joyous. Some mages look back on their Awakenings as nightmares, while others wish they could return to the Supernal Realm that they glimpsed oh-so-briefly, to unravel a riddle or vanquish a personal Questing Beast. Whatever a mage's experiences during the Awakening, almost all mages agree: that was the day it all really began.

A Banisher might say, however, that the day she Awakened was the day it all really ended.

No matter how a Banisher interprets the Awakening, no matter whether a Banisher understands (or buys into) stories about the Timori, the fact remains that the Banisher Awakening is a true phenomenon among mages. It has some common elements, no matter which of the five towers the mage visits, but as with all Awakenings, a Banisher Awakening is highly personal.

This section discusses the process of becoming a Banisher, starting with the Awakening. It seeks to answer the question, "What does a mage experience that drives him to believe that magic must be banished?" As discussed previously in this chapter, Banishers Awaken spontaneously, without contact with other Banishers, but at the same time, these fanatics *can*, apparently, create others of their kind. While the indoctrination practices of individual cults and cabals are highly personalized (and many examples can be found in Chapter Three of this book), it is possible to draw some generalities, and this section seeks to do so.

Pre-Awakening Banishers

It's easy to pin it on some glitch in the Awakening, or something that they saw after they visited the Watchtower, or whatever, but I think it goes deeper than that. It goes further back. In the case studies I've read — about 200 at this point — it always strikes me that either we don't know anything about a Banisher's early life or we find some supernatural meddling. It's not always us, the Awakened, you know, but it's always something vicious or spiteful or just plain selfish.

My hypothesis, and I'm still collecting data, mind, is that whether someone Awakens as a Banisher has to do with first contact with the supernatural (and please note, I didn't say "Supernal"). That contact can happen long before the Awakening.

—Occam, Mastigos of the Free Council and member of the Uncrowned Kings

It is possible that the foundation for a Banisher Awakening is laid long before the soul's journey across the Abyss actually takes place. Mages who study this phenomenon — sometimes called the “First Contact Hypothesis” or “FCH” — take the time to investigate who Banishers were before they took action against their fellow Awakened. These mages find that Banishers experienced supernatural occurrences pre-Awakening often, or at least often enough to give them pause.

A problem with this hypothesis, of course, is finding enough data to support it. This requires learning details about the lives of people who are generally unwilling to talk to mages, especially about the private facts of their childhood. Likewise, different mystagogues don't always have recognized, operational definitions for “supernatural experience.” Is seeing a ghost a supernatural experience? What about *believing* one has seen a ghost (as many Sleepers, most incorrectly, do)?

Proponents of the hypothesis usually state that for a supernatural experience to have an adverse effect on a potential Awakening, the experience has to fulfill three criteria: it has to be invasive, harmful and damaging.

Invasive Experiences

An *invasive* run-in with the supernatural means that the creature(s) in question attacked or otherwise molested the victim personally. The victim was not merely a witness to, say, a werewolf tearing someone apart in a frenzy or a vampire draining the blood from a helpless person (although if the victim in either case were a close relative or loved one, the attack would probably fall under the definition of “invasive” that proponents of the FCH use). What matters is that the victim is directly, personally affected by the event, rather than being a passive witness in no real danger.

The supernatural leaves indelible marks on a person. Mages understand the concept of Resonance, the notion that every action, every thought, leaves an imprint upon the Fallen World. The FCH states that even after Resonance that a mage could trace has long faded, the results of a truly invasive supernatural contact remain. A person takes them with her across the Abyss during the Awakening, and these subtle remnants of the contact affect the connection of the newly Awakened person's soul to the Watchtower. This, the hypothesis goes, can propel the mage toward being a Banisher.

Harmful Experiences

An invasive brush with the supernatural isn't necessarily harmful. A mage might use Life magic to heal a Sleeper injured beyond normal repair, and that experience would certainly be invasive, but it helps the Sleeper. For a Banisher Awakening to occur, the potential mage must come to some harm from the supernatural pre-Awakening. The experience must leave her worse off than she was before the supernatural intervened. Perhaps the victim develops a derangement, even if that derangement is later cured. Perhaps she develops a Flaw such as *Lame*, or perhaps she merely suffers a few points of damage. The specifics in terms of game mechanics don't matter, because injuries don't simply fade away as the marks on the character sheet are erased. The victim remembers the beast's teeth sinking in or the mage sifting through her thoughts like a prospector looking for gold.

Damaging Experiences

At first glance, “harmful” and “damaging” might seem to be synonymous. Damage, though, implies that the victim's brush with the supernatural has left a lasting and deleterious effect. Contact with the supernatural that leaves the character a complete amnesiac, unable to remember the experience but for a period of “lost time,” probably wasn't damaging enough to push an Awakening mage toward being a Banisher. But if the “lost time” leaves the victim with nightmares for the rest of his adult life, he might well be in danger of a Banisher Awakening.

Many supernatural creatures routinely inflict bodily harm upon Sleepers, but to qualify as a “damaging experience, the “damage” doesn't have to be physical. Many denizens of the World of Darkness are capable of inflicting lasting mental, emotional or spiritual pain without even scratching the victim's body. Some creatures can enter a victim's dreams and drive him slowly mad. A vampire might cause a Sleeper to fall desperately in love with the undead creature, a feeling that wears off in a few days. What, then, is the Sleeper's emotional state? Confused, angry and self-doubting, he carries this uncertainty with him for the rest of his life. If he then Awakens to Stygia, for instance, he sees other walking dead, and the conflict tears him apart. It's not hard to see how he could generalize his lingering mistrust and hatred to all things magical.

It follows, then, that a person possessed of a very strong will might be able to tolerate supernatural contact to a greater degree before being at risk for a Banisher

Awakening, but there is no way to test this notion, and no way to use it even if it is true. All that mages can do is check into the backgrounds of known Banishers (often posthumously), or regard with suspicion those Awakened that the mages know to have had contact with the supernatural before Awakening. Of course, not everyone who suffers at the hands of the bizarre inhabitants of the World of Darkness winds up a Banisher (or else Banishers would be much more common), and so these tendencies serve as tools to help gather more information, rather than as predictive indicators.

The Blinding Awakening

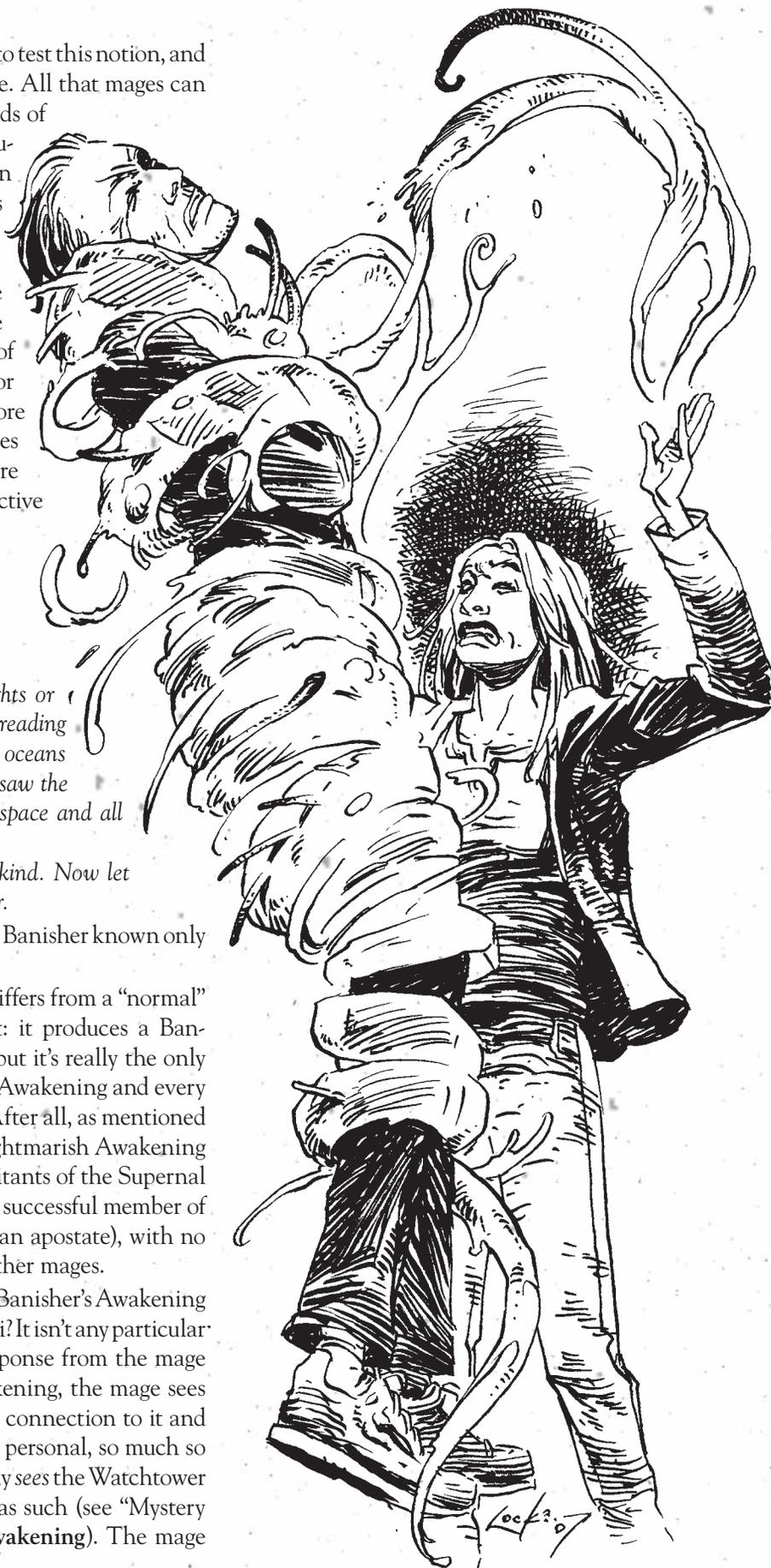
I didn't see a tower or any lights or angels. I saw fire. I saw fire spreading across the world, eating up the oceans and burning the moon to soot. I saw the fire consuming the blackness of space and all the worlds beyond.

You're the fire. You and your kind. Now let me up before we all burn together.

—Conversation with captive Banisher known only as "Pelt"

The Banishing Awakening differs from a "normal" Awakening in one main facet: it produces a Banisher. This may seem obvious, but it's really the only point on which every standard Awakening and every Banisher Awakening diverge. After all, as mentioned earlier, a mage might have a nightmarish Awakening and develop a fear of the inhabitants of the Supernal Realm that he saw but still be a successful member of one of the five orders (or even an apostate), with no homicidal tendencies toward other mages.

What, then, happens during a Banisher's Awakening that drives her toward the Timori? It isn't any particular event or being but rather a response from the mage herself. During a normal Awakening, the mage sees the Supernal Realm, forges the connection to it and returns. The vision is intensely personal, so much so that not every mage even actually sees the Watchtower and the Realm surrounding it as such (see "Mystery Plays," p. 31 of *Mage: The Awakening*). The mage



sees the cosmos *as it relates to her*, forging a personal connection between herself and the universe. From the perspective of magic, this makes a great deal of sense — the mage is able to draw down the natural laws of the Supernal Realms through the Abyss and into the Fallen World, and this is possible because the mage has a limited view of all three places. If the mage understood all of these places as a whole, saw how they fit together, would she still be able to perform magic? Would she have the will to do it?

Taking the Banishers as evidence, the answer is, “Yes, but only to ultimately prevent magic from ever being used again.”

A human being cannot stand to see herself in perspective to the rest of the universe. The shock of standing next to something as large and awe-inspiring as the Grand Canyon or the Atlantic Ocean is humbling. What, then, is the effect of witnessing the savage beauty of the Primal Wild, or the blinding light of the Aether? It would drive a person mad, no matter how enlightened, and this is why most mages don't see all of it. But this kind of total perspective is, perhaps, the curse of the Timori. They see too much, and they come to one inescapable conclusion: it's all working in concert. The vastness of reality doesn't *need* meddling from mages, and in fact, this is dangerous. Doing so could bring it all crumbling down.

Of course, most Banishers can't present their thoughts in this kind of context. They only know that magic is dangerous or “wrong,” but they often place the reasons for this within their own preexisting worldviews. A deeply devout Christian might settle on the old Biblical notion about not suffering witches to live. A physicist might make up a grand theory about Conservation of Reality, and carefully balance every spell he casts with some other action meant to “put something back.” Once in a great while, a Banisher understands why she has the reaction that she does. These highly enlightened souls are the most dangerous of Banishers, because they don't bother with trappings of religion, science, culture or any other pastime. They work quickly and efficiently to kill as many mages as possible.

Refusal to Awaken

Is it possible to reach the Watchtower but consciously refuse to sign one's name, or otherwise make one's mark? Most mages believe that if someone were to go through the mystery play or the Astral journey and arrive at the Watchtower, climb it, but then refuse to sign it, that person has demonstrated that she is strong

and capable but not ready or willing to Awaken. Such people become Sleepwalkers.

That's one possibility, of course, and it's one that mages enjoy because it paints the people who refuse to sign as something other than complete weaklings, and also because it paints *them* as truly strong and persistent (since they had the fortitude to sign the Watchtower). But the truth is that other possibilities exist.

One is simply going back to Sleep. The person winds up looking at the whole ordeal as little more than a dream, and doesn't wind up with any particular insight into the universe. Such people usually don't make it to the Watchtower — they quit or fail at the mystery play long before that stage of the journey is reached. Such a person is likely to unconsciously avoid the supernatural in his life afterwards. Effects such as Disbelief and other supernatural phenomena that block Sleepers' minds from experiencing the truth might have a slightly more pronounced effect on such people.

The other option, though, is that the mage *does* Awaken, but as a Banisher. She refuses to forge the connection with the Supernal Realm, but the connection exists nonetheless. She can perform magic, but she never quite accepts it in the same way that other mages do. This doesn't mean anything in terms of the game systems of magic use; the character is a Banisher, and all of the rules presented in this book apply normally. All it means is that the character has a healthy dose of self-loathing where magic is concerned. She feels, perhaps rightly, that this curse was thrust upon her, and even outright refusing to accept it did not change her fate. Such Banishers don't tend to live very long. They often burn out during the course of their crusade to eradicate magic, usually in a spectacular and deadly fashion.

Supposedly, a third option exists, one that is also relevant to the Banishers. The mage refuses to forge the connection to the Supernal Realm, but cannot return to the Fallen World. Lost in the higher planes, the person's soul eventually winds up drifting between the Supernal Realms like a virus in the body of the universe. Sooner or later, the universe responds, either absorbing the person into the fabric of time and space or sending him hurtling back toward the Fallen World.

Of course, getting to the Fallen World requires traversing the Abyss, and someone who has refused to Awaken doesn't always have the fortitude to do so. Sometimes, unAwakened voyagers are pulled down into the blackness of the void, keeping company with the strange beings

that dwell there. It might seem that these creatures would be hostile to the person, but in fact, he *chose* Quiescence over Awakening. The sympathy with the Abyss that all Sleepers share rings true for him, and the creatures of the Abyss exult him. They return him to the Fallen World, unharmed in body and mind, but forever tainted with the touch of the Abyss. For all practical purposes, he is a Sleepwalker, but such beings often acquire the Abyssal Resonance Merit as well (see p. 39).

Early Experiences as a Mage

“Dear psychotic, delusional bastards:

I’m out. I’m out of the Arrow, I’m out of the Angels, I’m out of this nest of vipers on acid. You’re all crazy. You’ve been handed enough rope to hang yourselves, and instead of saying, ‘Wow, this is rope, maybe we shouldn’t put it around our necks,’ you’re all just arguing over the best tree to use. I’m sorry I didn’t see it before I went through your super-secret initiation into your super-secret club, with your stupid superhero nicknames and everything, but I am fucking off right now.

Don’t worry. You’ll probably see me again.

— Steven Callahan

P.S. You’ll notice I used my real name. That’s because I don’t have delusions of grandeur that the whole universe thinks I’m so important that I’d better take another name, just in case!”

— Letter discovered by the Guardian Angels cabal in Cincinnati, Ohio, after the disappearance of a new recruit

Some people just can’t cope with life as a mage. Is it because they were born to be Banishers, or because they simply can’t reconcile who they were with who they have become?

This debate is central to many debates, among Consilii, orders and cabals, about the Banishers. Are they a product of their environment, as it were, or were they fated to become what they are? Some mages find the notion that any mage *could* become a Banisher far too uncomfortable to confront. Others feel exactly the same way about the idea that a Banisher was born what he is, because that would mean that identifying a Banisher would necessitate killing or isolating him.

In any event, not all Banishers come out of their Awakenings looking for other mages to murder. Some join orders and even cabals, and function for years in Awakened society without letting their proclivities rule them. The signs are there, though they’re usually visible only in hindsight. As with human serial killers, associates tend to mention how the Banisher was “quiet” and “kept to himself.”

What experiences in a mage’s career, then, might lead him to become a Banisher or finally decided to express his desires violently?

Trappings of Mage Society

As Mr. Callahan mentions in his letter to his (former) cabal, Awakened society has some aspects that the average person might find a little... silly. Mages use pseudonyms drawn from mythology and other, stranger sources to mask their identities, but many don’t take other steps to conceal their real names (wearing disguises, varying routines, etc.) and so the exercise is largely symbolic. Mages have secret councils, organizations and laws that exist outside of the larger population, which they derisively call “Sleepers,” and treat their own societal concerns as though they were of the gravest import. It’s easy to see how someone who doesn’t buy into the Consilium setup might find the whole thing laughable.

But then again, mages really *do* use magic. Their society isn’t built on faith or shared delusion, no matter what one thinks about Atlantis. Their society is built on objective truth — magic works, and it works better through prescribed practice (that is, rites, which are in turn taught by orders, and so on). The society wasn’t crafted artificially, but developed over thousands of years. Therefore, while it might seem silly to someone who cannot, by dint of a flawed Awakening, appreciate the cornerstone of the society (magic), the trappings of the Wise are important in their own way. The fault lies with the Banisher, not with the society.

(And incidentally, it isn’t always Banishers who find Awakened life a bit strange for their tastes. Some mages choose to remain apostates and solitaries, cut off from the Wise because they don’t relish the notion of being beholden to that society for all time. Those mages are the first targets of investigation when allegations of Banisher activity come up.)

Nests of Vipers

Quite apart from Awakened society, some mages just can’t handle the Awakened themselves. Mages have the potential to be benevolent, ambitious and, of course, wise. Not all are, however.

One mage, upon leaving his Consilium in disgust, compared mages to people who win millions in a lottery. People who are fundamentally miserable, selfish and unpleasant before being handed a fortune remain so afterwards. Likewise, people who are happy, productive and altruistic with no money keep those qualities once rich. The Awakening, he said, is much the same. A

complete scoundrel who Awakens is now a complete scoundrel... with magic. This is intuitive by itself, but the complaint of this particular mage (now a Banisher) was that Awakened society treats all mages as though they were good, noble and wise people. It was because the "gift" of Awakening was indiscriminate and was recognized unconditionally that he decided it needed to be removed entirely.

Horrors of the World of Darkness

It is virtually impossible to grow up in modern society and not have at least heard of vampires, werewolves, ghosts and so on. Most cultures have their own strange legends, and even a child raised on the blandest diet of consumerized pseudo-entertainment has some context for the supernatural. When a mage Awakens, though, he begins to learn the truth — these creatures *do* exist, they are all around us and they feed upon us, one way or another.

And, for some mages, the fact that the Awakened haven't risen up en masse and eradicated these monsters is too much to swallow. It's easy to understand why: Consider a young Obrimos, placed under a mentor who is a Master of Forces and a member of the Guardians of the Veil. This older mage can create sunlight at will and, with enough help from other mages, could probably flood an area with this sunlight. Why not use this power to wipe out the vampires of the city? Why not coordinate the attack with other masters the world over and destroy as many of the parasites as possible? When the master won't even consider this option, only giving the student some half-baked excuse about vampires having "too much power" to take on in such a direct fashion, the student begins to feel that mages don't really *want* to change anything. They're part of this bizarre world of the arcane, after all. They're monsters, too.

This only becomes worse if the student has direct experience with such a beast. Consider a young mage who happens across a man being pulled through a sewer grate, his bones cracking as his body compresses to fit. The mage can't save the man, but uses some spells to identify what is pulling the corpse into the darkness. He sees nothing but flesh — the creature isn't a horror from the Abyss or a shapeshifter, just an animal that science has no record of. Supernatural horror, the mage might be better prepared for, or at least he would be prepared for his ignorance. But creatures that prey on humanity, right here in the city, without anyone noticing? How is that possible? And again, *why aren't the Awakened doing anything?*

Yeah, Why Aren't They?

The reader might well be sympathizing with the hypothetical Banisher at this point — mages have the capacity to identify and destroy the more dangerous beings in the World of Darkness, so why don't they? There are several factors at work here, though. One is that, often, mages *do* combat these forces. The mages of the Adamantine Arrow and the Guardians of the Veil work, using very different methods, to protect Sleepers from the supernatural. The Free Council subtly works to educate them. The Mysterium's body of knowledge helps arm mages against these threats, and the Silver Ladder provides the leadership mages need to make a solid front. The Awakened don't ignore threats from the World of Darkness; they just don't always respond as fast as they should.

The other consideration is that vampires, werewolves and many of the other creatures lurking in the dark have their own societies.

Vampires don't have magic, true, but they do tend to have their fingers tight around the throat of Sleeper society, and a mage cabal that goes after a vampire had better make damned sure it kills the right one (or *all*); else the mages might wake up to find the mortgages on their sanctums foreclosed and their names (real names!) on terrorist watch lists.

Because of this, and because mages don't generally understand the societies other creatures but *know* that they don't understand, the Awakened are loath to go in guns blazing (the same is true, of course, for other beings and their dealings with the Wise).

Finally, more experienced mages come to appreciate a subtle, but important point: just as the Awakened aren't made morally better or worse simply by dint of their condition, other once-human creatures aren't *necessarily* ravening monsters. Yes, a vampire is more dangerous by nature than a mage, but Awakened who have lived in the World of Darkness long enough have met vampires who seem to be getting along without causing death and misery at every opportunity.

Thus, killing them off indiscriminately is foolish, unnecessary and, frankly, monstrous — exactly what a Wise individual should be trying to avoid.

The Matter of Paradox

Paradox is a fact of life for the Awakened, but some mages just can't seem to get their minds around it. If magic is natural, if it's appropriate, then why does the universe shun it? Why is the simplest Paradox to achieve — Havoc — the one that has the most potential for forcing the mage to shoot himself in the foot, so to speak? Other Paradoxes are potentially more damaging, but losing control of a spell means that what happens is still on the mage's head. And containing a Paradox in one's own Pattern seems to these mages as a further perversion of the natural order, an attempt to shamefully hide what was done.

A further problem with Paradox, and one not lost on the mages who obsess over it, is that Paradoxes get worse, not better, as a mage grows in power. If Paradox is the universe's control method and ultimately kills or cripples the mage, why not save some time?

Banisher Infection

"Lately, he's been checking his email compulsively."

The police had already finished their investigations. I knew they wouldn't find anything. I was talking to the widow. She was a Sleepwalker, thank God. She knew about Hatter's life among the Awakened, which made questioning her a lot easier.

"Do you know why?"

"No. I know he was corresponding with another... one of you, but he never said who."

I frowned. "Where's his computer now?" I didn't wait for an answer. I went back into the bedroom and stared at the bloodstain a while longer. "Shit."

"What's wrong?" She was scared. I don't blame her. I can't imagine how powerless she must feel. I decide to be straight with her.

"This isn't Hatter's blood. I don't think your husband's dead." I raise a hand to shush her. "But I don't think he's really your husband anymore, either."

Do Banishers choose their lot, or is the Banisher mindset a contagion? The question of whether Banishers have any real choice in what they do is one for your chronicle (and is discussed in that context on p. 24).

To the mages who study the Banisher phenomenon, though, it does seem that prolonged contact with Banishers and their magic can be infectious. This contact has to include the exchange of information — a phone call or an Internet conversation can apparently infect a susceptible mage, but if the mage never speaks to or listens to a Banisher, there is no risk. Cabals that battle or might conceivably wind up battling Banishers some-

times enact protective "scrambler" spells that garble any incoming information. This makes coordination in the field difficult, but it does, supposedly, afford a measure of protection.

Susceptibility is a hot issue among mages with an interest in the Banishers. It's possible, clearly, to study Banishers and even converse with them without becoming one, but then, some mages have a conversation completely unrelated to magic or philosophy, and they're murdering (or just leaving) their cabals a week later. What makes a mage vulnerable? A list of potential "warning signs" that various orders have identified follows:

- Mage expresses dissatisfaction with the local Consilium or mage society in general.
- Mage exhibits unwillingness to learn or use magic.
- Mage seems unable to master basic Practices in his Ruling Arcana.
- Mage has had prolonged contact with non-Awakened supernatural creatures, either before or immediately following Awakening.
- Mage was the target of a recruitment attempt by the Seers of the Throne.
- Mage shows a great interest in the Tremere, the Scelesti or any other Left-Handed Legacy.
- Mage shows a marked difficulty in learning High Speech.
- Mage has ever been possessed by a spirit or otherwise had his will subjugated by supernatural means.
- Mage makes a habit of containing Paradoxes within his body, even to the point of collapse.
- Mage has ever gained Mana via blood sacrifice.

Obviously, this list can be used as a political tool just as easily as a diagnostic one. "Banisher hysteria" crops up in Consilium circles occasionally, and as mentioned before, it's the mages who don't participate in Consilium matters at all (or enough) upon whom suspicion falls first. Cynics looking at this list remark that it might just as easily be used to ferret out "thought criminals" as Banishers.

But there's a reason for that, and it's not that the Banisher "condition" (whatever it truly is) results from deviance from the Atlantean norm. The reason is that Banishers find themselves repulsed by other mages, and so Banishers avoid mage societal trappings wherever possible. This also explains fascination with Left-Handed Legacies (and Seers, for that matter). It isn't that Banishers are necessarily attracted to these factions; Banishers are just looking for kindred spirits.

At the end of the day, magical practices that deviate from the “norm” won’t make someone a Banisher, but they might help to identify one, or a potential one.

Banishers, it might be said, don’t so much infect other mages as awaken the Banisher condition, if it already exists. The question, then, isn’t one of prevention but of resistance — what could be done for potential Banishers to prevent them from turning on the Awakened, even if these potential Banishers do wind up in contact with other Banishers? The question, unfortunately, doesn’t have an answer, as it would require an understanding of the Banisher condition that the Awakened don’t presently possess. The best they can do, for the moment, is be ever-vigilant and proactive in identifying Banishers before they kill.

Knowledge Like Poison

You think you can hide just because you know how to beat this world down with a few tricks. Most people can’t see what you really look like, under your skin. You fed the ones who could see the real you enough lies and bribes to turn them into fellow tricksters.

You think you can fool me by making your body look different, but you hurt me so bad that it sent me to the Other Place, away from my body and what you were doing. When I came back, I could see what you really looked like, all red smoke wisps grabbing at me and whatever you wanted.

I got older, ran away and saw more people like you, just shells of flesh over the red poison smoke. Some of the people with the mark weren’t much different from you. They wanted to do the same things to me that you did, but you taught me, the first time, how to get away from my body. Only difference is now, when I come back from the Other Place I bring the fire with me and I burn them.

I’ll burn them all until you’re the only one left, Dad. And then I’ll really hurt you.

— Angelo Baldacci’s blog

Whether Banishers suffer a psychic disease, choose their hatred or are the heirs of an ancient tradition does not change the basic characteristics of Banishers. They live in a state of spiritual agony, Awakened to an understanding of the world they find disgusting, yet illuminating. Never forget that, to a Banisher, casting all but the simplest extrasensory spells evokes shame and revulsion. One compares the sensation of casting Life Ruling magic to eating a bowl of live maggots. Another relives his mother’s slow, painful death from cancer because the vision is an integral part of each spell’s Imago.

It isn’t easy for other mages to understand the Banisher magical praxis. Banishers are capable of learning Atlantean rites, runes and order rites, but in many cases, Banishers learn the Art through religious and scientific metaphors combined with intuition. There’s even evidence that Banishers do not always *consciously* learn magic. Something in their obsessive mindset makes them sensitive to arcane currents and supernatural patterns so that their souls quietly learn to better harness Supernal power.

Banishers don’t have an easier time learning magic than other Awakened — quite the opposite, in fact. A Banisher’s intuitive abilities are a poor substitute for formal training. Therefore, while keeping grimoires and occult secrets out of the hands of Banishers slows down their progress, it can’t snuff it out. For the most part, Banishers have to find their own way through the Mysteries. If they survive for any length of time after Awakening, it’s almost always after finding other Banishers, codifying a collective worldview and sharing the crusade. Banisher cabals are true cults, fanatically devoted to a belief system that serves as the basis for understanding the universe — and a bulwark for members’ frayed sanity.

These are the basic facts. Let’s explore the details.

The Banisher Template

Mages who Awaken as Banishers (as opposed to those who turn to them after apprenticeship in another sect) use a modified version of the mage template (Step Five of **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 65), as the standard version assumes a certain degree of formal occult training. Banishers plunge from the fearful heights of their Watchtowers with little more than their convictions, Path-borne knowledge and raw Gnosis. With that in mind, apply the following adjustments and considerations to creating Banishers.

Banisher Paths

Let me tell you about the dream, and why we have to do this.

The dogs — the demons shaped like dogs — chased me up the mountain for what seemed like days. I was naked and covered in bloody wounds from their bites when they finally caught me at the summit. As they circled and waited for their meat, the clouds parted. I saw my nightmare.

It was untamed wilderness, so huge that I shouldn’t have been able to see it all, but I did, as if I had a hawk’s eyes. I saw men and animals coupling and things — hairy, lewd

beasts with hands like men's — ripping the living limbs from gazelles that screamed like little children. The grass drank the blood and laughed — grass laughed, rasping blades together. Somehow I could see the victims' pain flow out like wet gauze. Things I can't describe clawed their way through the underbrush to feast on it.

When I screamed, the dogs ran for me, and the other... things... came to suckle on my pain.

I still see them in the grass, in the trees and all those other wild places. That's nature. It hates us. It lives for our suffering. That's why the Lord gave man dominion over nature and why we'll strip mine that fucking mountain until it collapses.

— Don Whitfield, Thyrsus Banisher

Similar to all mages, Banishers Awaken with a special bond to one of the five Supernal Realms. Don't apply any special rules here. Banishers don't necessarily know anything about their own Path, much less the existence of all five, but any experienced witch hunter eventually picks up on the existence of rough divisions in attitude and magical ability. As noted above, this connection doesn't necessarily come with any sort of vision of the Watchtower or a sense of signing's one name, but the bond is present.

Ignorance doesn't make Banishers immune to the mental, emotional and spiritual currents of their Paths. Being an Acanthus or Obrimos is more than a facility for certain Arcana. It's a particular perspective on the world, informed by a Supernal Realm's influence on consciousness itself. Banishers are no different from other mages in this respect, but in most cases, Banishers will either harness their Paths' perspectives to make them better at attacking the enemy or do their best to deny everything their Paths stand for.

Where most mages basically trust their Path's influence, many Banishers do not. Some characterize it as a form of possession: an alien intelligence that distorts everything they see and feel. They monitor their thoughts for errant desires and resist the tendencies common to members of the Path. Banisher Acanthus struggle against destiny, and Obrimos are atheist skeptics, denying the divine presence in their lives.

Other Banishers either aren't conscious of the Path's influence or don't believe that it's inherently harmful. Not every Banisher objects to Awakening — just the study and practice of magic. In these cases, such Banishers turn the beliefs and talents of the Path to Banisher goals. Thyrsus Banishers with these tendencies terrorize mages who intrude on the wilderness or

Shadow Realm. Thyrsus Banishers retain an innate respect for nature and the spirits, but let it drive their witch-hunting strategy.

Acanthus

Acanthus Banishers who accept their Path are among the most dangerous enemies any mage could face. The Enchanter's fatalism manifests as fanatical fearlessness. When these Acanthus lead a cult, they pass on a belief in ironclad predestination. Their doctrine says that it's particularly blasphemous to manipulate Fate, though they'll make exceptions when they need to counter supernatural meddling.

Other Acanthus Banishers defy Fate. They believe that what sorcerers call "destiny" is nothing more than the product of supernatural schemes, perpetrated over generations. They postulate grand conspiracies, designed to control humanity's actions. They champion free will and attack supposed "Illuminati" and "Secret Masters." These Banishers' cults often use the trappings of self-help movements. Banisher gurus tell their followers that nothing — not social class, genetics or occult forces — can stop the truly dedicated from achieving their goals.

Mastigos

Among the Banishers, Mastigos are among the most compassionate, mild-mannered members. They saw passion-ravaged Pandemonium and decided that sin and desire should *not* be laid bare and twisted for a sorcerer's ends. Where most Mastigos tend to be arrogant and willful, Banishers try to save people from their own emotional turmoil. Even mages, caught up in the temptations of sorcery, deserve sympathy. Unrepentant sorcerers are slaves of their emotions. Banishers still need to oppose them, but many Mastigos refuse to let hate drive their mission. They pity the enemy. Of course, Mastigos Banishers rarely believe that mages can be cured of their madness. When Mastigos Banishers kill a mage, it's euthanasia.

Not all Mastigos Banishers are so modest. Some are as arrogant and manipulative as any other Warlock. They invariably ascribe to Manichean beliefs. Actions are right or wrong, good or evil. Other mages are enemies who deserve utter destruction because their very souls are tainted. Banishers and their helpers are members of a spiritual elect — as long as they obey their cult's leaders.

Moros

Moros Banishers are divided between those who hunt sorcerers for spurning the cycle of life and death and those who reject the Path and rage against death and change. Banishers who accept the basic Moros perspective believe that sorcerers defile some of the deepest aspects of the human condition. When they set their wills against Death, mages rob the living of closure and condemn souls to confusion, divorced from a true path to the divine source. When they turn lead into gold and shape stone and iron with their wills, mages mock the value of honest labor. These Banishers lead somber cults of simple craftspeople within tightly knit communities. Visitors could very well mistake these Banishers for Amish or Mennonite communes — until the guns and home-sharpened blades come out.

Defiant Moros hate the idea of inevitable death and toil. They blame mages for the nasty, brutish realities of life. Sorcerers squander miracles that could save millions on selfish ends. For all its potential, magic only seems to enhance others' suffering, all for the glory of the occult elite. Such Banishers often preach of the Rapture to come or the City of God that appears only when the last mage dies or renounces the Art.

Obrimos

Divine order, holy fire and righteous wrath all suggest stereotypical Obrimos. The classic Banisher from the Path is a religious crusader out to burn anything or anyone who challenges his worldview. Obrimos aren't more common among Banishers than other Paths, but the Obrimos worldview can be a powerful friend or foe. The Aether is a place of intense, glorious vistas and sublime intelligences that respond to faith and precise mystic formulae. Banishers who accept these visions believe that God never meant for mere mortals to summon His fire or that the secret names of thunder must wait for plodding, Fallen science to reveal them. Otherwise, human beings can only hope to wrest away the great secrets by using their own, corrupt wills. Obrimos Banishers defend that mystery (and all Mysteries) from sinful mages.

Other Banishers believe that the Path's divine revelations are nothing short of terrifying. The sapient Presence that lies heavy in the Aether is not God or Order, but some terrible demiurge who bars the way to real spiritual knowledge. These Obrimos Banishers specialize in attacking religions and ideologies. If it appeals to some ideal end state, higher power or

theoretical purity, the Banisher and his cult attack it. They are skeptics and cynics who want to do more than just fight sorcery — they want practitioners to believe it's meaningless.

Thyrus

Thyrus Awakenings have a reputation for generating powerful antipathy. Tossed into the spirit wilds, a Banisher sees a universe where humans are nothing special. Their bodies and even their emotions are

Christianity and the Banishers

Banishers believe in all kinds of things, but in North America and Europe, a large number are Christians. Christians aren't more likely to be Banishers. It's just a matter of demographics. Christianity's sects are the cultural background of the majority. Many Sleepers are non-practicing or moderate adherents, but the same isn't true for Banishers. They *know* that the supernatural world is real and that's usually enough to rip away the reasons they had for doubting that God exists. Many also reconsider conservative teachings that they used to have little regard for. If their pastors were right about demons and witches, what about homosexuality, birth control and freedom of speech?

Nevertheless, this is only common because of the surrounding culture. There are atheist and Buddhist Banishers, too. In other parts of the world, Christian culture isn't as powerful, so Christian Banishers are rare. Banishers who come from a given religious background are more likely to adhere to that faith no matter where they live, and being brought up in a Christian household does not mean that a Banisher will automatically adopt that faith to bolster his determination.

Practically speaking, Storytellers can create Banishers from a wide array of backgrounds but don't need to be forgiven for sticking to the stereotype. The classic Christian witch hunter is too powerful a motif to reject out of hand. As Banishers are usually antagonists, though, keep in mind that any religion they choose is only a vehicle for moral support and self-justification. The things Banishers do in the name of Jesus Christ, or anyone else, are theirs to account for alone.

food, fit for eating by any creature that can stomach them. Life magic uncovers the basic, animalistic bonds between a person and her environment, while Spirit spells unveil the role of Resonance, emotional energy and ecologies based on thought and feeling. Any body part, pulse of fear or flash of love is nothing more than meat for some beast or spirit that's acquired the taste. To many Banishers, this reveals an intolerably callous universe. They defy Path traditions and reject the wild for concrete, steel and corporate ventures. Mine it, cut it down and cover the wreckage with unfiltered smokestacks and battery farms. Leave nothing alive that will not serve human will. It's better for spirits to grow from office towers than untamed mountains. Some Thyrus Banishers have apocalyptic belief systems, in which ravaging the Earth will set the stage for divine salvation.

There are still Banishers who have more conventional Thyrus attitudes, but they take their attitudes to extremes to oppose would-be Life and Spirit mages. Even magical healing offends these Banishers, because

it steals Life's power to defy survival of the fittest. Mages use the Mysteries to defy natural selection and, in so doing, weaken the entire human race.

Cult and Craft

Banishers belong to organizations that outsiders call cults, but members identify under a variety of titles. Most cults are about the size of other Awakened cabals, but there are larger movements that encompass two or more cells, all operating under common doctrines and practices. Every cult approaches the Mysteries in a slightly different fashion. Some don't teach magic at all, yet somehow, members seem to unconsciously learn the Art as they prosecute the crusade, see spells in action and perform rituals to keep the group focused.

Occult Ignorance

Banishers don't have as intensive an occult education as their order-based counterparts. Unless Banishers completed training within an order and then defected



(in which case they begin with the standard mage template), alter their template as follows:

- Banishers cannot always understand High Speech. They don't get the High Speech Merit listed on p. 84 of **Mage: The Awakening** for free. Unlike Sleepers, Banishers can always hear High Speech, and can easily discern patterns within it to distinguish it from mere babbling. Banishers may purchase said Merit to reflect order training or an unusually instinctive understanding.

- Banishers can't use Atlantean runes to extend a spell's Duration. However, the High Speech Merit allows this advantage.

- Banishers don't begin with any rites, but might be allowed to trade Merit dots for them on a one-for-one basis.

- Banishers do not have Rote Specialties but, in some cases, might qualify for the Rote Specialty Merit (below). This costs Merit dots.

Most Banishers learn what they can while following their calling, often unwillingly. A few cults institute haphazard curriculums of their own that include what order mages might get taught, along with techniques that few non-Banishers can understand, let alone master. See "Banisher Merits" in this chapter for information about these unusual techniques.

Connections

Banishers do have one advantage compared to order-trained sorcerers. Banishers learn on the run and don't take the time out for a dedicated, sequestered apprenticeship. That means they spend more time meeting people, collecting resources and picking up talents. A Banisher might not know how to etch proper runes, but the last time she hunted a mage she picked up a knack for getting the first shot in, or made connections with the local police.

In game terms, a Banisher who's been created to be the equal of a standard **Mage** starting character but suffers the disadvantages listed under "Occult Ignorance" gains 10 additional Merit dots (17 dots total). Depending on her background and cult, a Banisher might have some or all of the Merits below to regain the benefits of conventional training.

Banisher Merits

Banisher characters can possess the following Merits. Some of the following can be purchased only with the 10 bonus Merit dots that baseline Banisher characters begin with. These Merits represent an

intuitive approach to magic practiced by many (but not all) Banishers. In effect, these Merits are integral to that character's supernatural template. Therefore, they're impossible for other mages (or even Banishers who didn't develop these Merits while Awakening) to learn unless the Storyteller decides otherwise.

Abyssal Resonance (● to ●●●●●)

Effect: All Sleepers have a shard of the Abyss within them, but characters with this Merit resonate strongly with the Abyss. The character has little or no control over this Merit, but any mage around her certainly feels its effects.

Dots in this Merit allow access to various effects based on the Abyss's growing intrusion into the character's soul. This Merit is progressive, that is, a character can and does find that her Resonance with the Abyss increases the more contact she has with Awakened magic. In game terms, each level of the Merit is a prerequisite for the next. A character can't have Skin of the Abyss without first purchasing Eyes of the Abyss.

Eyes of the Abyss (●): The character can automatically sense Paradoxes and even potential Paradoxes. Whenever a mage casts a vulgar spell within 100 feet of the character, she senses it. No roll is required. The character might perceive this information as a scent of saltwater and smoke, or a cold shudder down her spine or the sounds of wailing and screaming as if from a great distance. If the player makes a reflexive Wits + Composure roll, the character can pinpoint a direction. If she is in the presence of the mage who cast the spell, this roll allows the character to identify him.

Skin of the Abyss (●●): The Abyss protects the character from attempts to identify or analyze him. Any Unveiling or Knowing spell cast directly on the character is considered vulgar in aspect, as is any other spell designed to gain information about or otherwise analyze the character (including Scrying).

Beacon of the Abyss (●●●): Merely being in the presence of this character invites Paradox. All mages within a 50-foot radius of the character increase their Paradox pools whenever *any* mage casts a vulgar spell. For example, if one member of the cabal casts a vulgar spell (Paradox base dice pool of one), the next mage to do so, no matter who it is, has a Paradox base dice pool of two. If the character with this Merit is a mage, she is *not* immune to the effect, and neither are any allied mages in the area. The Abyss does not discriminate.

Claws of the Abyss (●●●●): Containing a Paradox within one's own body is often a wise decision ó better a few points of bashing damage than an hour's worth of insanity or the chaos of an Anomaly. A character with this Merit, though, can worsen the damage thus inflicted. This requires the character to grapple the mage (see p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) and the player to spend a Willpower point. The mage's player rolls Resolve + Stamina + Gnosis – (the number of vulgar spells the mage has cast during that scene, regardless of whether a Paradox occurred). If this roll fails, any damage from containing a Paradox upgrades to the next category (bashing becomes lethal, lethal becomes aggravated). The damage remains resistant.

Abyssal Warden (●●●●●): The character unconsciously understands and can manipulate the gateways between the Fallen World and the Abyss. Whenever a mage suffers a Paradox within view of the character with this Merit (that is, the character doesn't absorb the Paradox within his own body), the character can try to force a Manifestation. The player rolls Resolve + Presence + Gnosis in a contested action against the mage's Resolve + Stamina + Gnosis (resistance is reflexive). If the mage fails to equal or exceed the character's successes, the Paradox becomes a Manifestation, no matter what type was indicated by the Paradox roll. Using this power requires the expenditure of a Willpower point.

Drawback: So much exposure to the Abyss is dangerous for the character's sanity. Every time the character increases the rating of this Merit, she must check for a new derangement as if she had just failed a degeneration roll (dice pool is Morality or Wisdom). Also, mages with this Merit always have nimbuses that relate to or call to mind the Abyss ó shadows darken, objects grow cold to the touch, etc.

Ancient Echoes (● to ●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Awakened (Banisher or Storyteller's permission); must be purchased with bonus Merit dots at character creation

Effect: Some mages have stronger connections to the past than others. While many mages may eventually be able to track their ancestry back to survivors of the Fall of Atlantis, few have direct remembrances of actual experiences just before, during or just after the Fall. Mages with this Merit, however, can capture snatches of memories of life in Atlantis or other events of their past history in the Fallen World. This Merit may reflect reincarnation or memories of the fallen

grafting themselves onto a new body; this Merit is most common among Banishers who experience some measure of memetic transmission.

Mages with this Merit sometimes gain insights into their craft or into some aspect of the relationships among the orders. Banishers with this Merit perceive it as either a blessing or a curse (or sometimes both) for it not only gives them insights into the workings of their targets but also reminds them of a past they fervently wish to either ignore or destroy.

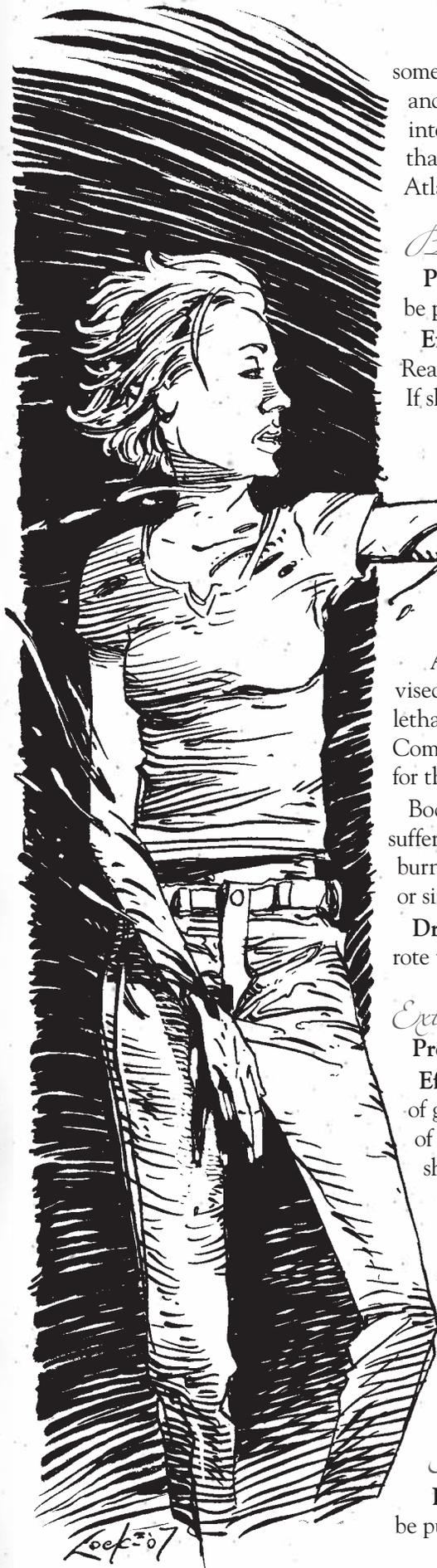
Déjà vu (●): The character experiences a sudden sense of having done or witnessed something in a past life up to 200 years ago, i.e., something that happened during the Victorian era (19th century) or later (20th century). The character may receive simply a feeling (“*I feel as if I've walked down this street before when it was cobblestones instead of asphalt.*”) or a more profound “memory.” (“*I followed a man into this library and through this hallway once before — long ago. There was a locked door and then the restricted books section.*”)

Memory's Thin Walls (●●): The character's memory or seeming memory extends back as far as 400 years (the 17th century). The more recent the memory, the more vivid its details are to the mage. (“*I remember watching fascinated as a child while some of my uncles shoved heavy crates of tea into the waters of the harbor.*”) or (“*I remember the stars were in the same position in the sky when a man darted across my path fleeing something indescribable and unspeakable — much like that!*”)

Memory's Open Door (●●●): The character can remember something (or something similar) having occurred as far back as the 13th century. (“*I've seen the signs before in this very house — a plague house!*”) Mages can sometimes experience premonitions based on past events at this level of the Merit. (“*The earth shook here once before, and I feel it growing restless again.*”)

Stepping Backward (●●●●): The character's memory can extend as far back as the beginning of the Common Era (1st century) and the amount of detail remembered may seem to place the character back in time, though this is certainly not an instance of time travel. (“*I was known as Eudoricus, and even then I hunted down those who sought to reinfect the purity of the Supernal with the taint of the Fallen World.*”)

Echoes of Fallen Atlantis (●●●●●): At the highest level of this Merit, the character seems to remember aspects of Atlantis itself. Banishers usually find clues for a possible starting point to track down a specific artifact or the key to locating an “old soul” in the modern world. Mages with this level of the Merit



sometimes receive insights into the ways of old Atlantis. Both mages and Banishers sometimes experience this level with hallucinatory-like intensity or as a waking nightmare; the memories are far more symbolic than literal, which makes it a frustrating affair to attempt to visualize Atlantis as it was.

Body-Ravaging Magic (●●●●)

Prerequisites: Awakened (Banisher or Storyteller's permission); must be purchased with bonus Merit dots at character creation

Effect: The mage can expose her body to the raw power of the Supernal Realms, opening a more potent channel for the energies of improvised spells. If she willingly suffers up to as many points of resistant bashing damage as the lower of her Resolve or Composure, she can add dice equal to the damage she suffered to the pool

of one instant, improvised spell, cast at the time of the injury.

Alternatively, she can suffer resistant lethal damage to enhance improvised extended spells. Once again, she can only suffer as much resistant lethal damage (and add as many dice) as the lower of her Resolve and Composure. She must suffer these injuries for each dice roll — not once for the entire casting.

Body-Ravaging Magic manifests differently for every Banisher. Some suffer spontaneous burns, cuts and contusions. Classic stigmata and spiral burns over the chakras have been reported. Others cough or cry blood, or simply tremble and turn pale.

Drawback: Injuries and limitations aside, this Merit can't add dice to rote versions of a spell.

Extemporaneous Affinity (●, ●●● or ●●●●●)

Prerequisite: Awakened

Effect: The mage has developed the ability to cast improvised spells of greater potency than is usual. This could be the result of an absence of formal magical training or representative of a mage who prefers to shape spells on the fly.

At one dot in the Merit, the character gains a +1 die bonus to improvised spellcasting; at three dots, the character gains a +2 dice bonus, and at five dots, the character gains a +3 dice bonus. Only improvised spells gain the benefit of bonus dice.

This Merit is intended to represent a character who has been using magic for a decent length of time without much in the way of formal magical education. Banishers who prefer to burn books rather than read them are also likely candidates for this Merit.

Mana Self-Sacrifice (●)

Prerequisite: Awakened (Banisher or Storyteller's permission); must be purchased with bonus Merit dots at character creation

Effect: The mage can transfer Mana to other Awakened characters through physical contact, but only if that Mana comes from Pattern Scouring (see **Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 77–78), performed at the moment of transfer. Just as other forms of Pattern Scouring, this requires a full turn, during which the mage can do no more than move her Speed.

Rote Specialty (● to ●●●●)

Prerequisites: Awakened; not a full member of any order

Effect: Each dot in this Merit confers one Skill-based Rote Specialty. This Specialty adds a die to the pool for rites that use the listed Skill.

Banishers versus Trained Mages

The modified Banisher template provides a lot of Merit dots. Storytellers should keep in mind that Banishers who have enough experience to effectively threaten other mages have to develop remarkable abilities in the face of incredible stress, danger and their ignorance of the very practices they want to overthrow.

Extensive Allies and Contacts are common, because Banishers who look like mad, dangerous loners usually have far shorter lifespans than counterparts who make friends and present trustworthy, normal façades.

Other Banishers prepare for their work in a more methodical fashion. They gather enormous war chests of cash and jewelry to fund their work and take up unarmed combat and modern weapons training (including associated Fighting Styles) to give themselves a better chance against supernatural threats.

Smart Banishers know that their reluctant studies can't keep pace with the enemy's raw dedication, but hope to even the odds with more worldly abilities.

Some Banishers join the cause after trying to live as "normal" sorcerers. In this case, the Banisher might begin with some or all of the standard mage template abilities. Simply purchase the Merits you feel that the character would have learned from High Speech, Atlantean Runecraft and up to three Rote Specialties. You may also purchase up to six dots of rites by trading them for Banisher bonus Merit dots on a one-for-one basis.

Drawback: Fully initiated members of an order effectively possess the maximum number of dots in this Merit and can't take it again. Some order apprentices might have only one- or two-dot Rote Specialties. If they leave order training early, they might forge a unique path, picking up their own rote skills.

Supernal Resistance (● to ●●●●)

Prerequisite: Awakened (Banisher or Storyteller's permission); must be purchased with bonus Merit dots at character creation

Effect: Nearly all Banishers go through life wishing they had never Awakened. Their new lives bring them misery, and they must constantly guard against the temptation to use magic, just to experience the feel of the Supernal Realms once more. Some Banishers go further with their repudiation of magic than others. Their continual denial of their abilities transcends mere psychology to become an unconscious resistance to all magic. They have woven the aura of the Fallen World around themselves so tightly that they are better able to deny the effects of magic used against them.

At one dot, this Merit gives the character +1 bonus die to add to her pool for resisting magical effects. At three dots, the Merit increased the bonus to +2 bonus dice.

Nimbus Sense (●●)

Prerequisite: Awakened (Banisher or Storyteller's permission)

Effect: The mage's supernatural "sixth sense" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 110) is especially attuned to other Awakened souls. He automatically senses another mage's nimbus whether it's uncloaked or not. Occultation and spells designed to conceal the mage's nimbus or Resonance automatically defeat this ability, but otherwise, it constantly functions within the character's line of sight. Banishers with this Merit can easily pick mages out in a crowd.

When a mage loses control of her nimbus after satisfying a Vice, a character with Nimbus Sense is struck with a sudden, distorted vision of the mage satisfying her Vice in other contexts — especially when she used magic to do so. In one case, the shadows flicker to suggest the mage's silhouette, satisfying her Lust. In another, the Banisher sees a rapid succession of bloodied faces: victims of the mage's Wrath. These visions are based on real events, but might play out in an abstract or symbolic fashion.

A character with Nimbus Sense can spend a turn sifting through these impressions for useful details. He

can even sense the presence of a mage's nimbus in places where she satisfied her Vice in the past, long after she's left the area. Make a Wits + Empathy roll and use the guidelines below to determine the results.

Dramatic Failure: The character ascribes the wrong Vice to the target or believes that she did things that never really happened.

Failure: A montage of confusing images yields no solid insights.

Success: The character knows the target's Vice and how she might have satisfied it within the last day, or senses the nimbus of a mage who satisfied a Vice in the area up to a day ago.

Exceptional Success: The character knows how his target satisfied her Vice within the past week, or about a particularly dramatic incident that occurred a month or more ago, especially if the incident involved magic. He can also sense if a mage's nimbus flared in response to satisfying a Vice in an area, within the same time limit.

Suggested Modifiers: Target has a Wisdom score of 5 or less (+1 for every dot lower than 6)

Drawback: Making contact with another mage's soul is a disturbing experience if one is unprepared. If the character doesn't anticipate meeting another mage, witnessing her nimbus causes nausea and disorientation. He suffers a -2 penalty to Physical, Mental and Social dice pools the first time he senses an unfamiliar nimbus, unless she takes the time (a turn of concentration) to brace herself for the experience.

The Wisdom of Fanatics

Banishers use the same Wisdom Advantage as other mages. When it comes to moral strength, Banishers never hold the middle ground for long. Cautious, compassionate Banishers who refuse to take lives do exist. They confront sorcerers as counselors and evangelists and try to talk their quarry into giving up the Mysteries. Similar to the ancient Timori, these Banishers observe and occasionally correct, but never impose their undiluted wills on the world.

Unfortunately, peaceful evangelism almost never works. Mages won't necessarily spare a peaceful Banisher, either, so the most virtuous Banishers are in somewhat shorter supply than the rest. The majority learn to lie, cheat and murder in the course of their calling. If they don't, they still might die at the hands of enemy sorcerers. Most Banishers learn to dehumanize the enemy in short order. Otherwise, the bloody busi-

ness of burning their books, smashing their artifacts and silencing their arcane tongues would soon give Banishers pause.

Bereft of true apprenticeships, most Banishers don't fully understand *how* magic imperils their souls. The irony isn't lost on Pentacle magi who've witnessed their enemies use Wisdom-eroding magic without the least hesitation. While educated mages don't have a Wisdom chart in front of them, they have a rough idea of how certain spells and actions imperil the caster's psychic stability. Banishers don't even have that. They believe that magic is spiritually harmful anyway, so when the nightmares, compulsions and delusions scratch at their minds they think of it as another part of their martyrdom.

The Hated Path

I think I know the appeal of demonology now. Monks invented the field, poring through old scrolls of questionable Greek, giving pagan gods ranks in Hell's army, all while praying for protection against the very infernal legions they so lovingly detailed. We impose a structure on evil to focus our efforts against it, but when we give it that, we grant it a kind of beauty. That's how a priest becomes a sorcerer — how I became one. God forgive me.

— Simplicius, Banisher scholar

How does someone who hates magic master it? There are as many tactics and justifications as there are Banishers, but the methods boil down to *subconscious*, *mythologized* or *direct* modes of study. Pentacle mages who specialize in studying Banishers use these standard categories. They seem to be all-encompassing, but might not work as the names suggest. Scholars don't know much about how *exactly* Banishers learn magic. Scholars know that Banishers often study the same grimoires as other mages do, but that some cults have attained significant power without resorting to known methods.

Banishers do seem to have a harder time learning the higher Mysteries, but the reasons for this aren't especially controversial. Banishers hate magic too much to approach it with the love and rapt attention of a true disciple. The Art chooses them, burning itself into their minds. Banishers devote a significant amount of time to tuning out the very hum of Creation that other mages use to further their understanding.

A player-controlled Banisher wouldn't need extra experience points for Arcana, rites and Gnosis, but she's unlikely to devote her efforts to increasing these traits as fervently as a Pentacle-trained counterpart.

Banisher Derangements

Banishers who suffer derangements from Paradoxes or Wisdom loss are subject to all the forms of madness known to the Awakened, but especially tend to acquire derangements that reinforce their calling. From some perspectives, Banishers are already mad; their very existence springs from a form of doublethink because they need magical power to destroy it. Awakening makes the world ring false, but Banishers use the gifts of Awakening to reinforce the Lie.

Banisher derangements resolve this by compartmentalizing doubts and urges that would sabotage their crusade, or by concealing inconvenient truths within compelling delusions. The following new derangements aren't exclusive to Banishers, but do reflect their special brand of madness.

Delusional Witness (severe): Whenever the mage witnesses some obvious supernatural phenomenon, she overlays hallucinations that bring the manifestation in line with a particular belief system. A skeptic sees stage magic trickery whenever someone levitates an object. A religious sorcerer sees angels and demons whenever spirits appear because her beliefs don't accept other kinds of subtle beings. Similar to Goetic Fracture (below), a Banisher may never learn that she's seeing anything false.

Goetic Fracture (severe; extreme): The mage surrenders his magic to a personified Vice. His madness spawns a fragmentary goetic demon (see **Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 323–326) — less than a true spirit but more than a voice in his head. He can't cast spells unless he either accedes to the demon's wishes (typically, by satisfying his Vice through increasingly extreme acts) or psychically overpowers it. To do the latter, make an extended Wisdom roll every turn. The target number is equal to the mage's own Resolve. This requires the afflicted character's full concentration, so he can't do anything other than move his base Speed while battling the Goetic Fragment. If the character accumulates more successes than his Resolve + Composure, he subdues the demon, regaining control of his magic until the next time he regains Willpower for satisfying his Vice.

This derangement is especially prevalent among Banishers because so many believe that their abilities are fundamentally selfish. Some even believe that their magic really does emanate from a demon. When active, the Goetic Fragment frequently speaks to the afflicted sorcerer. It taints his dreams and takes a shape in the mage's mind's eye consistent with his Vice, personality and beliefs.

Mystic Personality (severe; extreme): The mage develops an alternate personality with a diametrically opposed perspective on the supernatural. A Banisher becomes an enthusiastic sorcerer. A Pentacle mage might develop Banisher sympathies, or explore magic that she normally abhors, stealing souls or summoning demons. The mage doesn't adopt a new name or personal history. She believes herself to be the same person, but each personality only vaguely recalls the other's beliefs and magical workings, filtering them through its preferred attitude. Banishers who suffer an episode around fellow witch hunters keep a low profile. They know that something's *wrong*. They might rationalize their position inside a Banisher cult by thinking they're infiltrating it. They could betray their own cult or hide away artifacts meant for destruction. The switch occurs whenever the mage is exposed to a particular trigger, usually related to the event that inspired the derangement in the first place. The episode lasts for a scene or longer, after which the mage's normal personality asserts itself.

Occult Fugue (mild): The mage begins a lengthy magical working. She creates a magical Artifact, learns a rote, casts an extended spell or goes on a lengthy Astral quest. The working is usually benign, even beneficial, but once the mage is finished, she promptly forgets that she did it at all. The mage carried out the necessary preparations in a Fugue, as if sleepwalking, and may become irrationally hostile if anyone tries to get in her way. Banishers with a subconscious urge for more power often perform the bulk of their studies in a Fugue state. They even create magical objects. Consciously, they find the idea of giving magic a solid shape abhorrent, but while deranged, their secret desires have a free rein.

If the Banisher is a player-controlled character, the player can specify what his mage might want to accomplish if she was freed of her ordinary inhibitions. The Storyteller can handle the details for the player, or if everyone feels comfortable with it, the player might make all the dice rolls and preparations himself with the understanding that his character won't remember a thing.

On the other hand, Banishers spend the time that might have devoted to magical study on other fields. They tend to have a diverse range of skills — a virtual necessity, given the varied hazards of their crusade. Compared to other mages, Banishers tend to have fewer rites and lower Gnosis. Hating magic takes a toll by discouraging the exacting studies rites require, and greater enlightenment requires a degree of self-acceptance that few ever attain. The Body-Ravaging Magic Merit (see p. 41 of this book) compensates for these deficits to a certain degree but reinforces the Banishers' belief in the Mysteries' dangers.

Cultural Pollution

Given enough study, a Banisher learns that the traditions that make mages look secretive and selfish exist for good reasons. This is why many Banishers have shadow names. A shadow name might be a pretentious element of occult initiation, but it also provides basic protection against sympathetic magic.

Sure, anyone can get around a shadow name if he tries hard enough, but in this respect, a shadow name is no different from other such precautions. Most household doors and window locks can't hold back determined thieves, but that doesn't mean people have given up on locks. Most Banishers don't care about a shadow name's symbolism. That's just another way to *practice* magic, not defend against it.

Dueling also has its virtues, though not necessarily in the form of the Duel Arcane. Duels train Banishers to defend against their enemies. Duels lead to binding agreements between hostile parties in situations where each side would otherwise plunge into a cycle of attacks and counterattacks.

Subconscious Study

Banishers have the ability to refine their magical abilities without conscious thought. Mystagogues call it "subconscious" study, but nobody — not even the Banishers themselves — knows how it works. It might be a sign that Banishers have truly inherited the Timori's legendary sensitivity to magic. Banishers might learn the Mysteries from ambient Resonance, secret signs in the structure of the world and even the wordless behavior of sorcerers whose Arts influence every gesture. For this reason, mages try to keep their

more powerful spells in reserve when Banishers attack. Witch-hunting victims have testified to Banishers fleeing from powerful magic in the past, only to return later, able to counter and match them spell for spell.

A Banisher can learn Arcana only up to a rank where she has observed representative spells or read a grimoire or if she's spent time in close proximity with a knowledgeable mage. In most cases, this happens within a Banisher cult. Junior members gradually learn the leader's magic. Attuned to a common occult "frequency," cult members silently share their understanding.

Subconscious study is limited to the Arcana. Rites are detailed formal techniques that have to be intentionally studied. Banishers usually discover their new powers in moments of stress, lashing out with spells they could never cast before.

Tracking Subconscious Study

If your game features player-controlled Banishers or you want to track how Storyteller-controlled Banishers unconsciously learn Arcana, transfer one or two experience points per game session to a special pool. Spend them on new Arcana dots based on the kind of magic the Banisher's been exposed to. If a player controls the Banisher, the Storyteller can consult with the player about where the character might have felt weak or helpless in the face of enemy sorcery. A Banisher is more likely to pick up Arcana that address this deficit.

Mythologized Study

Magic is a flexible Art; magic manifests behind many masks, all of which ultimately descend from a Supernal source. Banisher cults often explore the Mysteries through a Fallen mythology. They justify their practices as "science," "blessings" — anything but the very sorcery their enemies use.

Most Banisher cults follow a common mythology that explains their abilities, their shared horror of Awakening and their compulsive calling. This blurs the lines between science, faith and magic. If a cult believes in effective, formulaic prayers, what really separates the cult members from other sorcerers? Some Banishers wrestle with these distinctions, but not all — the rest find sufficient refuge in their doctrine to separate the cult from the enemy.

Contrary to popular belief, mythologized study rarely gives Banishers confidence that their magic isn't tainted. The majority believe that Awakening is a curse, indelible sin or a paranormally charged

form of madness. When they pray or use “special technologies,” they believe that they’re placing their own, untrustworthy power under the dominion of more benign principles. The faithful Banisher “offers his sins to the Lord.” He knows that his wounded soul can’t help but reach into the Abyss, but if he prays instead of wills magic into being, he puts its manifestations into God’s hands.

Banishers use mythology to construct their own rites. A Christian witch hunter’s rote *Imago* might have him kneel and cross himself, or even convulse and babble in tongues like charismatic devotee. Members of a New Age sect go for yoga postures, crystal pendulums and repetitive affirmations.

Traditions and Technosticism

Tome of the Mysteries and Magical Traditions provide guidelines for magical practices that minimize or reject the influence of Atlantean mysticism. These books contain optional Merits and other rules that Banishers might use. The rote factor rules in **Tome of the Mysteries** are especially appropriate because they provide an incentive for Banishers to indulge their idiosyncrasies to the hilt.

A growing number of Banishers base their practices on science and technology. Even though no Banisher believes that magic isn’t real, “scientific” witch hunters attack its theoretical and ideological underpinnings. Banishers challenge the idea that mages are truly enlightened, or that there really is a “higher” world that casts a shadow of everyday reality. They distrust their own experiences and use science to better regulate a power that they refuse to second guess. Some use psychoactive drugs because they believe in “psionic” power, while others investigate electromagnetism and higher mathematics to yoke power to a belief system they trust. Material inventions are usually dedicated magical tools.

Direct Study

Most Banishers eventually take the quick, well-trod route to power — under protest, of course. They need to know the enemy’s lore to identify, counter and destroy it. Cult members watch each other for signs of unhealthy fascination. It’s not as if a Banisher *shouldn’t* be interested in the Mysteries. Everyone hears the call and sees the vast, Supernal energies behind the curtain of the Lie. Learning how the enemy manipulates occult forces isn’t just prudent — it helps a Banisher understand the secret world around her. But the more

Banishers study the invisible world, the more it studies *them*. As they learn more, the temptation to use magic for selfish ends only increases, but in addition to that, the Banisher’s soul edges closer to all the realms of power — including the Abyss.

The fact is that virtually every Banisher is secretly enthralled by sorcery. Banishers can’t completely deny the Awakening. Magic is more than mere technique. Deep down, Banishers know that the world is Fallen and that the magic they hate is a chaotic, inconstant emanation of the truth.

Banishers value grimoires above other occult artifacts. Banishers not only learn spells and arcane principles from grimoires, but can destroy them once they’ve thoroughly studied the relevant material. They grow wiser, better at the crusade, while denying the enemy his secrets.

Atlantean Legends and Neo-Timori

Similar to other mages, educated Banishers have all kinds of theories about Atlantis, but unlike other mages, Banishers rarely believe it was a *good* place. The *Pentacle* talks about the divine, enlightened island, or an ideal that lies deep within every human soul. Banishers who know the legends talk about a prehistoric tyranny whose masters defiled Heaven and Earth to stay in power. Banishers say that sorcerer princes destroyed the souls of commoners to give their demons empty shells to inhabit, and that they grew Atlantis’s walls and towers by torturing the spirits of earth and stone.

A growing number of Banishers embrace the Timori as the unsung heroes of Atlantis. They defied its lords, predicted its fall and were persecuted for speaking the truth. The Timori revival rejects many entrenched Banisher habits. They study the Mysteries freely, without wrapping them in Fallen traditions. Adherents want the power to destroy supernatural influence in the world. Only then will the true order of things assert itself. They’ll do whatever it takes to destroy the Mysteries in the hope that an age of natural miracles, granted by Creation instead of selfish will, can erupt from the ashes.

Arcane Experience

Supernatural mystery contains the essence of Awakening. The Wise know this; it's why they flock to haunted houses, fey woods and surreal Astral domains. Banishers also learn from the supernatural, but they don't do it by expanding their vision of the universe to include strange phenomena. Where other Awakened explore secrets, Banishers destroy them; Banishers don't earn Arcane Experience for just investigating the supernatural — they must oppose it. When they succeed, they feel a powerful sense of purpose, every bit the equal of the epiphanies felt by their more open-minded cousins. The act of destruction sparks a moment of clarity. The rush temporarily alleviates the fear every Banisher hides within herself. At that moment, the Banisher *knows* that she exists to purge the world of supernatural corruption. Some witch hunters experience visions when they earn Arcane Experience, as if they're in the presence of God or can see some grand plan unfold before their eyes.

Systems-wise, Banishers earn Arcane Experience under modified guidelines. Storytellers should consider awarding a point of Arcane Experience in the following situations instead of the ones detailed on pp. 340–341 of **Mage: The Awakening**:

- The character learns a supernatural creature or phenomenon's vulnerability. This might include a ghost's material anchor, the fact that vampires are paralyzed (and not destroyed) by a stake through the heart or that the seventh son of a seventh son can lift the curse that plagues a town. The weakness can't be common knowledge and must be absolutely correct. A Banisher who merely thinks that driving anything through a vampire's heart will do the trick doesn't get the award. A Banisher can earn this award only once per weakness, per type of creature or phenomenon. In other words, she can gain Arcane Experience twice by understanding how wooden stakes affect vampires and a serpent-man who also happens to be vulnerable to them, but doesn't get the award twice for two different vampires.
- The character drives supernatural beings or phenomena away from the presence of Sleepers. She can earn this reward once per enemy creature or phenomenon, but as long as the threat changes, the same group of Sleepers can be involved each time. Banishers who protect a community against supernatural forces protect the same people over and over again, but continue to reap the rewards.
- The character destroys an object that has supernatural properties. She gets the reward as long as she

has a rough idea of what they are. She doesn't need to understand every last function or rune, but should know at least one specific power or effect. Again, Banishers often target grimoires for this purpose because they can study the grimoires before burning them. Banishers earn Arcane Experience only when they first encounter a given Artifact. In the case of grimoires, the Banisher must discover at least one new rote within the grimoire's pages when she compares it to grimoires she's seen before.

- The character escapes from a hostile, supernaturally charged environment, such as the Shadow Realm, Astral Plane or a Verge filled with monsters. The location needs to contain an effective threat to the Banisher, and she needs to make an effort to defy it. A peaceful jaunt into somebody's dreamscape or sedately exploring a Shadow Realm garden doesn't qualify. If the escape involved an extended conflict, she might earn additional Arcane Experience, but only during portions of the journey where she's trying to leave.

Witch Hammers

If you're reading this manual, you're one step away from Ultraclear status. You're dealing with your own Intruder Thetan (IT). OT IX technologies will help you control it so that it doesn't attract other Intruder Thetans from suppressive reality tracks. This volume exists to introduce you to technologies that will protect you and the organization from enemy ITs.

You can only reach Ultraclear status through Militant Auditing. Your IT needs to be isolated from others like it before you use Ultraclear technologies to blow it from your body/mind unit. Militant Auditing is the science of identifying suppressive persons with IT channeling powers and isolating them from the sociodynamic field. This not only includes Ultraclear technologies but mundane tradecraft such as tactical firearms training, security and intelligence procedures and clandestine funding operations. That is why you must keep this book — and the existence of the Militant Auditing Division itself — a secret, even from fellow Church members, even if they possess OT IX ratings.

— Introduction to a Banisher cult resource

Somehow, Banishers know their own. If one Banisher has a chance to communicate with another for any length of time, they *know* they are of a kind. Mages who believe that Banishers contract their condition through some kind of spiritual disease say that the afflicted recognize common symptoms, but the Banishers

themselves don't have any common explanation. The feeling comes first; a new cult builds an edifice of belief based on that silent foundation.

Cults give Banishers the same advantages that other Awakened organizations give their members. Cult members provide mutual protection, help each other pursue their quarry and share insights about the nature of the supernatural world. A cult also provides moral support and an ideological focus for Banishers. Most desperately need both. The average Banisher Awakens alone, terrified, and as often as not, after encountering supernatural evil. Few Banishers have the capacity to understand what they're going through. They learn that magic is all around them, eating away the thin skin of the world, but they don't know how to fight it — just that they *must*.

A Sleeper in a similar situation would be ripe pickings for all kinds of destructive religions and authoritarian movements. In fact, many Banishers *do* trade their

homes for a compound or commune full of Sleepers who worship a guru or radical. Banishers who don't just leave when they realize that the leader isn't anyone special have a knack for taking these organizations over. Banishers might be emotionally vulnerable, but they're still mages of a sort, willful to the point of arrogance and nearly impossible for any normal person to control. These mages are likely to found the nucleus of a new Banisher cult.

Contact

If a Banisher doesn't have the genius to explain his own situation or Sleepers to turn to, he'll probably fall into the orbit of an experienced cult. It tells him why he's been cursed by magic, how to fight the enemy and how to gird his soul against Awakening's temptations. Most cults mine Fallen religions and philosophies for inspiration. Even if members used to be moderates, their experiences almost always push them to radical points of view. Mainstream science and religious practice don't deal with the supernatural in nearly enough detail to save Banishers from confusion. They not only need explanations for the vast, varied scope of supernatural phenomena but usually base at least some of their own magic upon Sleeper practices. A few so-called Neo-Timori found cults using modified Atlantean doctrines, but these groups are few and far between.

Most cults are the size of Pentacle cabals, and it's usually possible to use the terms "Banisher cult" and "Banisher cabal" interchangeably. Talented leaders with compelling teachings draw more followers, but when Awakened membership reaches the double digits, the cult usually splits itself into separate cells. An exceptional leader can keep them all under her control, but in most cases, splinter groups adopt schismatic beliefs, fight over money and politics or just lose touch with the root organization. Large cults spread their numbers out because once so many Banishers gather in a single area they either eradicate all local supernatural forces or find themselves the primary targets of local mages who can't ignore the Banishers' strong presence.

Sleepers and Banisher Cults

Banishers like normal people. Sleepers don't babble about lost cities and inhuman planes of existence. They have the same basic beliefs as Banishers themselves. Banishers might use a well-known religion to justify some strange things, but they don't often throw normal beliefs away in favor of a secret magical legacy. Most Sleepers, for their part, feel a mix of fear and

Family Business

Mages don't know why, but Awakening often runs in families. Although you might think genetics plays a part, the *Mysterium* has documented occasions where adopted children and committed partners of mages Awaken. Astrological and numerological (the seventh son of a seventh son) factors also seem to play a part.

Banishers are no different. Siblings, cousins, husbands and wives Awaken. When the relatives are both Banishers, they usually work together. They aren't exactly a "cult," as their pre-existing bond performs many of its functions. These teams are usually highly effective because they're so familiar with each other, but this can become a liability if an enemy decides to hold one hostage.

When one of the Awakened relatives *isn't* a Banisher, things get messy. A large number of Banishers with Awakened relatives suffered at their hands, making their crusades emotionally charged and prone to cloud their judgment. The Banisher usually either devotes much of his time to hunting down the relative, or finds he can't bring himself to do it. Other Banishers treat colleagues with mage relations cautiously. The Banishers won't know how thick the family blood runs until that wife, son or sister stands before them.

fascination around Banishers. Banishers have intense personalities; there's usually a glint of visible fanaticism in even the most mild-mannered.

So unless a cult descends into pure obsession, the cult will often attract a periphery of Sleepers. A holy woman and her "elect" minister to ordinary people, feeding and housing them, but send them to the shooting range every day to prepare for a fight with "the servants of the Beast." A team of "proactive skeptics" debunks (and eliminates) evidence of the supernatural. The cult's website takes donations and networks supporters into chapters across the country. Say what you will about the Banishers, but compared to the Pentacle, they have a bit more of a "common touch."

Indoctrination

A new cult usually forms by accident. Two or more Banishers meet, find common cause and examine their condition. There are also times when a lone Banisher's friends Awaken — they catch the Banisher "disease."

Banishers who meet after they Awaken apart tend to go for an egalitarian way of doing things, but when a cult's members Awaken under an experienced Banisher, he usually becomes the leader and invents the group's doctrines. His followers even give him credit for "enlightening" them. Awakening pains them, but it also charges them with a compulsive duty. To certain people, this is a blessing: a way to become martyrs.

Once a cult is founded, a cult's membership increases haphazardly. Banishers don't have a formal society that trains and trades apprentices. The cult's Sleeper associates Awaken after constant exposure to the Banisher creed, or members happen upon a traumatically Awakened soul during the course of a witch hunt.

Most cults test new members to ensure that they aren't working for the enemy. The process ranges from quiet surveillance to torture. Most often, the process turns into a form of hazing, trying the new Banisher's commitment and obedience. At the end, the cult offers the prospect intense, unconditional love. Banishers



do this to provide some small compensation for the intense alienation they know the new recruit feels by virtue of being a Banisher, but the emotional outpouring also breaks her will down. By alternating cruelty and kindness, the cult picks her emotional defenses apart. Some cults also demand certain forms of dress, unusual diets or vows of poverty (her possessions are given to the cult), all of which disorient the recruit and make her receptive to new ideas. Few cults do this to *deliberately* brainwash Banishers. The cults have simply learned through trial and error that this is the best way to guarantee loyal, dedicated membership.

Abuse of Power

Similar to mundane counterparts, Banisher cults often condone abusive behavior from the leadership. This is most common in cults that have a large Sleeper periphery; Awakened members pressure subordinates for sex and money. The Awakened make the Sleepers commit crimes for the cult and cover up indiscretions, including their own internal patterns of exploitation. Cult leaders treat fellow Banishers the same way when there's a significant experience gap. Naïve, frightened Banishers, weakened by trauma and cult initiation, give up their freedom for someone who looks able to protect them. Unfortunately, it's all too easy for frightened people to conflate protection with occasions when the leader merely withholds his abuse.

Many cults either *don't* condone systematic abuse or dwell in uncertain territory, freely consenting to rituals that would be considered abusive in other contexts. Cults that practice extreme fasting, self-flagellation or intense "self-criticism sessions" might do so with the sane consent of all involved — or they might not. Being a Banisher is an extreme emotional and spiritual condition. It's hard to tell where imposed rules end and personal obsessions begin.

Resources

Hunting the supernatural isn't cheap. Most cults depend on members and friends to foot the bill for weapons, gear and hideouts. This only takes the cults so far. Banishers have trouble holding down normal jobs because of their compulsive behavior, so cults that want to aggressively crusade against the supernatural need a way to earn money off the clock. Cults with large networks of Sleeper allies can subsist on donations, but more secretive groups usually consider the merits of crime. Fraud, armored car heists and even drug deals support various cults. Crime for profit is problematic

The Banisher Inquisition

There are rumors that the Catholic Church devotes some of its resources to hunting supernatural evil. These stories mention everything from a few bishops with money and crash space to hand out to desperate witch hunters to paramilitary Banishers on high alert under St. Peter's Basilica. Most mages believe that some clergy have accurate knowledge about the supernatural because virtually all global organizations of that size figure in occult power plays. Some obscure Church writings also hit close to the mark when it comes to describing various supernatural forces. The Awakened think that the Vatican's secret archives might have even more detailed information on hand.

Even so, the legendary Banisher Inquisition seems to be a myth. Banishers do set themselves up in the Catholic hierarchy and even help themselves to Church funds, but there's no evidence that the Holy See officially sanctions Banishers.

for Banishers because the most effective ways to rob or cheat other people require magic. Simple spells find valuables, destroy forensic evidence and ensure quiet burglaries. Banishers are well aware of the fact that using magic to exploit other people makes Banishers no better than their targets. Sometimes this forces a cult to rely on ordinary methods, but the most successful groups believe that the ends justify the means.

Ironically, nothing suits a cult scrounging for money better than well-heeled enemies. Banishers don't feel any reservations about stealing from enterprises run by supernatural forces. Banishers take magical artifacts, grimoires and occult libraries from their enemies, along with equipment, cash and valuables. Consequently, a populous Consilium that exerts a great deal of influence over Sleeper affairs can actually empower a Banisher cult. The cult members can steal everything they need from Pentacle mages as a part of the crusade.

Unfortunately, the more a cult turns to crime, the more likely it is that the cult will attract the police — for starters. Steal from the mob, and they won't wait for the cops. Powerful criminals aren't entirely ignorant about the supernatural themselves. If you follow a trail of dirty money, you're likely to trip over a mage, vampire or stranger being along the way. Cults that rely on

Sleeper networks can also fall apart when concerned citizens take a hard look at the inner workings. All it takes is a self-appointed cult deprogrammer, rival religion or even a tax auditor. Anyone could expose the Banishers to legal sanction. As a result, successful cults have detailed exit plans. Hidden cash, safe houses and weapons all lie in wait for these emergencies.

Merit: Armory (● to ●●●●●)

Prerequisites: Resources ●●●

Effect: Your character can draw upon an array of weapons and armor. This Merit could represent a large gun collection, the ability to call in favors for arms or ownership of a firearms or martial arts supply store. When you select this Merit, give it a descriptor such as “dojo weapons” or “hunting club.” This will guide your use of the Merit.

Each dot provides five “points” of weapons and armor. The pool of dots provides a vaguely defined assortment of available arms. You may use weapons and armor equal to your pool total at any given time.

The base pool cost for a weapon is equal to its Damage rating. Add 1 to the cost if the weapon is a firearm. Armor has a pool cost equal to its Defense bonus. Add 1 to the cost of any weapon or piece of armor if it’s illegal or highly restricted.

The maximum Damage or Defense rating possible for any Armory equipment is equal to the Merit’s dots +1. Firearms come with a full load or magazine. One Armory point adds an additional load or magazine.

You don’t need to account for every single knife and gun, and in fact, there are more parts and arms than the pool would allow — the equivalent of the classic briefcase or rack full of guns. Your total represents arms in good enough repair to actually use. You may change weapon selections freely as long as the choices could plausibly fit under the general descriptor.

Similar to the Sanctum or Library Merits, it’s possible to purchase this Merit collectively, dividing its benefits among the entire group.

Drawback: Unlike arms and armor purchased with standard Resources, Armory gear is gray market at best. It includes a selection of stolen, illegally modified or improperly registered weapons. If the authorities discover your Armory, you might incur a fine or imprisonment.

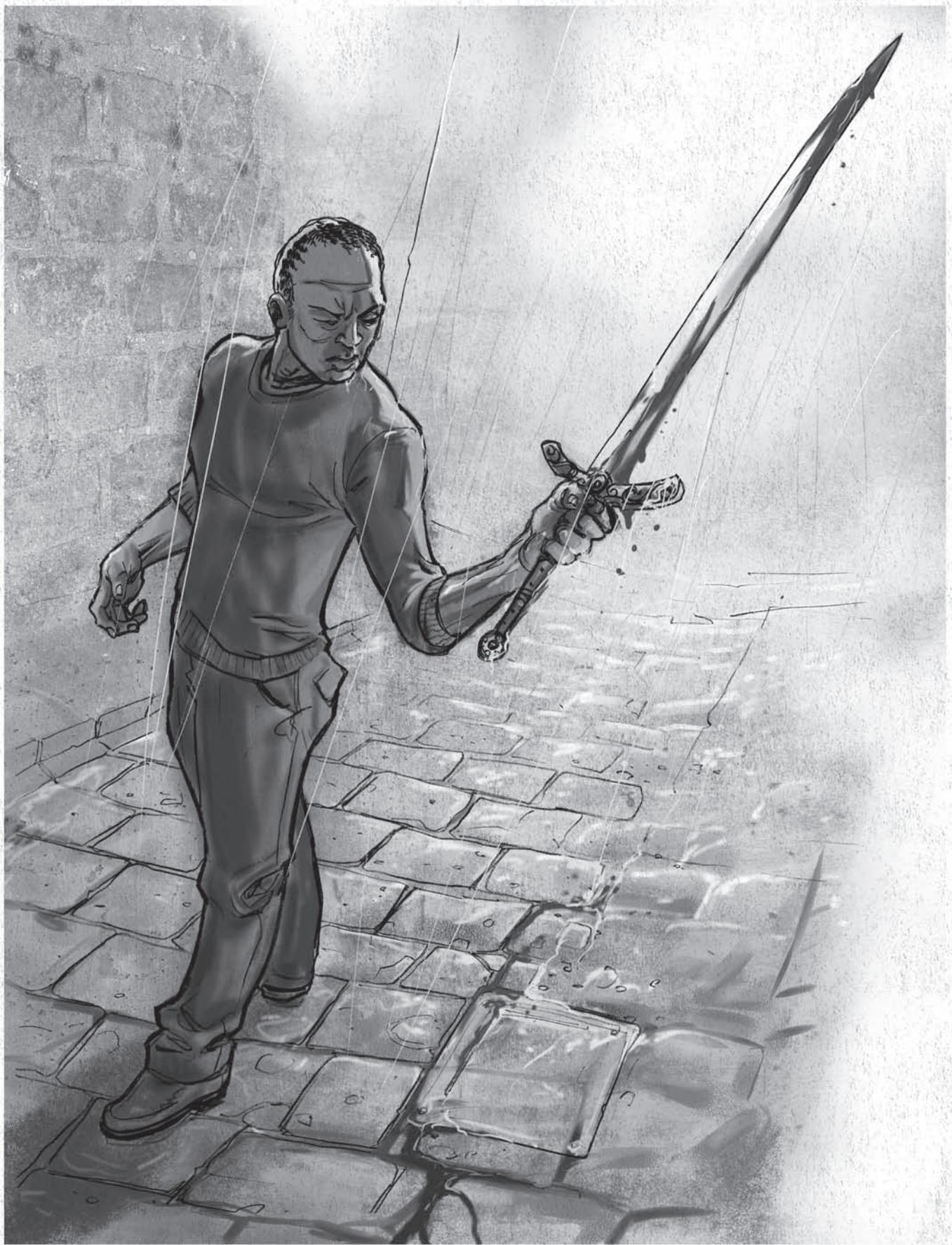
Merit: Fence (● or ●●●)

Prerequisite: Streetwise ●●●

Effect: No matter your character’s location, she can almost always find a way to buy and sell stolen goods within the local criminal community or online. No dice roll is required. She avoids common law enforcement tactics designed to catch fences, but her clients might not be as clever.

The one-dot version of this Merit applies to typical stolen goods: items that would require Resources ●● or less to purchase. More expensive or exotic goods such as sports cars, fine art or assault weapons require the three-dot version of the Merit.





CHAPTER TWO: WEAPONS

Oct. 6

I cannot stop thinking about it. It's driving me crazy. I try to lie down and get some sleep but every time I close my eyes I see the gold metal on my eyelids. Haven't slept in days, I think. Having trouble getting the words out. Very tired.

Oct. 7

Tried putting is in the base ment for a time. Where I wouldn't have to think about it. Didn't work. Kept hearing scratch scratch from under the door. Thought it was rats, went down to check. Then realized wasn't rats, it was just an excuse.

Or maybe it was moving.

I don't know.

Still haven't slept.

Oct. ??

Don't know what day it is. Can't think about anything else.

Oct. 12

Woke up this morning, felt wonderful. No dreams. No visions. Finally, sleep.

Things seem much clearer now, too. The sword — it's not a living thing, I know that much now. It's just a tool, one designed to fill its purpose.

And its purpose is my purpose.

It must be fate.

CHAPTER TWO

*Though hand join in hand, and a vast multitude themselves,
they are easily broken in pieces.
They are as great heaps of light chaff before the whirlwind;
or large quantities of dry stubble before devouring flames.*
— Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”

Spells

The magical practices of Banishers make a potent object lesson in parallel evolution. Without much of a centralized tradition for passing on lore, many Banisher cabals innovate magic with a vigor that would make some Pentacle mages envious. Necessity demands no less — the Banisher who refuses to learn from an established magical tradition and who has no real knack for sculpting her own spells won't last long in her struggle.

Banishers, as noted in Chapter One, are far less likely to learn rites from other mages. Most Banisher rites are personally innovated, the result of repeated trial and error. The samples that follow can be adapted to any Banisher.

Death

Forensic Invisibility (Death ●●, Matter ●)

This spell destroys material evidence that might emanate from a mage or the things she carries. Rapid decay obliterates fibers, dead skin, hair, saliva and all other detritus. She leaves behind fine, sterile ash that scatters in the slightest breeze.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Aspect: Covert

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Cost: None

The spell also destroys the mage's fingerprints by eliminating skin oils, but won't affect marks she's left in powders or other substances capable of retaining an impression. The spell won't eliminate evidence that the mage leaves by disturbing the surrounding environment, such as footprints or objects that she's moved or broken.

Banisher Rote: Humble Exit

Dice Pool: Composure + Stealth + Death

A Moros Banisher recently taught this rote to members of St. Michael's Promise (see **Boston Unveiled**) because he thought they'd need it in a city so infested by sorcery. The Banisher concentrates on humbling himself before God, reminding himself to leave no sign of pride, lest a

subconscious desire to take credit for his work give him away to the authorities.

Quiet Grave (Death ●●)

Once cast on a corpse, this spell interferes with attempts to make the corpse rise again.

Practice: Shielding

Action: Instant

Aspect: Covert

Duration: Lasting

Cost: None

Subtract the spell's Potency from any spell or power that would animate the corpse from within. This includes Death magic, possession and certain necromantic supernatural powers, but not the kind of telekinetic “puppetry” a Forces-using mage might employ. This spell cannot rob already-animated corpses or undead creatures of their vigor. The spell can't interfere with a vampire's Embrace, either.

It's also possible to cast this spell using Space 2 to suppress reanimation in an area instead of targeting particular corpses.

Banisher Rote: Proper Burial

Dice Pool: Presence + Academics + Death

Simplicius routinely casts this spell on victims and perpetrators alike. Nobody deserves to have his body violated by sorcery after he dies, even if the person would have happily done it to someone else while alive.

Thanks to Simplicius's theological education, he's capable of performing ad hoc funeral blessings from dozens of religions. He always takes the time to perform a service that fits the dead person's religious background as best Simplicius knows it. Otherwise, he prefers ecumenical prayers with a slight bias toward his own Christian beliefs.

Hollow Victory (Death ●●●)

It is very unusual for any mage other than a Banisher to know this spell. Used as a last resort and a final act of defiance, this spell allows the Banisher to submit to death rather than face capture and torment by order mages. The

Banisher also reaffirms her commitment to erasing magic from the world by removing herself, and the tainted power within her, from it.

Practice: Fraying

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: 1 Mana

To cast this spell successfully is to die. A Banisher who has contemplated the magic necessary for this spell is ready to make the ultimate sacrifice for his cause. The spell targets and shuts down vital physiological functions (such as the heart and the lungs) of the caster's body.

Banisher Rote: Martyr

Dice Pool: Resolve + Medicine + Death

This "rote" is obviously not gained through practice; it might be attained through study of a particular grimoire, or even learned instinctively after a series of terrible dreams. When used to its greatest effect, this rote is combined with a spell, Artifact or imbued item that removes the Banisher's soul beyond the reach of magic. Banishers know all too well that dead men sometimes can be forced to tell tales.

*Undying Zeal
(Death ●●●●,
Time ●●)*

This spell reflects a Banisher's intense dedication. If he casts this spell, he will become a revenant at the moment he wills himself to die. As soon as his heart stops, he continues his crusade — he might not even have time to hit the floor before his new incarnation soldiers on. As one of the walking dead, his actions depend on inflexible passions instead of genuine human feelings.

Practice: Patterning

Action: Extended

Duration: Prolonged (once scene)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: 1 Mana

This spell is a prepared version of the "Revenant" spell (see **Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 143–144). The mage must

cast the spell ahead of time; see pp. 260–261 of **Mage: The Awakening** for prepared spell systems. Once cast, the spell can be activated with an instant action. At that point, the spell kills the mage instantly (using a voluntarily permanent version of Suppress Own Life that painlessly causes physical and spiritual death) and turns him into a revenant. Determine the revenant's Passions and other traits at the time of casting, not activation.

This spell doesn't work if the mage isn't willing to die; the component that slays the mage isn't strong enough to overcome the psychic resistance he might muster by having second thoughts (though a Death 5 variant allows this). The character suffers real (and barring the intervention of an archmaster) irrevocable death. The spell is essentially a form of suicide, used when a mage is cornered, wounded and will not prevail in his current state. Storytellers and players should ensure that the character *really* is ready to die. If there's any question about this, a Resolve + Composure roll might help determine whether his will could really trump his survival instincts. Alternately, he might have to *fail* a Wisdom check.

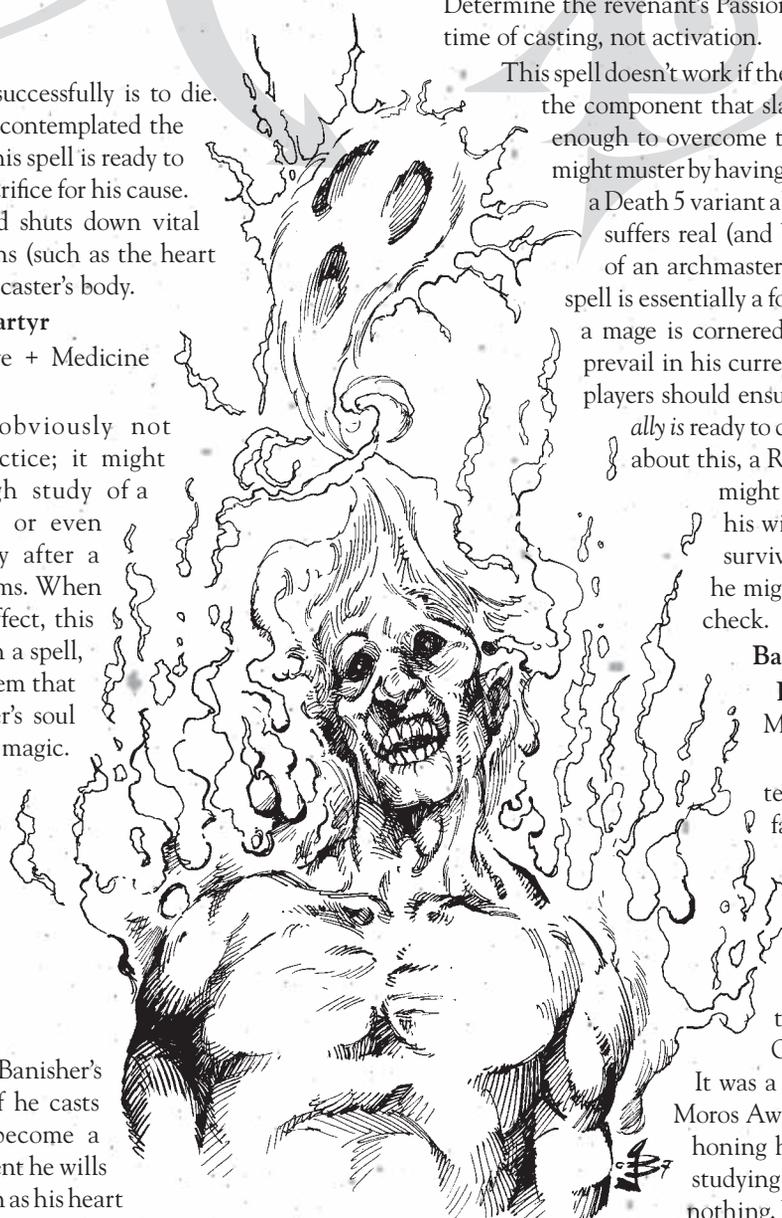
Banisher Rote: Die Today

Dice Pool: Composure + Medicine + Death

Erik "Shugyosha" Osterberg is a martial arts fanatic who fancies himself a "modern-day samurai." After he Awakened as a Banisher, he took his long-time interests in *jujutsu* and *iaido* to the point of obnoxious Orientalism and delusion.

It was a defense mechanism; the Moros Awakening taught him that honing his body, meditating and studying another culture meant nothing. He'd be food for worms in the end. With his penchant for wearing *tabi* ("socks") and carrying around a sword bag, he'd be a figure of mockery, if not for the fact that sword in the bag is real and he's used it to behead two mages and one woman he mistook for one.

Erik based his spell on the philosophies of *Hagakure*, a Japanese text that extols the virtues of suicide for one's lord. He believes that he's serving Sleepers as a whole and should be ready to lay down his life at any time, so he casts this spell periodically so that, in the event of being critically wounded or trapped, he can die and will his remains to



continue. His rote Imago consists of visualizing, in as exact a fashion as possible, various ways he might die.

Fate

Aim for the Dead (Fate ●, Space ●, Death ●)

The mage excels at striking specific targets on an undead creature's body.

Practice: Knowing

Action: Instant

Duration: Special

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

This spell is a variant of the spell "Sharpshooter's Eye." The mage uses Death 1 to lock on to a vampire, reanimated corpse or other undead creature. Each success removes one die of penalties to strike a specific target on its body. If the mage is using a ranged weapon, the spell also reduces all ranged combat penalties except for cover, armor and magical protection. The benefit applies to the mage's next attack. Knowledgeable mages use the spell in conjunction with a wooden stake to target a vampire's heart. Other walking corpses might be stopped in their tracks with a bullet to the brainpan or a blow that mars the mystic Brand that brought the corpse to life.

If the mage knows the second rank in each of the spell's component Arcana, he can bestow this ability upon another person.

Banisher Rote: Stake Strikes True

Dice Pool: Composure + Weaponry + Fate

A former Adamantine Arrow called Lacon took this rote from the Adamantine Arrow and spread it far and wide among American Banishers. The rote is based on the Arrow's close-range spear-fighting techniques, combined with a rigorous study of anatomy and the strange energies that animate the cursed dead. This rote is more limited than the basic version of the spell, as the weapon-based Imago does not lend the rote's benefits to ranged attacks.

Forces

Outer Music (Forces ●)

This spell enables the mage to eavesdrop on the noise of space itself, sorting out signal-to-noise frequencies without benefit of complex machinery or sensors. In theory, a mage using this spell could identify transmissions from alien lifeforms, hear the "music of the spheres" as the planets and stars emit their telltale signature noises or catch the sound of approaching spacecraft. Naturally, if no such data or noise is present, the spell produces only silence or white noise.

Practice: Knowing

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

A Wits + Science roll is made to enable the mage to pick out and identify the type of signal she is receiving. To break a code, an additional Wits + Occult or Computer may be necessary, while an Intelligence + Language roll can determine if the signal contains a message.

Banisher Rote: Invasion Alert

Dice Pool: Wits + Science + Forces

A Banisher may use this rote to determine if the signal is hostile and if it signals an imminent attack. By substituting Time for Forces in the dice pool, the Banisher may get a sense of the approximate time remaining before the attack arrives.

Activate Police Band (Forces ●●)

Banishers are often willing to die to pursue their bloody goals, so getting arrested isn't too big a sacrifice. Other mages, though, have to expend resources and move quickly to avoid problems with the law arrives, and so some Banishers know how to quickly summon the authorities. The Banisher sends out a signal on a police frequency. Rather than sending out a specific vocal transmission (à la the "Transmission" spell, see p. 167 of **Mage: The Awakening**), the Banisher simply sends a pulse that computers read as "officers need assistance." This spell doesn't work well in rural areas where all field communication uses two-way radios, but in cities where every patrol car has its own onboard computer, a Banisher can look forward to flashing lights in a few short minutes.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Transitory (one turn)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Banishers who make use of this spell often take the time to learn how the police (or other emergency services) communicate in the area. This spell might be used as a last resort, summoning the police to scatter combatants if things go wrong, or it might be part of the Banisher's plan all along.

Banisher Rote: 10-13

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Streetwise + Forces

This rote was created by an Obrimos Banisher who, pre-Awakening, was a police dispatcher. Noting how quickly cops respond to a call in which fellow officers are in danger, he developed this rote to summon some quick aid (or at least a distraction) when necessary.

Spare Sleepers (Forces ●●, Space ●, Prime ●)

The mage can fire (or throw or loose) ranged weapon attacks that will strike only mages and other supernatural

beings. He can sweep a fully automatic weapon through a crowd without fear of hitting Sleepers, blindly loose arrows or throw knives, or use the spell to guarantee that he isn't hitting a supernatural target's Sleeper double, or a Sleeper that he mistakenly thinks is a supernatural being.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Prime and Space lock on to the auras of everyone in range; Forces turns bullets and other projectiles away from targets the spell "tags" as Sleepers. The spell doesn't directly reveal who is and isn't a Sleeper, but an observant mage who sees projectiles tumble away from certain targets will be able to figure it out.

The mage must accept a penalty based on the maximum area of effect in which the spell will function. There are also a number of ways to fool the spell. A supernatural target who suppresses his aura or masks it as a Sleeper's will not be struck by projectiles fired under the influence of the spell. Sleepers with altered auras may not be able to take advantage of the spell's protection.

Banisher Rote: Take the Shot

Dice Pool: Composure + Firearms + Forces

Rumor has it that this spell was originally developed by a former police sniper. The inventor's name has been lost, but gun-toting Banishers have passed it around amongst themselves ever since. Thanks to this spell, a Banisher almost never needs to worry about shooting the wrong person — by Banisher standards, at least.

Trojan Horse

(Forces ●●●● + Time ●● + Fate ●●)

The use of this spell is undoubtedly an act of cruelty; some might even call it an act of terrorism. In the end, however, the difference between a terrorist and a freedom fighter depends on point of view. Certainly, Banishers have no qualms about using this spell in their fight against mages. The mage plants a destructive spell in a Sleeper subject, concealing a lethal time bomb within an unsuspecting person.

Practice: Unraveling

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: 1 Mana + 1 Willpower

This spell implants the Forces 4 rote "Thunderbolt" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 173) in a Sleeper. A Sleeper subject is procured by the caster, who proceeds to cast the "Thunderbolt" spell. At the very last moment, the mage channels the energy of the spell into the Sleeper, rather than at the Sleeper. This type of casting requires concentration and slows the spell from an instant action to a special type

of extended action. The mage has a window of three turns in which to properly complete the spell, or the thunderbolt will be discharged targeting the Sleeper. The extended roll requires five successes.

Once the spell has been set in the target, the mage weaves Fate and Time into the spell so it remains dormant until the Sleeper is in the presence of magic. The very next time a spell is cast within sensory range of the Sleeper, the "Thunderbolt" spell is discharged, targeting the source of the magic. The spell released in this way from a Sleeper requires no roll to hit. Damage caused by the spell is equal to the caster's Gnosis + 3.

Changing the primary Arcanum of the spell could produce a variety of different effects. Cast with Matter 4, for example, the spell could incorporate the "Transmute Air" spell (see p. 202 of **Mage: The Awakening**) to transmute the air breathed out by the Sleeper carrier into sarin gas.

Use of this rote is an act of hubris requiring a degeneration check for mages of Wisdom 4 or higher (roll three dice).

Banisher Rote: Minefield

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Forces

A Guardians of the Veil cabal, located in Chicago, have published a report documenting the cabal's battles with a small cell of Banishers and the Banishers' extensive use of this spell. The report indicates Banishers use this spell in two ways. One is to seed a crowd with Sleeper carriers, then draw a mage to the crowd and attack them in a mundane fashion. The crueller use is to cast the spell on Sleeper friends and allies of a mage.

Life

Simulate Basic Needs (Life ●●)

The mage can immediately obviate the effects of hunger and fatigue on him, readying himself for another full day of work in a few seconds.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Banishers don't always have time to rest and eat in between battles, and sometimes it behooves them to keep hammering on their enemies, regardless of how many days of pursuit and aggression it takes. This spell allows a Banisher to force his body to generate the energy it needs to simulate a nutritious meal and eight hours of healthy sleep. Casting this spell removes the effects of fatigue and hunger deprivation, and allows the mage to regain one point of Willpower as though he had slept for a full night.

Casting this spell repeatedly over a series of days, though, is difficult. Whenever the Banisher uses this spell, he is creating nutrients from his own body. Most people have

enough body fat for this to work, but casting this spell does force the mage's body to feast on itself. Over a period of time, the mage runs the risk of losing too much body mass and suffering malnutrition (which this spell can't cure).

In game terms, if a mage uses this spell for a number of consecutive days in excess of his Stamina, he suffers one point of lethal damage per day. So, if a mage with Stamina 2 uses this spell continuously, he suffers one point of lethal damage on the third day, a second on the fourth day and so on. This damage can't be healed magically, but if the mage starts eating normally again, it heals at a rate of one point per day.

At Life 3, the mage can cast this spell on others. If the subject is unwilling for whatever reason, subtract her Stamina from the mage's dice pool.

Banisher Rote: Rested and Ready

Dice Pool: Stamina + Survival + Life (- Stamina)

A Banisher strategist realized that the ability to "refresh" quickly after a fight was a critical advantage to have. He developed this rote to give his cult and him the power to do so, and used the few hours this bought them to devastating effect on his enemies.

Induce Vertigo (Life ●●●●)

The mage can send a victim into a fit of vertigo with a single touch.

Practice: Fraying

Action: Instant

Duration: Transitory (one turn)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

The Banisher must touch her target to use this spell (at Life 4, she can cast Induce Vertigo at sensory range). Subtract the target's Stamina from the spell roll. The spell affects the target's inner ear, causing him to become dizzy, nauseated and disoriented. The target's player must make a Stamina + Resolve roll each *turn* that this spell affects him. Failure means that the target falls down and cannot rise or take any action until the player makes the roll successfully. During that time, the Banisher (or anyone else, for that matter) can perform a killing blow to the target (see p. 168 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Even if the player succeeds on the Stamina + Resolve roll, the character suffers a -3 penalty to all actions while the spell is in effect. A mage with Life 2 can cast a covert Ruling spell to cancel this effect (Life 3 to affect others).

Normally, this spell is transitory in Duration, though the Banisher can use Duration Factors to extend it. At Life 5, the spell can be cast with a prolonged Duration.

Banisher Rote: Venom of the Righteous

Dice Pool: Strength + Medicine + Life - Stamina

Aaron Murphy, the "Huntsman" Banisher (see p. 103), developed this rote in his ongoing campaign to kill non-Thyrus mages. As a Master of Life, he is capable of spreading his "venom" over a small area, and then walking through

it, delivering killing blows at will. His disciples, however, have to start with the less potent version.

Matter

Sense Poisons and Drugs (Matter ●, Life ●)

The mage can sense the presence of poisons and drugs in liquid, solid or gaseous matter. He might not know the name of a specific substance but immediately understands what effects it would have in the human body. His senses extend to substances that have been adulterated by a poison or drug, so he can detect a drugged drink or poisoned food. Even if a substance is not a poison or drug per se, he understands at a glance what effects the substance would have if inhaled, ingested or introduced into the bloodstream.

Practice: Knowing

Action: Instant

Duration: Concentration

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

A mage with Matter 2 and Life 2 can extend this spell's benefits to another person.

Banisher Rote: Psionic Toxin Analysis

Dice Pool: Resolve + Science + Matter

The Militant Auditing cult uses this rote to detect attempts by so-called suppressive persons to drug or poison cult members. The cult is paranoid by policy and requires members to use the rote on everything from restaurant takeout to hotel rooms.

Secret Compartment (Matter ●●●●)

The mage can create a hollow area inside a block of solid matter whose only point of access is a hatch that's invisible until opened.

Practice: Patterning

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

The mage must devote spell Potency in cases where the chamber's Size exceeds 20. When the hatch is closed, its door either blends in among the object's existing seams and marks or fits with a seal too tight and fine to be seen with the naked eye. The secret compartment is airtight unless the object normally admits airflow.

The spell hollows out a chamber in an object by converting the matter inside. This reduces the object's Durability and Structure. If the mage puts the compartment inside a machine, the compartment could wreck the machine by disintegrating key components to make room.

The mage opens the compartment hatch by applying pressure in specific places and patterns. This is a mechanical effect, so she can teach another person how to open a given hatch. There's also a slight chance that a passerby might stumble upon the method.

Observers can't see or feel the hatch without magic or supernaturally enhanced senses. They can, however guess at the existence of a hidden chamber by the object's weight or the sound the object gives off when struck.

Banisher Rote: Instant Locker

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Crafts + Matter

Won-Il Hwang is famous in certain circles because of his willingness to travel around the globe in pursuit of sorcerers. He routinely smuggles weapons, chemicals and explosives by creating hidden compartments wherever he goes. Hwang's also created several caches in different locations — mostly around airports or famous landmarks. If pursued, he'll fall back to one of these locations, resupply and turn the tables on his enemies. Hwang drew on his professional experience as an engineer to develop the rote. He designs hidden chambers in his mind but needs Supernal power to create them.

Mind

Merge Mind (Mind ●)

With this spell, a mage can combine disparate or divided parts of him into a single, focused mind, stopping the process of “runaway thoughts” or sometimes avoiding schizophrenic episodes, at least for the length of the spell's Duration (one scene).

Practice: Compelling

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one Scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

The mage is able to center his mind, driving out extraneous thoughts or silencing “voices” in his head. Sometimes used to help a mage with attention problems, such as ADD or ADHD, focus on one continuous and sustained plan of action, this spell also helps individuals with Asperger's syndrome or moderate to advanced autism to function temporarily as “normal” humans.

Banisher Rote: Roger's Single Voice

Dice Pool: Wits + Expression + Mind (optional)

Roger, or any Banisher with a similar problem, can bring his inward-turning, rapidly processing mind into a state of relative stillness and focus to communicate with other people in an intelligible and rational fashion, including engaging in “small talk” about the weather or sports or giving clear, concise instructions for building a complicated piece of experimental machinery.

Stammer (Mind ●●)

The use of High Speech among order mages is commonplace. Most mages learn the proper pronunciation of the ancient language during their apprenticeship and rarely seriously misspeak a word during the casting of a spell. The language of Atlantis is the language of power, and when High Speech is spoken incorrectly, that power has a negative impact on spellcasting.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Transitory

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

This spell causes the words of High Speech to stumble out of the mouth of the target, slightly changing their meaning. With a single success on the casting roll, the target mage using High Speech to bolster a spell will suffer a -2 dice penalty on his casting roll. The target may realize he has misspoken by succeeding on a reflexive Intelligence + Occult roll. A mage who realizes his mistake may choose to abort the spell, but must still count the chanting as his action for the turn.

Banisher Rote: Tongue Tied

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Mind

During his extended surveillance of order mages in Miami, a solitary Banisher noted the mages frequently chanted in an unknown language to enhance their spells. The Banisher developed this rote as a method of disrupting the chanting, giving him the edge in a fight.

Call Eidolon

(Mind ●●●● + Spirit ●●●●)

The mage calls upon her nobler instincts, melding her conscience and enlightened urges into an ephemeral entity that dwells within Twilight. This higher self is called the *eidolon*.

Practice: Patterning

Action: Extended (target number equals the mage's Resolve + Composure)

Duration: Prolonged (1 hour)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: 1 Mana

This spell is the flipside of Goetic Evocation (see **Mage: The Awakening**, pp. 324–325). Instead of summoning the character's personified Vice, this spell calls her Virtue. Use the rules for Goetic Evocation to design the spirit based on the number of successes scored. Instead of Possession, eidolons automatically start with the Living Fetter Numen.

The mage's personality and beliefs control an eidolon's appearance and shape. The spirit takes an appearance that the mage associates with goodness. The spirit could look like a radiant, winged angel, one of the 18 Buddhist *arhats*

or like a historical figure she's always admired. In most cases, the eidolon either looks something like the mage or appears to be a parent, lover or close friend.

An eidolon can't be forced to give its mage Willpower points. On the other hand, it will explicitly point out opportunities for the mage to fulfill her Virtue, increasing the likelihood that she'll earn back spent Willpower points by "doing the right thing." An eidolon also opposes its mage whenever she looks likely to either satisfy her Vice or act against her Virtue. Depending on the eidolon and the situation at hand, the spirit uses everything from calm conversation to physical interven-

tion to keep the mage on a righteous path. Unlike a goetic demon, an eidolon is not automatically bound to follow the mage's orders, but it feels a duty of care and will usually help its host unless she's planning an immoral act.

An advanced version of the spell, using Prime 5 and Spirit 5, can evoke another person's eidolon.

Banisher Rote: Sarah

Dice Pool: Resolve + Empathy + Mind

Scelesti killed Sarah Holt, but her husband John survived to Awaken. He saw fire leap from their hands and knew they

Sarah, John Holt's Hope

Quote: John, listen to me. Love is never giving up — not never letting go.

Background: Sarah is John Holt's eidolon: the personification of his hope, bound to his best memories of the real Sarah Holt. She doesn't contain any of the genuine article's thoughts and feelings and her personality's only like the original's if you cut out all the arguments, everyday tensions — everything but the moments she and John declared their love for each other with utter sincerity. The real Sarah was a funny, cynical woman; the eidolon is direct, unaffected and idealistic in a way that only Hope itself could be.

Description: The eidolon is a slender woman with long, straight black hair and copper-colored eyes. She walks barefoot, with a dancer's grace and usually wears the long blue summer dress she had on when John and the real Sarah first kissed. A soft light often surrounds her, but she's capable of dousing it and making herself look like any other woman.

Storytelling Hints: John Holt hunts mages alone. He cruises the Pacific Northwest in a battered SUV, popping caffeine and amphetamines to stay awake on the trail of "Devil worshipers." John tends to target Scelesti and Abyssal cults, but he doesn't really know the difference between them and other mages.

He usually summons Sarah after he's killed someone, destroyed something or has had to flee from Sleeper authorities. She's created anew with each spell, but she draws enough from John's memories to keep a continuous identity. Her abilities may also change from manifestation to manifestation. The profile listed below is a typical incarnation.

John gets suicidal at times. Talking to Sarah shores up his faltering will to live. She leads John to places where he can do simple, good deeds and reconnect with the world. She also helps John behind his back, scouting the area for trouble and even arranging for John to meet people who can help him. Sarah might even reach out to Pentacle mages if she thinks John needs them.

She's recently been trying to encourage John to move on, meet another woman and stop mourning her. Hope always looks forward to a better future, but John Holt's still stuck in his mournful past.

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 5, Resistance 6

Willpower: 10

Essence: 20

Initiative: 9

Speed: 14

Size: 5

Corpus: 11

Influence: Hope 3

Numen: Materialize (nine dice), Living Fetter (nine dice) Healing Heart (nine dice)

worshiped some kind of demon. He was tied up, bleeding and angry, so he called out to it — and it answered. That's how he escaped and got the power to kill Sarah's murderers. But at the last moment, when he could have called the demon's true name and taken the cult's power for himself, he stopped, begged Sarah for forgiveness and reflexively bound his will within a powerful, obsessed Imago. She appeared.

John spends his days hunting supernatural evil and thinking of her. When he doesn't know what to do he calls out to Sarah, asking her to remember what he was like before he took up the Banisher's burden. She appears as shining and beautiful as the day they met and always reminds him that he's still a *good* person deep down, in the part of his soul that murder and angry magic can't touch.

Confuse Language (Mind ●●●●)

This spell throws the target's language skills into chaos. She can't read, write (or type), speak or understand spoken language. This deficiency even extends to all forms of sign language.

Practice: Unraveling

Action: Instant; subtract target's Resolve

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

To a victim of this spell, language doesn't look or sound any different — she just doesn't understand it. When she tries to talk, she babbles incoherently. When she tries to write, she puts down random, senseless strings of words and letters. The target can communicate in crude gestures or by drawing, but not at a level of abstraction that allows true sign language or pictograms.

The spell casts a notable burden on mages because it bars them from using High Speech or Atlantean runes.

Banisher Rote: Babel

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Mind

Banishers who follow the Abrahamic religions (including Christianity, Islam and Judaism) frequently develop this spell. Devout Banishers recall the Tower of Babel: a story that bears more than a passing resemblance to legends about the fall of Atlantis.

No Exit (Mind ●●●●●)

The mage can rework the communication paths of the target person's brain to form a loop that prevents thoughts or words from escaping the conscious mind. To all intents and purposes, the targeted individual appears catatonic or, at best, profoundly autistic. Attempts to communicate by



other means, such as drawing or writing (including typing), result in gibberish.

Practice: Unmaking

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting (permanent)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: 2 Mana

The mage must succeed in a contested role to exercise this power over an Awakened target, and an Awakened victim may attempt a contested role against the original success to break out of the loop. If the casting mage wishes,

she may attempt to reinforce the strength of the loop by re-casting the spell each month. Casting the spell sooner results in failure or, in the event of a dramatic failure, the breaking of the loop. Sleepers have no defense against this rote unless another mage has imbued them with protections against Mind magic.

Banisher Rote: Welcome to Roger's World

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Expression + Mind

Roger's peculiar take on this spell, and the form the spell takes whenever he casts it, causes the victim to speak in inarticulate phrases, unable to finish any thoughts either mentally or verbally. This means that a victim of "Roger's World" cannot even put together the complete thought "I'm going to try to overcome this spell" without first succeeding in a Willpower roll against a difficulty of 10.

Prime

Detect Banisher (Prime ●)

The Banisher can recognize the subtle distinctions in aura between normal mages and those of his ilk.

Practice: Knowing

Action: Instant

Duration: Concentration

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Banishers, for whatever reason, have magical signatures that are slightly different from those of other mages. While some Banishers refuse to work together, and are just as willing to kill each other as their foes, others long for companionship and backup. This spell allows a mage to see the cracks in a Banisher's aura and feel the chill from the Abyss within.

Non-Banisher mages can use this spell, as well, but they suffer a -2 penalty on the attempt. Use of this spell is also believed to make mages more susceptible to becoming Banishers, though this might just be paranoid rumor.

Any use of this spell adds the target's Abyssal Resonance Merit dots, if any, to the attempt (making mages with this Merit easier to detect). Note, though, that casting this spell upon a target with Abyssal Resonance ●● makes the spell vulgar in aspect (see p. 39).

Banisher Rote: Friendly Faces

Dice Pool: Wits + Composure + Prime

More than one Banisher over the years has developed this rote, and in larger cults, it's not too unlikely that someone winds up learning or creating it. Strength in numbers, after all.

Imbue Animal (Prime ●●● + Life ●●●)

The Banisher can imbue a living creature with one or more spells, creating an animal that functions as an imbued item.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Extended

Duration: Special

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: 1 Mana per spell

This spell functions as Imbue Item (p. 225 of **Mage: The Awakening**), save that this spell works on a living creature. The mage cannot affect human beings with this spell, though it's possible that an archmage might have this ability. Unlike Imbue Item, this spell is always vulgar, but all other particulars of that spell apply here. In addition, any use of this spell causes a check to avoid degeneration at Wisdom 5 or greater.

More information on imbued animals can be found on p. 75.

Banisher Rote: Genesis 1:26

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Animal Ken + Prime

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." The Banisher who created this rote quoted this passage whenever imbuing an animal with a spell. Though he is long dead, he inscribed the rote on numerous grimoires, marked with sigils intended to prevent anyone but Banishers from reading them.

Marked Power (Prime ●●● + Space ●●)

The art of intelligence-gathering includes a variety of ways to mark your target to allow for easier surveillance. This particular method of marking a mage targets their greatest strength and weakness, Mana.

Practice: Weaving

Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Covert

Cost: 1 Mana

This spell targets a tassel that forms naturally around a Hallow. With a single success on the casting roll, the mage implants a magical signature into the tassel. This signature lies dormant and cannot be detected by any means until the tassel is broken down to be used. Once this occurs, the signature activates and functions as an intimate sympathetic connection to the mage who used the tassel to refill her Mana pool. The sympathetic connection persists as long as even one dot of Mana gained from the marked tassel remains in the mage's pool.

A perceptive mage using Supernal Vision (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 221) may notice something odd about someone who has absorbed marked Mana. Suspicious mages may roll Resolve + Composure - the Potency of the "Marked Power" casting. With a success, the mage realizes that the Mana of person he is observing has been tampered with in some way, but additional study will be required to reveal exactly how.

Banisher Rote: Tag

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Prime

A cabal in Philadelphia brought a strange story to the notice of the local Consilium, shortly before the disappearance of the entire cabal. The mages had noticed an unusual quality about the Mana stored in their Patterns. Further investigation by the Consilium eventually uncovered evidence that the cabal had been attacked by a cell of Banishers calling themselves Children of Liberty.

When one of the Children of Liberty was apprehended, magically reinforced questioning revealed the Banishers had used this spell (in conjunction with more mundane forms of intelligence-gathering) to spy on the cabal and track the members' movements. Appalled by this information, the Hierarch of Philadelphia ordered a full-scale seek-and-destroy attack on the remaining Children of Liberty. To date, however, no further Banishers have been found in the city.

Price of Hubris (Prime ●●● + any one of the attacking spell's Arcana ●)

For many mages, the casting of a vulgar spell is an act of arrogance. Even with full knowledge that the Fallen World rejects such overt displays of power, the mage who routinely employs such spells is akin

to a brawler who relies only on his strength. In either case, the person's arrogance becomes the root of his defeat.

Practice: Shielding

Action: Instant and contested; successes are compared to the target spell's Potency

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Covert

Cost: 1 Mana

This spell follows the same rules as Counterspell (see p. 123 of **Mage: The Awakening**) except that if the Potency of the "Price of Hubris" casting is equal to, or greater than, the potency of the targeted spell, the hostile spell is redirected to its source. Any redirected spell becomes an Aimed spell, requiring a single success on a Wits + Occult + Prime roll to hit the target (normal modifiers apply). The effects of a redirected spell are equal to successes rolled on the original casting of that spell.

The mage must be the direct target of a hostile spell to redirect that spell. Spells that include the mage in an area of effect, or that have an indirect effect on the mage cannot be redirected.

Banisher Rote: Simple Simon's Glee

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Prime

A Banisher by the name of Simon Barnes concocted this rote to turn the powers of the "demons" he fought back on them. Known as "Simple" Simon to the media, who thought him a serial killer, Simon was eventually shot and killed by city police. Shortly after his death, Simon's body disappeared from the morgue and his notes, a sheaf of loose-leaf mad scribbles, vanished from the police evidence room.

*Annihilate Spell
(Prime ●●●● +
Time ●●●)*

The mage counters or activates all hung and prolonged spells that a target has active. A capable Banisher can spread this effect across an area.

Practice: Unraveling

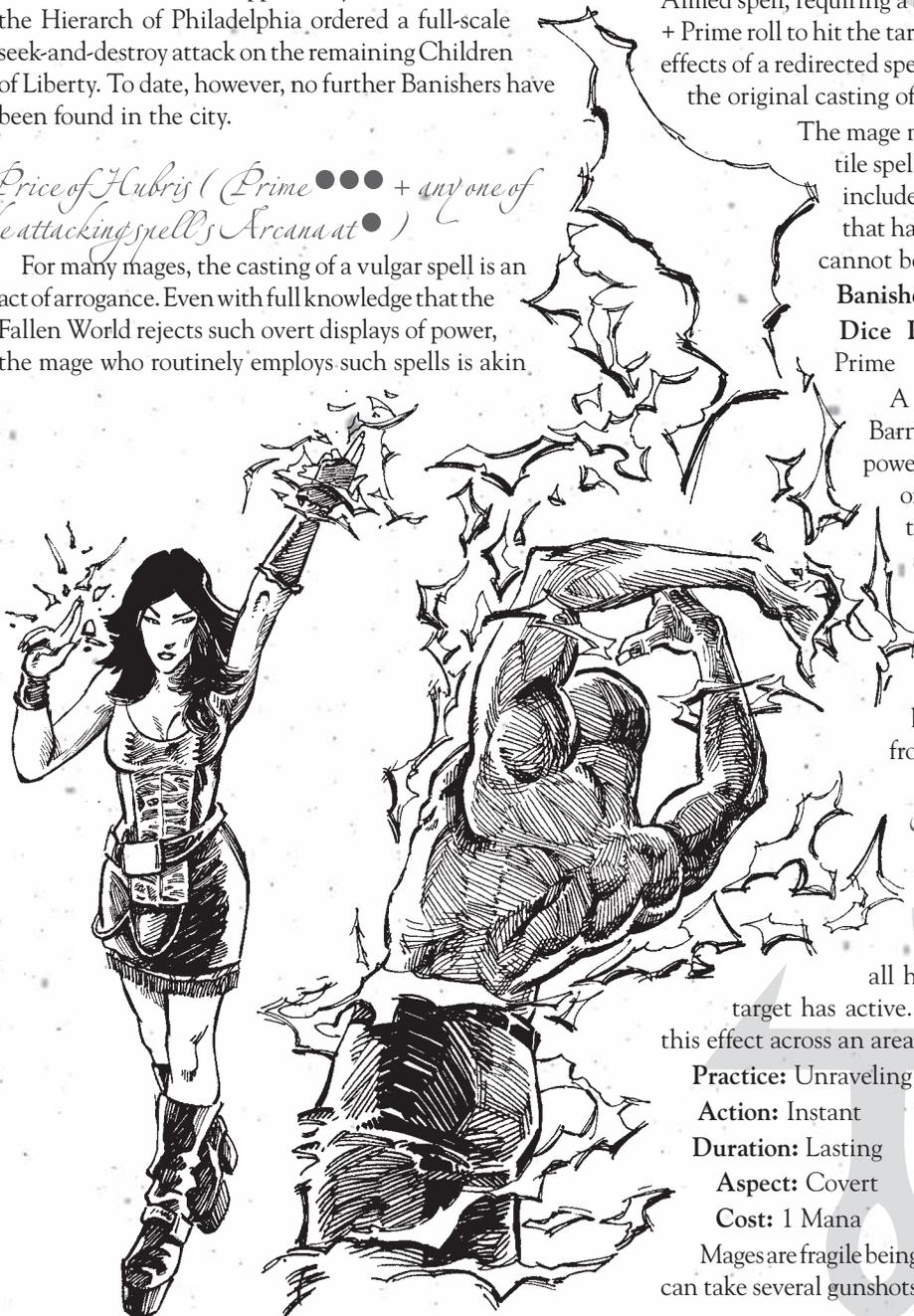
Action: Instant

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Covert

Cost: 1 Mana

Mages are fragile beings, but given enough time, any mage can take several gunshots or wounds before collapsing, and



every second that a mage isn't dead is another opportunity for him to turn the tables on his Banisher assailant. This spell allows the Banisher to strip away a mage's preexisting advantages: armor spells, hung spells, even Mage Sight. The Banisher uses Time to turn the "clock" ahead on an existing spell, and Prime to unravel it, much as Supernal Dispellation (see p. 229 of **Mage: The Awakening**). Unlike that spell, however, the mage doesn't need to beat the spell's Potency, as he is attacking the spell as it will exist in the future (that is, as it starts to fade and lose its Potency).

The Banisher must touch the mage to use this spell, but at Prime 5, he can cast it at sensory range. The mage can also work in target factors at this level, affecting several targets at once.

Banisher Rote: Oblivion

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Prime

The infamous Banisher known only as "Brown" perfected this rote, and used it to great effect against the mages of the Pacific Northwest. His cult, consisting only of Sleepers and Sleepwalkers, would wait until he removed the shields and other protective spells from their targets, and then the cult members would open fire.

Curse of the Fallen World (Prime ●●●●)

This spell forces an enemy mage to reveal his Awakened state with every spell he casts and increases the likelihood of a backlash against that mage.

Practice: Fraying

Action: Instant and contested; target rolls Resolve + Gnosis reflexively

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: 1 Mana

Mages are able to cast covert spells by working within the established rules for what is considered possible in the Fallen World. This spell forces magic used by the mage to manifest itself visibly and audibly. An "Alter Integrity" spell (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 198) used to weaken a lock might cause the lock to shriek with the sound of bending metal and glow red (for example).

With a successful casting, every spell cast by the targeted mage is considered vulgar for the remainder of the scene. Additionally, every casting uncloaks the cursed mage's nimbus in an enhanced state, making the nimbus stronger in effect than is usual. The summation of all this excess magical energy results in the addition of +1 die to each Paradox check made by the cursed mage during the scene.

Banisher Rote: Force Paradox

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Prime

Order mages who have studied literature of more organized and educated Banishers have found citations of Paradox as support for their theories that magic is unnatural. They insist that if mages were meant to wield mystical powers, counter-

forces such as Paradox wouldn't exist. Banishers claim this rote was first developed in Atlantis by the Timori, but such claims are dubious at best, and near impossible to prove.

Delusions of Grandeur (Prime ●●●●)

The heady rush of power involved with casting a spell is like a drug to mages. The more power available to a mage, the greater the temptation to use that power. This spell tempts a mage with power, then punishes him for using it.

Practice: Unraveling

Action: Instant; subtract target's Resistance

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

This spell targets the Mana of an opponent, allowing it to flow more easily from the target for a limited time. For the Duration of the spell, the target mage may spend one Mana more per turn than would normally be allowed by his Gnosis rating. Excited by the feeling of the Mana surging within them, mages usually give in to the temptation of spending more Mana than is necessary, but this newfound power comes at a price. While the mage is under the effect of this spell, any Mana expenditure is doubled in cost.

Banisher Rote: Mana Leak

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Prime – Resistance

Abuse of power by mages is a common element in the poorly produced Banisher pamphlets used to indoctrinate their followers. No power is as absolute as magic, they say, and so it follows that all mages must be corrupted by their power eventually. The Banishers point to the success of this particular rote against order mages as proof of this claim.

Pierce Magical Shield (Prime ●●●●)

The mage can bypass the protection granted by magical Shielding spells.

Practice: Unraveling

Action: Instant

Aspect: Covert

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Cost: None

Each level of Potency allows the mage to ignore one point of magical armor when he attacks targets that possess it. This benefit is exclusive to the caster and affects any targets he attacks during the spell's Duration.

This spell affects only Awakened Shielding spells. It does not affect mundane armor or armor granted by other supernatural powers.

A mage with Prime 5 can grant this spell's benefit to another.

Banisher Rote: Eye and Hand of David

Dice Pool: Composure + Athletics + Prime

Simplicius was a theologian, not a warrior, but in one desperate moment he had to defend himself from a seemingly unstoppable gang of mages. They shrugged off his son's bullets before they killed the boy. They chased Simplicius to an old quarry. That's when he prayed that God would forgive him for dabbling in the occult. He gave his magic up to God, and in seeming response, a stone dropped right into his open hand, jostled from above by a witch crawling down to ambush him.

With perfect faith he looked up, threw the stone and knocked the formerly bulletproof enemy unconscious. Simplicius managed to frighten off the rest with a few handfuls of rocks, got away and shared his revelation with other Banishers.

Poison Mana (Prime ●●●●)

The mage can introduce dangerous occult vibrations to part or all of a supply of Mana as long as it isn't being stored within a living being. Once used, the poisoned Mana injures whoever's channeling it.

Practice: Fraying/Patterning

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: 1 Mana

The spell taints a number of points of Mana equal to the spell's Potency. The spell can be cast on a Hallow, where it affects the first Mana drawn until its Potency in points has been withdrawn. Once a mage internalizes the Mana, the poisoned Mana stays inert until it's transferred to another receptacle, expended on a spell or used on another action. When that happens, the Mana performs its normal functions, but each point spent also inflicts a point of lethal damage.

A Prime 5 version of this spell can be used to poison Mana to such an extent that it inflicts aggravated damage.

Banisher Rote: The Wages of Sin

Dice Pool: Presence + Expression + Prime

Famous "cult awareness researcher" Isaiah Pickens conducts regular sermons at places he says are hotbeds of cult activity. He does the same thing for fellow Banishers when they bring him objects that stink of excess Mana. The theme of every sermon is that Satan has no real power and his promises and payments are always empty.

He says, "That rush you feel, exploring witchcraft and playing with the dark side can never profit you — Satan has nothing to give! Even when he looks like he's giving you the power he has to take something away to keep the balance of his gifts — a balance of zero. Those are the wages of sin, my friends." And, for mages who draw from Hallows and items he's preached around, that turns out to be true.

Tainted Source (Prime ●●●●)

Poisoning a well used by your enemies has been a valid (if repugnant) strategy employed by humans in their struggles

against each other from time out of mind. This spell poisons the Awakened version of the town well, the Hallow.

Practice: Unraveling

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Covert

Cost: 1 Mana per roll

The total number of successes gained during the casting represents the amount of Mana that will be tainted when it is drawn from the Hallow.

Successes **Amount of Mana Tainted**

5 1

10 5

15 10

20 15

25 20

30 25

Tainted Mana is sluggish in the body of a mage, and responds more slowly when called upon. While a mage retains any tainted Mana in his pool, he can spend only one Mana per turn, regardless of his Gnosis rating. Additionally, tainted Mana cannot be used for Pattern Restoration (see p. 77 of **Mage: The Awakening**).

Mages viewing a Hallow with Mage Sight may notice the Hallow has been tainted with a single success on a Composure + Occult roll. The simplest way to cleanse a Hallow of its taint is to simply draw out the tainted Mana, but mages theorize there must be other ways of accomplishing the cleansing.

Use of this rote is an act of hubris requiring a degeneration check for mages of Wisdom 4 or higher (roll three dice).

Banisher Rote: Poisoned Well

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult + Prime

For Banishers without the ability to completely shut down a functioning Hallow, this spell acts as a fair deterrent to mages seeking to refresh their Mana from an unclaimed Hallow. Use of the spell against a claimed Hallow is much more challenging, but can still be used as a sort of preliminary attack against a cabal. This rote is commonly used by the Shepherds (see p. 120) when they begin their citywide attacks against mages.

Desiccate (Prime ●●●●● + Life ●●●●)

The mage can drain the subject of one of her Physical Attributes, her Mana (if Awakened) or her Health and augment his own pool.

Practice: Unmaking

Action: Instant

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: None

The caster cannot increase his pool beyond the maximum he can have (for example, an individual with a Strength 3 can only increase his Strength to 5 and cannot exceed

the amount of Mana he can hold according to his Gnosis rating). Similar to the spell "Siphon Mana" (Prime ●●●●●), successive castings against the same target within the same scene suffer a cumulative -2 dice penalty.

If an Attribute or Health is reduced to 0, the caster has the option of returning a portion of the siphoned energy to bring the Attribute or Health rating up to 1. Otherwise, the victim dies.

An Awakened target can attempt to resist through a contested roll: Willpower versus the caster's successes. A Sleeper has no defense unless otherwise protected by a mage. Protective spells apply.

Banisher Rote: Weaken the Alien

Dice Pool: Wits + Occult + Prime

The Translator version of this spell, used by Morris, is intended to keep any aliens or suspected aliens (or even alien sympathizers) from operating at their full capacity and

posing a threat to the Banishers during questioning and up to the time of "translation."

Halt the Flow (Prime ●●●●●)

The act of denying resources to an enemy is fundamental in any conflict. Sometimes harsh measures must be taken in particularly brutal situations to gain final victory. This spell is employed with the idea that it is better to destroy something than let the enemy use it to destroy you.

Practice: Unmaking

Action: Extended

Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: 1 Mana per dot rating of the target Hallow

This spell slowly dissipates the energy of a Hallow, reducing it to a mundane location. Each dot of a Hallow is considered a separate extended roll and requires 10 successes to destroy. The Mana cost of the spell may be paid throughout the casting, rather than all at once. To fully destroy a Hallow, the mage must continue his work uninterrupted until the rating of the Hallow is reduced to zero. Once a Hallow is reduced to zero dots, it is considered destroyed. The backlash of suppressed magical energy forms a "Dead Zone" (see p. 230 of **Mage: The Awakening**) with the original rating of the Hallow acting as the number of successes gained to determine radius and volume. Until a Hallow is reduced to zero dots, treat the Hallow as being subjected to a "Suppress Hallow" spell (see p. 229 of **Mage: The Awakening**).

The casting of this spell creates a powerful clash in magic as the mage strives to pit himself against the natural magic of the Hallow. The visible results of this struggle can manifest themselves as violent storms, rains of frogs, glowing bands of light in the sky (similar to the *aurora borealis*) or anything else the Storyteller can devise. Mages attempting to destroy powerful Hallows are advised to seek help and cast this spell as a group ritual (see p. 129 of **Mage: The Awakening**) to increase their chances of success.

Banisher Rote: Destroy Hallow

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Prime

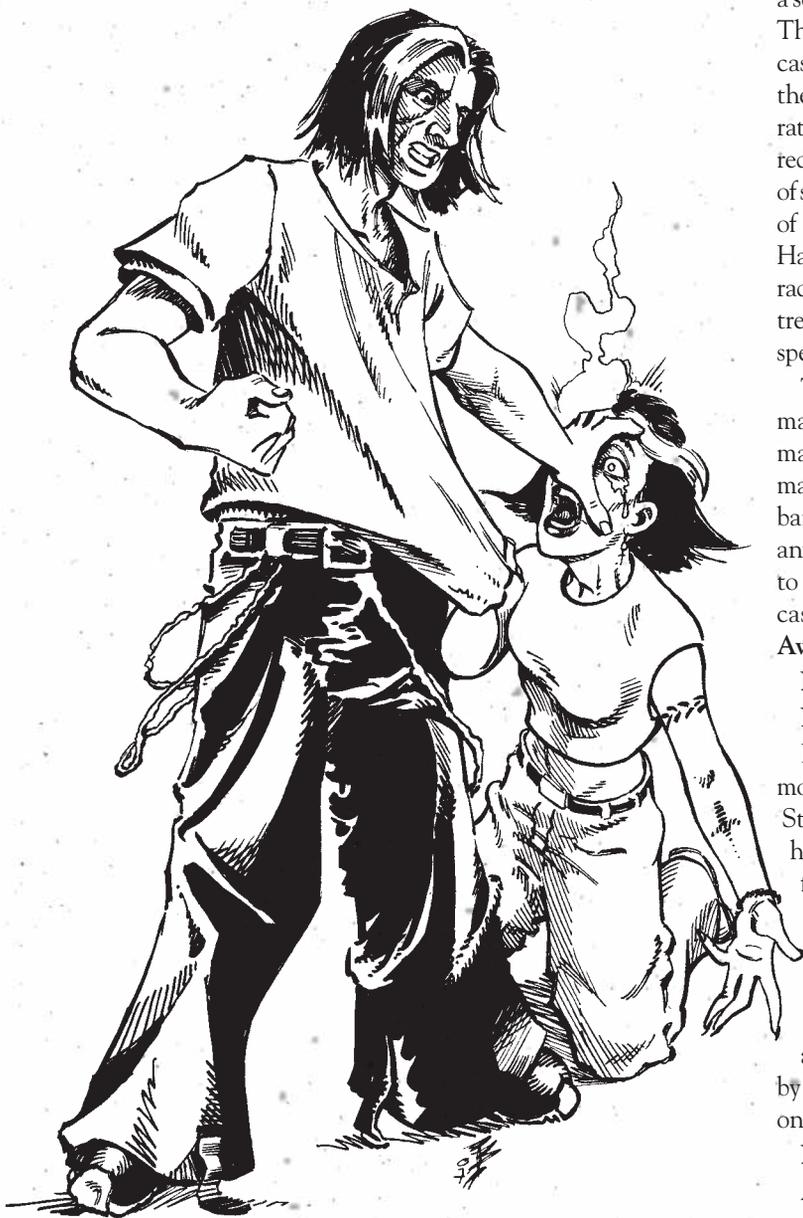
Banishers adept at this level of Prime are a rare commodity amongst what passes for a Banisher community. Still, those practitioners capable of wielding this power have been known to keep in contact with each other and form *ad hoc* cabals for the sole purpose of destroying a particularly powerful Hallow.

Scorched Earth (Prime ●●●●●)

Drawing an enemy to a battlefield of your choosing is a basic tenet of combat, understood instinctively even by lower life forms. Use of this spell prepares a battlefield on which magic is not welcome.

Practice: Unmaking

Action: Extended



Duration: Lasting

Aspect: Covert

Cost: 1 Mana per category (see below)

Casting this spell first requires the mage be inside the radius of a “Dead Zone” (**Mage: The Awakening**, p. 230). The “Scorched Earth” spell then increases the Potency of the magic Dead Zone by further leeching any remaining hints of magical energy from the physical surroundings of the area and strengthening the boundaries of the zone. In addition to the usual effects of a Dead Zone, every five successes gained on the extended casting roll increases the Potency of the Dead Zone by one category on the chart below. The caster needn’t raise the zone to category 5 if she doesn’t wish to, but may stop whenever she likes. Effects generated by increasing category are cumulative.

Category	Effects
1	All spells suffer a –3 dice penalty.
2	Mana costs for spells are doubled.
3	Mana is leeching from every mage present at the rate of one Mana per turn.
4	The effective Gnosis rating of any mage in the zone is reduced by 2.
5	Any roll for Paradox gains the 8-again quality (re-roll results of 8, 9 and 10).

Familiars, spirits and most other supernatural entities will not willingly enter an area of Scorched Earth, and even non-sapient entities will avoid the area instinctively.

Casting this spell is an act of hubris requiring a degeneration roll for mages of Wisdom 4 or higher (roll three dice).

Banisher Rote: Safe House

Dice Pool: Composure + Occult + Prime

Banishers create “Safe Houses,” the ultimate expression of their fear and hatred of magic, whenever possible. Banisher allies of the Sleeper variety frequently use such places as headquarters for their cults and sometimes as refuges from the terrors of the Fallen World.

This rote was first developed by the notorious Banisher named Elizabeth Reedy. Elizabeth worked as a web designer before her Awakening and has used her technical skills to spread instruction of how to cast this rote across the Internet. The information is disguised in the form of the eccentric ramblings of fantasy fansites and in mass email spamming.

Universal Bane (Prime ●●●●●)

Practice: Patterning

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: 1 Mana

This spell temporarily enchants a weapon or a single magazine of ammunition (the clip can be no larger than Size 1) so that it inflicts aggravated damage. The spell “supercharges” the weapon or ammunition’s Pattern, giving

the weapon or ammunition the intense reality of a Supernal form. Fallen objects can’t endure this for long, however. The weapon or ammunition burns, melts or disintegrates once the spell’s Duration expires.

Banisher Rote: Vajra Dagger

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Prime

Dorjee talked about demons all the time because they plagued his dreams. After a near-death experience, he was trapped in a *bando* or psychic “gap,” constantly confronting the Wrathful Deities that monks told him about when he was young. For years now, those same monks came to him, sharing their alms in exchange for his insights about spiritual realms.

Every night, Dorjee screamed in his dreams, but every dream taught him something new. So when the demon came disguised as a newly arrived monk Dorjee knew what to do. He stole a *vajra* — a knife that represented the “thunderbolt” of enlightenment — and stabbed the monster, calling on the absolute reality of the *dharmakaya* to dismiss its incarnation.

Spirit

Alien Spotter (Spirit ●)

With this spell, a Banisher can detect the presence of an alien force or being within a human, similar to Exorcist’s Eye (Spirit ●).

Practice: Unveiling

Action: Instant

Duration: Concentration

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

If an entity of any kind, extraterrestrial or otherwise, attempts to hide, it may use whatever method the entity possesses and pit its successes against those of the Banisher. More successes mean that the entity remains hidden and the Banisher’s attempt fails.

Banisher Rote: Invader or Parasite

Dice Pool: Wits + Empathy + Spirit (optional)

This rote enables the Banisher to determine whether or not an alien is masquerading as a human or is possessing a human who might be salvaged. So far, the Translators have not yet determined how to separate a possessing alien, though they are looking into the practice of exorcism as a model.

Buy Jar (Spirit ●●)

As the Death 2 “Soul Jar” (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 137) spell.

Practice: Ruling

Action: Instant

Duration: Prolonged (one scene)

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

Any container that can hold liquid safely can be used for this spell. Success on the casting simultaneously enchants the container so that the soul or spirit (or alien “bug”) cannot escape. The lid is usually sealed with wax or with a metal locking mechanism. The jar protects the contents from attacks and is almost indestructible. If the lid is opened, the soul or spirit can flee to its body.

Banisher Rote: Alien in a Box

Dice Pool: Presence + Crafts + Spirit or Death

The Translators have worked out a system whereby certain metals that correspond to certain sectors of the universe or planetary systems must be used in the construction of the container depending on the type of alien the mages wish to contain. If forced to use a standard jar or bottle made of a different substance, the Translator suffers a -1 die penalty. Renewed casting of the spell can extend the duration.

Alien Highway (Spirit ●●●)

The mage opens a road as in the Spirit 3 spell “Spirit Road,” but instead of crossing the Gauntlet to the Shadow Realm, there is a 25% chance that the road leads to a random spot on earth, a 25% chance of opening into the Abyss and a 25% chance of opening onto the vastness of outer space. There is, of course, a 25% chance that the spell works exactly as Spirit Road and allows access to the Shadow Realm. The intent of this spell, however, is to open a path that will enable a Banisher to send an alien entity “home.”

Practice: Weaving

Action: Extended (target number = Gauntlet strength)

Duration: Transitory (one turn)

Aspect: Vulgar

Cost: 1 Mana

A minimum of one success is necessary to open the road where the Gauntlet is weakest; a dramatic failure sucks the caster himself into a gaping rift that closes immediately, depositing the luckless caster in one of four places (see above) with no immediate egress.

The caster’s intent is more often to force another individual through the opening, in which case the caster must successfully grapple the victim and use an overpower maneuver to cast him into the road. (See the Spirit 3 spell “Spirit Road,” **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 251, for more details.)

Naturally, if the road opens onto space or the Abyss, the person who crosses onto the road usually meets his death unless he is prepared to withstand the rigors of those places.

Banisher Rote: Morris’s One-Way Trip

Dice Pool: Resolve + Survival + Spirit

The Translators’ version of this spell, as practiced by Morris, has an altered Duration — concentration. The opening can remain viable as long as the Translator concentrates on it, allowing the caster to yank the victim back once she has had a “taste” of what’s behind the door or else enabling the

caster to close the road immediately, trapping the victim on the other side, subject to whatever horrors await her.

Time

Worst Moment (Time ●●)

The Banisher learns the best possible time to strike her opponents, taking advantage of terrain, injury or any other conditions that might help.

Practice: Knowing

Action: Instant

Duration: Concentration

Aspect: Covert

Cost: None

The mage can either use this spell while physically at the location where she expects to attack her foes or combine it with Space 2 to determine both *when* and *where* to strike. In either case, temporal sympathy (see p. 259 of **Mage: The Awakening**) applies, and if the subject of the spell is under the effect of the “Shield of Chronos” spell (see p. 261 of **Mage: The Awakening**), the Banisher must exceed the Potency of that spell for this one to function.

If the spell succeeds, the Banisher knows when to attack the target to gain the greatest tactical advantage. What “greatest tactical advantage” means in game terms is somewhat fluid; the spell might indicate that attacking target at dawn, while he is just waking, would be the best use, and in that case the character might be disoriented and without his armor spells. The spell might induce the Banisher to attack the target after a protracted battle, when his Mana and Willpower reserves are depleted. The advantages can be story-based rather than mechanical, but if the Storyteller would like something more objective, he can allow the Banisher to apply twice the successes rolled for the spell in penalties over the course of the scene (much like the Bane of a mage with the Destiny Merit). These penalties are considered environmental for purposes of mitigating them with spells and other effects.

Banisher Rote: Never Let Up

Dice Pool: Wits + Investigation + Time

The creator of this rote is long dead, shot multiple times by the Sleeper widow of one of the mages he killed. The creator was a ruthless Banisher, pursuing identified mages until they couldn’t run anymore and then looking ahead to determine where they would go to sleep. He taught this rote to at least one of his protégés, however, and so it slowly spreads to other Banishers.

Tools

The Banishers find themselves in possession of lost Artifacts or imbued items more commonly than one might

expect, given their philosophy of magic as anathema. Some are quickly destroyed, while others might be wielded against other mages, depending on the Banisher in question and his interpretation of what role the item plays in the world. Some Banishers, such as the Translators or Militant Auditing Division, devise imbued items through means they consider scientific rather than “supernatural.” Others simply happen across Artifacts through seeming chance. The greater hand of Destiny is often at work where the Banishers tread.

Artifacts

Abyssal Scope (●●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 0, Structure 3

Mana Capacity: 11

While modern weapons and accessories aren't typically found in the Supernal Realms, this scope — suitable for use with any rifle or pistol that would normally support such an item — seems to be native to the Aether. When this scope is used to take an aimed shot (see p. 162 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) against a character protected by an armor spell, the shot completely bypasses magical armor, no matter how high the mage's Arcanum rating or how Potent the spell. The Scope does not help to penetrate normal, mundane armor, however.

In addition to its magical properties, the Scope also lowers the penalty for firing the weapon at long range from -4 to -2 (see Range on p. 161 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Alien Cuffs (Imbued Item ●●●●●)

Durability 2, Size 1, Structure 3

Mana Capacity: Maximum 10

Although these restraints resemble standard police-issue handcuffs, they serve as more than simple physical restraints. Crafted by a Banisher who has mastered the Prime Arcanum, these cuffs are capable of canceling all active and passive magical effects possessed by the person bound by them. The Banisher operating these cuffs rolls Gnosis + Prime to activate the cuffs, which can mimic the Prime 1 spell “Dispel Magic” with one success. Two successes enables the Prime 3 spell “Controlled Dispellation,” and three successes enables the Prime 4 spell “Supernal Dispellation.” The energy dispelled is absorbed into the cuffs to make up for any spent Mana, though the cuffs can never exceed their maximum Mana capacity. Any excess Mana is simply released into the world at large.

The Dragon Chained (Artifact ●●●●●)

Durability 6, Size 1, Structure 7

Mana Capacity: None

Shining with the dull luster of Stygia, this Artifact takes the form of a set of crudely wrought iron manacles. The edges of the manacles are sharp and uncomfortable, breaking the

skin if the captive struggles. Placed on a Sleeper, the manacles function like any other binding, but when placed around the wrists or ankles of a mage, the manacles show their true power. Any mage bound by The Dragon Chained cannot use magic. Even the simplest spells fail. Order mages theorize that the manacles contain the essence of the part of Stygia in which all things eventually end, but have been unable to conduct a thorough investigation of the Artifact.

To the dismay of the Banishers, the power of The Dragon Chained has proved impossible to duplicate with modern magic. Banisher scholars and artificers haven't completely forsaken the idea of reproducing the Artifact and continue to study it.

Durandal

(Enhanced) Imbued Item ●●●●●●●●●●

Weapon Statistics

Type	Damage	Size	Durability	Cost	Notes
Durandal	5	2	Special	N/A	See text

Mana Capacity: 11

In legend, Durandal is the sword of Roland, one of Charlemagne's paladins. *Orlando Furioso* says that the sorcerer Malagigi gave him the sword. It had once belonged to Hector of Troy but was refitted through the ages. At some point, holy men placed a tooth of St. Peter's, blood from St. Basil, hair from St. Denis and part of the Virgin Mary's veil in the hilt.

Its name means “inflexible” as a testament to its supposed indestructibility. They say that Roland tried to break the sword as he lay dying but failed. And, over the years, as mages have tracked the sword that some claimed is Durandal, they've noted that it's defied every attempt to destroy it. Tales say that Durandal's made of the same metal that was used to forge Ogier the Dane's Cortana and Charlemagne's Joyeuse, but none have found credible, magical candidates that could be identified with these blades.

Is this Durandal the genuine article? Mages doubt it. There's no evidence for a historical Roland beyond a single obscure reference in an old Frankish record. The battles of the tales, where Roland and the other paladins fight bestial caricatures of Muslims, are about as historical as Arthurian myths — not very. But somewhere, someone created the sword, and it has become associated with the Roland legends. Interestingly, while Roland is almost certainly fictional, French mages do have records of a sorcerer with the shadow name Malagigi who was attached the Charlemagne's court.

The sword has a talent for falling into the hands of Banishers. Nobody knows whether this is a function of raw luck or magically altered destiny, but the fact is that Durandal's washed itself in Awakened blood regularly over the 400 years that mages have been tracking the sword. The Mysterium and Adamantine Arrow have programs dedicated to capturing the sword, but it hasn't resurfaced after vanishing in 1941, when the Nazis captured it along with dozens of other religious, artistic and occult objects.

The sword's blade looks as if it belongs to an unusually

long Greek *xiphos* made of pattern-welded thaumium. This suggests the sword's legendary heritage, but the sword's composition and size are anachronistic. The sword's furniture (its cruciform hilt, pommel and guard) look to be from the 12th century—the right date for the *Chanson de Roland* but wrong for the era that the hero is said to have lived. Nobody's ever attempted to see if the relics of legend actually reside in the hilt. Untranslatable symbols that look vaguely like Greek Linear A have been roughly etched into the blade.

Durandal is an enhanced, imbued thaumium sword. Its thaumium countermagic (see "Forge Thaumium" on pp. 203–204 of **Mage: The Awakening**) provides 12 dice of protection.

As an Enhanced Item, Durandal is sharper than a steel counterpart. (This is figured in the listed game statistics.) Furthermore, the wielder can spend a point of the sword's Mana to cast the spell "Pierce Magical Shield." For unknown reasons, Durandal appears to be indestructible. Extremely powerful magic has so far failed to even nick the sword, but this may be due to the weapon's ability to suppress magic.

Grimoire of the Exarchs (Artifact ●●●●●●●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 5

Mana Capacity: 12

Legend states that when the Celestial Ladder to the Supernal Realms shattered, mages from both sides were flung back to earth. One particularly powerful Exarch found himself literally falling from the heavens and, temporarily bereft of his magic, failed to save himself before crashing to the ground. The Exarch was hovering on the edge of death when his body was discovered by an exile. Recognizing the Exarch as an enemy, the exile magically ripped the mind and brain of the Exarch from his body in an act of vengeance.

The exile kept the brain alive through magic until she had finished crafting a container for it. The brain was sealed inside a cloudy crystal globe filled with liquid tassar and further enchanted to allow the exile to draw information from the preserved organ about the Exarch's magical repertoire and studies. Later, the mage used the Prime 1 spell "Inscribe Grimoire" (see p. 220 of **Mage: The Awakening**) to add her own magical knowledge to the Artifact before her death.

The Grimoire passed from mage to mage over the centuries, gathering knowledge and power until one day the Artifact gained sentience and began to speak. Whether this was the ghost of the long-dead Exarch or not is unknown (the Artifact doesn't seem to know, itself), but the effect on the item was substantial. No longer could the owner of the Grimoire simply peer into the milky depths of the Grimoire in search of spells; the Artifact began to make demands before it would share its knowledge. The owner of the Grimoire of the Exarchs must exchange information for information, either in the form of a spell unknown to the Grimoire or obscure pieces of historical or magical knowledge.

Exactly what the Grimoire of the Exarchs knows, or wants to know, is left for the Storyteller to decide. The Artifact is likely to know all the spells presented in **Mage: The Awakening** as well as most of the spells found in other **Mage** sourcebooks. This item is intended to be a Storytelling device, so feel free to broaden or limit the knowledge of the Grimoire as you see fit. There is no reason the Artifact can't ask for favors beyond those of pure knowledge, either. Perhaps the Grimoire wishes to recover the long-buried remains of its body, or maybe the Grimoire would like to be put to rest. This item provides a source of multiple story hooks and ideas.

Why a Banisher would own, or seek, the Grimoire varies in accordance with how that particular Banisher operates. Many Banishers would no doubt destroy the Artifact without a second thought. However, there are Banishers who would keep the Grimoire to provide them with insight to Atlantean times with an eye toward learning the secrets of the Timori.

Kingly Regalia (Artifact ●●●●●●●●●●)

Durability 4, Size 1, Structure 5

Mana Capacity: 11

This Artifact is a golden torc fashioned in Celtic knotwork with stylized human figures on the ends. When studied closely, the "mazes" formed by the knotwork seem to have no end and call to mind the mythical paths said to lead to the Supernal Realm of Arcadia. When the Artifact is placed around the neck, the owner of the Artifact activates it by spending one Mana and establishing eye contact with his target. *Kingly Regalia* then reproduces the spell "Psychic Reprogramming" (see **Mage: The Awakening**, p. 218) with a successful Gnosis + Mind roll. Once the Artifact is active, the owner begins the extended and contested Composure + Gnosis rolls to reprogram his target. This version of *Psychic Reprogramming* differs slightly from the original and is considered lasting whether the target is a Sleeper or not.

A large cult of Banishers in Paris used this Artifact to convert solitary mages to the Banishers' ideals. The cult discovered that *Kingly Regalia* wasn't as useful when employed against a cabal so instead used the Artifact on Sleeper friends and allies of order mages, forcing the Sleepers to act as spies.

Mind Protectors (Imbued Item ●●●)

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

Mana Capacity: Maximum 10

These simple circlets were once common among mages, some apparently harking back to Atlantis while others originated with ancient cultures of high magic after the Fall. Made of various materials, primarily gemstones such as malachite, turquoise, jade, these circlets possess the capability to use the Prime 2 spell "Mental Shield" even

if the wearer does not possess the knowledge of the Mind Arcanum. Many Banishers collected these items to destroy them, along with other magic the Banishers found. Only much later did they realize that these circlets could benefit Banishers as well. They stopped trying to destroy these Artifacts, and began accumulating and, in some cases, creating as many as they could for themselves and for other Banishers.

Permit (Artifact ●●●●●)

Durability 2, Size 0, Structure 2

Mana Capacity: 11

Modern society has a number of checks and limits on who can do what, who has access to whom and who can purchase certain items or substances. Unfortunately for Banishers, these objects and privileges are often out of their purview. This Artifact, which takes the form of a plain piece of paper about four inches by six inches, carries with it the power to sway the minds of those who see the paper and grant the Banisher *permission*.

The Permit functions much as the Mind 3 spell "Imposter" (p. 211 of **Mage: The Awakening**), except that the witness sees the Permit itself as something important, rather than seeing the mage as a different person. The Permit might appear to be a federal agent's credentials, a medical examiner's ID, a gun collector's license or any other official document that grants the character entry, access or privilege. This power is contingent upon the character showing a target or a group of targets the Permit in a confident manner.

Soul Hammer (Artifact ●●●●●●●)

Durability 5, Size 2, Structure 7

Mana Capacity: 11

Soul Hammer is a war hammer made of an unknown cobalt blue metal alloy, slightly lighter than one would expect. Traces of the Realm of the Celestial Spheres can be found in the Soul Hammer's enchantment. Soul Hammer shares the statistics of mundane maces (see p. 170 of **the World of Darkness Rulebook**) but seems specifically designed to combat mages. Whenever the Artifact deals two or more levels of damage to an Awakened opponent, Soul Hammer flashes with arcs of power that boil the Mana contained in the mage's Pattern. For each strike that deals the required damage, remove a dot of Mana from the mage and roll an additional five dice of lethal damage against the target. Damage caused in this way may not be mitigated by armor or Defense.

It is no secret why the Banishers covet this weapon. An Artifact designed specifically to kill mages is nothing short of a godsend to Banishers. Although rumors of Banishers using Soul Hammer are whispered across five continents, no order mage has ever given an eyewitness account of the Artifact's power. The simplest explanation for this is that no mage has survived such an encounter.

St. Peter's Key (Artifact ●●●●●●●●●●)

Durability 4, Size 1, Structure 5

Mana Capacity: 12

This Artifact takes the shape of a large stylized gold key. Named the Celestial Key by order mages, the Artifact was most likely created in the Aether. St. Peter's Key is activated by speaking a command word in High Speech. Once active, St. Peter's Key has the following effects for the Duration of the scene:

The owner selects a mage as his target. Whenever that mage spends Mana, instead of dissipating, the Mana is drawn to the Key and collected. The energy collected from every two Mana spent restores one Mana to the Key, up to its maximum of 12. The user may not nominate himself as the target of this effect, but may change his target as a reflexive action by spending one Mana.

St. Peter's Key grants its owner a measure of mystical protection against magic. The owner gains a +2 dice bonus to any roll to resist a hostile spell.

In addition to the above uses, Obrimos mages may dedicate the Key to use as a magical tool.

St. Peter's Key was last seen in the possession of the Banisher known



as Simple Simon. Simon believed the Key was a gift from God, and when he spoke High Speech to activate the Artifact's powers, he perceived himself to be speaking in tongues. After Simon was killed by Sleeper police, his body vanished from the morgue. It is assumed that whoever has his body also has St. Peter's Key.

Supernal Scourge (●●●●●●●●)

Durability: Varies, **Size:** Varies, usually 1, **Structure:** Varies

Mana Capacity: 12

These weapons can come from any of the Supernal Realms, and their forms vary depending on their origins. Supernal Scourges are meant to punish mages who risk Paradox, but they also have a terrible affinity for mages from their home Realm. These weapons inflict aggravated damage upon any mage of the Path appropriate to the Scourge's Realm of origin, or any mage on the turn after that mage creates a Paradox (even if the mage contained the Paradox in his own Pattern).

These weapons also have some additional power, typically using one of the Ruling Arcana of the Realm in question. Some examples of Supernal Scourges follow:

- **Whispering Blade (Arcadia):** This rapier's blade is so thin that it barely makes a sound when swung, but it cuts like a razor. The metal shimmers like a fish through sunlit waters as the blade whispers through the air. In addition to inflicting aggravated damage to Acanthus mages, in the hands of an ignorant wielder (that is, someone who doesn't know the High Speech phrase to speak upon drawing it), the blade bestows a -3 *instead* of a damage bonus. **Durability:** 5, **Size:** 2, **Structure:** 7, **Damage:** 2L (2A against Acanthus or any mage on the turn following a Paradox).

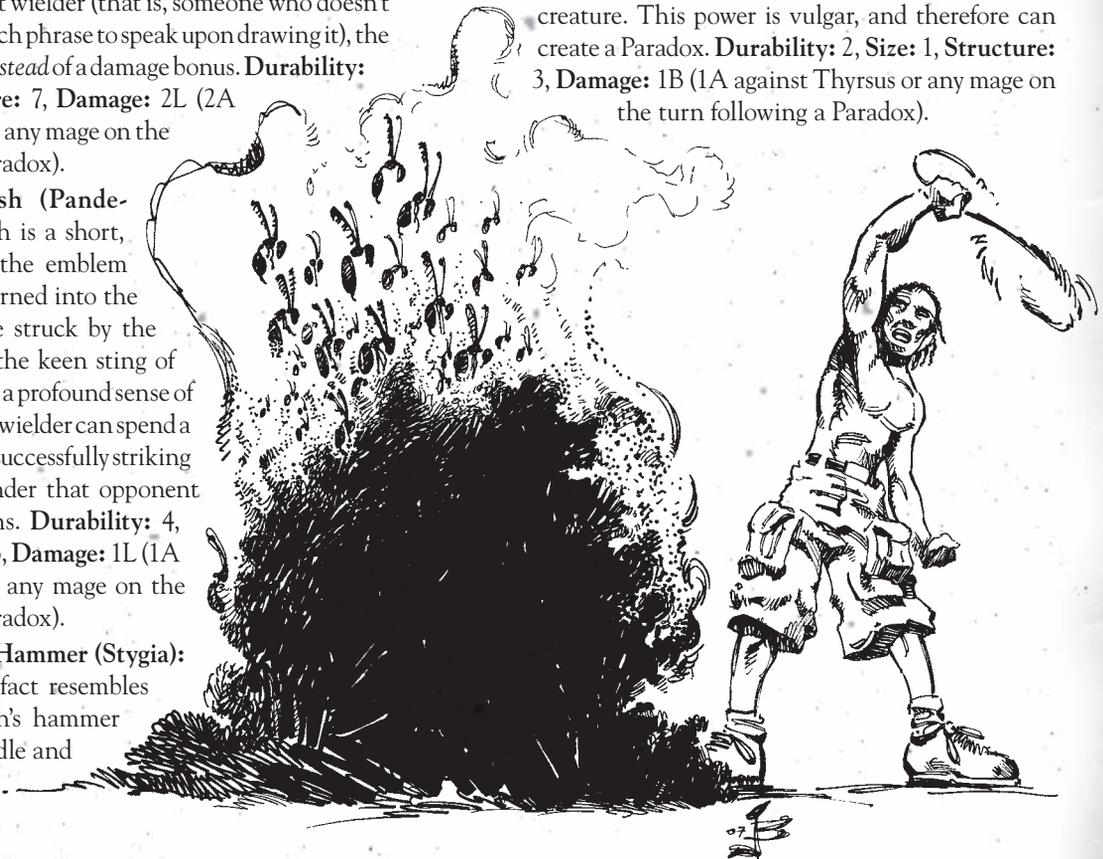
- **Oedipus' Lash (Pandemonium):** The Lash is a short, leather whip with the emblem of a bleeding eye burned into the wooden hilt. Those struck by the Lash feel not only the keen sting of the wounds, but also a profound sense of shame and fear. The wielder can spend a point of Mana upon successfully striking an opponent to render that opponent blind for three turns. **Durability:** 4, **Size:** 2, **Structure:** 6, **Damage:** 1L (1A against Mastigos or any mage on the turn following a Paradox).

- **The Forgeless Hammer (Stygia):** This powerful Artifact resembles a simple blacksmith's hammer with a wooden handle and an iron head. A mage armed with

the Hammer can speak a curse before striking an inanimate object. Successes against that object in excess of the object's Durability are then treated as aggravated damage against the object's Structure, enabling the mage to destroy an object in short order (this effect is vulgar, however, and can engender Paradox). **Durability:** 5, **Size:** 1, **Structure:** 6, **Damage:** 2B (2A against Moros or any mage on the turn following a Paradox).

- **Lightbringer's Sword (The Aether):** This short, double-bladed sword is embossed with angelic script. A translation reveals a passage from the Gospel of Luke: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from the Heavens." The wielder of this blade can raise it up (the player spends a point of Mana) to ignite the tip. While ignited, the sword inflicts an additional die of damage, and all damage from the sword is considered fire (which might be of note if the mage faces a vampire or another creature that takes special damage from flames). This effect is vulgar, of course, and can engender a Paradox. **Durability:** 6, **Size:** 2, **Structure:** 8, **Damage:** 2L (2A against Obrimos or any mage on the turn following a Paradox).

- **Swarm-Caller (The Primal Wild):** This weapon is a simple leather sling, suitable for hurling small stones at opponents. If the mage aims the stone at a patch of plant life — a bed of moss, a bush, a flowering tree and so on — he can change the plants into a swarm of insects or other base life (spiders, scorpions, horseflies and bees are all popular choices). This requires a point of Mana, and a quiet invocation to the spirit of the appropriate creature. This power is vulgar, and therefore can create a Paradox. **Durability:** 2, **Size:** 1, **Structure:** 3, **Damage:** 1B (1A against Thyrsus or any mage on the turn following a Paradox).



Imbued Items

Rune of Witnessing (Imbued Item ●●●●●●)

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

A Rune of Witnessing is an imbued item in the form of a magical tattoo. Used most prominently to mark Sleeper cultists of Shepherds (see p. 120), Banishers outside that particular organization have been known to use versions of this item. The Rune of Witnessing can be hidden in the midst of any tattoo, but the basic shape of the item may not be concealed. The Rune of Witnessing is a tattoo of an equal-armed black cross.

The Rune of Witnessing has two persistent effects. The first effect simulates the Prime 4 spell “Eyes of the Awakened” (see p. 228 of **Mage: The Awakening**) and allows Sleeper agents to spot mages and magical effects. The second power of the Rune reproduces an altered version of the Prime 3 spell “Disguise Resonance” (see p. 224 of **Mage: The Awakening**) to disguise the magical signature of the Rune. Mages employing Mage Sight suffer a –3 dice penalty if actively looking for magic on the Sleeper, or a –5 dice penalty if the mage is simply scanning an area that includes the Sleeper.

Sleeper agents marked with the Rune of Witnessing can provide valuable information to their handlers with little danger to the Sleepers. When the Rune is widely used (standard operating procedure for Shepherds) on a variety of different Sleeper agents, Banishers can very quickly gain a large amount of information about a city.

Scourge (Imbued Item ●●●)

Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3

Many Banishers use various methods to atone for their sins (see p. 150). This item serves the dual purpose of atonement and Mana generation. Scourges come in a variety of shapes, from a simple leather strap to the vicious cat-o-nine-tails. Regardless of the item’s shape, the purpose of the Scourge is to purify the body and soul through pain.

When a mage uses a Scourge on himself, he can attempt to reap Mana from the damage caused in much the same way as he might scour his Pattern for Mana. For every level of lethal self-inflicted damage caused by a Scourge, the mage may roll Stamina + Gnosis. For each success on the roll, the mage gains one Mana, up to the usual maximum. Banishers may use a Scourge to regain Mana and perform an atonement with no penalty to either action.

Sown Salt (Imbued Item ●●●●●●)

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

Sown Salt is made from a small bag of some kind filled with salt. When activated by spending one Mana, the item

reproduces the spell “Tainted Source” (see p. 65) with a single success on a Gnosis + Prime roll. Mana is tainted by spreading the salt from the bag in and around a Hallow. The owner needs at least five minutes uninterrupted to spread the salt, and each bag of Sown Salt holds enough salt to corrupt 20 Mana. Once used, Sown Salt loses its enchantment.

Bags of Sown Salt allow Shepherds to quickly infect most of the Hallows within a city when the Shepherds begin their attacks. The use of these items is one of the few times Shepherds will expose themselves to direct risk since they cannot rely on their Sleeper followers to activate Sown Salt.

Subtle Ring (Imbued Item ●●●●)

Durability 1, Size 1, Structure 2

This item produces a persistent version of the Prime 2 spell “Transform Aura” (see p. 223 of **Mage: The Awakening**) that disguises a Banisher by giving him the aura of a Sleeper. This item can, indeed, be made from any piece of jewelry that is habitually worn by a Banisher. The Banishers have a variety of different names for this particular item, simply because it is such an obvious idea.

Suppressive Theta Energy Auditing Device (Imbued Item ●●●)

Size 1, Durability 1, Structure 2

Mana Capacity: 11

The Militant Auditing Division (see Chapter Three) uses Suppressive Theta Auditing Devices (STEADs) to root out Atlantean mages (“Suppressive Theta Carriers”) and clear fellow Banishers. The Militant Auditing Division has built a lot of them over the last 10 years. As a result, many STEADs have fallen into the hands of other Banisher cults, mages of all kinds and even a few clueless Sleepers.

A STEAD is a modified version of the pseudoscience device that the Militant Auditing Division’s parent religion uses to “audit” members and help them attain what the faith calls “clear” status. That Sleeper religion uses these devices in public demonstrations. Militant Auditing operatives camouflage themselves and even perform missionary home visits to uncover local mages.

The STEAD’s base unit looks no different from the religion’s standard “energy meter.” It’s basically a device that measures electrical resistance in the human body. Sweat lowers electrical resistance, so the device can measure stress in a crude, unreliable fashion based on how sweaty the points of contact are. A STEAD connects the base to a small LCD monitor and a tiny box — actually a computer jury-rigged from PDA parts. When operated by a Militant Auditor, the monitor is visible to the Auditor and the subject. The device displays a flowing succession of abstract patterns.

Atlantean runes and sigils are hidden within the shapes. Subjects can perceive the sigils and runes only sublimi-

nally — they flicker and shift too quickly and fuzzily for conscious recognition. If the subject associates Atlantean symbols with strong emotions, the STEAD detects it with enough precision to determine whether or not the subject is a Sleeper who's experienced a strong emotional response to Atlantean symbols, a Pentacle mage or Seer of the Throne, a Banisher who's witnessed Atlantean symbols or none of the above.

The spell embedded within the STEAD combines Prime 1's "Supernal Vision" with a superficial Mind 3 telepathic effect, modified due to the way Militant Auditors construct and use the device. It outputs false results if the subject responds to the images in an unexpected fashion. An order mage who despises Atlantean traditions may show as a Banisher; a Banisher who practices revived Timori traditions may register as an order mage, due to her lack of antipathy for the symbols.

Militant Auditors prefer to examine subjects while both are seated in a calm environment. Subjects hold input leads in each hand. If necessary, a Militant Auditor can spend a point of the STEAD's Mana to use it "psionically" at sensory range. This involves a small bout of active telepathy to broadcast the monitor pattern for recognition testing. It normally shows up as something the subject sees in the corner of her eye, like a floater or weird shadow. Either way, a STEAD's targets can make a Wits + Composure roll at a -3 dice penalty; success indicates the subject recognizes the subliminal patterns, assuming she's familiar with Atlantean iconography.



Translator Chamber
(Imbued Item ●●●●●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 5, Structure 8
Mana Capacity: Maximum 15

The Translation Chamber (or translation box) is an upright structure made of reinforced steel and bullet-proof glass. At first glance, the Chamber resembles a modernized mummy's sarcophagus or, perhaps, an iron maiden or a magician's cabinet. It has a hinged door with glass view holes and a locking mechanism that seals the door as well as locks it. Inside the chamber, sets of ankle, neck, wrist and waist restraints ensure that the person placed inside it is held immobilized. The absence of padding within the chamber, though uncomfortable, minimizes any accidental combustion due to the buildup of "translation energy."

The Translation Chamber serves as a receptacle and gathering place for great amounts of Mana, due to Roger's grasp of Prime and his knowledge of the Prime 3 "Channel Mana," Prime 3 "Dissolve Tass" and Prime 4 "Siphon Essence" spells. When the Chamber is activated by throwing a lever on the outside of the chamber, the storage "coils" release immense amounts of Prime that surge through the person inside the chamber. The combined creative and de-

structive forces of raw Prime are more than the mage's body can take, particularly since the victim is usually weakened when placed inside the chamber. A small explosion signals the utter disruption of the mage's physical being and the timed opening of a roadway within the chamber (Spirit 3 "Alien Highway" spell) disbursts the remains into whatever realm is accessed by the spell.

The Translators believe that they have successfully sent the "alien" being back to his or her home, when in reality, they have disintegrated a human and scattered their victim's remains across the Gauntlet.

The Truck (Imbued Item ●●●●●●●●)

Type: Modified Light Pickup Durability: 3 Size: 15
Structure: 18 Acceleration: 15 (20 mph/turn) Safe Speed: 88 (60 mph.) Max Speed: 154 (105 mph) Handling: 1 Occupants: 1+2 Cost: N/A
Mana Capacity: None.

This '57 Ford pickup drives better than it looks. It's got a coat of rust and patchy gray primer across a dent-ridden body, but the pickup really stands out to casual observers because of its age, tinted windows and the big custom bumper. The plates are covered in grime, preventing anyone from identifying them.

Mohammad al-Abbas enchanted the Truck half a century ago. He actually helped build it, working the factory line. He Awakened, took it and spent 30 years sleeping in it while he hunted supernatural horrors throughout the continental United States. Al-Abbas died of a heart attack in 1976. Another Banisher found al-Abbas's body in the Truck, buried the body and took the vehicle for himself. Over the next three decades, the Truck passed from Banisher to Banisher as previous owners die, the Truck gets stolen, the thieves die (the Truck has a tendency to crash and roll violently when non-Banishers drive it) and is passed on to the next owner.

The Truck has a number of features that benefit Banishers who drive it. It repairs itself whenever it isn't being driven as if the owner was casting the spell "Repair Object." Interestingly, this process also destroys attempts to repaint or otherwise mark the surface of a vehicle and converts all license plates and ID stickers into unreadable rectangles of grime. This was more useful 50 years ago, before the rise of computer databases and stricter motor vehicle laws. Nowadays, it's as likely to attract unwanted attention as avoid it.

The Truck is remarkably, tough and agile for an old truck. Banisher drivers roll 9 again to control the vehicle. Non-Banishers have a more difficult time; they don't benefit from the 10 again rule, and every 1 rolled on the dice subtracts a success from their totals.

Lastly, it's battered, built-in toolbox always looks empty, but when someone unlocks it with the proper key, the toolbox opens the way to an air-filled Size 20 pocket realm (as the spell "Pocket Realm," using the Matter 4 variant that keeps it air-filled).

Imbued Animals

An object can carry magic. Every mage knows this. Any Disciple of Prime can instill a weapon, an article of clothing, a trinket or virtually any other object with a spell, creating an imbued item. But the closest that mages can get to imbuing living creatures with spells is to create fantastical monsters, and this requires mastery of the Life Arcanum (see p. 192 of **Mage: The Awakening**).

What, then, of the Banisher who sees through the eyes of a sparrow? What of the Banisher whose cat takes the breath from sleeping enemies? What of the dog that guards the entrance to a mage's sanctum and whose bark sounds like a gunshot?

Imbued animals do exist, and almost without exception, they belong to Banishers. Why is this? One explanation

might be that Banishers don't have the same regard for life (and for Wisdom) that other mages do, but this answer is dismissive. Pentacle and Seer mages fall prey to hubris just as Banishers do, even if the triggers are different.

A better explanation, though still far from a conclusive one, is that Banishers see the world in a manner that lets them circumvent the mental blocks that other mages have. Banishers can see, to a greater degree than most mages, the basic nature of the building blocks of life. We are all, after all, made of energy, if we break the components down far enough, and some mages theorize that Banishers can work with living beings at the same level that other mages work with base matter.

This isn't meant to paint the Banishers in any kind of positive light, though. Rather, it's akin to saying that because a sociopath sees people as objects and lacks the basic empathy with others that most people possess, he has the "ability" to murder them without feeling remorse or disgust at his actions. Creating imbued animals puts the animals in question in a great deal of pain and can cause degeneration (see the "Imbue Animal" spell, p. 62).

And this explanation is still wanting, because if the Banishers are capable of working with living matter as though it were inert, why can't they imbue people? Why can't Banishers lock spells into Sleepwalker minions and trigger them from afar?

Some mages think that the human body is too complex for this kind of manipulation. The human body contains a soul, and the soul resists this kind of alteration. Other mages feel that humans *can* become imbued, but a successful attempt would Awaken the person.

And, some mages, some of whom have actually fought the Banishers, say that they can and do imbue humans.

Life Cycle

An imbued animal doesn't normally live as long as a normal member of its species (though exceptions, such as the Witchcat, exist). Generally, an imbued animal's lifespan is about half that of the standard for the animal. The animal suffers from fitful sleep, moments of confusion (as magical senses conflict with its natural ones) and chronic pain. Eventually, the animal's Pattern cannot handle the strain of the magic, and the animal simply falls over dead. Until then, though, the animal is at the mercy of whoever created it.

The spell "Imbue Animal," found on p. 62 of this book, allows the Banisher to weave a spell into the creature's body. The animal must be immobilized for this process. For small animals, such as rats and birds, the Banisher simply holds the creature. For larger ones, anesthesia might be required. Once the spell is complete, the animal is subservient to the mage who created it, but cannot understand commands too complex for it. Thus, cats, rats and dogs, all of which are capable of fairly advanced conditioned behaviors, make

popular choices. The uses for imbued animals are limited only by the Banisher's imagination. Banishers have been known to create plague-carriers out of affectionate cats, spies out of birds and, of course, guardians out of just about any animal.

Traits

Imbued animals have the same game traits as typical examples of their species. Imbued animals also have access to whatever spells the Banisher gave the animals, but cannot cast those spells at will. Imbued animals are, for all intents and purposes, mobile imbued items, able to access their magic only at the behest of their creators (again, though, exceptions happen).

All imbued animals have Mana pools (maximum 10). Whenever an imbued animal casts a spell, regardless of which spell, the animal must expend a point of Mana. Animals regenerate Mana at a rate of one point per week, but only if they do not cast during that week. Animals can also regain Mana if a mage uses the "Imbue Mana" spell (see p. 226 of **Mage: The Awakening**), or if the creature has been imbued with a spell allowing it to channel or siphon Mana from another source.

Imbued Animals as Merits

Imbued animals can be purchased as Merits for Banisher characters. The cost is configured as for an Imbued Item (see p. 84 of **Mage: The Awakening**), adding two dots (one for the animal's Mana pool and one for simply being an imbued animal).

A mage with an imbued animal doesn't necessarily have to be the mage who created it. A mage creating an imbued animal can "wire" the animal to respond to another mage instead of the original mage (or to both mages, or even to anyone who performs a trigger).

Example: Carrier Pigeon

Description: Pigeons are often known as "feathered rats" or "gutter-birds." They aren't afraid of people in urban environments, and nest anywhere they can find a bit of space. Thus, pigeons make superb choices as imbued animals. This particular pigeon has been altered to carry a virulent disease, but the disease is magical in nature — it only affects beings that can hold Mana in their Patterns (that is, mages).

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 2, Resolve 2, Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Survival 3

Willpower: 5

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 11 (flight only; species factor 8)

Size: 2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type Damage Dice Pool

Beak 1 (1) 2

Health: 4

Mana: 10

Spells: *Magical Disease* — The pigeon can spread the disease by simple contact. Spend one Mana for the bird. The victim's player rolls Stamina + Resolve. If this roll fails, the victim is infected with the disease, suffering one point of lethal damage per day. This damage is *resistant* (see p. 78 of **Mage: The Awakening**), and cannot be healed by magical or supernatural means until the mage has overcome the disease. This requires 10 successes on an extended Stamina + Resolve roll, one roll per day. If the mage has no Mana in his pool, the player receives a +2 to this roll. While suffering from the disease, the mage can spread it to other mages through physical contact (potential infectees roll Stamina + Resolve, failure indicates infection).

Example: Spy Sparrows

Description: Sparrows and other small, brown birds are innocuous and ever-present. Large buildings, big-box stores and even airports play host to these animals. They flit about, steal crumbs and drink from water fountains, and if people notice the birds, they just cluck in amusement at the "funny little birds" flying around inside. Banishers make good use of the birds' ubiquity and mobility, of course.

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 1, Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Skills: Athletics 3, Survival 3

Willpower: 5

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 15 (flight only; species factor 10)

Size: 1

Health: 2

Mana: 10

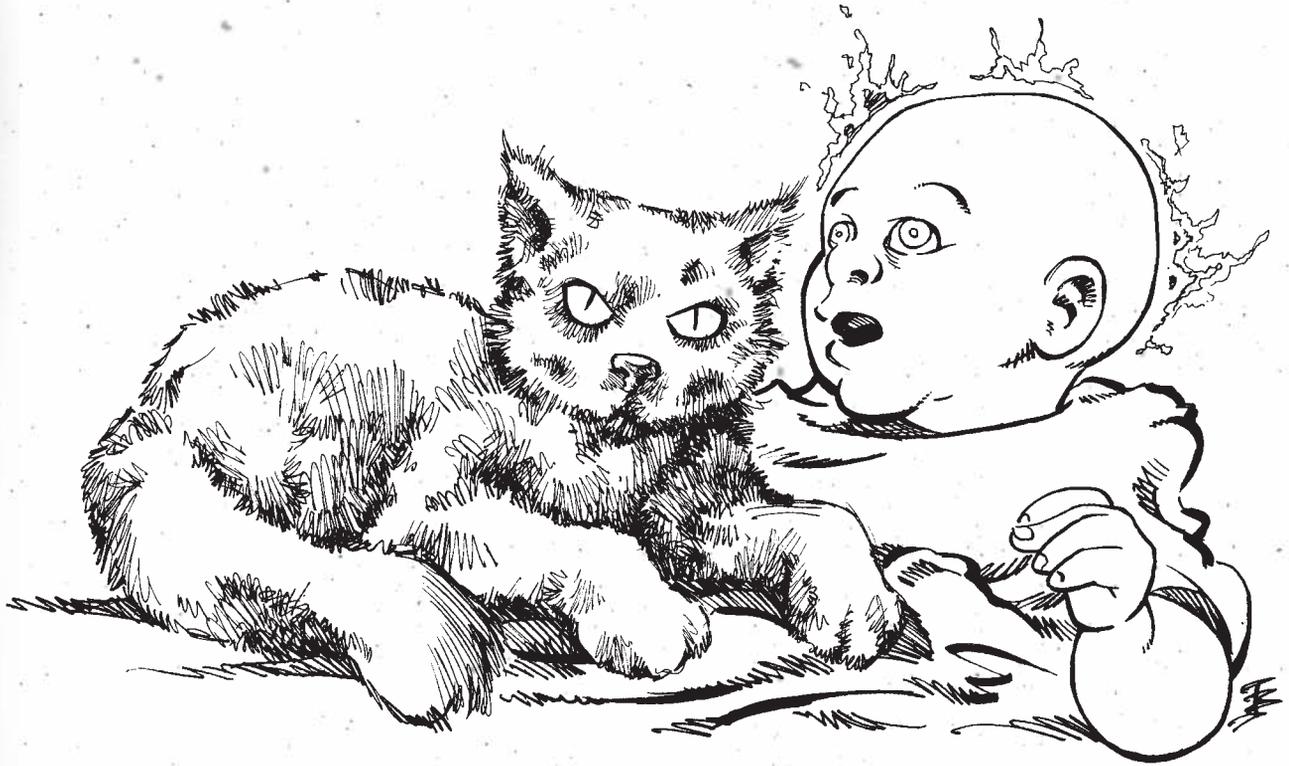
Spells: *Innocuous* — As the Numen (see p. 321 of **Mage: The Awakening**). Always active.

Eyes of the Master — Spend a Mana point for the sparrow. The mage who created or owns the bird can use its senses, including sight, hearing and even touch, for one scene. The mage can guide the bird from afar, commanding it to find a better angle from which to view its subjects.

Example: Witchcat

Description: Witchcats resemble housecats, and are usually gray or tabby-striped. They are more intelligent than most felines, and possessed of a vicious streak. Like the cats of old wives tales, though, these creatures can steal the breath of helpless people, carrying it back to their Banisher masters to allow them to heal.

Unlike other imbued animals, Witchcats don't suffer from reduced lifespans, provided that they are occasionally



permitted to consume the breath that they steal from their victims (see below). Also, Witchcats have more autonomy than most imbued animals. Witchcats can follow more complex commands and employ limited strategy in carrying their masters' directions out.

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 3, Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 2, Stealth 3

Willpower: 6

Initiative: 8

Defense: 5

Speed: 13 (species factor 7)

Size: 2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	0 (1)*	3
Claw	0 (1)*	3

*A Witchcat's attacks receive no damage bonus, but still inflict lethal damage.

Health: 5

Spells: *Devour Life* — A Witchcat can "drink" the life energy of a target by placing its mouth over the victim's mouth and nose and inhaling the victim's breath. The target of the attack must be asleep, unconscious or otherwise incapacitated

(and thus, this attack doesn't require a roll, and the victim doesn't have any passive defense). Infants are susceptible to the Witchcat's attack no matter their state of consciousness, as they are too weak and lack the fine motor skills needed to disengage from the attack. For each turn of attack, the creature devours one Health point from the target. The Witchcat ceases drinking the victim's breath when the creature has reached its maximum storage capacity of five Health points; when the victim runs out of Health, or when the attack is interrupted. The damage incurred during this process is considered lethal for healing purposes.

The stolen Health can then be conferred to the cat's master. It replaces any Health boxes from right to left that have wounds in them, regardless of what kind of wound is recorded. Conferred a point of Health from a still-living victim to a mage gives that mage an Intimate connection to the victim, for purposes of sympathetic magic.

If the cat's master permits it, the Witchcat can consume a point of Health from a victim. This keeps the cat alive and healthy for one month past the cat's usual time of death.

Store Health — Witchcats can store up to five points of Health from another creature. The Health points may be willingly invested into the creature, usually by a mage or some other powerful individual, for safekeeping and later use, or may be forcibly stolen from the target using the Devour Life Ability.



CHAPTER THREE: CULTS AND CABALS

Yu:

I need you to warn the others as soon as you get this. I'm trying a new spell to get it to you quickly and securely. This is not an old message. This is right now.

The cannibal cult's real. They operate out of a house in Brookwood; 433 Lankin Drive. I'm in the basement now. It's awful.

I need you to gather the others and move quick. Pack everything you have. Be careful: these aren't ordinary people. They can undo magic.

They're Banishers, Yu. They've been eating mages.

Someone's coming downstairs.

Hurry.

The less reasonable a cult is, the more men seek to establish it by force.

— Jean-Jacques Rousseau

The Bonfire

"We've got to do something!" Asphodel leaned forward, gathering her courage to run into the burning house. Two pairs of hands quickly caught her, held her back.

"No!" Zenobion said gruffly, his voice near its breaking point. *"That's what they're watching for."*

"But our entire library, your library, all our workings are in there. It was supposed to be our safe place!" Asphodel's face shone wet with tears in the firelight that illuminated the block of small residential houses and cast its sinister red glow upon the growing crowd of onlookers, most of them neighbors concerned for their own homes. In the distance, sirens could be heard, growing closer.

"The fire trucks will be here any minute now," Cerise spoke, tightening her grip on Asphodel's arm but addressing her words to Zenobion, the leader of their cabal. *"We should go before anyone starts asking questions."*

"But why?" Asphodel said. *"Why shouldn't we want them to find whoever did this?"*

"Because we already know," Zenobion said. *"This is the work of Banishers. Let's hope they're content with destroying our books and workings. We'll need to leave town just to be safe."*

One of the oldest and most cryptic of Banisher manifestations, the Bonfire originated sometime around the first century CE in either Greece, Syria or Egypt, depending on which Torches are consulted. Some even claim that the original members of the Bonfire were present at the Fall of Atlantis and brought their knowledge with them into the Fallen World, where it became known as Gnosticism, Manicheism and other, more obscure names. Unlike some other Banisher groups, the Bonfire knows all too well the origin of their magic. Their ultimate aim is not only to destroy magic, but to bring about an end to the Fallen World and its material taint as well.

The Call

The Bonfire is a loose confederation of separate groups, called Torches, that has spread across the Fallen World and claims a history that dates back before the Fall of Atlantis. Although each group tells a slightly different version of their origin, a composite version proceeds as follows.

When the essence of Prime became entrapped within Matter, the material world was born. Spirit encased within Matter gave birth to Life and Mind. Forces trapped in Matter created Space and Time. The world existed in a constant state of flux as Prime and Spirit sought their release, finding it through Death, while Forces could break free only through the exigencies of Fate.

In even simpler terms, the world of people, places and objects is a mistake, a flaw in the grand design. Existence is meant to be a state of pure Spirit and Prime, a fiery, ecstatic dance of energies forever renewing itself through its constant change yet always remaining perfect in its essence.

The division of creation into matter and spirit, or body and soul, brought evil into the world, as well as pain, suffering, greed, hatred and all the other vices. The center of this evil, the point at which the two worlds came closest to merging, was the island of Atlantis, where humans Awakened to the dueling principles within them and used their growing mastery of magic to bind together Prime, Spirit, Matter and all the energies represented in the Arcana, thus preventing the liberation of "being" from its material prison.

When Atlantis fell and the Gauntlet rose, there were some mages who saw this "catastrophe" as a blessing. For spirit to free itself from matter, the two had to remain separated. Even the Abyss was seen as a protective construct to ensure that the two worlds

could never again become one. Until the heretical mages started working seriously to bring the Supernal and Material worlds back together.

At this point, the Banishers who would be known as the Bonfire made it their business to seek out mages who were (or seemed to be) working productively to bring together the conjoining of worlds that existed before the Fall of Atlantis. To better cover the vast lands that existed in the Fallen World, they divided into groups that called themselves Torches. These groups further divided into other groups of Torches. (Some suggest that the name “Bonfire” is meant to refer to them as “the good flames,” and may alternate to the bastardized French “Bonfeu” or “feu bon” to refer to themselves. Ironically, the original meaning of “a bone-fire” is far more apt for the murderous arms of the group.)

Wherever they could find and identify a mage or, better yet, a cabal of mages, the Bonfire sought out their enemy’s sanctum and, more specifically, their library and collection of magical artifacts and items. These symbols of power, in the minds of the Bonfire, helped bind together magic within the non-living world. Destroying them released the imprisoned energy of Prime and weakened the hold of the Fallen World on the Supernal World.

In Eastern Europe, some early Christian churches adopted the belief that the material world was created by a god of evil, identified with the god of the Old Testament. Christ, the god of the New Testament, came to liberate the soul from its fleshy prison. Persecuted by a church that opposed the sect’s adamantly non-materialistic approach to religion, these early Gnostic Christians fled across Europe, finally finding refuge in the south of France, where the Duke of Toulouse gave them assistance and protected them from the pope’s armies for as long as he could. Here, they became known as Cathars.

Eventually, France’s desire to solidify and centralize its power and its desire to bring the southern part of France, the Languedoc region, which included the city of Toulouse, into the emerging nation gave the pope sufficient reason to declare these Cathars heretics, giving the Christian armies the right to slaughter the Cathars, pillage their lands and make off with their treasures — or what they believed were treasures. In this fashion, the Cathars were almost totally wiped out. Thanks to some Banishers in the Cathars’ midst, however, a few Cathars were spirited away to Bonfire safe houses where they, and later their descendants,

actually helped train young members in the philosophy of Gnosticism.

A second element crept into the history of the Bonfire, and which solidified for them their name and their primary approach. In Florence, in the 15th century, a growth of art and philosophy based on the rediscovery of the classic teachings of ancient Greece and Rome gave birth to a cultural flowering known as the Renaissance. The movement would spread throughout Europe, reintroducing the teachings of Socrates, Aristotle and Plato as well as the arts of sculptors, poets, dramatists, etc.

Crass materialism overwhelmed the Church in those days, as Church fathers worked to amass material fortunes not just for themselves but as adornments of the churches. Inevitably, a challenge arose in the person of a Dominican priest by the name of Girolano Savonarola. This charismatic — some say Awakened — young preacher with his fiery words and his beautifully composed songs and prayers soon was winning converts among many of Florence’s nobles and commoners. Calling for a great purging of pagan and secular items, Savonarola organized the Bonfire of the Vanities, into which participants cast their non-religious books, works of art, jewelry and other valuable items, renouncing secular pleasures for a life of the spirit.

Before Savonarola’s time of fame and success ended for him in a fiery death at the stake for heresy, condemned by fellow Churchmen who could not divest themselves of the world’s pleasures, he received visitations by some members of the Bonfire, who pledged to carry on his work and who, some say, blessed him with a charm to ease his liberation from his fleshy prison.

The Creed

In essence, members of the Bonfire believe in the destruction of magical items, especially books or scrolls, and in assisting Awakened beings to liberate themselves from their prison of flesh — or, in some instances, to accept their sincere repentance and conversion to swell their own numbers and hasten the day of the Great Fire.

Organization

The Bonfire is one of the largest groups, or possibly the largest group of Banishers in the world today. Yet the Bonfire is as elusive as any cell-based group of

conspirators or spies. Similar to these covert groups, the Bonfire is organized into small groups known as Torches. Unlike such groups, Torches rarely share any common connections. Unless two groups discover each other and decide to work together, no efforts are made to unite the Bonfire into one large unified group. Such total decentralization makes it almost impossible to identify and stop all of the groups.

Within each Torch, leadership is generally a factor of longevity. The member who has been around the longest in the group assumes decision-making powers when necessary. Many day-to-day aspects of life within the group are a matter of consensus within the overall group beliefs.

There is one exception to the lack of hierarchy. Any time a Perfectus, or Perfected One, is present within a Torch, that person assumes leadership. The rank of Perfectus is the only higher authority within the Bonfire. Other members are known as Imperfectors, while converts are referred to as “the Consoled” until they are admitted to the rank of Imperfector.

Tenets of Belief

The Bonfire has only a few tenets that anchor their beliefs. These are the principles of Yearning, Liberation, Consolation, Perfection and Release.

- **Yearning:** All things, living or non-living, yearn to be free of their material prison. The spirit or soul within each person desires to flee its fleshy encasement and become reunited with the Supernal World. The spark wishes to become one with the flame. Even dead matter, such as rocks, or created objects such as books or statues, seeks the solace of entropic corrosion. Everything moves toward its own destruction; people age, sicken and die, land erodes, water evaporates, human-made objects rust or disintegrate or become brittle and break over time.

- **Liberation:** There can be no better action than liberating an object that yearns to be free. Primary among these objects are magical items, artifacts and books of magic or scrolls of magical lore. The energy confined within these objects yearns more strongly than simple books of non-magical content or items that have no spells imbued within them. Of course, this does not preclude the destruction of simple items (i.e., non-magical) as collateral damage or in lieu of items with magical content.

- **Consolation:** Those who have practiced magic and thus compounded and strengthened the bond between the material and non-material worlds can

still repent and avoid immediate Release (see below). Such Awakened individuals who are willing to forswear their use of magic except as commanded by one of the Perfectus and who abides by the same restrictions as the Perfectus may “console” their yearning spirits with the thought of eventual Release while atoning for their misdeeds by helping participate in the process of Liberation.

- **Perfection:** Those who remain prisoners of their physical bodies to do the work of the spirit on earth and who choose to purify their lives in preparation for their eventual Release are called the “Perfected” or “Perfectus.” These individuals abstain from most physical pleasures, including sex and most forms of recreation. They read only approved material — usually Gnostic texts or similar documents. They keep a daily journal of their insights and their thoughts to monitor their readiness for release. They forswear eating meat or meat by-products such as milk, eggs, cheese, butter, etc., although fish is acceptable as are most vegetables and fruits. Whatever they can consume without cooking, they do. They adhere to conventional standards of cleanliness so as not to call attention to themselves, but they do not adorn themselves with jewelry of any kind. They seek medical attention only when absolutely necessary to prolong their lives for the sake of their duties. In short, they do nothing that is not somehow connected with their work as a member of the Bonfire. Sleep is necessary, but only the minimum needed for functioning. Though they do not starve themselves deliberately, many Perfectus eventually appear anorexic as their bodies are honed to nothing more than skin over muscle, while they often seem to glow with an inner fire as if their spirits are consuming them from within.

- **Release:** All things yearn for Release, and it is the duty of the Bonfire to help them along the path. Whether this means setting fire to a library or to a house that contains a library or cache of magical items or burning a mage within her sanctuary or tied to a more conventional stake makes no difference to the confirmed Bonfire. Eventually, the Perfectus arranges for his own Release, sometimes taking with him one or more of the Consoled associated with his Torch.

Methodology

There is not a lot of method to these Banishers' madness, except insofar as they do tend to use their own magic to locate mages and magical items. These Banishers particularly enjoy tracking down members

of the Mysterium, since they tend to have magical objects in their vicinity.

Each Torch tends to disappear into its chosen community. The members live together, claiming family ties whenever possible. Enough of the members hold down jobs (usually service-oriented or menial labor) to keep their Torch in food, shelter and clothing as well as to purchase any materials they might need for their actions.

Torches usually carry several false IDs and learn to travel light, usually with one carry-on bag.

The Banishers (Nathan's Torch)

While it is difficult to categorize the Bonfire as a whole, since each group has its own peculiarities, the following individuals from a group known as Nathan's Torch may serve as an example of the many Bonfire groups at large in the Fallen World. Working out of a small town in the Midwest, Nathan's Torch sometimes travels many miles in search of items to cleanse (by their destruction) or mages to purify, either by their conversion or destruction.

Nathan (The Perfectus)

Quote: *What we do is necessary. We make sacrifices so that others may attain that state of perfect being to which we all aspire!*

Background: Nathaniel de Courcy claims to remember the Fall of Atlantis, and sometimes, when he speaks of it, his voice carries the ring of truth, and his eyes burn with the fire of his conviction. Rumors have spread about him throughout various Banisher circles and even among mages, where his name is known and often feared.

Indeed, some ancestral memory in him may carve a path of remembrances that lead to Atlantis, but the actual physical form of Nathaniel de Claret was born in the south of France in 1898. The son of a winemaker and a woman prone to visions (many accurate), Nathaniel Awakened when he was 13, in 1911. A vision informed his mother that he would cause the death of many willworkers and other people of power and that his life would be linked with fire and destruction. Compelled by her premonition, Nathaniel's mother tried to kill him by administering a powerful poison, purchased from a local herbalist, to him before bedtime.

The boy slipped into a coma that lasted for nearly a week, during which time he traveled in his mind to a place of oppressive darkness, where, looking upward at what he thought must be the sky, he saw a great leaden tower looming above him — too distant to reach, yet never further than a thought away. Slowly, with agonizing steps, he climbed the tower and entered a room filled with a huge bonfire. Unable to stop his forward momentum, Nathan pitched forward onto the pyre and felt his body burn to ash, a sense of prolonged agony that has never quite left him. The ash fell back to earth and reassembled itself into Nathan, now Awakened.

The boy found that his mother had confessed to attempting to kill her child and had already been tried and executed. Her final words, meant more as a warning than as a curse, still shake Nathan whenever he “remembers” the execution he never actually witnessed. “Beware the child of the Bonfire, for he will consign many to the flames!”

Whereas many of Nathan's contemporaries, including his father, took his mother's words as proof of Nathan's fundamentally corrupt nature, Nathan himself heard it as a call to arms. He was to spend his life bringing people to a confrontation with their inner demons and purifying their natures of all taints of magic. To this end, Nathan has sought and continues to seek for ways to prolong his unnaturally long lifespan even further — at least that's what he tells himself. In reality, Nathan fears death and a return to that place of darkness and, above all, the horror of death by fire.

Nathan has a voracious appetite for the lore of the Bonfire. He learned of its traditions from a dying man, a Banisher with powerful Fate magic whose last work was to find a successor. The journal handed to Nathan gave him the inspiration to recruit mages to his own Torch, and affirmed his beliefs that the fire that so haunted him was indeed the key to a greater truth. He read and reread the journal until he knew its contents by heart, and then burned it — the first of many such acts of release.

Description: Nathan de Courcy stands just over six feet and has a well-built, ascetically thin, though superbly conditioned, body. He dresses in unrelieved black most of the time, except when he performs a rite of Consolation (the Consolamentum), in which case he wears white robes. His blond hair is worn long and usually tied back by a black leather strip. His regular features attract women easily, though they quickly realize he has little interest in either sex. He speaks

softly, yet forcefully, rarely needing to raise his voice to be heard. Needless to say, he does not look his age.

When Nathan's nimbus becomes visible, it appears almost Freudian in its simplicity. He is surrounded by a ring of bonfires that reflect images of a sinister leaden tower.

Storytelling Hints: Nathan rarely speaks above a whisper, yet his voice seems to carry to whatever group he addresses. He carries himself with the quiet confidence of a leader who expects to be listened to and obeyed, yet he is never haughty or overbearing to his followers. He grows passionate only when he is discussing matters of the spirit or is performing either the rite of Consolation or the rite of Purification. He has an astounding mastery of rites for a Banisher, some inherited from his occult learning and some granted by simple practice.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Platinum ring (Matter)

Real Name: Nathaniel de Courcy

Path: Moros

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Theology) 4, Crafts (Woodburning) 2, Occult (Written Histories) 3

Physical Skills: Brawl 2, Drive 1, Firearms (Flamethrower) 2, Stealth 3, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Expression (Debate) 3, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 4

Merits: Ancient Echoes 5, Resources 2

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 6

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 7

Gnosis: 5

Arcana: Death 5, Forces 4, Matter 5, Prime 4, Time 4

Rotes: *Death* — Grim Sight (•), Soul Marks (•), Decay (••), Entropic Guard (••), Destroy Object (•••), Entropic Shroud (•••), Enervation (••••), Destroy Mana (•••••), Steal Lifespan (•••••); *Forces* — Nightsight (•), Control Heat (••), Influence Fire (••), Control Fire (•••), Personal Invisibility (•••), Transform Energy (••••); *Matter* — Find the Hidden Hoard (•), Unseen Aegis (••), Repair Object (•••), Annihilate Mater (••••), Annihilate Extraordinary Matter (•••••); *Prime* — Analyze Enchanted Item (•),



Dispel Magic (•), Supernal Vision (•), Activate Enchanted Item (••), Celestial Fire (•••), Dissolve Tass (•••), Supernal Dispellation (••••); *Time* — Perfect Timing (•), Augury (••), Acceleration (•••), Prophecy (••••)

Mana/per turn: 14/5

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Flamethrower	0	20	4	Always autofire; fire damage 4

Armor: 5 ("Entropic Guard," Death ••)

Christine (The Imperfect)

Quote: *Every day, I bring myself a little closer to perfection, yet I also dread the day I reach my goal.*

Background: Christine's Awakening was not a healthy one — it took on a nightmarish quality of bloodthirsty shapes bright and shadowy, dancing madly through a dying land. The visions didn't end with her

Awakening, but kept intruding into her dreams every now and again. As near as anyone knows, she went a little mad — she dropped out of college and ran, only surfacing again in a homeless shelter. As fate would have it, that's where she met Nathan.

He took her home, talked to her, fed her and generally helped her through to lucidity. As he did, he was pleased to discover that she had a natural gift that mirrored his own, one that could eventually become great. The thought that his own Awakening might have planted the seed for hers never occurred to either of them.

Since joining the Torch, Christine has developed a severe dependence on its teachings. She shows a natural gift for magic, and therefore, Nathan encourages her to work on that ability that she may one day become Perfectus herself. The others suspect that he does this to keep her alive, and thus useful to the Torch. Christine certainly shows a strong yearning for Release, and without the encouragement of potential Perfectus status, she might well win that Release for herself.

Description: Christine is a thin, slightly unhealthy-looking girl in her early 20s; it's not difficult to tell from looking at her that she doesn't eat or sleep as often as she should. She tends to wear a slightly distracted expression most of the time as well, as if listening to music nobody else can hear. Ironically, these warning signs actually serve her as excellent camouflage. When wearing something close to trendy, she can pass for the average, weight-obsessed, not-all-there club girl. In shabby clothes, she passes for a vagrant or just plain white trash. Her nimbus manifests as shadows lunging around in sudden, random movements, with a faint sound of ringing, high-pitched laughter.

Storytelling Hints: Similar to Nathan, Christine has made the Bonfire into her faith. Unlike Nathan, Christine has little confidence in her own ability to determine a place in that faith. She follows orders as best she can, but shows little initiative of her own. Christine often acts in strange, fey ways — she's convinced that the dancing creatures she saw during her Awakening watch her from time to time, and are ready to drag her off. When she engages in violence against other mages, she will often let her terror of those things run away with her, slicing and battering her enemy as if her soul depended on it. The other members of her Torch work with her carefully, knowing that she'll be a true terror with a bit more training.

Real Name: Christine Marie Woods

Parh: Acanthus

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

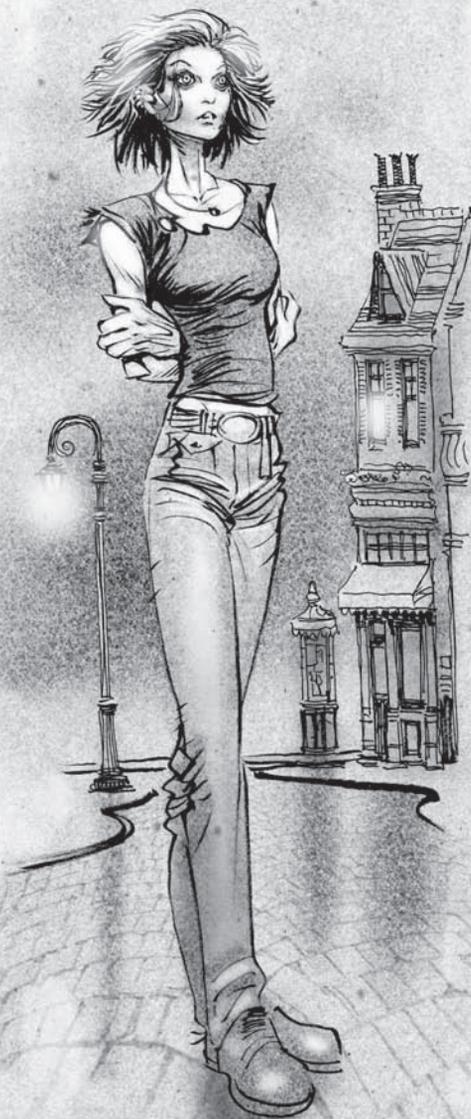
Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 1, Investigation 2, Occult (Faeries) 2

Physical Skills: Brawl 1, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Stealth (Shadowing) 3, Weaponry (Knife) 2

Social Skills: Expression 1, Persuasion 2, Socialize 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Barfly, Dream 3, Extemporaneous Affinity 2 (see p. 41), Nimbus Sense (see p. 42), Occultation 2



Willpower: 6

Wisdom: 4 (Suspicion, Irrationality)

Virtue: Temperance

Vice: Sloth

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 7

Gnosis: 1

Arcana: Death 1, Fate 3, Forces 1, Time 2

Notes: *Fate* – Winds of Chance (•), Fortune's Protections (••)

Mana/per turn: 10/1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Dice Pool
Knife	1L	1	6

Armor: 3 ("Fortune's Protection," *Fate* ••)

Vauban (The Consoled)

Quote: *Funny how one's principles will fall apart when faced with certain death by extreme unpleasantness!*

Background: Vauban is one of the Consoled, recruited from the enemy and permitted to learn the path of the Bonfire. He was a more willing recruit than Nathan might have expected, and has been a pillar of the Torch ever since.

Alan Delaney's first shadow name was Vigoro, taken at the time of his initiation into the Mysterium. His Awakening had been quiet, as Awakenings go, and much to his dismay, he found that he didn't really stand out much among the Consilium. Most of his fellow mystagogues seemed more interested in the books, objects and lore they discovered than in one another. Coming as he did from a household in which his parents were more interested in their own jobs and hobbies than in their children, it frustrated him to no end to find himself in what seemed a very similar situation. He grew to resent his fellow mages, but stayed with them in the hopes that someday he'd get the recognition he deserved.

He got it from a Banisher. Nathan's Torch raided a chapterhouse Vigoro was in at the time, and captured him and a colleague in the process. The Banisher looked over his captives, and then offered a simple choice: come with them and learn the ways of the Bonfire or perish. Vigoro's colleague declined; she apparently was going to take her chances with the two of them using magic to escape the burning building. Unfortunately for her, Alan accepted without any real hesitation.



Since taking Nathan up on his offer, Alan (now operating under the new shadow name of "Vauban") has proved to be a key part of the Torch's successes. His knowledge of the Pentacle mages' ways, particularly the Mysterium, has helped coordinate strikes against the Torch's enemies' weak points. In addition, the formal magical training he's received makes him an obvious candidate for teaching new recruits how to use their abilities. He feels no remorse whatsoever for the death and destruction that he contributes to; to his mind, this is a far better life than his previous one. He does indeed take consolation from his role, and awaits a time in which he can begin the journey to becoming Perfectus himself.

Description: Vauban is a working-class sort of man, with slightly coarse features, a conservative haircut and a somewhat rough voice. He's a bit short and slender, but keeps in shape. If the situation allows, he prefers to dress in designer brands to call attention to himself, but when in more casual clothes he blends into a crowd remarkably well. He smiles often, and is a bit touchy-feely; he likes to shake hands, slap backs and take people by the shoulder. The personal contact reaffirms his place in the universe, even when he's wrapping his hands around a mage's neck. His nimbus manifests as a faint sound of gnawing teeth and the appearance of tiny holes on nearby objects.

Storytelling Hints: Alan has been driven by a desire for personal validation that still grips him today. It was easy for him to turn on the Mysterium because he felt they valued objects and writings more than they valued him. The offer Nathan made to Alan, by comparison, seemed to say: "I value you even more than I value my creed. I will set aside my Banisher ethos to spare you, because of what I see in you." Since then, Vauban has embraced the creed of the Bonfire fervently: he feels as though he has a real place among the Torch far more than he had in the Mysterium. He acts the part of Nathan's faithful disciple, and Vauban's heart is usually in the role. However, he is also motivated by the desire for revenge against his former order and all their allies. The "purity" of the Bonfire philosophy is somewhat tainted by his spite.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Cigarette lighter (Forces)

Real Name: Alan Sean Delaney

Path: Obrimos

Order: Banisher (formerly Mysterium)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics (Military History) 2, Crafts 2, Medicine 1, Occult (Mysterium) 4, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Drive 2, Firearms 1, Stealth (Easily Overlooked) 2, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Intimidation 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Bald-Faced Lies) 2

Merits: Destiny (Marked by Three Betrayals) 4, Dream 1, Language (Spanish, Greek) 2, High Speech, Occultation 1

Willpower: 5

Wisdom: 4

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Health: 8

Gnosis: 2

Arcana: Forces 3, Life 1, Matter 2, Prime 3

Rotes: *Forces* — Influence Light (•), Control Heat (••), Influence Fire (••), Unseen Shield (••), Control Fire (•••), Telekinesis (•••), Turn Projectile (•••); *Life* — Sense Life (•); *Matter* — Find the Hidden Ward (•), Transmute Water (••); *Prime* — Discern (•), Dispel Magic (•), Sufferal Vision (•), Counterspell Prime (••), Unseen Spy (••), Celestial Fire (•••), Channel Mana (•••)

Mana/per turn: 11/2

Armor: 3 ("Unseen Shield," Forces ••)

The Carnival of Innocents

Phantom tongue. Once Europa realized that the itching wasn't really there at all and that there was only a freshly cut stump, she screamed. She felt her tongue arch to direct the sound, but that, too, was a part of the phenomenon. Instead, the air blew past the short, bloody nub unimpeded. A chaotic, liquid noise burst forth, incoherent and inhuman.

Europa's hands also itched, but she didn't want to check on them. That would be too much to deal with right now.

Then a woman bounded in, blue hair extensions twirling, playing at a bit of clumsy mock ballet as another woman in a long, red coat followed her into the tent. She put her top hat on the stool next to the cage — Europa's cage. As the tent flap closed, Europa saw the glow of electric light and heard chattering, laughing people. A party.

"We love you," said the woman in the red coat. "Isn't that a terrible thing, to be consumed by love? We had to part, you and me — part by part. I could not bear to let go all at once. I. Could. Not!"

The clumsy dancer smiled and trilled, "First the hands that show. Then the tongue that teaches. Very scientific! Right, Babe?"

"Right!" said the woman in the red coat. "We could never be ourselves if you could show us or teach us to make your magic ours. We loved you, we learned from you and now we have to let you go."

Obsessed with individuality and freedom, the Carnival of Innocents is a lesson for mages who push apprentices too hard or who demand Awakenings from Sleepers who aren't ready for the experience. Two sisters founded the cult as a direct result of their upbringing. Their father thought that love and compas-

sion should be sacrificed on the altar of Awakening. It was, and as a result, the cult strives to unlearn magic by understanding, rejecting and then destroying its doctrinaire forms.

The individualistic ethos combined with the sisters' talents to turn their obsession into a traveling show: a gang of proud freaks searching for the unmapped edges of human experience. To find them, the gang needs to discover what's come before. They seek out mages to learn exactly what *not* to do and kill them so that they will never, ever, come back to leash the cult to orthodox Mysteries.

The Call

Babe and Angel used to be Barbara and Angela Grace: the daughters of Marvin Grace or, as the Awakened knew him, Koenig. Koenig's grandmother was a mage named Vervain. Jealous of her grandson's budding Awakening, she treated him horribly, hoping to drive him away from the Mysteries. He spied on her library, and she beat him for it. He copied her rote mudras, and she used his body to entertain bound spirits. Still, Koenig was determined and, in the end, inherited Vervain's lore after years of difficult, secret studies, culminating in the moment when he refused to use his Life Arts to save her from a fatal stroke.

Koenig vowed to never do to his descendants what Vervain did to him. Acanthus prophets told him that there was an excellent chance his twin daughters would Awaken, "in time or blood," so he began their magical training at the age of 11. He inundated them with magical theory, taught them the ways of his Silver Ladder and drilled them in dueling etiquette, the Lex Magica and the subtle properties of each Practice.

For two years he taught gently, expecting nothing but for his daughters to listen and try to learn. He constantly suppressed the instincts brought on by his own brutal experiences. Part of him raged, constantly, for the Art was an angry thing for him. His inspirations had always been born of the need to escape pain. But in two years, his daughters showed no sign of Awakening. They couldn't hear a syllable of High Speech. They skipped lessons to do the things that normal, young girls like to do and started to see the endless drills and studies as a kind of prison. Not only did it keep them from enjoying normal lives, it wasn't even anything they could explain to their friends. Koenig insisted on absolute secrecy.

In the third year, Koenig lost his self-control. He pulled Barbara and Angela out of school, abandoned

their mother Tanya and moved to remote ranch in New Mexico. The sisters weren't allowed to have friends now. Koenig's staff, which he'd used to demonstrate rote mudras, was more often employed to hit his daughters. He started with the occasional rap on the knuckles, but after more than two years when they hadn't Awakened, he beat them harder and harder.

By the fifth year, Koenig's house was surrounded with wards to keep the twins from escaping. If anyone had visited, they would have seen two mad sisters, sporting bruises (but never broken bones, for long; Koenig healed those, but left the other injuries as a lesson). The twins escaped into a fantasy land: a traveling circus from one of Koenig's boyhood storybooks.

Finally, at age 17, both Awakened. They vanished for a week; Koenig's rage overflowed while he looked for them. They explored the Realms Invisible in the flesh, following the strange circus of their dreams to the Primal Wilds. They returned as quietly as they left. Koenig didn't know where they'd gone or how, but he was determined to torture the answer out of them. So instead of waiting for their proper time, the twins completed the Awakening in blood — Koenig's blood. They killed him over weeks. They cut and beat his secrets out of him and forced him to rewrite the family grimoire in his own blood. When it was over and he had moments left to live, they said, in unison, "We'll forget it all."

They took to the road, using the Mysteries and mortal cleverness to entertain people in dusty towns, attracting misfits as they went. Banishers joined the sisters and helped them build a caravan of trucks and trinkets. Three years later, the Carnival of Innocents turned trendy. Bohemians and punks now pay to see its freaks and magicians perform. Members of the audience occasionally disappear when the show hits the road, but few people notice, because the Carnival plays only in illegal venues. Some of the missing people are mages who joined the Carnival willingly, but sometimes they're abducted to play a very special part in the climax of the show: the Festival of Freedom. The blood only *looks* fake.

The Creed

After half a decade of abuse under a severe traditionalist, the sisters have built a crazed philosophy based on freeing mages' spirits. Under their direction, the Carnival of Innocents believes in a duty to free the Awakened from spiritual oppression. The Carnival defines "oppression" as any received magical tradition,

whether born of Atlantis or a Sleeper mythology. Rotes, ritual languages, grimoires — all are ways to shackle Awakening.

It isn't enough to avoid dogmatic magic. Without preparation, a mage will only reinvent what's come before. The Fallen World twists pure wills, forcing them to follow well-trod archetypes. Traditional ways (including the new traditions of Techgnostic magic and postmodern, mixed methods) are destructive memes: "mind viruses" that implant themselves in sorcerers' desires. All known forms of magic are diseases. Mages are the vectors. To immunize itself, the Carnival studies mages before it kills them, so that it can avoid exploring the same methods as they did. The sisters believe that ultimate individuality is only possible when every last mage is dead and every mystic rune's been erased. Only then can the Carnival lay down the burdens of the Arcana — even spellcasting. Once the cult's reached that stage, the Banishers' unshackled souls will transform the universe with pure intuition. Magic will manifest on its own instead of being forced to obey rigid intentions.

The Carnival believes that Sleeper society spreads the soul infection, too. Sleeper society isn't as dangerous, but dropping out of mundane culture is prudent. Members fall "off the grid." They don't carry ID, pay taxes or use email. They prefer barter and theft to paying with currency. The Carnival sews its own clothing, builds its own sets and composes its own music for shows. In theory, this gives members license to indulge their free spirits to the fullest.

Step Right Up

Despite (or perhaps, because) of these habits, the Carnival of Innocents is a popular underground event. Similar to early raves, the Carnival's got a bit of rebellious chic. The Carnival sets up shows in farmers' fields, urban vacant lots, abandoned warehouses and other unregulated venues. The Carnival might stick around a town for up to a week, but sets up in a new location every night.

It advertises its presence with cryptic posters and graffiti. Fans recognize these and spread the word through online discussion and word of mouth. They drag a few friends along for good measure and trek over to the show. Upon arrival, they encounter an oil drum in which they can deposit donations and a large, freshly painted sign indicating the items the Carnival needs. It accepts cash or anything on the list. Strong Unknown (see p. 93) guards the drum and crosses off any items the Carnival earns that night.

The Carnival of Innocents usually sets up five tents around a large, central performance area. Babe stands on a central stage, bullhorn in hand, directing entrants to various shows. Dancing, drinking and other revelry happen in the clearing. The Carnival doesn't care if audience members get high, have sex in the dirt or fight each other, as long as they don't threaten the performers, destroy property or attract the police.

The tents feature shows and exhibits by cult mages. These change from town to town, but performers fall back on the following:

Doctor Catharsis's Consequence-Free Hypno-Transgressions: Doctor Catharsis induces hallucinations and uses mind control to get audience members to act out their deepest fantasies. Half of the show's nothing more than normal crowd-effect hypnosis. The Doctor uses magic to unlock the audience's deepest inhibitions and to provide hallucinatory targets for murderous rage and other extreme acts. Once the audience has been reduced to weeping human wreckage, the Doctor takes all the guilt away, gently shifts memories down to the level of fuzzy, drunken recall and bids them adieu.

Audience members who take part in the show regain a point of Willpower for indulging their Vices.

Human Etch and Sketch: Morphella's act starts with perfectly ordinary sleight-of-hand and mechanical illusions. This primes the audience for the next part, where she strips to a bikini, dons a rubber mask and invites them to tattoo or brand any exposed part of her body. She provides an array of pre-filled tattoo guns and red hot wire for this purpose. Morphella uses Life magic to erase, alter and even animate the audience's contributions. If an audience member's tastes turn to torture or humiliation she'll hurl insults, shaming him in front of everyone else. Burns and marks might even "jump" off her body and on to the offender's. If someone tries to get really rough, she can usually knock him out with a quick spell then and there. When she meets a true sadist, she'll discreetly kill him as he's coming home from the show.

The Mad Mortician's Crawling Punks: The Mad Mortician keeps a dozen antique pickled punks, half of which are "bouncers." Pickled punks are deformed human fetuses, preserved in formaldehyde. "Bouncers" are fake pickled punks made of rubber or wax. After introducing each of his "children" under suitably spooky lighting, he uses Death and Matter spells to animate them. They crawl about, interacting with audience members. Whenever possible, the Mad Mortician invites ghosts to inhabit the "children." Some ghosts

take the opportunity to pass along messages to the living by speaking through the punks' mouths.

Strong Unknown's Displays of Destruction: Strong Unknown puts on a combination strongman/geek act. He lifts old engine blocks, smashes bricks on his forehead and devours everything from live squirrels to broken glass. He finishes off with a fire-eating routine. Strong Unknown does it all silently, staring at the audience blankly in between feats. This usually makes the audience rather uncomfortable, so this show is the least popular one.

Angel's Special Shows: Angel's Spirit magic conjures a new act every night. The show features whatever the spirits can conjure for the occasion. Past acts have included levitation, spontaneous plant growth, sculpted columns of fire and short-lived, shambling figures made of trash. Most spirits join the show in exchange for Essence, but on the odd occasion, Angel compels one to perform. Angel lets in only two or three audience members at a time because the spirits occasionally run amok. Sometimes people go in, but don't come out.

The Festival of Freedom

The smaller events are just a warm-up. Two hours or so after opening for the night, the tents close; cult members set up seats in a round and herd the audience over to them so that it'll get a good look at the Festival of Freedom.

The audience doesn't know is that the Carnival of Innocents scouts out locations weeks in advance, looking for the Awakened and their works. Members make several trips up until a day or two before the first show. That's when they kidnap local mages at the rate of one or two for every night they expect to perform. Doctor Catharsis does a little Mind trick he calls "the Whammy" that keeps victims from concentrating enough to cast spells, but this takes a while to cast safely, so, as an extra measure, the cult drugs targets into unconsciousness and applies ad hoc countermagic until the cult feels it's safe to start the interrogations.

The cult questions mages gently at first; the Banishers might use drugs or a few beatings to ensure cooperation, but they hold back until they can discern whether or not the subject's another Banisher. If she is, the cult frees her, apologizes profusely and offers her a place in the Carnival. If she wants to leave, they let her go. The Carnival never forces anyone to stay; over the years, Banishers have come and gone. But if she's a trained mage who belongs to a coherent occult tradition, the torture begins.

The Carnival wants nothing less than a comprehensive summary of the victim's beliefs and practices. They'll do anything to get it. Once they do, they toss her in a cage to keep her under guard until it's time for the Festival of Freedom.

The festival isn't magical, but it is a ritual. The victim is a scapegoat for her beliefs. The rite changes from night to night; Carnival Banishers make the mage's incapacitated body the focus for a number of performances. One night, the victim might be made into a human dartboard. On another, she's the mute villain in a punk-vaudeville musical. The Carnival always makes the victim a figure of mockery and, in the end, kills her. Using theatrics and a bit of magic, the Carnival makes her death look like cheap stage effects. Some members of the audience actually edge closer at the climax to get in the so-called splatter zone. They get showered in the blood and gristle that they assume come from some local butcher.

In the end, the Carnival of Innocents dismantles its tents, cleans the area, burns the body and leaves to repeat the performance in a new town.

The Banishers

Currently, six Banishers make up the Carnival of Innocents. Members come and go, so Storytellers should feel free to alter the membership as they see fit. Three — Angel, Babe and Strong Unknown — are permanent members and, thus, given increased detail. The rest of the current roster is as follows:

Doctor Catharsis: Doctor Catharsis is a Mastigos and a Master of Mind, but that's only because of an extremely narrow focus. He's not particularly skilled at any other Arcana. He's a stocky, black-haired, sallow-skinned, muscular man who glowers from beneath a red bowler. He wears a purple pinstripe suit.

Morphella: Morphella the Mutable Beauty is also a Mastigos, but expresses her individuality by refusing the urge to master the Mysteries of Mind and Space. Instead, she uses Life to control her own body down to the individual cells. Morphella's a bald, slender Asian woman. She routinely uses magic to give herself ornamental scars and new tattoos.

The Mad Mortician: The pale, crooked-backed Moros called the Mad Mortician wears a lab coat covered with odd stains, a pair of black rubber galoshes, an unkempt suit and gray slacks. Dark brown eyes squint behind thick, horn-rimmed glasses. He wears his blond hair in dreadlocks. The Mortician whispers in a sinister voice for the audience, but when he's

not performing, he's actually quite friendly. He was a pharmacist by trade before Awakening, so he keeps the cult awash in drugs to help pacify prisoners and spice up dull moments on the road.

Banishers from the Carnival of Innocents have few to no rote. It's against the cult's beliefs to learn them from each other or even from grimoires, so members devise their own or rely on pure improvisation.

Angel Impressaria

Quote: *Show us everything! We need to know what to forget.*

Background: Angel was always the quieter of the twins, but always did her best to shield her sister from Koenig's abuse. Angel was the first one to cope by losing herself in their father's books. Angel elaborated on the places in them, adding fantasy elements and new, strange denizens. Babe portrayed their imaginary friends. The sisters Awakened during one of these sessions; Angel's fantasy sideshow appeared before the girls. Babe channeled spirits playing the parts of freaks and actors.

Angel wanted to hurt their father, but never wanted to kill him. That was Babe's idea. She still has nightmares about that day, but would never admit it. She's a hard-nosed pragmatist, almost single-handedly responsible for getting the Carnival started. They took ordinary performers at first: Sleeper punks and carny-culture aficionados who wanted to ride the coattails of the sisters' magical luck. But as the urge to track down and punish other mages grew, it was impossible for the sisters to maintain any semblance of normalcy.

Angel still manages the Carnival. She makes sure that despite their theatrically tattered and battered appearance, the tents and vehicles are in good repair. She gets new members up to speed on what the cult does, helps them design an act and comforts them when their conscience tells them that the Festival of Freedom is wrong. She quietly killed another cultist (the Electrifying Halo) when he talked about giving himself up to the cops. She doesn't believe in mercy, because Strong Unknown is a walking demonstration of why it's a waste of time.

Description: She dresses like an unkempt goth, in old leather corsets, yellowed lace and tear-smudged eyeliner. She's got chin-length, curly blonde hair, but it's usually mixed up with multicolored extensions. Blue eyes stand out from her ivory pancake makeup and baby-faced bone structure.

She's Babe's dizygotic twin so she doesn't look exactly like her sister, but the family resemblance is easy to see. Angel likes to move eccentrically, with intentional stumbles, odd little shuffles and twitchy hand gestures, but it's all a put-on. Her Awakening included an extended stint as an acrobat in the phantom carnival that the Carnival of Innocents is based on, so she returned to the mortal world with a trapeze artist's agility. Her squeaky, childlike voice is a ruse, too; when she needs to order somebody around, she uses a deep, forceful tone. She's 24 years old.

Her nimbus is a collection of whirling, glowing multicolored bubbles, rolling atop each other like parts of a nimble, soft machine.

Storytelling Hints: Beneath a flighty exterior, Angel's a cold devotee of the Carnival's mission. She hates herself and her sister and sees them as little more than puppets, dancing under their father's thumb. She doesn't like the spotlight. Even in the early days, when they had to rely on her acrobatics and Babe's singing to get by, Angel acted more like a marionette than a person. She's much more comfortable directing from behind the scenes.

Angel often wonders what happened to her mother. The Carnival swung by their old house early on, but she was gone. Spirits and Scrying spells haven't managed to track her down. Babe's forgotten about it, but Angel misses her mother more and more, to the point where she might make a deal with mages who could find her.

Real Name: Angela McManus

Path: Thyrsus

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 1

Mental Skills: Crafts 4, Investigation 2, Occult (Atlantean) 5

Physical Skills: Athletics (Acrobatics) 4, Firearms 2, Drive 2, Larceny 3, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Streetwise (Illegal Gatherings) 3, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Ambidextrous, Body-Ravaging Magic, Fast Reflexes 2, Fighting Finesse (Knives), High Speech, Mana Self-Sacrifice, Nimbus Sense, Quick Draw, Strong Back

Willpower: 5

Wisdom: 2

Derangements: Fugue, Suspicion

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 8

Defense: 2

Speed: 12

Health: 7

Gnosis: 3

Arcana: Life 4, Prime 2, Spirit 4

Rotes: None

Mana/per turn: 12/3

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Dice Pool
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Knife	1L	1	7
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Armor: 4 ("Organic Resilience," Life ••)

Babe
MC

Quote: *Ladies and gentlemen! Who wants to see the viscera fly tonight? Wear your goggles and watch closely!*

Background: Babe was never the creative one, but she knew how to please her father — to a point. She

could recite everything he taught word for word. That made him smile, until he tested her for Awakening and she failed, over and over again. Koenig beat her harder because she looked so much more likely to succeed.

When they had time alone, Babe pretended to be other people: wandering musicians, nomadic warrior-queens and astronauts who were stronger than she was and, best of all, could travel wherever they liked. She copied runes with a secret hate for every stroke and memorized secret customs that disgusted her, but deep inside, she pretended to be another person. She smiled, read and wrote what she was told, said, "Yes Dad," and "Thanks Dad," and dreamed of leaving — and of punishing him, too.

When she Awakened, she wandered into strange realms from her sister's stories. Spirits possessed her and let her assume identities she'd always dreamed of. There were alien thoughts in the mix, hidden behind the façade of the spirit carnival, but she didn't mind their demands — especially when they wanted blood. As spirits of freedom, they needed her to wage a passionate battle for her own liberty.



The rush of experiencing life as dozens of spirits made her socially fearless. She learned to sing and busk for change while her sister danced. Babe naturally took a position as the Carnival's master of ceremonies. Nobody — not even her sister — knows that she still hears the spirits' voices within her. Sometimes they want her to say strange things while she shouts to the crowd, to travel to particular towns and even free certain mages. She always tells Angel that they escaped, but it's happened five times now. Angel won't let her guard captives any more, so she probably suspects something.

Description: Babe's a tall, slender woman who dresses like the punk counterpart to a circus ringmaster. She wears a huge top hat, a red coat covered in patches, ripped black jeans and knee-high PVC boots. Her unruly hair's a bright, artificial red. She has her sister's blue eyes and, as a twin, is naturally the same age: 24. Her nimbus is a chorus of shadows, gesturing and thrashing in every direction.

Storytelling Hints: Babe is loud and outgoing and has an easy smile, even while she cracks wise about mages being tortured on stage. She's prone to sudden shifts in personality from the residue of spirits she met during her Awakening. She shifts from comedy to compassion to quick brutality without skipping a beat. Babe worries that she'll have to leave the Carnival one day, because she can feel her self-control slipping as she careens from persona to persona.

Real Name: Barbara McManus

Path: Thyrsus

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 4, Crafts 1, Occult (Atlantean) 5

Physical Skills: Brawl 2, Drive (Buses and Trucks) 2, Firearms 1, Larceny 2

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression (Singing) 4, Socialize 4, Subterfuge 2, Streetwise 1

Merits: Barfly, Body-Ravaging Magic, Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, High Speech, Inspiring, Mana Self-Sacrifice, Nimbus Sense, Striking Looks 2

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 2

Derangements: Irrationality, Multiple Personality (many; none of them have fully formed identities, but they're occasionally sympathetic to mages)

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 7

Gnosis: 3

Arcana: Death 2, Life 3 Mind 2 Spirit 3

Rotes: None

Mana/per turn: 12/3

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Dice Pool
.44 Magnum	3	1	6

Armor: 3 ("Organic Resilience," Life ••)

Strong Unknown

The Carnival Muscle Man

Quote: *Please run. I don't want to hurt you unless I catch you.*

Background: Two years ago, a cabal called the Five Wolves caught wind of the Carnival of Innocents. The cabal's mages were impulsive young Adamantine Arrows, wanderers who fancied themselves modern knights errant. They tracked a vanished cabal to the Carnival and stalked it to Scranton, Pennsylvania, but as none were skilled in Spirit magic they never realized that Babe and Angel had discovered them, bound spirits to follow them and alerted the Carnival when the cabal closed in on the cult's camp. The Carnival of Innocents had eight members at the time; the Five Wolves were no match.

A mage called Mukti was the only survivor, and only because Babe refused to finish him off. She even offered to fight anybody who'd try. The cult drugged him, bandaged his wounds and talked it out. With Doctor Catharsis's help, they came to a compromise: if they couldn't kill him, they'd erase the dogma inside him.

Doctor Catharsis spent two months crawling through Mukti's mind, cutting and burning away the parts that remembered his magical training, his loyalty to the Five Wolves and his mission against the cult. Doctor Catharsis destroyed thoughts carefully as he could, careful not to disturb the man's Awakening because the cult intended to make him one of their own. There were still side effects. Mukti's intelligence owed much to the way his mind ordered itself: a structure so entwined with his occult knowledge that the Doctor had to damage the former to remove the latter.



After this psychic lobotomy, the cult was left with as close to a *tabula rasa* as possible. The drooling, babbling remains of Mukti still had a grip on the Supernal, but he didn't know his name or much about the world. Language returned rapidly, as if he was recovering from a stroke. In fact, they told him that this was what happened to ease the transition into his new life. They called him "Strong Unknown," a joke nickname that stuck. He had to learn to read again, socialize with others — the only things he remembered how to do well were fighting and exercising. He escaped the stress of relearning by throwing himself into physical training. Mukti was big and strong before he was captured; Strong Unknown is a monster.

Strong Unknown protects the Carnival. He has a show, too, but his terrible stage presence doesn't make it especially entertaining, even when he's bending crowbars or eating glass. He has a child's outlook on things. He understands that the cult captures certain people and that they're never seen again, but his low intelligence and a strong sense of denial help him gloss over what's really going on. He's killed two people since the Carnival remade him, but he doesn't remember those occasions very well. He hurt some

people bad, saw their souls drift away, but he doesn't remember why.

Description: Strong Unknown has short black hair, brown eyes, bronze skin and a huge, muscled body. It's not a bodybuilder's physique; he's made of uneven, ugly knots, and his abdomen juts out. He's 22 years old, but his face looks younger because it lacks expression. His nimbus is a huge bestial shadow whose yellow eyes glimmer with more intelligence than the man himself.

Storytelling Hints: Ironically, Strong Unknown is probably closer to the cult's ideal than anyone else. His magic comes from feeling a simple, quiet sense of harmony with the world's secret energies and imagining the new forms they might take. When he hits the punching bag in his tent or pushes himself with exercise, old memories flutter in and out, but he has no frame of reference with which to understand them. He knows, deep down, that someone's done something terrible to him, but if he thinks about it too hard the emotional pain is too powerful for him to handle. If someone confronted him with what really happened, it wouldn't necessarily cure him, but it might turn him against his caretakers.

Real Name: Bassam al-Samir (former shadow name: Mukti)

Path: Moros

Order: Banisher (former Adamantine Arrow)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 1

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Crafts 2, Medicine 2 (Treating Lacerations), Occult 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Weaponry 4 (Axes and Hatchets), Survival 3

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Boxing 3, Brawling Dodge, Strong Back

Willpower: 4

Wisdom: 4

Derangements: Melancholia

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Sloth

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3 (4 vs. Unarmed)

Speed: 14

Health: 9

Gnosis: 2

Arcana: Death 2, Life 2, Matter 2

Rotes: None

Mana/per turn: 11/2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Fire Axe	3	2	9 again	13

Armor: 2 ("Unseen Aegis," Matter ••)

Emilio's Last Ride

A story traded among the mages of the American Southwest speaks of a cabal of a big, orange bus with a red splash of paint across the grill. According to the mages who claim to have seen the bus and lived, the people on that bus aren't really people. They're Abyssal creatures that *look* like people, and they all pile out when they find isolated mages or a small cabal. And then the creatures kill the mages and burn their bodies to ash.

That splash of paint across the front of the bus isn't paint. It's blood. It's the blood of a hundred mages, and while you can't see it without a spell, the shadow names of the victims are written on the windows of the bus.

The mages of the American Southwest are right about many of these details, except that the inhabitants of the bus aren't Abyssal creatures. They are, for the most part, mages, and they're not killing other mages out of madness or bloodlust. They're doing it to honor Emilio.

The Call

Nobody even knows Emilio's last name. He was Mexican, but born in the United States (Texas? California? Again, no one's sure). He was college-educated, and most folks think he was a teacher at one point. But somewhere along the way, he started operating the bus.

He bought the bus from a junk dealer near the border, and with his cousins' help, fixed it up so that it looked like a tour bus. He made contact with a lot of people in Mexico, folks who wanted to get over the border, find some work and hopefully have better lives than back home. He discovered that a lot of those people had relatives already living the United States, legally or otherwise, and those folks were willing to help. So Emilio would load up the bus with Mexican people who had passports and legal ID, and take them on "tours" over the border. He'd make arrangements with the people who wanted to get into the States to put these folks up for a night, and then he'd drop off the people

with IDs, take the illegal immigrants over the border and take them into an urban area. The people with IDs would return on their own, usually with friends or relatives or with rides that Emilio arranged, over the next few days. Meanwhile, the Mexicans he brought across had to make their own way, but it allowed them to get into the country without suspicion. Emilio found that the border guards, having checked 20 IDs once, waved him through without looking. But apart from playing off simple laziness, there was something about Emilio that made folks want to trust him. He always seemed above reproach.

The bus made 13 runs across the border and back, and brought close to 500 people into the United States — illegally — during that time. On the 13th ride, the last one, the Border Patrol stopped the bus, cleaned it out and searched everyone there. Of the 28 people on board, 26 were not U.S. citizens (Emilio and his cousin Miguel were, and were immediately arrested).

Emilio might have gotten off with a lighter sentence, if he'd been allowed to use his natural charisma in a courtroom, but he never made it that far. It turned out that one of the people he'd taken over the border in the past wound up, rightly or wrongly, on a terrorist watch list. Emilio, now guilty, without a trial, of aiding and abetting terrorists, was taken away to some dark prison in another country. He might still be alive, but no one has seen or heard from him since. Miguel, Emilio's cousin, was freed but deported to Mexico. He wound up dead in a shootout in Mexico City three months after his release.

The bus was impounded, but five months after the arrests, an unknown group of people broke into the police yard and stole it. Despite the bus's distinctive appearance, the bus has not been found to this day (not by the police, at least).

The Banishers and the Bus

One of the people on the bus when the police raided it was a Banisher named Marisol Ruiz. She had been Awakened for nearly a decade, and was desperate to shed her "curse." She met Emilio the night before the fateful crossing, and the two shared a bed. When he was arrested, Marisol looked at his mind and saw his visions — a world without borders, a world without hatred and fear. But she saw something else in the eyes of the police taking him away. She saw the Abyss, the gulf that divides the world. And the only way she could think of to defeat that vast gulf was to make it meaningless. That meant severing the Supernal Realms from the Fallen World entirely.

She tracked down other people who were on the bus that day, and she told them what she intended to do. To her amazement, of the 12 people who agreed to join her, five were already Awakened (most having done so during or directly after the raid), and two more Awakened upon hearing her proposition. Convinced, now, that hers was the right path, Marisol and her compatriots stole Emilio's bus and went hunting.

The Creed

Emilio's Last Ride is dedicated toward isolating the Fallen World from the Supernal Realms, although most of the members don't see it in quite that context. Most, especially the unAwakened, see the mission as fighting demons from Hell, *brujas* who wield of the Devil and threaten to upset God's plan. Such grand designs, though, pale in inspirational power compared to simply invoking the memory of Emilio.

The bus travels across the Southwest, from the Pacific Ocean to the Texas/Louisiana border, never going farther north than Denver. None of the mages aboard have ever had any real contact with the orders of the Pentacle, but they do know that *las brujas* have a society and that it spreads across the world. The general feeling among the inhabitants of the bus is that any government official of the USA is probably working for *las brujas*, and so the law is to be avoided as much as possible, since anything the cops discover will find its way back to their enemies. Therefore, the bus doesn't speed, obeys traffic laws and always has legitimate in-state plates.

When the Last Ride discovers a mage or a cabal of mages, the Banishers usually try to isolate the targets. Marisol often prays for a vision on how to best attack the new targets (using the Dream Merit and sometimes her command of Time magic), and she passes her information along to the other Banishers at a meeting reminiscent of a Catholic service. The Banishers then attack their targets in a fast, brutal strike. Sometimes that means running them off the road. Sometimes it means smashing the bus into a rest stop and opening fire with automatic weapons. Sometimes it just means that someone gives the mage a flat tire and then the bus runs him down as he changes it. The Banishers of Emilio's Last Ride do their best to kill the Awakened without using magic, but Marisol's Catholic upbringing has left her with a keen appreciation for absolution from sin. Almost any act can be forgiven, provided expiation is made.

The Last Ride has managed to stay under Consilium

radar because the cult doesn't usually enter cities. The Banishers watch the highways and sometimes outlying towns or even suburbs for magical activity, but to enter a metropolitan area is to give up many of their advantages. Even so, if Marisol received a vision that seemed to require the Banishers to enter a more populated area, she would follow it. God will provide, and they owe Emilio at least that much faith.

The Banishers

Marisol Ruiz is the spiritual leader of Emilio's Last Ride, and the most important decisions (where to go, what route to take, what targets to attack) are hers. Even she, however, refuses to absolve the others of sin or hear confession, as such a role doesn't befit a woman, in her eyes. Padre Esteban, then, listens to the confessions of the other members (including Marisol) and assigns penance as he sees fit. This gives him a fair amount of power in the cult, but so far he has not exploited it. El Españo is the tactical mastermind of the group. Although Marisol chooses the targets, she defers to him on the specifics of how to attack.

Emilio's Last Ride has 13 members. Eight are mages, three are Sleepwalkers and two are Sleepers. The cult is roughly split between the sexes (five women, eight men), and so far the question of new members hasn't been raised. Marisol knows, however, that it is only a matter of time before one of their number dies in battle. She likewise understands that although she and the other two leaders have chosen chastity, sooner or later one of the other four women is going to get pregnant. Raising a child into this kind of life — is that the beginning of new society, a pure faith raised to reject the evils of the *brujas*? Or is it a horrible crime to damn a child to this life of rootless wandering and violence?

Marisol Ruiz

Quote: *The gulf is so wide. The only way not to drown is to stay firmly on land, and that is what we must do.*

Background: The youngest of nine children, Marisol grew up in Mexico City, lost amidst the poverty and the filth. She never quite learned to communicate, not with her parents or with her peers, except within the context of her faith. The routine and the dogma of the Catholic Church gave her a way to express herself, when human communication otherwise seemed arbitrary and frightening.

Marisol Awakened at the age of 17, and the experience shattered her. She remembers almost nothing

about her trip to the Watchtower of the Lunargent Thorn, except being offered a book by a dark man with an alluring voice. She offered up a prayer to the Virgin Mary instead, and found herself back at home, sweating and cold, with her family and the local priest standing around her. They believed (and she agreed) that she had been possessed, but then exorcised. She never did find out what she had done during her “possession,” but the looks that her family gave her were too much to bear, and she fled the city. She traveled around Mexico for the next decade, rarely using her magic but letting her visions from Mary (her Dream Merit) guide her steps. She dreamed of, and subsequently met, Emilio on the 10th anniversary of her Awakening.

Description: Marisol is a plain-looking Mexican woman in her late 20s. She favors black or gray dresses, and normally ties her hair back. She has a pleasant and gentle demeanor when dealing with the other members of Emilio’s Last Ride, but is harsh and vitriolic when confronted with the Awakened.

When Marisol’s nimbus flares, those around her feel a profound sense of guilt, as though all of their transgressions have been laid bare. Voices echo and deepen, while lights seem to focus and brighten, giving everyone the sensation that he is being watched and judged.

Storytelling Hints: Marisol Ruiz has never really fit in, and until her Awakening saw other human beings in an abstract manner. She has little in the way of real emotion or empathy, but her faith gives her detachment a more acceptable front. She is easily distracted, and if something catches her attention, she doesn’t have interest in much else until it is removed. Secretly, she still loves Emilio and she knows he still lives, but she also knows she will never be able to help him without using magic. That knowledge eats away at her, but she thinks that her pain is a good thing — it proves her faith.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Picture of Emilio (Space)

Real Name: Marisol Ruiz

Path: Acanthus

Order: None (Banisher)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Crafts (Sewing) 3, Investigation 1, Medicine 2, Occult 3, Science 2



Physical Skills: Drive (Bus) 2, Firearms 2, Larceny 3, Stealth 3, Survival 1

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Intimidation (Cold) 2, Socialize 2, Streetwise 3

Merits: Destiny (“Men are two-faced”) 4, Dream 3, Iron Stamina 2, Language (English, native Spanish), Sanctum: Bus (Size 1, Security 3)

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 5

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Sloth

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 7

Gnosis: 3

Arcana: Fate 4, Mind 2, Space 4, Time 4

Rotes: None

Mana/per turn: 12/3

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Clip	Dice Pool
.38 Revolver	2L	20/40/80	6	7

Armor: 4 (“Fortune’s Protection,” Fate ♦♦)

Padre Esteban

Quote: *In doing the Lord's work, we must not forget that we are but mortal men. We are made in His image, but we are not God. When we act, we do so with faith and hope, and with the promise of redemption of sin. Go forth, children of God.*

Background: Juan Morales never considered becoming a priest. A gang member from the streets of Mexico City, he fully intended to die by the age of 20. He even formed his own gang around that concept — Los Veintes Muertos, the Dead 20s. The gang carved out a reputation for utter brutality, psychopathic behavior and unparalleled violence. Other gangs would

cede turf rather than fight with the Dead 20s, because those guys wanted to die.

And then, one night, the Man came around. Juan isn't sure to this day what the Man was; even after Awakening, Juan wasn't certain that Man was a living, breathing person. The Man, a gringo but one who spoke perfect Spanish, walked into Veintes Muertos turf and started insulting the gang. When they arrived, he killed them, one after another, just shot them all dead. He never missed. Juan arrived just as the Man was leaving, soaked in blood but walking just fine, despite the bullet holes in his body. It was Juan's 20th birthday, and it should've been the day he died, but he dropped his guns and fell to his knees, praying for God to spare him. The Man spat on Juan in disgust, and walked by him. "Guess your boys wanted it more than either of us," he said.

Juan remained there, kneeling amidst the corpses of his brothers, and he went to the River of Death. He followed that river until he reached Stygia, and there he saw his brothers again. They damned him for a coward, and said that he was not worthy to look upon the Lead Coin. Juan wasn't sure what that meant, but they made it sound like a big honor, so he agreed — he wasn't worthy. He stood up again, Awakened but humbled.

He had some brief contact with some of the mages of Mexico, and he learned what the "Lead Coin" was — and most of those mages didn't deserve the honor they'd received, either. The young Banisher fled north and wound up on Emilio's bus that fateful afternoon. When Marisol Ruiz found Juan, she brought him more than just the opportunity to find unworthy mages and send them on to Hell. She rekindled his faith, and she led him to his true calling: the service of God. Juan took the name "Esteban" (his confirmation name) and started using the title "Padre." He's not officially a priest, but it's very much his symbolic role. He's sworn off alcohol, sex and drugs, but not violence (he feels it's part of his calling) and certainly not revenge. Marisol promised to help him find the Man someday.

Description: Esteban has put on a little weight, and he's a little more tempered than back in his vicious days as a gang leader. He retains a predator's grace and his rough smile, though, to say nothing of his numerous gang tattoos. Barely 25 now, he stands just shy of six feet tall, and wears black clothes and a priest's collar.

Esteban's gang tattoos glow gold when his nimbus is visible, and his skin darkens, becoming almost black.



Storytelling Hints: Esteban isn't actually a priest, but the members of the Last Ride expect him to know the rituals and the dogmatic answers to their spiritual questions. He reads the Bible and various catechisms in a mad attempt to live up to their expectations, and he's good at formulating reasonable answers to their questions, but once in a while someone asks a question that hammers home the point — he's not a priest, he's not ordained, and if he's wrong about that not really mattering, he's sending these people straight to Hell.

Esteban takes part in all combat operations and attacks that the group makes. Marisol originally counseled against this, but then realized that his experience in the field, as it were, makes him too valuable a resource to ignore. Esteban still fights viciously, but with a much greater sense of control and precision. He wants to live long enough to see the Man again.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Shell casing from the Man's gun (Death)

Real Name: Juan Morales

Path: Moros

Order: None (Banisher)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics (Catholicism) 1, Crafts (Car Repair) 2, Occult 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Dirty Tricks) 3, Drive (Bus) 1, Firearms (Drive-By) 2, Larceny 3, Stealth 1, Weaponry 3

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression 3, Intimidation 3, Streetwise 4

Merits: Danger Sense, Eidetic Memory, Fast Reflexes 2, Fresh Start, Language (English; native Spanish), Sanctum: Bus (Size 1, Security 3)

Willpower: 4

Wisdom: 2 (Narcissism, Megalomania)

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 7 (with Fast Reflexes)

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 8

Gnosis: 2

Arcana: Death 3, Forces 2, Matter 3

Roles: Death — Soul Marks (•); Forces — Nightsight (•)

Mana/per turn: 11/2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Dice Pool		
Knife	1L	1	7		
Type	Damage	Range	Clip	Special	Dice Pool
SMG	2L	25/50/100	30+1	Autofire	7

Armor: 3 ("Unseen Aegjs," Matter ••)

El Español

Quote: *Kill the woman first. She's not the most powerful, but the two men love her. If she dies, they will fall to pieces.*

Background: Victor del Castillo was born in Madrid, Spain, and Awakened to the Watchtower of the Iron Gauntlet at the age of 15. As it happened, his father, and his father before him, had all Awakened and served *el Voz del Drag*—*n* — the Silver Ladder. Generations of power were Victor's birthright, and he, a dutiful son and devout Catholic, couldn't find the nerve to tell them how horrible his Awakening had been. His soul had slipped away from Pandemonium and been cast adrift in the Abyss, and he had spent black eternity there before something had drawn him back to Earth. He joined his father's cabal, however, and another Mastigos of the order set about teaching Victor how to hone his skills.

One night, he opened a portal without bothering to see where he was going. He just wanted to get away, anywhere, far from his father and his insane cohorts. Victor stepped into the portal and once again was lost in the timeless deep. A teleportation spell is supposed to be instantaneous, body and mind. For Victor, his body traveled instantly, but his mind took ages. He woke up in rural Mexico, with no passport, no identification, no money, no cabal.

Many times over the next three years, he contemplated contacting his father. Victor knew that his father was looking for him, but through luck or fate, he managed to dodge the older mage's spells. Victor finally found an agent of the Spanish cabal in a tiny bar outside Tijuana, and put a knife in his eye — from the parking lot. Now a murderer, Victor realized his calling. The black endlessness he had felt was because of his superior will. Other mages slept, and so did not know what was out there in the spaces between worlds. Victor decided he had to kill those mages, leaving only the ones who were strong enough.

He wandered Mexico, using his knowledge of Consilium practice to get close enough to mages to tell if they had "seen the depths" (that is, if they were Banishers). If they had, he talked with them, and more than a few Banishers had their missions and identities come into focus after a conversation with "El Español" (the Spaniard). If not, Victor murdered



them and moved on. It was after a brutal shootout in a small border town that he decided to get out of Mexico for a while, and with a pair of Banishers he'd recently discovered, he got on Emilio's bus. Both of those mages, as well as Victor himself, wound up joining with Marisol afterwards.

Description: El Españo is tall and dark-skinned, with classical European features and a strong Castilian accent. He is graceful and eloquent, but usually taciturn until the wine starts flowing or until he has a good sense of who's in the room. He wears dark clothes and a wide-brimmed leather hat.

When his nimbus is visible, witnesses feel lost, dizzy and cast adrift. Metal becomes cold to the touch, and shadows gain a terrifying depth.

Storytelling Hints: Victor has lost much of his continental sensibilities after so many years living on the dusty roads of Mexico. He still prefers comfort; he just can't get it very often. He compensates by buying or stealing expensive liquor when he can, and although he, just as Marisol and Padre Esteban, has sworn himself to chastity, he hasn't been entirely faithful about this vow. He does confess, of course, and do his penance, but his agenda is less overtly religious than his companions'. El Españo kills because he feels it his duty to cull the weak mages. He and Marisol are actually working toward very different goals, and sooner or later they will have to come to terms with that.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Engraved ring with family crest

Real Name: Victor del Castillo

Path: Mastigos

Order: None (Banisher; formerly Silver Ladder)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Investigation 2, Occult (Spanish Legend) 3, Politics (Mages) 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Drive 2 (Bus), Firearms 3, Larceny 2, Stealth 4, Survival (Living on the Road) 3, Weaponry 3

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 1, Socialize 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Abyssal Resonance 2 (see p. 39), Direction Sense, Enhanced Item (Dagger), Iron Stomach, Language (English; native Spanish), Sanctum: Bus (Size 1, Security 3)

Willpower: 6

Wisdom: 3

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Gluttony

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 7

Gnosis: 3

Arcana: Fate 2, Mind 3, Space 4

Rotes: *Fate* — Evil Eye (••); *Mind* — Alter Aura (••) •, Incognito Presence (••); *Space* — Omnivision (•) •, Scrying (••) •, Portal (•••) •, Ranged Blow (•••) •, Teleportation (••••) •

•El Españo knows the Silver Ladder "version" of these rites, and thus benefits from the rote Specialty Skills for them. His other rites have been learned from other Banishers or stolen from grimoires.

Mana/per turn: 12/3

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Dagger	3L	1	+2 Durability	8

(Enhanced Item)

Armor: 4 ("Untouchable," Space ••)

Emilio's Bus

The bus serves as the headquarters, home and symbol of Emilio's Last Ride. It is a modified school bus, originally painted white, but the Banishers repainted it when they liberated it from the impound. They tried to give it the traditional gold-yellow for school buses, but it came out pale orange, and they left it at that. The red splash on the front of the grille is indeed blood, but some mystical property of the bus prevents the blood from drying or fading in color. It remains crimson, rather than dulling to brown.

The bus is an Enhanced Item, though who performed the spells to Enhance it is something of a mystery. Since no member of Emilio's Last Ride has ever performed any sort of magical diagnostic on the vehicle, it might well have capabilities that they don't know about. As it stands, the bus has the following characteristics:

Durability: 9

Size: 21

Structure: 30

Acceleration: 10

Safe Speed: 88 (60 mph)

Maximum Speed: 147 (100 mph)

Handling: 0

Special Traits: The front grille of the bus is armored (Armor 3). The bus is considered to have Occultation 4, so any magical attempts to find or analyze the bus suffer a -4 penalty. Attempts to find or scrutinize people in the bus likewise suffer this penalty.

The Huntsmen

I have heard others describe it as a jungle, as the Forest Primeval, and that is all very well. I remember it on a much more basic level. I remember seeing the world from the eyes of the spider, and I was struck by the vivid color, the sensation of feeling scent and sound... and the abundant prey.

Oh, yes. The prey.

The Huntsmen are a small cult of Banishers that formed around the charismatic and purely psychopath-

Where Did the Bus Come From?

None of the three leaders of Emilio's Last Ride have the Arcana necessary for Enhancing the bus, so how did it happen? Below are a few suggestions for why the bus is the way it is, all of which twist the cult in a slightly different direction.

- The bus is possessed by a spirit of murder. It couldn't care less about the agenda of Emilio's Last Ride, but the spirit does quite enjoy smashing into fleshy objects and feeling them turn to pulp beneath its wheels. In addition to the traits above, add spirit Traits as defined in Chapter Four of **Mage: The Awakening**. The spirit can't disincorporate, of course, and if damaged, it has to be repaired, but it can use its Influence (Buses) to increase its Durability or make other minor changes.

- Emilio was a mage, and cast spells upon the bus before being arrested. While he probably could have prevented his incarceration, his conversation with Marisol showed him what would happen on the Last Ride — and he chose to go to prison to let the Banisher cult form and do its work. He speaks to Marisol in her dreams periodically, meaning that a capable cabal of mages could follow him back through the Temenos through her dreams.

- The bus contains a Hallow. Usually Hallows don't move, of course, but this one is unique. The Hallow centers upon the remains of a mage that the bus ran down shortly before Emilio purchased it. A chunk of the mage's skeleton remains lodged in the bus's undercarriage. Slowly, parts of the bus have changed to tass, resulting in the higher-than-usual traits for the vehicle. The Resonance of the bus (best described as "secretive") keeps it hidden, but if a mage were to discover it, she could cripple or destroy the bus with one well-placed Prime spell — provided that the Banishers don't get her first.

ic mage called Aaron Murphy. All of the Huntsmen are Thyrsus, as Murphy makes it a point to kill non-Thyrsus mages (Banisher or otherwise).

The Call

Aaron Murphy (a shadow name; see below) Awakened to the Primal Wild and, upon his return to his body, was found and “drafted” by the Adamantine Arrow. Murphy was an ex-soldier, honorably discharged for medical reasons, a respected member of his community, and seemingly a good man. The Arrow had no qualms at all about inducting him.

The Arrow in the area, unfortunately, didn’t do its work well enough. Murphy was and remains a very sick man. He was discharged from the Army for psychological reasons, but had made enough friends to secure a non-specific medical discharge rather than a psychiatric one. While the Arrow did perform some brief analysis of him when the order admitted him, the mages doing so focused mostly on the state of his soul using Death magic. Murphy had killed in the line of duty, but despite his lifelong fantasies about murder, he had never indulged them. Murphy was, at the time of his Awakening, a serial killer waiting for the “trigger” to set him off. The Awakening alone might not have done it, but the fight with a Banisher cult four weeks after joining the Arrow was certainly enough.

The Banisher cult was weak, young and disorganized. The Adamantine Arrow cabal that the Banishers unwisely chose as targets crushed them easily, and Murphy chased down one of the Banishers himself. The Banisher, a young Moros named Emma, tried to defend herself, but she had never received any real training in self-defense, combat or even defensive magic. Murphy used Life magic to paralyze her, and then returned later to extract as much pleasure as he could from her body before finally killing her. In that 12-hour session of pain, blood and rape, Murphy figured out what he was. In the Primal Wild, he had seen mindless, weak creatures, blundering about helplessly until a superior creature caught and ate them. Murphy was that predator — the spider. The hunter.

Murphy remained with the Arrow for several years after the incident. The Consilium’s involvement with individual cabals was lax at best, and Murphy managed to ingratiate himself with all of the Arrow mages in the area, blinding them to his bloodthirsty tendencies. Then, he met Aconite, an apostate and member of the Orphans of Proteus Legacy (see p. 346 of **Mage: The Awakening**). Seeing his chance, he presented himself to Aconite as a prospective pupil, telling him a bit about his spider-like urges, but not enough to arouse suspicion. Murphy played the older mage masterfully, telling him about how he never felt

quite at home in the Arrow, his memories of the Primal Wild and so on. Aconite agreed to take Murphy on, and he became a Shifter.

When he’d completed the second Attainment, he poisoned his Master and spilled his blood, reaping the Mana from the sacrifice. Murphy left the city and hunted down other Banishers, slaying the non-Shamans and training the Thyrsus in how best to infiltrate and destroy mage cabals. From then on, Murphy was the leader of the Huntsmen (named after the nickname for the *Sparassidae* family of spiders).

The Creed

Murphy is the undisputed leader of the Huntsmen, and he goes out of his way to foster the hero worship that the other members have of him. He refuses to allow non-Thyrsus into the cult, and likewise will not admit women. He claims that this latter exclusion has to do with the fact that female spiders eat the males, but this isn’t really the case. Murphy hates and fears women, and though he has grown practiced at masking his distaste when he must, he can’t stand to have females around him for any length of time.

The Huntsmen, through Murphy, believe that all mages except for Thyrsus are weak and flawed. The other Supernal Realms are places of stagnancy, cerebral navel-gazing and wishy-washy prophecy. The Primal Wild is truth — blood, sex and hunger. People who are strong enough to handle this truth fight their way through the other Realms to the Primal Wild. Weaklings get stuck along the way.

Why this philosophy necessitates *killing* other mages isn’t something that Murphy has ever expounded upon. He recruits Banishers, though, and so they don’t generally need a reason to kill mages (if anything, they sometimes object to Murphy’s policy of sparing Shamans).

At the end of the day, though, Murphy isn’t really interested in Banisher philosophy or in what the members of his cult do or don’t do. Murphy is fundamentally self-interested, a complete solipsist and sociopath. He wants to kill because it makes him feel alive and aroused, and he formed the Huntsmen to give himself a bit of cover. Murphy prefers to kill mages (he is a Banisher), but if pickings are slim or if he spies a suitable target, he’ll murder Sleepers as well.

The Huntsmen aren’t all as depraved as Murphy. That is, they don’t take his sick joy in killing. A quick shot to the head or a knife across the throat is good enough for them, and rarely if ever do the Huntsmen sacrifice their victims for Mana. Murphy, on the other

hand, studies the literature on serial murderers and takes notes, eager to try out the “techniques” of others like him. He tortures, mutilates and violates his victims, even going so far as to heal them magically to extend the process. The cult, truth be told, doesn’t know what kind of man Murphy really is — they know he’s a killer, but not *that* kind of killer.

Infiltration

When the Huntsmen reach a new city, they begin by doing some reconnaissance on the mages of the area. If a Consilium exists, the Huntsmen try to determine how extensively involved it is with its member cabals and how well everyone knows each other. Small Consilii are the prey of choice for the spider Banishers, as are Consilii with a great deal of internal strife and mistrust. A large Consilium might be a good target, if the Huntsmen can pick off a cabal or two and get out of town before the larger body of mages figures out what happened, but this is chancy (and the last time the Huntsmen tried it, three members died). A Consilium with a large contingent of Guardians of the Veil is usually safe from the cult, as Murphy fears the order and the members’ ability to work subtly from afar.

If the Consilium looks like a likely prospect, one of the Huntsmen allows the mages of the area to find him. The Huntsman claims to be an apostate, either recently Awakened or recently having discovered mage society, and asks for help. Usually, the Huntsman is introduced to some of the important members of the community, and often given the chance to meet with several of the cabals of the area, so he can see how the orders function and what his options are. The Huntsman, of course, is looking for victims. Which mages like to work alone? Which ones are experienced, but not very powerful? Taking new recruits is a bad idea because they tend to be closely watched, but mages who have found their footing in mage society and are allowed to act autonomously make good victims.

Meanwhile, the other Huntsmen (Murphy included — he never attempts infiltration, as he assumes that word may have gotten around about him after he killed Aconite) set up a sanctum somewhere in the city. Often they rent a house, preferably something with a basement. The infiltrating Huntsmen communicate with the others via spirit messengers, never by telephone, email or other mundane means. If other mages notice spirits hanging around the new Thyrus in town, they don’t typically find that too unusual.

Once the Huntsmen have a good idea how the power structure works, they start their attacks. They target

mages who can disappear without being noticed for a few days — apostates, solitaries, mages who are on the outs with their cabals or orders and mages who are prone to sudden trips or absences (often Acanthus) are favorite prey. The infiltrator never actually kills or participates in the kidnapping of these mages. In fact, he takes great pains to be somewhere visible while the attacks take place, the better to extend the ruse. The Huntsmen try to stagger the attacks so that there isn’t an easy correlation with the infiltrator’s movements, and they certainly don’t make an attack immediately after arriving in town, as an arrival immediately followed by a dead mage is a dead giveaway.

Murphy, though, can’t always keep himself from indulging in his murderous urges. In the past, he would simply behave like a serial killer, taking random victims (Sleeper or mage). Recently, though, he has found it more amusing to summon a murder-spirit and strengthen it to the point that it can influence a human being, and then allow it to possess or Urge someone to commit murder. This removes much of the trail that could be used to trace a killing back to Murphy, and still allows him to “get his fix.” Of course, this is no substitute for a long knife, a spool of wire and blood under his nails.

On one occasion, Murphy found an already-operating serial killer and gave him a boost, enhancing his Attributes and making modifications to help him see in the dark and cope with physical pain. Disbelief, of course, interfered. The killer’s enhancements ran out at the worst possible moment, and a cabal of mages caught and killed the young man as he fled from a murder scene. Murphy hasn’t tried this again, but he does wonder what the result of turning a spider into a person would be.

The Banishers

Aaron Murphy is the unquestioned leader of the Huntsmen. Other members come and go infrequently, dying off as they are discovered or, occasionally, as they decide that Murphy’s tactics are too vicious to countenance (at which point Murphy usually kills them himself). Game traits are provided for Murphy only; the Storyteller can populate the cult with other Thyrus Banishers as she sees fit.

Aaron Murphy

Quote: *I’m bored. I’m going hunting.*

Background: The man who would become Aaron Murphy was born in 1975 in central Ohio. He was

unremarkable — bright but not gifted, fit but not athletic, pleasant-looking but not handsome. He was an everyman, and so people didn't notice him, despite how desperately he wanted them to do so.

Abused by his mother from the time he was a small child, he would sit home alone in the dark, nursing his wounds and wishing for some kind of power. He was too terrified of his mother to tell his teachers what was happening, and he was so average, so nondescript that they rarely acknowledged him, anyway. When he was 16, he heard from a classmate (he didn't really have "friends") that it was legal to drop out of school at that age, and he did so. He caught a bus west, and never went home again.

A few years living on the streets of Los Angeles helped toughen him up, and also allowed him to study the human condition and learn to mimic it. He had no interest in being like other people, or being with them, but he did want to be close to them, to watch them the way a person might watch a particularly grotesque insect. After honing his skills blending in with people, he joined the Army and wound up in the Middle East for three years.

His superiors considered him a good, average person, just as in his childhood. He had no special talents or deficits, and when the order came down to discharge him following an "incident" in Kuwait, his CO pulled some strings and made sure the discharge didn't mark him as a psycho for the rest of his life. He Awakened less than an hour after getting home again, and finally, he felt like he knew where he belonged. Unfortunately for him (and, as it turns out, quite a lot of others), he couldn't stay in the Primal Wild.

He took the name "Aaron Murphy," claiming it was the name of an Army buddy who had died in combat while protecting him. In fact, it is a play on the word *Araneomorphae*, the suborder of spiders that includes, among many others, the huntsman.

Murphy is, among other things, an extremely accomplished mage. In addition to being an Orphan of Proteus, he is the creator of several rotes (some of which can be found in Chapter Two).

Description: Murphy remains as uninteresting to look at as he ever was. He is a fit, white man in his mid-30s, with brown hair, a smooth, clean-shaven face and a blank expression. He dresses casually and comfortably, never wearing clothes that could be considered objectionable and doing his best to stay away from any particular subculture.

Murphy's nimbus, though, reveals a great deal about him. Those around him feel a series of painful pricks,



as though they were being bitten by spiders or stung by bees. When he casts powerful vulgar spells, spiders crawl from his ears, mouth and nose; but they vanish before reaching the ground.

When Murphy uses his Beast Gift Attainment (see p. 348 of **Mage: The Awakening**), the bony ridge behind his front teeth changes into a spider's chelicerae. In addition to making his bite damage lethal, rather than bashing, this Attainment means that he can spend a point of Mana to inflict a Toxicity 5 poison with a bite. If he bites a target, the target's player rolls Stamina + Resolve - 5 (the Toxicity rating). If the roll fails, the target immediately suffers five points of lethal damage. The same roll must be made every time Murphy bites a target, but he must expend the Mana each time. Murphy must grapple a target to bite her.

Storytelling Hints: Murphy is a serial killer who just happens to be a Banisher. Killing mages in accordance with any kind of higher order of the Timori is entirely secondary to his bloodlust. Murphy is a good character to use if you wish to highlight the question of whether Banishers are born or made (which, incidentally, can be asked of mundane serial killers as well): Did Murphy really have any choice in what he became? At what point in his development could this descent have been checked?

Aaron Murphy cannot really understand human interaction. He has no desire for relationships that don't focus entirely on him. He avoids thinking about sex by thinking of himself as a male spider (and what male spider would willingly mate, given sentience?), and thereby dodges his true feelings on the subject. Female mages terrify him. This is especially true of female Thyrusus, to the point that he avoids them rather than trying to kill them.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Spider preserved in amber
Real Name: Donald Edward Clay

Path: Thyrusus

Order: None (Banisher, formerly Adamantine Arrow)

Legacy: Orphans of Proteus

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 1, Investigation 2, Medicine (Poison) 2, Occult 4, Science 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Grappling) 4, Drive 2, Firearms 3, Larceny 3, Stealth 3, Survival 1, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Acting Normal) 2

Merits: Contacts (Military), Fast Reflexes 2, High Speech, Iron Stomach, Language (Arabic), Occultation 3

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 1

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 10

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 8

Gnosis: 5

Arcana: Life 5, Mind 2, Prime 2, Space 1, Spirit 3

Rotes: *Life* — Cleanse the Body • (•), Body Control • (••), Transform Base Life • (••), Honing the Form • (•••),

Induce Vertigo • (•••; p. 58); *Mind* — Alter Aura • (••); *Prime* — Detect Banisher • (•; p. 58), Unseen Spy • (••); *Spirit* — Lesser Spirit Summons • (••), Control Spirit • (•••)

•Murphy knows the Adamantine Arrow "versions" of these rites, and thus benefits from the rote Specialty Skills for them. He created the other rites, and they can be found in Chapter Two of this book.

Legacy Attainment: 1st — Snake Skin, 2nd — Beast Gift (see above)

Mana/per turn: 14/5

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Bite	1L	N/A	Poison (see above); must grapple	8
Knife	1L	1	None	6

Armor: 5 ("Organic Resilience," Life ••)

Magic Shield: 2 (Prime ••)

The Militant Auditing Division

If you believe that human beings are prisoners of an evil galactic tyrant who bound their souls to exploding volcanoes before recorded history, then the Militant Auditing Division might be dwelling in your midst. Many Banisher cults devote themselves to the fringes of human belief, but the MAD is a fringe within a fringe: a cult within a Sleeper religion that is widely believed to be destructive or outright ridiculous. A mage who spoke to a MAD adherent about his beliefs would be hard-pressed to keep a straight face — but combined with a well-heeled parent organization, those very beliefs make the MAD extremely dangerous.

There are three MAD cabals: the Militant Auditing Division of the Americas (MADA), the Militant Auditing Division of Europe (MADE) and the Militant Auditing Division of Oceania (MADO). Each aggressively recruits members through the parent religion's standard programs.

The Call

In the mid-1950s, the minor pulp science fiction author Levi Bones founded a fringe religion, which he termed "Panography." His motives were a mystery. At least one source says he founded the faith on a bet; others point to the founder's unpublished writings on philosophy and religion, or his association with fringe

occult groups such as Aleister Crowley's Ordo Templi Orientis. (Crowley characterized Bones as a loud and confidence man.) In any event, Bones released an amphetamine-fueled pseudoscientific history of the universe that, in conjunction with an equally dodgy book on mental health he'd written a year earlier, set down the tenets of the faith.

That Old-time Science Fiction

The so-called mental health aspect of Panography involves questioning subjects about painful memories, traumatic incidents and even subjecting them to verbal abuse, all while they're connected to a device that supposedly measures psychic "weight." In fact, the device detects changes in galvanic skin response. Once the initiate undergoes (and pays for) enough sessions to quiet the device down via crude biofeedback, he's considered "clear" of mental burdens. Then he learns that there are *other* problems he's got to cure with a series of increasingly secretive and expensive initiation programs.

The pseudo-history book reveals that human beings actually have an immortal "theta" spirit that's plagued with amnesia and psychosis, thanks to genetic memories and attendant psychoses (most of which spring from nonhuman ancestors in the religion's bizarre interpretation of human evolution) and brainwashing from evil extraterrestrials. The entire genre of "space opera" science fiction is supposedly an unconscious recollection of alien intervention.

As the initiate rises through the religion's ranks, he undergoes new forms of "training" and learns secret doctrines, including the idea that his "theta" soul was originally imprisoned by an evil interstellar overlord. This being's hench-aliens erased human beings' memories, imprisoned them in ancient volcanoes and then bombarded them with nuclear weapons, leaving them to bond with the Earth's primitive life. Initiates discover that their bodies actually contain *multiple* souls, most of which need to be "blown off" with new, secret exercises so that the primary "theta" souls can take charge.

The religion is more successful than its eccentric doctrines might indicate. Part of the reason for this is the multilevel initiation scheme. It costs thousands of dollars to attain status and "enlightenment," making members reluctant to turn their backs on the commitment. The faith also targets celebrities for recruitment. It provides them with special facilities, staff and people who'll cover up their personal indiscretions. The religion opposes psychiatry, preventing members from

dealing with emotional problems outside of medically questionable, faith-based techniques.

The Rise of Militant Auditing

The religion believes that a psychically pure human soul can perform supernatural feats, including telepathy, psychokinesis and the ability to manipulate electromagnetic fields. The faith aggressively searches for signs of these extraordinary powers in its adherents, and to a lesser extent, within the general population, so it was only a matter of time until the group encountered mages.

Unfortunately, Panography didn't have anything a typical sorcerer wants. The faith's stories contradicted Atlantean legends. To Atlantis's skeptics, Panography actually managed to come off *worse* in comparison to the old orders' lore. When it came to dealing with mages, the faith was far out of its depth. A few Free Council mages swept in, stole a few useful ideas and then destroyed the branch they were dealing with.

Banishers are not typical sorcerers. They're much more emotionally fragile, easier to ensnare with promises of answers. In 1975, the sect acquired its first willing mage. Willie Knox was still reeling from his Acanthus Awakening when they took him in, fast-tracked him through the initiations (for free, no less!) and put him at the right hand of the religion's increasingly drug-addled, deranged founder, aboard the ship he lived in to avoid taxes and other inconvenient laws. Knox adopted the religion as a way to explain everything he was going through. In the process, two other members of the shipboard staff Awakened as Banishers, too.

Before he died, the former pulp writer authored a series of secret directives and initiation levels to support future Awakened recruits. The religion's past experience with Pentacle mages and his Banishers' animosity toward them shaped the result: the Militant Auditing Division.

The founder gave the MAD very broad powers and relative independence, including its own corporation in his church's complex web of organizations. All the MAD needed to do was demonstrate some simple abilities for the sake of inspiring high-level recruits, ruin so-called suppressives — the faith's name for political enemies — and increase the church's own numbers. Knox and his two Banisher students each started offices in different regions: one in rural California, one in Bremen, Germany, and one in Sydney, Australia. All are well-equipped, but the California office (for

MADA) benefits from the personal patronage of Hollywood superstar John Maverick.

Caught in the Dragnet

Mages are not the only people to display such supernatural abilities. Scattered groups of "hedge magicians," mystics and psychics work in the shadow of Awakened powers.

Unfortunately, their powers tend to fail in the presence of Sleepers, so even though the faith successfully attracted them it couldn't verify their talents. The MAD's religion looked for humans with exceptional abilities for a long time, but even when they hit close to the mark, they could rarely verify a subject's powers.

The MAD found it far easier to identify these "lesser theta emanations." It entices them into the religion with special privileges and a comfortable lifestyle. They're influential figures themselves; the MAD upgrades them to the highest Sleeper initiation. All they have to do is stay on call for the cult. The MAD calls on their gifts to support major operations but won't expose them to danger any more than it would other devout Sleepers.

World of Darkness: Second Sight

includes detailed rules for psychics (thaumaturges are too committed to incompatible belief systems) that the MAD might be able to contact. If you don't have those rules, a psychic is just someone who doesn't count as a Sleeper for the purpose of witnessing magic and can use one or two rites that emulate typical ESP or "psionic" abilities. Vulgar abilities automatically fail in front of Sleepers. They do not have Arcana and cannot cast improvised spells.

The Creed

The MAD believes there are two kinds of Awakened: MAD members and "suppressive theta" carriers (STs — the cult is big on acronyms). STs are reincarnated henchmen of the alien tyrant that imprisoned humanity and crippled its divine powers. STs radiate an energy field that blocks people from attaining complete enlightenment, so they have to be converted or killed. The process of identifying and neutralizing STs is thought to have a beneficial effect on the whole world, but particularly on the spiritual condition of

MAD members, since, as beings closest to the edge of true cosmic awareness, they are especially sensitive to "suppressive emanations." To them, magic is "Psionic Tech" — "Tech" being the general term for cult doctrine and magical techniques. The constant discomfort they feel about magic is explained as the result of ST interference and their own mental imperfections.

The MAD is one of the best-equipped Banisher cells around. It not only has access to all kinds of surveillance gear, weapons, vehicles and equipment but also has potent social ties. While the existence of the MAD is unknown to all but the highest ranks of the parent religion, members are authorized to pose as important church officials. This lets them impose on members for shelter, emergency funds and access to all sorts of facilities. Famous adherents allow MAD agents to stalk the enemy through the most exclusive echelons of high society.

MAD agents focus on other mages, but still perform various services for their religion. Notably, they show off a bit of magic for high-level church members to prove that, by following the right doctrines, it's possible to develop "superpowers." Secondly, MAD agents lead the way when it comes to dealing with mundane "suppressives." MAD mages use a full arsenal of dirty tricks against the church's critics. Longstanding policy prevents MAD agents from using violence against Sleepers because if the agents were discovered, it would cause an unmitigated PR disaster.

The cult's approach to mages is highly formal. It's even been set down in a secret manual that all members consult. MAD members are technically forbidden to even paraphrase the manual's contents because it's considered to be religious scripture that mustn't be interpreted for a third party. Nevertheless, agents do talk about procedures under the name "I4." This stands for the following policies.

Step One: Identify

First of all, the MAD sweeps an area for the presence of mages. Members start by researching local folklore and talking to people who believe that magic is real, tracking them down by investigating local New Age and alternative faith communities. MAD agents look for strange events in a region's politics and economics. Sometimes they uncover mundane corruption or the influence of inhuman supernatural beings. In those cases, members do as much damage to those conspiracies as they can without revealing their involvement.

After exhausting avenues for ordinary research, the group begins its magical investigation. The agents examine ambient supernatural energies such as spiritual Resonance, signs of nearby Hallows and traces of magical energy. The cult starts with locations that seem most likely to turn up clues and traces concentric circles out from there.

After that, the cult commandeers their religion's local church to examine individuals under the cover of evangelism. They set up street corner kiosks and go door to door to offer "free stress tests" — actually STEAD examinations (see Chapter Two).

A MAD cell picks an area for one of three reasons. The cell has an opportunity to visit a place because of unrelated church work, has heard rumors of supernatural activity or hasn't visited a population center before. MAD operations take time to complete and need "cool down" time to keep the law and vengeful mages away, so the group hasn't been everywhere. Each office is lucky to complete two or three missions a year.

Step Two: Investigate

Whenever possible, the cult investigates one mage at a time, but occasionally looks at up to one mage per two Banishers. If the targets are part of a tight-knit cabal, the cult grudgingly breaks this guideline to cover them all, but might abandon the hunt in favor of easier targets instead. The MAD eschews suicidal heroism for slow, safe effectiveness.

Once again, the cult starts with mundane surveillance tactics. Members have access to directional microphones, night vision, signal interception technology and everything else an elite security task force could possibly afford. All the cult lacks is the trusted expertise to make the most of these resources. A MAD group can find experts within the faith but won't use them when there's a good chance they'd discover the existence of STs. Cult doctrine forbids that, lest the enemy recruit Sleepers with promises of power.

The cult uses magic cautiously at this stage because targets might detect and trace it back to the source. Whenever possible, the MAD's investigative magic enhances the operative's abilities instead of targeting subjects, minimizing the chance of detection. Only a demonstrated need takes the cult to the next step of using Scrying and other powerful spells.

The goal at this stage is to learn as much about the target as possible: his family, friends, hobbies and habits. Most of all, the cult needs to know if he would

accept conversion. In practice, this means discovering whether or the target's a Banisher, because attempts to convert other mages have always failed. Either way, the cult gathers the information to help it along to the next step. This means that, at some point, the cult needs to dig deep with Scrying, telepathy or direct contact. If possible, a lone agent works his way into a position of confidence.

Step Three: Isolate

Convert or destroy, it doesn't matter — the cult's next move is to sever the mage's social ties. It suits both objectives. Once again, the MAD prefers to use magic as a last resort or finishing touch. Church lawyers sue the target or his business interests. Anonymous parties leave his lover evidence that he's cheating. The police get anonymous tips that he's dealing drugs, and a Hallow gets bled dry. Angry mages find his Resonance at the remains.

The cult doesn't like to do it, but there are times when it has to treat the Sleepers around a target badly to better alienate them. The cult uses violence against Sleepers as an absolute last resort, but if they think the target's dangerous enough to warrant it, assault and murder aren't out of the question.

Step Four: Integrate or Eliminate

Ideally, the MAD strikes once the target's confused, vulnerable and suggestible. If he's a Pentacle mage, the cult kills him using the safest, quietest and most efficient methods it can imagine. One particular priority is to hide the MAD's involvement as much as possible by destroying mundane and supernatural evidence. If feasible, the cult tries to frame another mage for the murder.

On occasions when the cult's after multiple targets, it might capture one mage, interrogate (and, perhaps, torture) him for information about the rest and then dispose of him. Cult agents disguise their true identity on these occasions so that an escaped target won't give them away.

If the target is a Banisher, agents introduce themselves as friends — hopefully, the only friends he has. The MAD combines indoctrination with material rewards, based on the subject's needs and desires. The cult can spend millions on this aspect, if necessary. The target's debts vanish, he gets the home, job and partner he always wanted — anything's possible except for drugs. The cult's faith forbids it. Agents remove existing addictions if they can or provide substitute

pleasures that, thanks to a bit of magic, can be just as habit-forming.

The Banishers

The following characters are members of the Americas cabal: MADA. MADA has five more members. These three men and two women have learned an even mix of espionage tradecraft, security skills and modern combat training, but each one also has an additional specialty. Only John Maverick is exempt from the rigors of training, though he's managed to pick the odd talent up under the ruse that he's studying for a film part. Except for Willie Knox, none are particularly talented mages.

John Maverick Celebrity Banisher

Quote: *I stand by what I said about psychiatry, but I came here to talk about the movie!*

Background: Everybody knows about John Maverick, but few people actually *know* him. John was a terrible student thanks to a heavy case of ADHD, but he managed to brush it under the rug with athletic ability and sheer charm. He didn't really want to be an actor until 10th grade, when a football injury kept him on the sidelines. He decided to give the school play a shot out of boredom, but his talent carried him through with aplomb.

Two years later, he had a stage name, an agent and small parts in a handful of pictures. In 1989, the hit *Air Cav* pushed him into the ranks of superstars and made him a prime target for conversion by the MAD's home religion. Sure, it cost a lot to "clear" his soul, but he had plenty of money. The church claimed they could cure his learning disability and, when he bared his secrets to them during high-level initiations, said it would control his desires for other men. Most of the "Tech" used in these sessions consisted of severe aversion stimuli. This didn't cure a thing, but it did drive him to be extremely secretive. He could pursue acting without any problems (and, in fact, did some of his strongest work in the '90s, while the church's "therapies" hit him with electrical shocks, starvation and imprisonment during "retreats"), but in private life he was given to erratic outbursts, followed by extended periods of emotional flatness. He got a reputation for being difficult to work with because he never left his trailer off the job, but he used his solitude well. He used a network of assistants to broker deals from solitude and became a successful producer. By 2000, he was one of the most powerful people in Hollywood.



When it was obvious that the church couldn't affect his mood swings or bisexuality, they cared for him with the next best things: assistants who would discreetly handle his day-to-day management and sexual services without telling the public. That's how John Maverick was able to Awaken and why he became a Banisher.

His soul journey happened at the instant of orgasm — an eternity for him, but a few seconds for his "personal assistant." Unfortunately, the orgiastic mindscapes he encountered in Pandemonium conflicted with his faith. He fled back to the world, rattled by spiritual dissonance. He displayed his new abilities for his religious counselors that weekend, and word hit the MAD 48 hours after that. They recruited him; the MAD's mission kept him from going completely crazy.

That was in 2006. Since then, Maverick's fired his agent, openly talked about his religion and given some of his bizarre behavior (though not the issues that caused it) free reign. The MAD doesn't exactly approve of this, but Maverick now believes that it's his duty to promote the religion and, someday, dem-

onstrate his powers to a wide audience. The MAD set him up with an actress who was willing to have his child to refocus him on private matters (and on the off-chance that Maverick's powers might be inherited), but the Americas branch of the cult doesn't want to curtail him *too* much, because he pumps a massive amount of money into their activities. Maverick also provides cover for them, since he can fit any number of MAD agents into his entourage without anyone taking notice.

Description: John Maverick is a compact, muscular 42-year-old man. Exercise and minor plastic surgery keep him looking 10 years younger. He has dirty blond hair, ice-blue eyes and a wide smile that simply can't be compared — it's his trademark. Even his casual clothes are immaculately tailored. Bespoke suits, Italian sports cars — there's nothing he can't afford. At any given moment, at least 100 people are devoted to his personal well-being, and at least a dozen of those (half of whom are veteran bodyguards) accompany him at any given time. His constant companion is a young man named Ted: a church member who has the ability to read surface thoughts.

Maverick's nimbus is a reddish outline of the man that twitches and whispers in tongues.

Storytelling Hints: MAD uses John Maverick's money and fame to help them get into a city quietly, find them cash to do their job and, when they discover Banishers, dazzle them into joining the cult. John fancies himself a bit of a man of action and wants to do more work in the field, but Knox does his best to keep Maverick far, far away from the cult's dirty business.

When people meet John, he usually seems to be presenting a blatantly artificial front, or suddenly bursts forth with rapid, manic speeches about subjects ranging from his religious beliefs to how he *really, really* loves his new wife. He's genuinely fond of her and believes in the sanctity of marriage, which makes him all the more guilty about his continuing indiscretions with willing young men from the church.

Real Name: John Shipley Kurtzmann III

Path: Mastigos

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Computer 1, Medicine 2, Occult 3, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Running) 4, Brawl 2, Drive 3, Firearms 1, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Expression (Acting) 4, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 4, Socialize (Interviews) 4, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Allies (Religion) 5, Allies (Entertainment Industry) 5 (\$50 million in assets, \$500,000/month disposable income), Contacts (Entertainment Industry, Media) 2, Fame 3, Fleet of Foot 2, Resources 6, Retainer (Psychic Personal Assistant) 5, Retainer (Bodyguard) 3, Retainer (Three 24-Hour Personal Staff) 2 each, Status (Entertainment Industry) 4, Striking Looks 4, Stunt Driver

Willpower: 6

Wisdom: 4

Derangements: Narcissism, Irrationality

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Health: 8

Gnosis: 3

Arcana: Mind 2, Prime 2, Space 2

Rotes: *Mind* — Emotional Urging (••), Voice From Afar (••); *Prime* — Counterspell

Mana/per turn: 12/3

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Dice Pool
Glock 17	2	1	6

Armor: 2 ("Misperception," Mind ••)

Willie Knox

Leader of the MAD

Quote: *This is a fight to free humankind from galactic oppression. The subject's deeds, good or bad, are irrelevant data points.*

Background: Willie Knox Awakened when he was 14. It was the worst day of a bad year, after his father had kicked him out of the house and left him to camp beneath an underpass. He followed his Mystery Play through the streets of Chicago, but instead of symbolically ascending to Arcadia, he followed graffiti and the cryptic ranting of other street people to imprisonment and torture in a high rise. They were Scelesti thrill-killers looking to refuel their Mana before making a bid for the legendary Celestial Flange (see **World of Darkness: Chicago** for details). He barely escaped, used his nascent powers to find a bus ticket to Florida and, while searching for food and shelter, entered a building where people were offering free "stress tests" with odd machinery. He'd found the faith.

Lifestyles of the Rich and Insane

John Maverick opens the door to stories outside the usual, street-level focus of **Mage: The Awakening**. He's very, very rich — six dots of Resources worth. A man like Maverick is this wealthy because he's made even more money for a huge group of people. Anonymous key grips and famous directors owe their careers to him. His continued well-being — well, the ability to keep making movies, at least — is a serious concern to an entire industry.

To get anywhere near him, mages will have to get around several layers of mundane security, the supernatural static created by his fame and his MAD minders. Cabal members could accomplish this by entering the ranks of the super-rich themselves, by faking it or by infiltrating the services that care for people like him. Characters could impersonate another celebrity and her entourage, pose as representatives of a producer interested in making a deal or just slip in with caterers, makeup artists and other support staff.

Aside from the unique challenges involved in getting to meet Maverick, you can use him to change the tone of the game. Let the characters experience jet-setting luxury, high-class decadence and corporate intrigue. Give them the wealth to travel the world, dress to the nines and drive fast, expensive cars in pursuit of an Arcane mystery. Whatever you do, though, don't forget that in the World of Darkness, no small amount of privilege is secretly sponsored by supernatural powers. When a Sleeper's fate decides what happens to millions of dollars' worth of business, those forces are going to protect their investment — or demand compensation when something goes wrong. The MAD might not be the only faction with an interest in John Maverick's bankability. He probably doesn't even know who these other, silent partners might be.

Instead of having his stress level measured, he accurately predicted that the woman across from him would be killed in a hit-and-run as soon as she left the building. The church took note, tracked him down and arranged a meeting with the reclusive pulp author who had founded the religion. Knox demonstrated

other powers and entered the faith's inner circle. He co-founded the MAD, developed its training methods and protected the founder from harm until he died.

Since then, Willie Knox has presided over the MAD program's expansion into three cabals and, though few people know this, is one of the most influential figures in the religion. He's a true believer of sorts. He thinks the initiation levels are just ways to fleece fools but believes that the religion channels an eternal truth. Banishers are the elect, but need to fight Atlantean mages who keep the world ignorant and imprisoned, away from the interstellar community.

The years haven't been good to his idealism. The faith sponsored harsh military training that took away the rest of his adolescence. He's devoted his life to judging whether mages should live or die. Knox is a heavy drinker, and hooked on speed whenever he needs to work in the field. He's thoroughly familiar with Atlantean magic and Consilium politics, but that's hurt his resolve as much as it's aided MAD's mission. He's seen mages work together and knows they're selfish — but not much more so than ordinary people.

Knox leads the entire cult, but he usually takes to the field only with MADA, and even then, hangs back to provide indirect support until it's time to complete the fourth step of I4. He likes to be the one to either deliver the killing blow or comfort the Banisher they've found. Murder doesn't bother him much anymore, but he does feel a bit of pleasure when he helps a confused Banisher find some meaning in her life. He's an excellent teacher, capable of presenting the MAD's mythology with enough detail to support a structured system of magical study.

Description: Willie Knox is a stocky, coarse-featured and careworn 47-year-old man with steel-shot black hair and light brown eyes. He dresses exclusively in neat blue and white formal wear (the faith believes that people are conditioned to obey anyone wearing these colors because they were worn by the galactic tyrant shock troops), but covers it up with a threadbare, oversized beige trench coat. The coat covers his H&K MP5. Knox is rarely seen without a steel briefcase containing a rugged laptop with biometric (authorized, human-temperature fingerprint access only) security, extra ammunition, a STEAD (see Chapter Two) and other gear specific to the mission at hand.

His nimbus makes anything it covers look as if it's dripping a glowing green ichor. His nimbus flows into strange shapes, like characters from an alien language, before dissolving into mist.



Storytelling Hints: Knox is pragmatic and ruthless. Thanks to his derangement, he's convinced that Atlantean rites are a form of super-science, used by evil alien forces to keep humans from discovering their godlike powers. This conflicts with the information he's gathered by spying and using telepathy. He knows for a fact that Hierarchs and Masters *aren't* knowingly working for aliens.

Innocent people have to die, so Willy Knox doesn't get sentimental about it. The MAD exists to do a job efficiently, minimize risks and move on. He doesn't bother with inspiring speeches because there's no reason to feel pride in what they do. When troop morale needs boosting, he gets Maverick to visit, while Knox retires to another room with a bottle of scotch.

Real Name: William Stephen Knox

Path: Acanthus

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 3, Investigation 3, Medicine 2, Occult (Atlantean) 4, Science 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Drive 3, Firearms (SMGs) 3, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Expression 1, Intimidation (Extortion) 4, Persuasion 5, Socialize 3

Merits: High Speech, Nimbus Sense, Rote Specialty (Occult, Persuasion, Science) 3

Willpower: 6

Wisdom: 3

Derangements: Delusional Witness, Depression

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 8

Gnosis: 4

Arcana: Fate 5, Life 1, Matter 1, Mind 4, Time 4

Rotes: *Fate* — Shifting the Odds (••), Monkey's Paw (•••), Forge Destiny (••••); *Matter* — Sense Poisons and Drugs (•); *Mind* — Incognito (••), Mental Shield (••), Memory Hole (••); *Time* — Acceleration (•••), Divination (••)

Mana/per turn: 13/4

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
H&K MP5	3	2	Autofire	9

Armor: 7/6 (Kevlar Vest and "Fortune's Protection, Fate ••)

Phageans

"It was like good, fully developed veal, not young, but not yet beef. It was very definitely like that, and it was not like any other meat I had ever tasted. It was so nearly like good, fully developed veal that I think no person with a palate of ordinary, normal sensitiveness could distinguish it from veal. It was mild, good meat with no other sharply defined or highly characteristic taste such as for instance, goat, high game, and pork have. The steak was slightly tougher than prime veal, a little stringy, but not too tough or stringy to be agreeably edible. The roast, from which I cut and ate a central slice, was tender, and in color, texture, smell as well as taste, strengthened my certainty that of all the meats we habitually know, veal is the one meat to which this meat is accurately comparable."

— William Buehler Seabrook on the taste of human meat

The Phageans are not one singular cult, but rather a type of cult that arises independently in places all



around the globe. They aren't simply destroyers — they are devourers, cannibals driven by a twisted and supernatural hunger.

As archaeologists uncover more and more about the activities of early humans, they discover more evidence that all humankind once engaged in the practice of cannibalism. The proper term for cannibalism is anthropophagy, which is composed of the Greek words “anthropos,” meaning man, and “phagein,” meaning to consume. The word cannibal itself evolved from the improper pronunciation of the names of the Carib West Indian tribes by the crews of Christopher Columbus. The crews told stories about the natives practicing the ghoulish act of consuming human flesh and mispronounced the name of the tribes, calling them “canibs.” Eventually, the word “canibs” was replaced with “canibales,” which is Spanish for thirsty and cruel. The English translation of the Spanish phrase resulted in the word cannibalism, which has become the most widely used expression for the practice of consuming human flesh.

While cannibalism is sometimes practiced as a last, desperate attempt at survival, more often it is performed as the result of a combination of causes and beliefs. During World War II, some Chinese villages were accused of eating the Japanese dead out of hatred for them. This particular sort of anthropophagy is referred to as hate cannibalism. The Chinese were showing their utter contempt for the bodies of their enemies by using them for meat as the Chinese would cattle or pigs. Some scholars suggest that the Aztecs practiced cannibalism in addition to their ritual of sacrificing thousands of prisoners every year, because they believed this created a universal balance between the world and the cosmos.

In more recent times, the act of cannibalism has been linked in the media with such people as Jeffrey Dahmer and the Frenchman Nicolas Claux. Claux was arrested in 1994 for murder. Under interrogation, Claux confessed not only to the murder of which he was accused but also of eating the flesh of his victim. Claux went on to tell investigators that when he had worked at a Paris children's hospital morgue, he had cut strips of flesh from the dead children to take home and eat. Dahmer and Claux claimed they had spiritual or religious reasons for eating their victims, which echoes the beliefs of a number of cannibalistic tribes from around the world.

Cannibalistic tribes that practiced what is referred to as exo-cannibalism killed and ate their enemies. These tribes believed they could take the skills and

power of their enemies into themselves by consuming their enemies' spirits. Some tribes also believed that by eating an enemy you denied them a chance at rebirth by devouring their souls. These beliefs sometimes emerge in a more gripping and maddening truth, riding the souls of the Awakened.

The Call

Similar to other types of Banisher cults and cabals, Phageans tend to appear sporadically and in groups. Unlike most Banishers, however, Phageans Awaken with more than just hatred for other mages; Phageans hunger for other mages as well. Order mages who have studied Phageans are unable to give a satisfactory answer as to why this might be. Some scholars suggest that a small percentage of people who Awaken as Banishers are subjected to more horrific experiences than others. This accounts, scholars explain, for the Phageans' obvious insanity in wanting to consume the flesh of mages.

Other order scholars criticize this idea, pointing out that Phageans don't eat each other or other Banishers. Order mages have no doubt that Phageans are insane, but it is impossible to ascertain whether their madness is a result of how they Awakened or a result of their cannibalistic activities. These mages also point out that the Phageans must have some way of controlling their urges, or they would be more easily discovered before they became a problem. Theories on how Phageans accomplish this feat range from wild speculations of pacts with Abyssal powers to conspiracy theories involving the Seers of the Throne.

What is known is to order mages is that Phageans appear and hunt in packs, like wild dogs. Phageans are clever and crafty, for all of their insanity, and instinctively wield magic. They seem to have an uncanny ability to find mages and show no fear during an attack, even when one of their own is killed. Of course, what order mages think they know and what is the truth are often two different things.

Phagean packs are the result of Banishers who traveled to the Primal Wild during their Awakening. In the Realm of Totems, the Banishers found a world where flesh was ever renewed and contained a power within it. Lost from the paths that led to the Watchtower of the Stone Book, the Banishers learned that ephemera and flesh were one and the same. They learned that by consuming their prey they could incorporate the power of the ephemeral flesh into their own abilities, making them mighty. By the time these unfortunate

wanderers return to Earth, they have gained an appetite for power that amounts almost to an addiction. Unfortunately for mages, they represent the most obvious source of power-made-flesh to be found in the Fallen World. Phageans retain enough humanity not to want to feed on those they consider to be like them, so instead they band together in packs to hunt order mages.

Because of the way Banishers instinctively react to and teach each other, when a Phagean encounters a Sleeper with Banisher potential, that Sleeper Awakens with the beliefs and appetites of the Phagean. This process doesn't happen overnight, however. A potential Banisher who meets a Phagean reacts strongly to his presence. The Sleeper begins to have dreams about the stranger she met, always involving the hunting and killing of unidentifiable prey. If the Phagean is of the preferred sex of the Sleeper, the dreams are likely to have erotic overtones. Eventually, the Banisher-to-be feels compelled to seek out the Phagean and tell him what she's dreamt. Most Sleepers with Banisher potential need only spend a day or two in the presence of a Phagean before they Awaken.

The Creed

Phageans don't crave the flesh of their fellow mages for its physical sustenance. It's the power the flesh contains. In this, Phageans are very similar to the tribes that consumed the meat of their enemies to become stronger. There is also, however, an element of hatred cannibalism to be found in their practices. At their core, Phageans are still Banishers. They hate mages and fear magic, so mages become an easy scapegoat to blame for the Phageans' condition. In a natural world, as it existed before the sundering, the Phageans believe their hungers would have been channeled in other directions. It isn't without a hint of contempt that they consume their foes.

The Life

Most of the time, Phageans act like normal people (or as close as they can get). They work, they eat fast food and they pay too much to watch overproduced Hollywood movies. They meet with their packs once or twice a month to keep in touch with each other, and they use magic in small ways to make their lives easier. During these times, the hunger for power-made-flesh that lies within them is mostly dormant, only manifesting itself as a preference for meat over other food choices.

Some Phageans reflect upon their lifestyle and come up with theories about their grisly practices. If they have met other Banishers (whom Phageans regard as a similar but different pack), they may come to believe that by eating a mage they are helping to return the world to its natural state. This idea helps to sooth their uneasy consciences.

Any Phageans who make a study of human sacrifice and cannibalism find inspiration in the ancient rituals of the Aztecs. Through the Phageans' unique perspective, they can understand why the Aztecs believed what they did and even come to adopt those ideas for themselves. In the entire world, Phageans are probably the only sympathizers with people such as Dahmer and Claux. Phageans know the feeling of power that comes from eating flesh and sometimes find it difficult not to try and justify the actions of such monsters to Sleeper audiences.

The social dynamics of the Phageans vary from pack to pack. In some packs, the strongest Phageans are the dominant members, while in other packs those Phageans who prove gifted at identifying prey hold greater status. The only constant of the internal hierarchy of a pack is the leader. In almost every case, the Phagean who visited the Primal Wild and returned with the hunger for power-made-flesh is the leader (sometimes referred to as the pack progenitor). The reasons for this are twofold. All Banishers who were lost in the Primal Wild and survived to return to the Fallen World will have been changed by their experience. They are stronger, tougher and more ruthless than Thyrsus who simply followed the paths leading to the Watchtower of the Stone Book. It is an accepted part of natural order that the leader of a pack of predators should be the strongest. The other reason for progenitor leadership is the near reverence in which progenitors are held by the other members of the pack. The Phageans realize that without the presence of the progenitor, they would never have Awakened and never learned to enjoy the taste of power-made-flesh.

The Hunt

When one of the pack senses another mage, the transition from their everyday lives to a pack of ravening cannibals occurs rapidly. The merest hint of power-made-flesh causes the hunger within them to rear its ugly head and demand feeding. The Phagean contacts the rest of the pack, and once they have assembled, the instincts of the pack reinforce each other until the Phageans are reduced to the most



basic of instincts. Hunt, kill, eat. Once the pack has devolved to this mentality, the Phageans retain just enough human intelligence to restrict their activities to nighttime. During the daylight hours, the pack remains together and either sleeps or rests fitfully, waiting for night to come. When night finally falls, they emerge from hiding to hunt.

In this primal condition, Phageans are reduced to non-verbal communication, relying on body language, hand signals (such as pointing) and primitive grunting to convey their meanings to each other. This inability to think or communicate in an intelligent manner might hamstring normal Sleepers or other mages. Phageans, however, can also rely on the instinctive thought wavelength shared by Banishers to assist the pack members in conveying more complex ideas. Although not quite a hive-mind, the shared thoughts and instincts of the pack as a whole make the task of communication through non-verbal means nearly as effective as normal speech.

Use of complex tools such as guns, telephones or automobiles is quite beyond the capabilities of a Phagean on the hunt. Fully aware of this, during their more normal, lucid phase, the Phageans will prepare multiple “lairs” around town that grant them walking access to the areas they will likely be hunting in. They also stock their lairs with extra clothing, normal food and basic weaponry. Small, concealable weapons such as knives and short clubs are preferred for their ease of use and portability.

Just as other tools, magic use becomes more basic as Phageans descend into the madness of their hunger. Rites and spells become impossible to use, with spontaneous casting becoming the norm. Thus, most Phageans develop the Extemporaneous Affinity Merit (p. 41) as a result of so much time spent casting spells instinctively. It should go without saying that use of High Speech or dedicated magical tools is impossible in this state.

There are some benefits to the Phageans’ particular brand of insanity, however. While in the throes of their hunting frenzy, Phageans are immune to any type of magic or ability that targets their mind. The lack of intelligent thought combined with the pack bond is too much for these kinds of tricks to overcome. With their hunt-kill-eat instincts running at full blast, Phageans are highly responsive to their environment and tend to shrug off wounds that don’t kill them outright. While hunting, Phageans gain the Danger Sense Merit (see **the World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 108) and the Iron Stamina (●●●) Merit (see **the**

Free Will

It is important to note that the Phageans aren’t forced into the insanity of cannibalism. Although the hunger for power-made-flesh beats at the heart of every Phagean, it isn’t until Phageans *choose* to join their pack in the hunt that the hunger takes over. Once the pack gathers to hunt, the instincts of the pack overcome the instincts of the individual, but any one of the Phageans could choose to stay at home and watch TV rather than eat someone. The fact of the matter is that most Phageans *like* eating people. Phageans like the feeling of power that comes from tracking down a mage and eating her flesh. They *relish* the opportunity to drink the hot blood that gushes from an arterial tear. They do not, however, *have* to behave in this way. They choose to.

World of Darkness Rulebook, p. 113) whether they meet the prerequisites or not.

Once they are on the prowl, a Phagean pack won’t rest until morning. They take to the streets and begin their hunt at the location where their pack member last spotted their target. Magic and instinct play important parts in the hunt. Magic will be used to detect the “spoor” of the target mage, giving the pack a general idea of which direction they need to go. Instinct plays a role in avoiding the gaze of Sleeper police and other nocturnal creatures that might be curious about why a group of people is sniffing around a suburban neighborhood at three o’clock in the morning.

When their prey is finally tracked back to its home, Phageans close in for the kill without hesitation. The pack combines their magical abilities to overpower any security that might be present, be it magical or mundane. Once the Phageans are face-to-face with their prey, the pack attacks the prey *en masse*, attempting to overwhelm the mage by weight of numbers. If the pack bursts into a dwelling to discover multiple mages present, the Phageans will attack the person who seems to be in charge first, before moving on to her subordinates. This battle is a fight to the death. A Phagean pack offers no surrender and will fight to the last man, howling for blood the entire time.

The Aftermath

Any mage who is unfortunate enough to be the victim of a Phagean attack can gain some small com-

fort in the fact that the Phageans don't eat their prey alive. The pack kills their prey as quickly as possible to give themselves more time to feast before morning comes. No attempt to cook the newly won meat is made; the Phageans simply carve pieces off the corpse and devour them raw.

When the time comes for the pack to depart, their hunger for power-made-flesh has been satiated, and they begin to return to normal levels of intelligence. This is also the time when the realization of what they have done hits home, and any derangements a Phagean pack member might have manifest in full. The entire pack helps with cleanup and disposal of the remains of their meal, as well as assisting pack members who are incapacitated by a derangement. Cleanup finished, the Phageans retreat to their lair to rest and recuperate.

Phageans are at their most vulnerable during the time immediately after a successful hunt. Pack members may have been wounded or overcome by a derangement. The stress and strain of hunting all night will have caught up with the Phageans, and they are likely to be physically, as well as mentally, exhausted. If the pack members were unable to scavenge for new clothing or take the time to clean themselves up properly, they must now be cautious about being spotted even by Sleepers. Nothing is more likely to draw attention to the pack than a Sleeper noticing a group of strangers, covered in blood, emerging from a neighbor's house.

The difficulties of the Phageans don't end once they have returned home after a successful hunt. One of the problems with eating meat taken from humans is the health risks involved. Not only does cannibalism take a toll on the mind of its practitioners, but it can also cause serious physical illnesses. Some diseases, such as kuru (also known as the laughing sickness), are transmitted mainly by acts of cannibalism and have a very low recovery rate. If any member of a Phagean pack becomes terminally ill or mentally incompetent, the rest of the pack will put the member out of her misery and burn the remains. Regardless of cause of death, Phageans *never* eat their own kind, including other Banishers. It is the Phageans' sole taboo regarding their ugly practice.

The Banishers

Phageans can appear in any city at any time, just as other types of Banishers. All that is required for a Phagean pack to form is one Banisher with a bad experience in the Primal Wild and at least two other Banishers tuning in to the progenitor's frequency. Presented below is a small, recently formed pack of Phageans.

Chichi

Pharmacist

Quote: *My! What a lovely fragrance you are wearing today, Mrs. Williams. Hmmm? You aren't wearing perfume? Oh, it must just be you then. How nice!*

Background: Chichi spends most of his time at work, where he spends long hours ensuring that every prescription that leaves the store is precisely correct. Some people might call him anal-retentive, but Chichi believes that doing things right the first time is a sign of professionalism. Besides, when the odd antibiotic goes missing from the stock, he is the last person the store manager will blame.

Chichi used to go out on the town regularly with his friends, but ever since he met up with his pack, he doesn't seem to have the same appetite for social activity. Now, when not at work, he spends his time searching for potential candidates for his new... hobby. Nothing excites him more than the possibility of a new hunt and the feel of power-made-flesh sliding down his throat.

Description: Chichi is the youngest child in a large Puerto Rican family. Short and stocky, he exercises just enough to keep from being described as fat. He has short brown hair, brown eyes and prefers jeans and T-shirts when not at work. His nimbus manifests itself as the sickly-sweet smell of rotting flesh.

Though a decidedly lapsed Catholic, Chichi still recognizes the value of the old school methods of personal discipline instilled in him during his tutelage under the nuns. When he feels like he is becoming over-stimulated by his imagination, Chichi pulls out the belt he stole from his father and punishes himself for his lack of discipline.

Storytelling Hints: Chichi is twitchy and focused at the same time. His obsession with details becomes a bit of a mania at times, and he is unable to simply let go of past mistakes. During a hunt, he is likely to be found at the head of the pack, acting as tracker.

Real Name: Raulo Pacheco

Path: Mastigos

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 2, Crafts 3, Investigation 3 (Unusual Occurrences), Medicine 3, Science (Pharmacology) 4



Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Survival (Urban Tracking) 3, Weaponry (Knife) 2

Social Skills: Expression 2, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Direction Sense, Extemporaneous Affinity 3, Language (English) 1, Resources 3

Willpower: 6

Wisdom: 6

Derangements: Fixation (mild)

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Gluttony

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 7

Gnosis: 1

Arcana: Life 3, Mind 2, Space 2

Rotes: *Life* — Organic Resilience (●●), Self-Healing (●●), Healing Heart (●●●); *Mind* — Sense Consciousness (●), Third Eye (●); *Space* — Scrying (●●)

Mana/per turn: 10/1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Dice Pool
Knife	1	1	6

Knife 1 1 6

Armor: 3 ("Organic Resilience," Life 3)

Kolufu

Construction Worker

Quote: So I went out with my people last night. Man, did we get fucked up. We found this bitch and gang-banged her. She was screaming the whole time. Looked like a pile of meat when we were done. *laughs*

Background: Kolufu was raised in the projects and joined a gang at age 12. By the time he was 15, he had a rap sheet a mile long that included multiple arrests for assault and battery and was under suspicion for the murder of a rival gang member. When his younger brother was shot and killed, Kolufu decided he'd seen enough and broke free of the gang lifestyle. Still possessed of a streak of viciousness a mile wide, Kolufu decided to put his excess energy to use and went to work for a construction company. The work was hard, and he returned home every night too exhausted to be angry.

When he met Maori, Kolufu knew immediately his life had changed, even before he Awakened. Kolufu still works construction, but he looks forward to the nights he can run with his pack and indulge his innate cruelty.

Description: Kolufu is of mixed ancestry, composed of at least African American, Filipino and Caucasian heritages. Never a small man, the demands of his job have left him with an impressive physique. His skin is dark brown and his eyes a startling shade of green; he shaves his head. Kolufu's nimbus is the feeling of imminent violence.

Since the day he gave up the life of a gangbanger, Kolufu has sworn off alcohol and drugs, having witnessed firsthand the long-term effects of substance abuse.

Storytelling Hints: Kolufu is basically a bully. His sense of humor and sense of fun are cruel. He knows, and doesn't care, when he offends someone or hurts her feelings. When he is running with his pack, Kolufu is the beatstick. He is the first to strike a blow and the first to savor the flesh of his victims.

Real Name: James Newsome

Path: Obrimos

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 2



Mental Skills: Computer 1, Crafts 3 (Construction)

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 4 (Dirty Tricks), Firearms 2, Larceny 3 (Shoplifting), Stealth 2, Survival 1, Weaponry 4 (Improvised Weapons)

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Extemporaneous Affinity 1, Fast Reflexes 2, Giant, Language 1 (Spanish), Strong Back

Willpower: 6

Wisdom: 5

Derangements: Irrationality (mild)

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Health: 9

Gnosis: 1

Arcana: Forces 3, Matter 2, Prime 1

Notes: *Forces* – Kinetic Blow (●●), Unseen Shield (●●), Personal Invisibility (●●●); *Matter* – Find the Hidden Hoard (●); *Prime* – Supernal Vision (●)

Mana/per turn: 10/1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Dice Pool
Lead Pipe	2(B)	2	11

Armor: 3 ("Unseen Shield," Forces 3)

Maori

Phagean Pack Progenitor

Quote: *I used to be into all that hippie shit, too. See these teeth here? The pointy ones? Yeah, those say I'm a predator, so you can take that salad and shove it up your ass.*

Background: Maori was the love-child of hippie wannabes. Her parents instilled in her a love of nature, but never got around to teaching her about the darker side of the world. As a result, when Maori traveled to the Primal Wild during her Awakening she was completely unprepared for what she encountered. Unhinged by the sight of nature at its most primeval, Maori stumbled off the path leading to the Watchtower and was lost.

At first, she hid from the predators that stalked her, but eventually, driven by hunger, she managed her first kill. Overwhelmed by the taste of power-made-flesh, Maori continued to hunt and kill ever more dangerous game until she finally found her way back to the path and returned to the Fallen World. Perhaps unfortunately for her, Maori's memory was always better than average, and she recalled with a high degree of clarity what had happened to her. The positive aspect of her recollection is that Maori also recalls everything she learned while in the Primal Wild and is magically stronger because of it.

Shortly after her return, she was filling a prescription at the drugstore when she noticed the man behind the counter was staring at her. As a pretty girl, Maori wasn't unfamiliar with this sort of thing and didn't think any more about it until the man showed up at her door a few days later, saying he'd dreamed about her. He introduced himself as Raulo and said he'd seen her eating meat from a creature he didn't recognize. Intrigued, Maori let him in and began to teach him, in the Banisher way, about power-made-flesh. Raulo, renamed Chichi, became the first member of her pack.

A few months later, she met a large, dark-skinned man at a bar. When she looked into his bright green eyes, Maori felt a shock of recognition, like kinship. The stranger before her was a predator born. She took the man home, and after a bout of rough sex, he introduced himself as James. Maori watched James

that night and noted the way he bared his teeth as he thrashed in his sleep. The next day, she discussed his dreams with him and brought him into the pack with the new name of Kolufo.

Now that the pack was three strong, when Chichi noticed a female mage at his store, the shared instincts of the Phageans kicked in. The pack tracked the mage back to her home and proceeded to kill and eat her. Since that night, the pack has found only one other victim and no other pack members, but are constantly on the alert for both.

Description: Maori is an exceptionally attractive woman in her mid-20s. She has long blonde hair and wide blue eyes. Naturally curvaceous, Maori wears clothing intended to show off her body. Maori's nimbus spreads as a gloating sense of satisfaction, not unlike that felt after a good meal or good sex.

After her experiences in the Realm of Totems, Maori has gained something of an addiction to pain and



pleasure. When Kolufo and Chichi aren't available for or interested in a round of violent sex, Maori cuts herself on her inner thighs or other areas not normally visible, leaving a patchwork of thin scars.

Storytelling Hints: Maori leads the other Phageans in her pack through a combination of seduction and steel. Much stronger in body and spirit than she appears, Maori won't back down from a fight and will have the last word in any argument. When on a hunt, Maori is the pack member urging the others on after they become weary. She is also the one most capable of cleaning up after a kill, thanks to her ability in the Death Arcanum.

Real Name: Star Burke

Path: Thyrsus

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 1, Crafts 2, Occult 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl (Tooth and Nail) 4, Stealth (Hide) 4, Survival 3, Weaponry 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Expression 2, Persuasion (Seduction) 4, Socialize 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Extemporaneous Affinity 5, Eidetic Memory, Fast Reflexes 1, Striking Looks 2

Willpower: 8

Wisdom: 5

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 8

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 8

Gnosis: 2

Arcana: Death 3, Life 3, Time 2

Notes: *Death* — Corpse Mask (●●), Suppress Aura (●●), Quicken Corpse (●●●); *Life* — Sense Life (●), Organic Resilience (●●), Honing the Form (●●●), Transform Self (●●●); *Time* — Temporal Eddies (●), Postcognition (●●)

Mana/per turn: 11/2

Armor: 3 ("Organic Resilience," Life 3)

Shepherds

And, lo, the Lord revealed unto His servants the Great Work that lay before them. He said unto them, "Go forth into the world and gather unto thee those bright souls that follow the Path of Righteousness. Thou shalt be unto them as Shepherds, guiding thy flock to assail the Hidden amongst them. The Hidden shalt be shown no mercy lest they cast the world a second time into chaos and disorder."

A prospective Brother/Sister should have a stoic personality that allows them to endure psychological traumas such as those involving bloodshed, murder, arrest, imprisonment, and close quarters contact with the Hidden. They must also be able to withstand reverse psychological traumas such as the killing of one or all of their Brethren. They must, above all, be willing and able to carry out the Work.

— Excerpts from Shepherds pamphlets

Some Banishers are willing, even eager, to throw themselves body and soul into the fight against the unnatural forces of mages and their orders. Shepherds take a different tact. Rather than gamble on losing everything in a single battle, they gather Sleeper allies to assist. When the time comes to take the fight to the Shepherds' foe, the Sleepers act as the combatants; the Sleepers absorb the casualties. Shepherds remain in the background, recruiting, training and indoctrinating ever more Sleepers to assist the Shepherds in their Work.

The Call

The first Shepherd was a Southern Baptist minister from Alabama named Dr. Richard Paine. Dr. Paine was driving his truck down the dusty gravel and dirt back roads near his home late one Sunday afternoon and noticed a stopped car. As he drew closer, he saw a young woman staring perplexedly under the raised hood of the car. Always the Good Samaritan, Dr. Paine stopped by the woman and rolled down his window to ask if she needed any assistance.

Smiling, the woman walked to his window and asked if he had a cell phone she could use. The minister had just begun to explain that cell phones were almost useless this deep in the country when he heard a strange humming noise. In the field beyond the woman's car, the surface of reality cracked and parted. Dr. Paine had just long enough to see a man step through the shimmering obscenity before the woman said, "Aww shit, Rev. You'd better **HIDE**."

The last word was spoken with a power Dr. Paine had never heard before, and he found himself sprawled on the floor of his truck, unable to disobey. He heard a male voice say, "Goodbye, Lucy," and then felt the truck falling as though it had just plummeted through the Earth.

Dr. Paine survived the resulting crash, but fell into a coma. Swimming through the inky black of his unconscious mind, Dr. Paine saw a dim light form in the distance. Struggling toward the light, he suddenly found himself standing naked on a rocky path winding its way up a desolate hill. All around the hill was a dense forest, and he could hear the hunting cries of strange creatures in the undergrowth.

Dr. Paine looked down at his body and saw that it was mangled and torn. When he took an unsteady step forward, he groaned from the pain, and the sharp rocks of the path cut into his feet. Behind him was the forest, and having little wish to face the things that crept within it, he staggered down the path, leaving bloody footprints in his wake.

As Dr. Paine struggled up the hill, he began to make out a distant shape at its crown. His heart leapt with joy when he recognized the shape as that of the cross he had venerated all his life. Forcing himself to move faster, Dr. Paine reached the summit and collapsed at the foot of the cross, panting in pain and fatigue. Then he heard a Voice.

"Look upon Me, Richard, and know that I love thee. I have watched thy struggles and will reward thy pain with a great Work."

Tears streaming from his eyes, Dr. Paine looked up at the cross and saw that it glowed with a pure white light. As he stared into the light, he felt pain leave his body, and a great calm swept over him.

"There are those Hidden amongst My people, Richard, who sin in pride before Me. The Hidden are small in number but great in power. They gnaw at the Pattern of My creation like a worm in an apple. In time, the worm will cause the apple to rot, and the apple must then be destroyed lest it infect the whole of the tree. Unlike the worm, the Hidden comprehend fully the folly of their actions, but repent them not."

"It will be your Work, Richard, to defy the Hidden. To weed them out and destroy them. Will you pledge yourself to Me and this Work, Richard? Whilst thou sign thy name upon My most Holy cross?"

Weeping, Dr. Paine approached the cross and with his own blood signed his name on the cross. At once, knowledge and power filled his mind as he Awakened and the instructions of his God echoed through his mind.

Dr. Paine snapped out of his coma to find himself in the hospital surrounded by beeping machinery. Within days (the hospital staff called it a miracle), Dr. Paine had been discharged from the hospital and began to transcribe the words still echoing in his mind. Oddly, he never asked about the broken figure lying in the bed next to him. A woman, also in a coma, who had suffered crippling injury in the same automobile accident as him. He never noticed her or the merest hint of a smile that lingered on her face for days after he left.

The Creed

Shepherds approach their battle against the mages of a city in a multi-stage method with each stage building on the one before it.

Stage 1: Infiltration and Recruitment

When the Shepherds first enter a new town, they lie low and scour the town for secure locations to house their flocks. Once the locations have been bought (through dummy corporations), prepared and stocked (guns, food, religious tracts, bomb-making supplies and beds), the Shepherds initiate their recruitment process. They begin by watching the Sleeper members of ultra-conservative religious groups for suitable candidates, they canvass local colleges and universities for the radical students and they also read the newspapers and scan back issues for survivors of unexplainable catastrophes.

Once the Shepherds successfully recruit new Sleeper Brethren, the Shepherds house the new members at the prepared locations. Each location is its own cell, and a cell is never larger than five Brethren. The total number of cells in a city varies depending on the size of the city and preparatory intelligence gathered about the city. At this stage, cells typically have no contact with each other and know only the Shepherd who leads and trains that cell. The new cultists are slowly weaned from their old lives, giving up family and friends and liquidating their possessions to help finance their cell.

Once all the prearranged locations have been filled, the Shepherds institute a program of hardcore indoctrination and training. The members of each cell are first trained in basic self-defense techniques. Once the purely physical training is finished, the Shepherds branch out and begin training the members of a cell in the arts of one of two Specialties: Intelligence or Application. It is also at this point in Stage 1 when

the cultists are marked with the Rune of Witnessing (see p. 73).

Stage 2: Training Intelligence Cells

Intelligence-gathering cells are trained by multiple Shepherds, most of whom the cultists will have met for the first time at the beginning of Stage 2. Each cell is trained in a specific area of intelligence-gathering, which include (but aren't limited to) the following:

- Scanning local media, print and televised, including national tabloids with articles about local phenomena. The cultists are asked to collect and collate information about any unusual happenings in the city. Reports of a string of unsolved arsons, mysterious disappearances and bizarre advertisements placed in the want ads are all subject to thorough scrutiny and filed away for later reference.

- Monitoring national televised media, newspapers and, more recently, the Internet. Because of the Herculean nature of this area of intelligence, often multiple cells will be tasked with this duty, divvying up responsibility for each type of media. These cells follow much the same routine as those involved in gathering local media information, except for the cultists tasked with watching the Internet. These Brethren may spend as much, or more, time in chat rooms or on forums as they spend looking at digital media.

- Another type of intelligence cell is made up of cultists who wander the city in shifts using the power of the Rune of Witnessing to sniff out magic. These cultists pose as tourists, drive gypsy cabs or engage in other types of activity that easily explain their presence in out-of-the-way places. When a Brother or Sister conducting this kind of reconnaissance encounters a person or place with a magical signature, he or she is under strict orders not to investigate or approach that person or place. Instead, cultists are instructed to take a picture of the person/place if they are capable of doing so in a way that won't attract undue attention. With or without a picture, once a cultist has spotted a magical person/place, he or she is to immediately return to the cell house and report the find.

- The last type of intelligence cell acts on the information gathered by the other cells. These cultists have been rigorously trained in surveillance and counter-surveillance techniques. They watch, follow and record people and places that have aroused the suspicions of the Shepherds. These Brethren also operate under strict instructions not to attempt to contact or infiltrate their targets.

If a cultist engaged in surveillance believes she has been spotted, she has instructions to return to pre-arranged safe houses (including places made safe by use of the spell "Scorched Earth," see p. 66, when possible) and wait to be contacted by a Shepherd. For the direst of circumstances (i.e., imminent capture), cultists are issued special fast-acting suicide pills. The pill not only kills but also activates a version of the spell "Haunting Death" (see p. 143 of **Mage: The Awakening**) that draws the cultist's spirit to a beacon in the cell house, allowing the spirit to be questioned by a Shepherd and denying their enemies the ability to question the shade.

Application Cells

Application cells are removed one at a time from the city and taken to permanent training facilities that exist throughout the state. There, the cells are trained by Shepherds and by a few well-trusted Brethren from military backgrounds in multiple weapons use and squad-level tactics. The cells are trained to take orders without question and to kill or be killed. The cultists learn how to fight mages and what to expect from their foes. Those with interest in explosives or other specialty military type weapons (such as flamethrowers) are encouraged to test their capabilities in those areas.

Once a cell is declared ready, the members are shipped back to the city, and the next cell takes their place. After graduating from training, Brethren are expected to maintain their physical conditioning and military readiness without drawing attention to themselves. Some cells have found war games such as airsoft or paintball to be useful in maintaining their edge.

Stage 2 is often the longest stage in a Shepherd siege of a city, lasting anywhere from two to three years. The largest concern for the Shepherds at this stage is keeping themselves and their Sleeper cultists under the radar of order mages. If a Shepherd at any time suspects he or his cell has been compromised, he will order the cell to disperse until the Shepherd can be sure all is well. If necessary, Shepherds will kill cell members to keep the larger operation a secret.

Stage 3: Preparation and Evaluation

At this stage, the Shepherds begin to ramp up the level of their operations, preparing for their imminent attack. A list of known or suspected mages and mage allies is drawn up by Intelligence cells and pictures with attached bios sent to Application cells. Common Awakened meeting areas and residences are also prime

Day-to-day Activities

The flocks of the Shepherds can't spend every hour, of every day, on duty. Humans, no matter what their mindset, require some form of diversion. The cells become like mini-families to the cultists, and their downtime is spent in the same types of activities as those enjoyed by normal families. The Brethren gather for meals, play games and watch Shepherd-approved movies and television. At least an hour out of every day is spent in prayer and reflection. Sometimes this period of religious observance is practiced as a group, but more often it is spent alone for individual devotions.

targets, and any blueprints obtained of these places are passed on to the Application cells. Any last-minute requests for weaponry, equipment or imbued items are resolved before moving on to the next stage.

During this stage, the Shepherds select leaders for the cells, called Superiors, as well as an overall Sleeper cult leader for the city, who is given the title Heritor. The Heritor is taken to meet the Superior of each cell and gives them certain information and countersigns to pass on to their successor in the event of the death of that Superior. Possible Superior and Heritor candidates are noted during Stages 1 and 2, and are tested in their abilities before receiving promotion. Shepherds slowly remove themselves from the day-to-day activities of the cult at this point, but make themselves readily available to respond to requests for assistance or clarification.

Only when the Shepherds have checked and double-checked to make sure all their assets are in place, cultist leaders are performing up to par and the Application cells are primed and ready to go will they order the cult to advance to Stage 4.

Stage 4: Attack

Contrary to their standard operating procedure, the Shepherds themselves assume the responsibility for launching the cult's offensive. Separating into two-person teams, Shepherds use the cover of night to attack as many known Hallows as possible, using bags of Sown Salt (see p. 73) that have been prepared during Stages 1 through 3. This is the first time during a siege that Shepherds will knowingly expose themselves to danger.

If Shepherds encounter enemy resistance at a Hollow, they *will* fight if their pre-existing intelligence indicates they should win. Shepherds will not fight if they believe they might lose and will attempt to escape rather than be captured or killed. In the unlikely event a Shepherd is captured or believes the odds are high he will be captured, the Shepherd will attempt to kill himself by use of the "Hollow Victory" spell (see p. 54) or a similar rote.

Once the Shepherds have contaminated as many Hallows as possible, the Application cells swing into action. Armed with the best weaponry the Shepherds can buy and with intimate knowledge of their targets thanks to information gathered by Intelligence cells, Application strike teams first target solitary mages or important Sleeper allies and friends of order mages. As a result of the Shepherds' extraordinary preparation, the initial attacks usually proceed without a hitch. Relying on the relatively low possibility of any casualties (by attacking the weakest targets in the city), these initial missions are designed to raise morale and instill a feeling of confidence in the strike teams.

Every care is taken during the missions to leave as little evidence as possible behind for either Awakened or Sleeper authorities to find. Guns are fitted with silencers and casing catcher bags. Cultists are shaved from head to toe and wear full city camouflage complete with balaclavas. If feasible, every Application cell member checks the equipment of his Brethren before exiting the kill zone, and stray bullets are removed from walls.

After the initial attack, the Shepherds instruct their flock to wait for two days before launching new raids. This break in the action gives the Application cells time to critique their work and presents the Intelligence cells with an opportunity to observe the effect of the raids on their list of targets. Shepherds allow the cultists to run this portion of Stage 4 to ensure the cult is fully operational.

Stage 5: Siege and Withdrawal

After the pause in fighting that began in Stage 4, offensive operations against the enemy are resumed. By this stage, the Heritor and Superiors are fully directing the siege of the city with only minor input from the Shepherds. The Shepherds can watch in satisfaction as the entity they have so carefully shaped begins to take its toll on the enemy.

Their work in the city nearly done, the Shepherds have two more tasks to complete before they quietly

leave town to begin their Work anew. The first task is the simple matter of leaving the Heritor with bank account information to assist in financing the ongoing operations of the cult. The second task requires an additional week or two of work, but only requires a single Shepherd remain in town to complete it.

The Shepherd takes the Heritor aside and confirms details with him for the transfer of power in the event of the Heritor's capture or death. Shepherds leave the exact details for the Heritors to decide. Finally, the Shepherd passes on to the Heritor all remaining pamphlets, material assets and details of any city contacts made. Once the last Shepherd has left town, the cult is a full-fledged entity that is expected to recruit, gather intelligence and conduct strikes on their own initiative.

Shepherds will continue to monitor the work and health of their flocks after leaving town, but the Shepherds do so in a circumspect manner. No direct contact information is left for the cultists to ask the Shepherds for help. A struggling cult might be contacted by the Shepherds to offer additional assistance, but leaving any sort of email address, phone number or mailing address with a cult is considered too large of a security risk to be allowed. To further muddy the waters, all cults are asked to choose a name for themselves, specifically a name without the word "shepherd" in it. This presents even less of a connection to the Shepherds if the cults come under investigation by national security entities, such as the FBI.

The Banishers

Heritor Larson
Cult Leader

Quote: *Weep not for your fallen Brethren for they shall dine at the right hand of the Lord in Paradise. Weep not I say, but cry for vengeance instead. For the Bible says, "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth."*

Background: Saul Larson was 18 when his family died in a fire that destroyed three blocks before it was contained. No true cause for the fire was ever found, but city officials labeled it an arson case started by individuals unknown and moved on. With his nearest extended family member living three states away and no other real choices, Saul joined the Marines.

Saul enjoyed his time in the Marines, taking comfort in his adopted military family, but left after serving only four years, searching for something to fill the void left by his family. He spent a number of years working



odd jobs and volunteering for a variety of community services, but never quite felt as though he had found what he was looking for.

That all changed when Saul answered a knock on his door late one summer afternoon. The man at the door introduced himself as a private investigator who had been hired to look into the cause of the fire that had claimed Saul's family. Saul volunteered to help the private investigator, and after several excursions together, the man showed Saul a thick file. He apologized for misleading Saul and named himself as Shepherd Paine. The contents of the file claimed the cause of the blaze was the result of magic gone awry. The file listed names, places and even included a photograph of the woman suspected of being the culprit.

At first Saul scoffed at the information. Magic? Sure. Shepherd Paine asked Saul to go for a ride with him and, as they approached a city park, told Saul to close his eyes. Paine told him that when he, Saul, opened his eyes he would be able to see the truth. He would be able to see the Hidden. Still skeptical, Saul did as he was instructed. When he opened his eyes again,

Saul's world changed. Saul saw the woman from the file reading a book on a park bench. The very air around her seemed to shimmer, and it seemed to Saul he could smell ozone in the air as the car passed her by.

Shepherd Paine asked Saul if he would like revenge. If he would like to make sure the woman and all her kind never perpetuated another atrocity like the one that had claimed Saul's family. Shepherd Paine told Saul not to answer right away and gave him some pamphlets to read. Within the week, Saul had joined the flock of Shepherd Paine, and after four years of hard work, Saul was named Heritor.

Since Shepherd Paine and his cabal left town, Heritor Larson has run a subtle campaign of terror and misdirection against the mages in his city. Saul personally attended to the execution of the woman who killed his family, but even that act of vengeance hasn't dimmed the fires of hatred that blaze inside him. With the death of each mage, at the hands of his cult (renamed the Crucible), he feels a surge of satisfaction.

Description: Heritor Larson is a tall, well-built man with the air of burning intensity. His impassioned speeches energize the cells with righteous anger. Now in his mid-30s, time doesn't seem to have touched him. His black hair and brown eyes show no signs of age or fatigue.

Storytelling Hints: Heritor Larson is intensity personified and has little patience for stupidity or arrogance. He approaches the Work in a methodical fashion and demands the best from himself and those around him. Larson is also known to pray extensively for the health and well-being of his Brethren. This has become such a defining characteristic that some cultists have begun referring to him (respectfully) as Father Saul.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 1, Crafts (Explosives) 4, Investigation 3, Medicine 1, Occult 4, Politics 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Drive 1, Firearms (Pistols) 4, Stealth 3, Weaponry (Knife) 3

Social Skills: Expression 4, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 4, Socialize 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Ambidexterity, Eidetic Memory, Gunslinger, Imbued Item 6 (Rune of Witnessing), Quick Draw, Status (The Crucible) 5

Willpower: 8

Morality: 4

Derangements: Fixation (mild), Obsessive Compulsion (severe; prays for his Brethren)

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 8

Defense: 3

Speed: 12

Health: 8

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Pair of Glock 17s	2	1	Silencer	11

Armor: 1/2 (Kevlar Vest)

Shepherd Paine
Cult Organizer

Quote: *Go now, secure in the knowledge that God is with you. Superior Laura, please check your Brethren for full weapons loadout. Brother Jameson will take point.*

Background: After his miraculous recovery from his coma, Dr. Paine spent several months sequestered in his home writing down the memories of his experience, as well as his own ideas on the Work. These writings became the foundations for the pamphlets used by Shepherds today. After organizing and transcribing his thoughts, Dr. Paine sold his house, all of his belongings and left his hometown to travel on what he termed a “pilgrimage” to concerned family and church members.

In his travels, Dr. Paine met other Banishers on the path of the Work. Impressed by Dr. Paine’s zeal, the Banishers agreed to form a team (the word cabal was never mentioned) to fight those he called the Hidden. More than half of the new team was killed in their first battle with a cabal of mages, but the team emerged victorious. Unwilling to accept those kind of casualties in so small a group, Dr. Paine prayed for guidance and began to research alternate methods of fighting.

As an educated man and a preacher, Dr. Paine had no difficulties gaining access to a number of small college libraries. In his studies, he came across the idea, pioneered by the French political activist Louis Auguste Blanqui, of covert cells. After thanking God for his discovery, Dr. Paine began to research the organization of covert cells in depth and drew up an outline for what would become the standard operating procedure for the Shepherds.

Armed with this new wisdom, Dr. Paine contacted his Banisher allies and explained his ideas to them.

Dubious at first, they eventually agreed to test his theories. Dr. Paine renamed the team “Shepherds” and set out alone to select a town to lay siege to. He instructed the new Shepherds to learn everything they could about intelligence-gathering, small unit tactics, weaponry and covert actions while he was gone.

After eight months of careful research and ultra-paranoid surveillance, Dr. Paine, now calling himself Shepherd Paine, chose the city of Little Rock, Arkansas, as his test site. He called in his Shepherds and they went to work. The results were nothing short of phenomenal. In the span of three short years, the mage population was entirely wiped out with only a few Shepherd casualties. Leaving his new flock to maintain watch over the city, Shepherd Paine dispersed the other Shepherds with instructions to recruit more Banishers to their cause and methodology and to spread the word of the Lord’s Work.



Unlike many Banishers, Shepherd Paine devotes time to studying magic to better understand how it works. He rationalizes his magical knowledge (gleaned from pillaged grimoires and notes of dead order mages) as arming himself against his foe and instructs the other Shepherds to follow his example. Paine is frequently heard expressing his firmly held opinion that if God didn't intend for them to gain magical knowledge He wouldn't make the Arcane texts so readily available.

Description: Shepherd Paine is now in his late 50s. He is a striking figure standing six feet tall, with hair and close-cropped beard both a snowy white. His regular Caucasian features have a handsome paternal bearing. Shepherd Paine dresses in simple, almost monkish, clothing. His only ornamental adornments consist of the golden cross he never removes and a silver-headed walking cane that was a gift from his congregation in Alabama.

Shepherd Paine's nimbus reveals itself as a feeling of tranquility.

Storytelling Hints: Shepherd Paine never raises his voice above normal speaking level, seeming to be able to make himself heard regardless of noise and activity going on around him. He appears a calm and gentle soul, only revealing an inner fire when he preaches to his flock about the Hidden. Though he doesn't notice it, Shepherd Paine has a habit of muttering to himself when making difficult decisions.

His favored method of atonement is placing a sharp stone in his shoes. In this way, he reminds himself of the suffering he endured that led him to the cross and his Work.

Real Name: Dr. Richard Paine

Path: Obrimos

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 4 (Theology), Crafts 2, Investigation 3, Occult (Awakened Society) 5, Politics 3, Science 2

Physical Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 3 (Shotgun), Stealth (Surveillance) 5

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression (Oratory) 5, Persuasion 4, Socialize 2, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies (Weapons Dealers) 3, Allies (Shepherds) 5, Contacts (Shepherds) 5, Contacts (Cultists) 5, Destiny 4, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Meditative Mind, Resources 5, Status (Shepherds) 5

Willpower: 8

Wisdom: 5

Derangements: Depression (mild), Vocalization (mild)

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 8

Health: 7

Gnosis: 3

Arcana: Fate 3, Forces 2, Prime 5

Notes: *Fate* — Winds of Chance (●), Fortune's Protection (●●), The Perfect Moment (●●), Superlative Luck (●●●); *Forces* — Control Sound (●●), Invisible Object (●●); *Prime* — Dispel Magic (●), Supernal Vision (●), Magic Shield (●●), Transform Aura (●●), Disguise Resonance (●●●), Imbue Item (●●●), Eyes of the Awakened (●●●●), Tainted Source (●●●●), Supernal Dispellation (●●●●), Dead Zone (●●●●●), Scorched Earth (●●●●●), Siphon Mana (●●●●●)

Mana/per turn: 12/3

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Shotgun	4	2	9-again	10

Armor: 3 ("Fortune's Protection," Fate 3)

Application Cell Strike Team Members Militant Cultist

Quote: *I have a confirmed Go order on the target. Attack will commence at 23:00 hours. God be with you.*

Background: The men and women of the Application cells come from a variety of backgrounds. They might once have been teachers and housewives, but you would never know that by looking at them now.

Description: Most of these cultists were in decent physical condition before they joined the cult, and their daily training and exercise regimens have further honed their bodies. Even when they aren't out on a raid, an Application cell cultist has the bearing of a soldier. These Brethren are devout in their belief in God and determined in the prosecution of their orders.

Storytelling Hints: Strike team members have the professional arrogance of a trained soldier. They look down on people who are unwilling to sacrifice themselves for a greater cause. A number of these cultists suffer from derangements as a result of their activities, so the odd twitch or quirk of personality isn't considered unusual. Strike teams never operate in groups smaller than three.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 1, Crafts 3, Medicine 2 (First Aid), Occult 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Drive 2, Firearms 3 (Assault Rifles), Larceny 2 (Security Systems), Stealth 3, Survival 1, Weaponry 3

Social Skills: Intimidation 2, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Fast Reflexes 2, Imbued Item 6 (Rune of Witnessing), Quick Draw 1

Willpower: 6

Morality: 5

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 8

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 8

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Clip	Dice Pool
AK-47 Assault Rifle	4	3	42+1	11
Knife	1	1	N/A	8

Armor: 1/2 (Kevlar Vest)

The Translators

"The biggest problem we have will be getting the alien into the box," Blaine said, looking through her thick glasses at her five companions. "Suggestions?"

A gawky man with thinning hair and a funny scar down the side of his neck raised his hand and waited for Blaine's nod.

"I suppose reasoning with them is out of the question," he said, craning his neck so that he could see if the group agreed with him. They did. "So that implies a modicum of force." Several people, including Blaine, nodded.

"That's correct, Morris," Blaine said approvingly.

"What about our paralyzing ray?" this remark came from Roger, barely out of his teens, or so he claimed, but already the holder of several patents for his inventions.

"If that doesn't work, I have some chloroform that should do the trick," Jenine said. "I can smuggle it out of the hospital anytime I want."

Blaine nodded, then held up her hands for attention. "That's settled then. We start tomorrow with our first target, the alien masquerading as Freda Gosnell,

the owner of that little bookstore down the street. Tomorrow, Freda will be translated from this world back to the stars."

The Call

When Blaine Halliwell was 15 years old, she became the victim of an alien abduction — or so she believes. The experience had a devastating effect on her mind and made it impossible for her to live a normal life until the right combination of drugs gave her a semblance of stability. What she never told anyone in her family, however, was that her experience left her with supernatural powers. Although she rarely uses those powers, they have enabled her to sense the presence of other aliens masquerading as normal human beings. These extraterrestrials, she believes, are upsetting the equilibrium of the world — how else to explain the proliferation of earthquakes, killer tornados, hurricanes and tsunamis? Global warming, she claims, is the Earth's response to the presence of alien creatures with unearthly powers.

They must be stopped, and it is her duty to stop them. To stop them, Blaine realized that she needed to find a way to send them back where they belonged — to the stars. Just killing them wouldn't work, for their bodies would remain on the Earth, an offense to science and nature.

Blaine knew that she couldn't do this alone and that she needed to work within the context of a group. Her self-imposed isolation had led her to spend a great deal of time online, communicating with various cyber-communities of alien abductees and UFOlogists. Through some carefully worded online ads, she managed to attract the attention of a few like-minded individuals.

Before meeting with any of the respondees in person, Blaine vetted them carefully, through emailed questionnaires and, in time, phone conversations routed through her Internet connection. The ones she accepted into her group had two things in common — they firmly believed in the existence of "aliens on earth," and they either possessed or were victims of supernatural powers. Those who, just as Blaine, had been cursed with supernatural powers (had Awakened), had to swear an oath, which Blaine bound with magic, that they would not associate with aliens other than to promote their "translation" back to their rightful place "out there," and that they would not use their powers except in service to the cause.

Those Blaine interviewed and found wanting, she caused to forget their meeting. Soon she became the

center and acknowledged leader of the group of warped and intellectually brilliant people who call themselves the Translators.

The group chose the name “Translators” after much discussion. Some thought they should call themselves the League of Alien Cleansers or Aliens Go Home! Blaine argued that they needed a subtler name, one that didn’t immediately mark them as either crackpots or potential troublemakers.

Finally, one of their members, a young man with a degree in linguistics, suggested the name “Translators” because of its derivation, coming from the Latin *translatus* (trans- + latus), “borne or carried across.” The word stems from the 1300s and was used in the sense of “removal from one place to another” or “carrying across.” The name was also contextually neutral, so it would most likely arouse little to no suspicion.

The Creed

The Translators exist to rid the world of “alien” influence by capturing as many extraterrestrials (mages) as possible and “translating” them back to their home in the stars. To this end, the Translators have constructed a device that looks like an old-timey spirit cabinet used by spiritualists in the 19th century. The device makes use of the “alien technology” and “superpowers” inflicted upon the Translators during their abductions to propel the alien from Earth’s realm to their own place, whether in outer space or in another dimension is a topic the Translators are still discussing.

The “translation chamber,” however, does not send the aliens home; instead, it serves as nothing so much as a disintegration machine that, when activated, annihilates anything or anyone placed inside it.

Although the Translators are primarily interested in the aliens themselves, the Translators intend to destroy any alien artifacts they manage to acquire, including books, wands, or anything else that resonates on an alien frequency (i.e., detects as magic).

Tools of the Trade

The group has spent most of the time since their formation preparing for their work. Roger and Morris, who together came up with the translation chamber, have also played around with weapons intended for use against aliens only: so far, they have come up with a “paralyzing ray” using a hand-held flashlight as the basis for its exterior design, a set of “alien restraints” intended to prevent their captives from using their superpowers to escape and “mind shields” that protect

the Translators from falling under the control of any aliens they encounter.

Roger’s latest device, which he and Blaine have devised, is an alien detection module, meant to identify aliens within 50 feet. The two hope this item will help them compile a list of aliens to target.

Abducting the Abductors

Although the Translators have not yet put their methods into practice, the Translators have rehearsed their actions so many times they could perform them under almost any circumstances. Blaine has drawn up a seven-point process for dealing with the aliens they locate and target for translation.

- **Identify:** The first step consists of identifying the target or targets. So far, the Translators feel they can handle only one alien at a time. They have, however, compiled a list of around a dozen individuals that they either suspect of being aliens or else have observable proof, having seen them using their superpowers.

- **Study:** Once the Banishers have selected the alien they plan to translate, they proceed to study her from every possible angle, learning her living place, her workplace (if she has one), what stores she frequents, who her friends are (which may give the Translators more names for their list) and where she goes to be alone.

- **Befriend:** Once they have identified the target, the Translators’ next move consists of making “friendly” contact with the target. The Banishers know they must not allow themselves to see the target as anything other than an object for translation, but they need to get close enough to the alien to succeed with their abduction without arousing the target’s suspicions.

- **Isolate:** The Banishers make every effort to isolate their target from her normal circle of friends (although the Translators keep tabs on these “friends” in case they, too, are aliens or can lead the Banishers to more targets). The Banishers may do this in any number of ways, from sabotaging the target’s normal mode of travel so that she cannot go anywhere without the aid of a “friendly” Translator to poisoning her relationships and then offering sympathy for the baseness of so-called friends. By becoming the target’s main connection to the outside world, the Translators increase their chances of a successful abduction (see below).

- **Abduct:** When they have achieved enough rapport with the target to control her actions, the Banishers make their move. They remove the target to a place away from prying eyes, overcome their victim by any

means necessary — chloroform, physical force or, as a last resort, magical means, and deliver the target to a holding place (in this case, the secure basement of Morris's house).

- **Verify:** Because the results of translation are so extreme, the Translators want to ascertain for themselves beyond all doubt that their target is truly an "alien." The verification period, therefore, consists of intensive interrogation and experimentation to ferret out any indication that the target possesses "alien powers" and that she is not, herself, an abductee. If the Translators become convinced that their target is a victim, just as they are, they will terminate all plans to "translate" their subject and, instead, attempt to recruit her. (If the target is smart, she will pretend to be recruited and disappear at the earliest possible opportunity.)

- **Translate:** The final step in the process consists of activating the "translator box" with the victim secured inside it. The process is almost instantaneous, barring any operational errors. When the box is opened after the process is complete and the device has "cooled down," the target is no longer inside, presumably having been "translated" back to its home world or dimension. The slight tang of burnt ozone and the faint ashy residue on the inside of the box, however, attest to a totally different resolution. Fortunately, translation is quicker and less painful than burning at the stake, though the end result is ultimately the same.

The group has devised an interim method of containing individuals who may simply be "possessed" by aliens rather than being aliens. This consists of trapping the alien part of the individual in a container (see the Spirit 2 "Bug Jar" spell below and in Chapter Two).

The Banishers

The Translators have only recently formed and haven't done any real "translating" yet. Blaine Halliwell located the current members of the group and acts as their leader and coordinator. Morris Wheeler responded to her ad and admitted to being a fellow abductee as well as to having some "weird alien magic." His engineering skills came in handy when they recruited Roger Zeelig, their youngest and, perhaps, brightest member. His unfettered thought processes guided him toward the idea of a "translation box," and with the help of Morris's technical expertise, they have been able to construct one.

Their newest member, Jenine Washington, is a confirmed alien abductee, though she does not have

any superpowers. She does have a connection to the local hospital, where she can siphon off many of the drugs the Translators figure they will need to control the aliens before their translation. Whenever the Translators use their powers in Jenine's presence, they don't evoke the usual reaction that comes from working spells in front of Sleepers. Jenine believes in her friends' "superpowers," and doesn't question them. After all, aliens have them, don't they?

Blaine Halliwell

The Voice of Authority

Quote: *So long as they continue to live among us, so long as their agents in the starships abduct us and experiment on us, so long as the earth is subject to their abnormal powers, we can never be safe and the earth can never be whole.*

Background: Blaine's family had high hopes for their precocious daughter. Although she was no beauty, she more than made up for her nondescript appearance with her prodigious mind. An avid reader by the age of three, Blaine developed a real affinity for math and science, particularly in the areas of astronomy, physics and probability theory. But her advanced mental development proved a barrier to having a normal social life. She far outstripped the boys her age and had no concept of using artifice or dumbing herself down to attract their attention. She had a similar problem with girls; small talk, for her, was not an option. Her head was wrapped around meatier matters, such as the degrading environment and the possibility of the existence of extraterrestrial life.

Her parents, scientists themselves, never pressured Blaine to conform. They were proud of their daughter's achievements and pulled strings to get her admitted to MIT when she was just 12 years old, making arrangements for her to live with her advisor, physics Professor Melton Tunstar and his wife Corinne.

Although she finished college in three years and received her degree in astrophysics with a minor in electro-communications, when she returned home, her parents found her strangely withdrawn. Blaine never spoke to them of the frequent visitations by Professor Tunstar to her bedroom from the time she was 13 until she returned home. She also never spoke to them of the strange events that usually followed immediately upon the professor's "visits" — the alien voices she began hearing over the radio and in her head, the strange lights that flitted around her bedroom and drove all thoughts of Tunstar's actions out of her head. She especially never mentioned the night the



aliens actually came for her, lifted her up into their spaceship, looking like nothing so much as a silvery tower, and subjecting her to experiments that left her mind with no protections from the powers they implanted in her.

Unaware that her experience was actually an Awakening, Blaine has become a Banisher to fight back, to purge the world of what she has convinced herself were alien invaders.

Description: Now in her mid-20s, Blaine knows that her appearance will never turn heads. She has regular features, a strong jaw line, weak blue eyes that need strong corrective lenses and a nose that is perhaps a tad too long for her face. Her lackluster sandy-colored hair is worn in a short bob for convenience. She dresses in conventional clothing, purchased haphazardly at department stores, and prefers slacks to dresses. She occasionally wears light makeup, most often to meetings with her fellow Banishers — after all, a girl has to look her best when others are looking up to her.

Blaine's nimbus makes those around her literally "see stars." Her aura expands into a circular band resembling the night sky, with constellations clearly visible. When she is performing vulgar magic, some

of the stars blink on and off and move about — unidentified flying objects in the night sky.

Storytelling Hints: Blaine has to make an effort to be outgoing, since her experiences have afflicted her with an almost pathological shyness. Within the company of the Banishers, however, she can almost become the person she used to be — bright, confident and determined. She has begun to develop romantic feelings for Morris, her first recruit, but is afraid to initiate anything that might remind her of her experiences as a teenager. She manages to speak with a confidence she does not feel, and as far as leadership goes, she does a fairly good job at faking it.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Collapsible binoculars (Space)

Real Name: Blaine Sigourney Halliwell

Path: Acanthus

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Mathematics) 4, Computer 2, Occult (Aliens) 1, Science 4

Physical Skills: Brawl 2, Drive 2, Firearms 1

Social Skills: Expression (Meetings) 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 3

Merits: Destiny ("A child shall be your downfall") 3, Imbued Item 4 (Binoculars: Multispatial Perception [Space 3])

Willpower: 5

Wisdom: 7

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 8

Gnosis: 3

Arcana: Fate 3, Mind 3, Prime 2, Space 4, Time 3

Rotes: *Fate* — Interconnections (•), Superlative Luck (••); *Prime* — Supernal Vision (•), Mage Shield (••);

Space — Spatial Awareness (•), Apportation (••)

Mana/per turn: 12/3

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Clip	Dice Pool
Rev. Lt.	2	20/40/80	6	4

Armor: 2 ("Mage Shield" Prime ••)

Morris Wheeler
The Voice of Science

Quote: "There is always something to learn and, if you look hard enough, someone to teach you. Knowledge exists for one reason only — to make the world safe from Them!"

Background: Even as a young child growing up in the sheltered suburban life of upstate New York, Morris Wheeler knew "they" were out there. Truthfully, he came by his beliefs in extraterrestrials honestly: his father and one of his uncles claimed to have been abducted by aliens in the 1950s, and his paternal grandfather had strange tales of voyages to alien lands he claimed to have made 30 years before that. The Wheeler household's mailbox was always bulging with magazines with titles such as *Aliens Here and Now!*, *The Visitors*, *Starfarers*, *Weird Occurrences*, *The Real Truth* and *Neighborhood Star Watch*.

Morris's family home-schooled him and his siblings — three brothers and two sisters — lest the children's



minds become contaminated by alien microwaves piped into public schools. His father, an astrophysicist employed by the government until his mind became "unstable" and he was retired with a generous government pension, took over Morris's education personally when he realized that his middle son had a prodigious capacity for absorbing scientific information and keeping banks of statistics in his head.

The boy's first abduction experience occurred when he was 12, preceding the onset of puberty. Each year after that, almost with clockwork regularity, Morris experienced an abduction event, each one a little more complicated than the one before. Strangely, he kept these events from his father, finding his curiosity aroused by them and realizing that he could use them as sources of information that might be useful in the future.

His final abduction took place when he was 16. He traveled in the alien craft to a planet made of golden metal, in the center of which was a tall, oddly shaped golden building. His abductors, who remained faceless automaton-like creatures, forced him inside and held him inside a force field while bolts of electrical energy passed through him repeatedly with the impact of a shaft of lightning. When they finally tired of this procedure, they left him alone. He found himself clutching a golden key, somehow formed in his hand by the excess energy that still rifled his body. He used the key to escape the building and teleport himself back home.

This time, Morris had Awakened as a mage of the Path of Obrimos. He now considered himself an informed insurgent, a warrior against the aliens who were taking over the minds of the people of Earth. Since that experience, he has experienced no further abductions and feels that he is mentally armed to withstand any that might be attempted in the future.

Since joining up with Blaine and putting his scientific knowledge to work with Roger in building the translation box, Morris now feels that he can take steps to eradicate the alien threat. He also believes that, in Blaine, he has found the perfect soul mate, though she so far seems oblivious to his modest advances.

Description: Morris is an unprepossessing young man in his late 20s. His thin blond hair has just begun receding, emphasizing his high forehead, overly large ears and prominent temples. He is just a hair over five feet 11 inches tall and stands tall and straight, especially whenever he thinks that Blaine is looking in his direction. A long, thin scar on the side of his neck is a reminder of an experiment gone explosively wrong. His

gray-green eyes show his intelligence, and he always seems to be in deep thought, even when engaged in conversation. He dresses neatly, in inexpensive but good clothing, and is usually well-groomed.

Morris's nimbus appears as a field of ambient energy, with shifting colors and widths — similar to bandwidths on a graphic equalizer display. The more vulgar his magic, the greater the variance of colors and bandwidths.

Storytelling Hints: Morris's natural tendencies are to take the leadership of the Translators from Blaine, but he defers to her at the moment since she is the originator of the group. He also wants to win Blaine's trust and affection, and he doesn't think that can happen if he takes over the group. So far, Blaine's actions have all met with his approval so he watches and waits until she shows him that she can no longer lead. He dismisses Roger and Jenine as "lesser lights" in so far as leadership potential, but envies Roger's brilliant inventiveness and Jenine's lack of alien contamination.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Portable battery charger (Prime)

Real Name: Morris Cantrell Wheeler

Path: Obrimos

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer (Graphic Modeling) 4, Crafts (Gadgets) 4, Science (Astrophysics) 4

Physical Skills: Brawl 2, Drive 1, Firearms 2

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 2

Merits: Eidetic Memory 2, Encyclopedic Knowledge 4, Language (German) 1

Willpower: 6

Wisdom: 7

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 7

Gnosis: 4

Arcana: Forces 4, Life 3, Prime 5, Spirit 3

Rotes: *Forces* — Read Matrices (•), Outer Limits (•)¹, Influence Electricity (••), Unseen Shield (••), Control Electricity (•••), Transform Energy (••••); *Life* — Purify

Bodies (••); *Prime* — Supernal Vision (•), Magic Shield (••), Imbue Item (•••), Eyes of the Awakened (••••), Supernal Dispellation (••••), Desiccate (••••)¹; *Spirit* — Coaxing the Spirit (•)², Alien Spotter (•)¹, Bug Jar (••)¹, Alien Highway (••)¹

¹ Banisher rote created by Morris and described in Chapter Two.

² Morris knows the **Free Council Rote: Helping Hand**, enabling him to coax most devices, including the Translator Chamber, into working to full capacity.

Mana/per turn: 13/4

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Clip	Dice Pool
Glock 17	2	20/40/80	7+1	5

Armor: 4 ("Unseen Shield," Forces ••)

Roger Zeelig
The Voice of Invention

Quote: *I'm almost finished! I just have to connect the — wait! — This is even better! Now I just — Unless I — got it!!*

Background: When Roger was born, his parents knew something about him was different. Unlike most infants, who move their arms and legs constantly as they discover what their bodies can do, Roger hardly moved at all. He also made almost no noise, neither crying nor laughing. When he hadn't spoken a word by the time he was two, his parents realized that their son was most likely autistic. Trips to the doctor resulted in recommendations for institutionalization of the profoundly withdrawn child.

Roger's family refused, feeling that a loving home environment would do much better for their son than a loveless institution. Unable to send her son to school, Roger's mother quit her job and took on the formidable task of teaching her son herself even as she took online education courses to qualify her to teach a special needs child. Fortunately, Roger's father owned a company that provided high-tech devices to various government agencies for inflated government prices.

On his 14th birthday, Roger's family prepared a birthday cake for him as usual, even though he ignored it. This time, however, Roger stood up from the table, took a deep breath and blew out the candles himself. He looked delightedly at his parents and said his very first words. "It's good to be home!"

After that, Roger seemed in all ways to be a normal child, though he became a brilliant student, particularly in math, science and linguistics, and showed a real talent for invention, racking up several patents of objects he'd designed by the time he was 15.

Roger's parents were so happy that their child had overcome his difficulties that they gave him almost anything he wanted. They consider him their miracle child. Only Roger sees another story.

Roger's experience of his early life consisted of one continuous "kidnapping by aliens" who experimented with the human infant and child — at least where the child's spirit was concerned. They left his physical body running on idle. In truth, like so many Banishers-to-be, Roger experienced an abnormally brutal and extended Awakening in which his soul was confined within an iron prison (the Watchtower of the Iron Gauntlet) and where visions of the Abyss and the infernal creatures that dwell within it tortured his infant mind.



Once his Awakening had completed itself, on his 14th birthday, Roger experienced no further incidents of alien contact. His nightmares, however, continue to this day, driving him to greater and greater devotion to his chosen cause — ridding the world of the aliens who have opened up the world to the Realm of Nightmares.

A side effect of his experience is Roger's ability to think way outside the box and invent truly bizarre artifacts (which he thinks of as scientific devices).

Description: Roger has just turned 21, though his youthful face looks barely 16. He has bright red hair, worn just to his collar and parted to the side. He is desperately trying to grow a beard to hide his weak chin. He has had laser surgery to correct his vision so he does not need glasses. He dresses in T-shirts advertising '70s rock bands, loose-fitting jeans and expensive running shoes. The only clues to his autistic past are his tendency to rock back and forth on his heels when he is thinking and his inability to complete a sentence when he is excited. Roger's nimbus is dark and smoky, seemingly filled with unseen monsters, whose hideous laughs are clearly audible and grow louder depending on how vulgar his magic is.

Storytelling Hint: Roger's Awakening broke through his autistic shell for the most part, but when he is under stress or excited, he becomes almost incoherent in his speech, never finishing sentences out loud. He is never happier than when his mind is at work on a new invention or discovering a new alien language. He considers Blaine, Morris and Jenine his true family and sometimes believes that they are inside his head with him.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Laminated certificate of patents (Matter)

Real Name: Roger Preston Zeelig

Path: Mastigos

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Invented Languages) 5, Computer 4, Crafts (Contraptions) 4, Science (Quantum Physics) 4

Physical Skills: Athletics (Running) 2, Stealth 2

Social Skills: Expression 1, Intimidate (Bizarre Behavior) 2

Merits: High Speech 1, Dream 5, Language (German) 1

Willpower: 7

Wisdom: 7

Virtue: Temperance

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 7

Gnosis: 4

Arcana: Forces 3, Life 3, Mind 5, Prime 4, Space 4,

Rotes: *Forces* – Outer Limits (•)¹, Receiver (•)², Kinetic Blow (••); *Life* – Cleanse the Body (•), Body Control (••); *Mind* – Merge Mind (•)³, Memory Hole (••)⁴, Mental Shield (••), Augment the Mind (•••), Universal Language (•••), Augment Other Minds (••••), No Exit (••••)⁵; *Prime* – Supernal Vision (•), Magic Shield (••), Channel Mana (•••), Dissolve Tass (•••), Siphon Essence (••••); *Space* – Correspondence (•), Scrying (••), Ranged Blow (•••), Suspension (••••)

Mana/per turn: 13/4

Armor: 5 (“Mental Shield,” Mind ••)

Note: Roger does not use “weapons,” but fights with his mind when he has to, using Kinetic Blow (Forces ••) or Ranged Blow (Space •••).

Magic Shield: 2 (Prime ••)

¹Banisher rote created by Morris and described in Chapter Two

²Roger knows the **Guardians of the Veil Rote: Thunderous Whispers**, which he calls **Alien Voices**.

³Roger created this spell and its rote out of necessity to communicate with outsiders, i.e., anyone else.

⁴Roger knows the **Free Council Rote: Bastion of Thought** under the name **This Didn’t Happen** to forget any mistakes his Translator Chamber might make.

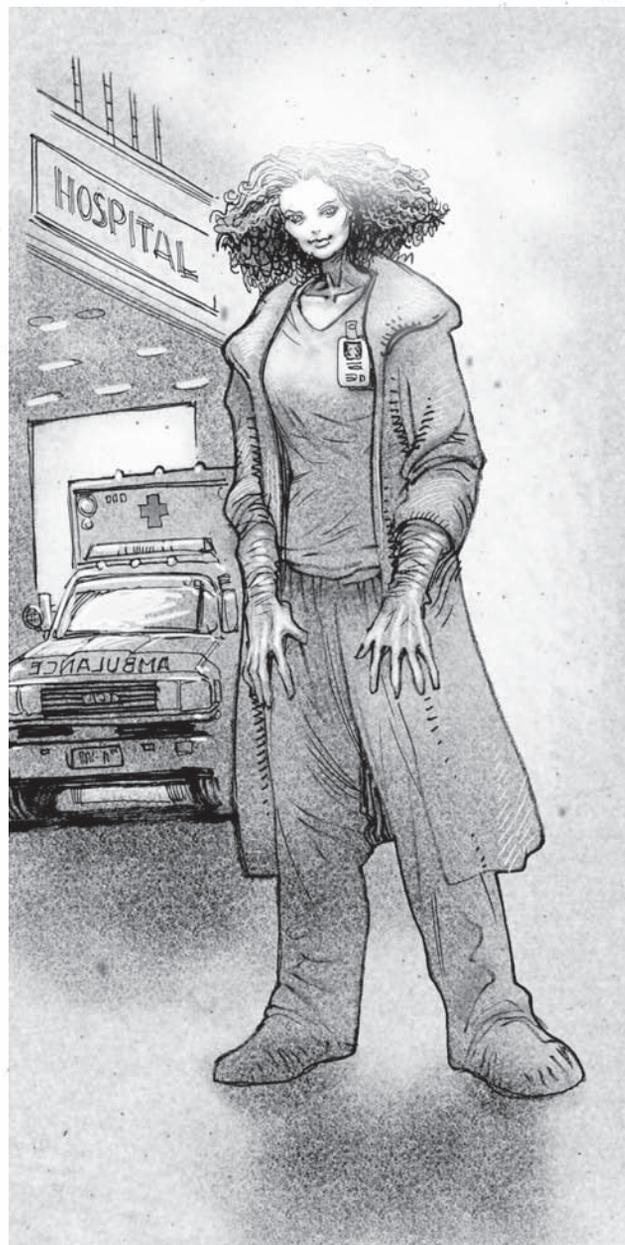
⁵Roger created this spell and its rote to neutralize dangerous people.

Jenine Washington

The Voice of Resourcefulness

Quote: *My shift is over in an hour. Meet me outside the hospital with a van, and I’ll bring out what you need. I’ve altered the books, so no one will know.*

Background: Jenine should have Awakened when a life-threatening illness landed her in the hospital. Her treatment included extreme measures such as ice-cold baths, wet wraps and an induced coma, during which she experienced what seemed to her an alien abduction incident instead of a trip to the realm of Stygia. She refused to Awaken, nearly dying in the hospital and having to be brought around by extraordinary means.



Jenine has her nursing degree and is considering pursuing a medical degree after working a few more years. In the meantime, she has hooked up with Blaine’s Translators and serves as their quartermaster, providing them with various kinds of supplies, from knock-out drugs to surgical tools to shock blankets. Both her parents are physicians: her mother is a surgeon and her father an endocrinologist, so Jenine’s reputation as a medical brat protects her from suspicion when things go missing.

She accepts that her fellow Translators have “superpowers” granted them by their experiences with aliens, so her presence does not invoke Paradox when they work magic.

Description: Jenine is an attractive mixture of her biracial heritage. Her chocolate-colored skin comes

from her African American father, while her classic Anglo features mirror those of her British-born mother. When she's not wearing scrubs or nurses' white, she dresses in jeans and bulky pullovers or loose-fitting turtlenecks. Her dark curly hair frames her elfin face and provides a startling contrast to her pale amber eyes.

Storytelling Hints: Jenine realizes her place in the Translator hierarchy as that of real-world facilitator. She has no special powers, but she has honed her abilities at procuring supplies to a fine art. She does not speak a lot, but when she has something important to say, she does not hesitate to make herself heard. She usually follows Blaine's lead, though, and would like to break through to Roger some day and make him realize her fondness for him.

Abilities:

Medicine (dice pool 3) — Jenine not only has good first aid and nursing skills but has developed a physician's eye for diagnosis and has a rudimentary knowledge of field surgery.

Larceny (dice pool 4) — She has practiced the art of covert acquisitions enough that she can generally supply her fellow Banishers with just about anything they need from the hospital stores.

Venus Valley

It's a romantic getaway, great for couples who can't spare much time off work but have a bit of money to burn. Venus Valley is secluded — it's a difficult drive from the city, but the nearby town has everything you might need for your stay. The proprietors of the Venus Valley Bed-n-Breakfast don't advertise much. They get all the business they can handle through word of mouth.

Besides, if they got *too* much more traffic, they'd run the risk of someone finding the bodies. That wouldn't do at all.

The Call

The name "Venus Valley" is used to indicate the physical valley itself and the bed-and-breakfast that the Banishers own and operate. The valley is an interesting topographical phenomenon in itself, falling in between the hills in such a way that a thick fog blankets the valley every morning. The fog doesn't burn off until around noon, and the small village nearby (population 1,800) knows not to expect the folks from the B&B to start shopping until after lunch. The restaurants in

the village don't bother with breakfast specials.

The view of the valley from the hills is striking, though, especially as the sunlight hits the fog. It's like looking down into a cloud, watching the mist bank part and the B&B and the cabins appear as if by magic. There's not really much to *do* in Venus Valley, other than hike, browse through the shops in the village and lounge about in the cabins or on the decks... but that must be enough, because those cabins book a full year in advance, even in the off-season. When people come back from Venus Valley, they are rested, happy and (with a wink and a nod to their close friends) *satisfied*. Something in the air down in the valley, they say. Makes you feel like a newlywed again.

There's a reason that the valley engenders this effect, of course, and it's not the air — not exactly. Beneath the valley floor, in an underground spring, lies an incredibly potent Hallow. The Resonance there is best described as "primal," but it isn't brutal or animalistic. It's slow, easy, relaxed — nature on a geological scale. The Hallow doesn't really put people in the mood to make love, but it does remove their stressors, making the things in modern life that seem life-or-death feel trivial (which they are, on the right scale). With those things out of the way, a couple can focus on what's nearby. That is, they can focus on the natural beauty of the valley and, of course, each other.

The B&B does not allow children but does permit pets (for a slight surcharge). The prices are reasonable, if not exactly cheap. They don't rent for anything more than a three-night stay. The Banisher couple who runs the place doesn't like to chance people having enough time to snoop around — they'd rather that folks just relax, sleep in, have a lot of sex and go home. The house has a classical décor and theme, with a muted color palette. The couple employs teens from the village to maintain the grounds, but does most of the work on the house, and all of the cooking. Breakfast, Annabelle Cassidy says with a smile, is served promptly at 11. Really more of a "bed and brunch," her husband chuckles, and everyone shares a laugh.

The Creed

The Cassidys are Banishers, but they aren't nearly as aggressive as most. The Cassidys don't have any interest in hunting down mages and killing them. They just want to defend their own little slice of land. Unfortunately, the sheer power of the Hallow in the valley means that mages visit more often than the Cassidys'd like.

The Cassidys believe, perhaps correctly, that the reason that the Hallow has such a pleasant effect on the area is that mages *aren't* tapping it for Mana every day and bleeding it dry. The Banishers never take Mana from the Hallow by oblation. Instead, Annabelle Cassidy brews a special tea using herbs from her garden. These herbs are, of course, tass, and the tea that the Cassidys imbibe daily keeps them hale, healthy and empowered.

When strange mages come to Venus Valley, the Cassidys follow two priorities. The first is to protect the Hallow. If they can't reasonably kill the interlopers without causing undue risk (say, if the mages are obviously on a mission from a Consilium and would be missed quickly), the Cassidys just try to keep the Hallow pure and drive the mages off as soon as possible. If the Cassidys *can* kill the strangers, though, they do, burying their bodies in the soft earth of the valley. The Banishers try to avoid using overly violent methods of murder. They much prefer poison or psychic attack, something that doesn't tip intent to the victim. They'd rather the victim not have any reason to linger after death, and not taint the area with unpleasant Resonance.

The Banishers

The only two members of the "cult" are Annabelle and Brad Cassidy. They are aware that other mages have a society of some sort, and might be able to name the orders, but have only the vaguest notion of how this society really functions. Their son, William, is a mage himself, but is a member of the Free Council and is not a Banisher, a fact about which the couple remains ignorant.

Annabelle Cassidy

Quote: *You really should walk down to the stream before you leave. It's quite beautiful. Very secluded, dear.*

Background: Annabelle was quite a hell-raiser in her youth. She protested the war, she attended Woodstock, she spent a lot of time out of her mind on drugs while in college. Annabelle developed a taste for sensation, and she was never afraid to follow it. Meeting up with a cabal of mages in the early '80s changed that. The mages weren't malicious, but they were a little too enamored of cocaine, and that clouded their judgment and played merry Hell with their magic. Annabelle barely walked out of that party alive.

While she wasn't quite sure what had happened, once Disbelief kicked in, the experience was enough

to calm her down somewhat. She was getting older, too, and wasn't quite as interested in running off to drug parties or all-night binges and so on. She met Brad Cassidy one pleasant night at an outdoor concert, and the two fell in love. They had a son together, and she got a job as a staff coordinator for the local school district.

It was when she entered labor with their second child that she saw Hell. The Abode of Demons sprang up around her, but all she could do was try and cope with the pains of childbirth. The creatures of the Realm swarmed around her, and she saw other mages, lost in the fugue of their own Awakenings, and she called to them. They couldn't hear, or they didn't listen, and her body began to shut down.

And suddenly, there was Brad. He'd said once that he'd follow her into Hell to protect her. He'd actually done it — but it was too late to save their child.

Neither used magic much in the ensuing years. They never tried to get pregnant again, and they never spoke of what they'd seen. And then they took a camping vacation in Venus Valley. As mages, even untrained, they saw what power the area held. They also saw a cabal of young mages carelessly draining the area of its magic. Annabelle, furious, attacked them, driving them mad and destroying their minds. She and Brad decided then that they would protect the area, and for more than a decade, that's what they've done.

Description: Annabelle was gorgeous in her younger years, and now nearing her 60th birthday, she's still a lovely woman. Her lustrous black hair has faded somewhat, and her skin isn't as smooth as once it was, but her smile is bright and vibrant.

Annabelle's nimbus is horrific, so much so that she never uses vulgar magic if she can possibly avoid it. Onlookers hear the sounds of Hell — the screams of the dying, the tearing sounds as the demons attack and, if they listen, the cries of a baby.

Storytelling Hints: Annabelle is passionate and caring, but losing her child hardened her more than she would ever admit. She hates mages because she considers them arrogant and short-sighted, but she remains adamant that she and her husband are good people. Yes, they kill mages, but only those who come to steal. Surely they have a right to protect their home?

Annabelle's youthful energy has mellowed into a playful innuendo, and she's not above skimming the surface thoughts of her (Sleeper) guests, the better to suggest ways to spend their vacation time. She is an unabashedly sexual person, but she is never crude or overt about it.



Dedicated Magical Tool: Empty brass picture frame (it would have held the first picture of their new baby)

Real Name: Annabelle Cassidy

Path: Mastigos

Order: None (Banisher)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 2, Crafts (Gardening) 3, Medicine 1, Occult 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Drive 1, Larceny (Sleight of Hand) 3, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Empathy (Relationships) 2, Expression 2, Persuasion 2, Socialize 3, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Contacts (Business Owners, Local Government, Police), Fame 1, Hallow (shared) 5, Resources 4, Retainers (Local Teens) 2, Sanctum: Venus Valley (Shared; Size 5, Security 3), Striking Looks 2

Willpower: 5

Wisdom: 5

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Gluttony

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 7

Gnosis: 3

Arcana: Mind 5, Prime 1, Space 2

Rotes: None.

Mana/per turn: 12/3

Armor: 5 ("Misperception," Mind ••)

Brad Cassidy

Quote: *Oh, dear. What's the missus been saying about me, now?*

Background: Brad Cassidy grew up in a large Irish American Catholic family, and worked at one job or another (paper route, mowing lawns and so on) from the time he was a child. He developed a somewhat compulsive personality — he had to be working on something, and had trouble relaxing. Unlike many of his brothers, he didn't turn to drinking to wind down. He turned to women, instead.

Brad does not, as far as he knows, have any illegitimate children, but he's had enough close calls to wonder. After a tearful breakup with a woman who had labored under the belief that Brad would settle down and marry her, he decided he needed to leave his hometown. He moved out of state and took work as a bartender, and found that he could have the thrill of meeting new people without going through the mess of sleeping with them. He learned to move in several different subcultures, and developed a reputation as "Father Brad" — people told him secrets, they told him about the horrible things they'd seen or done and they knew he'd keep it quiet. Brad learned enough about the dark corners of the World of Darkness (but always secondhand) to realize that something was going on. If he'd remained alone, he might have pursued it, and wound up dead under a vampire's fangs or at the end of a werewolf's claws. As it happened, he met Annabelle, and his passions went in a different direction.

The two completed each other perfectly. Both were passionate; both were looking for someone challenging

and honest. They had what Brad jokingly described as a “traditional lapsed Catholic wedding,” and they welcomed William into the world a few years later. When the time came to take Annabelle to the hospital to birth their second child, Brad watched her in labor, excited, but with a sense of calm. This was his life, and it was good.

And then his wife disappeared. The medical staff didn't notice, but Brad certainly did. He saw her vanish into a pit, a yawning chasm that opened on the bed beneath her. He heard the screams of the damned, and without a second thought, he jumped in after her. He swam through freezing, numbing and not-quite-empty blackness, and he finally reached her. He pulled her up again, past the souls who were too self-absorbed to see them, and back into the world. She was safe. Their child, however, was stillborn.

It wasn't until the Cassidys arrived at Venus Valley that Brad felt like himself again. The very air in the valley seemed to help him cope with the grief and terror he felt, and that night he slept soundly for the first time since his Awakening. And so when the careless young mages tried to take power from the area, threatening to destroy that peace... it's not so strange that Brad and Annabelle responded harshly.

Brad had saved up a great deal of money over the years, and between that and Annabelle's Mind magic, they purchased the land in the valley. It's paid off — Brad and Annabelle are millionaires. They don't go in for ostentatious displays, though. They just want to keep the valley safe.

Description: Brad is lean, fit and capable. Avoiding alcohol has served him well, as he hasn't had the problems with addiction and health complications that his father and brothers have faced. His dark hair has remained thick over the years, though it grays at the temples now. His hands are steady, and his careful, kind demeanor still compels people to tell him things that they wouldn't tell anyone else. Brad earns this trust — he has never in his life divulged something told to him in confidence (except to Annabelle, and he makes it clear that they don't keep secrets).

Brad's nimbus is sensual, but not overtly sexual (not usually, anyway). Onlookers feel gentle touches on their faces and hands, though if he uses magic for hostile purposes the touches are sharp and unpleasant.

Storytelling Hints: Brad would like nothing more than to spend the rest of his days in the valley, maintaining the cabins and taking care of the gardens. He understands *why* mages feel compelled to come

here, he just hates that they do, and hates that they feel the need to steal even more. He doesn't attend mass anymore, because he doesn't trust priests to keep confessions secret, but he does pray over the bodies of everyone he and his wife have killed. In his heart, he sometimes worries that some of their victims might, like him, have only Awakened out of love for another, and that thought gnaws at him.

Dedicated Magical Tool: Cheap brass symbol on a leather cord

Real Name: Bradley Michael Cassidy

Path: Mastigos

Order: None (Banisher)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Crafts (Carpentry) 3, Occult 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Drive 2, Firearms 1, Stealth 1, Survival 2



Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Empathy 4, Expression 2, Intimidation 1, Persuasion (Quiet Charm) 3, Socialize (Bartending) 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Barfly, Contacts (Business Owners, Local Government, Police), Fame 1, Hallow (shared) 5, Resources 4, Retainers (Local Teens) 2, Sanctum: Venus Valley (Shared; Size 5, Security 3), Strong Back

Willpower: 6

Wisdom: 5

Virtue: Temperance

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Health: 7

Gnosis: 2

Arcana: Life 3, Mind 1, Space 4

Rotes: None

Mana/per turn: 11/2

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Clip	Special	Dice Pool
Shotgun	4L	20/40/80	2	9-again	7

Armor: 4 ("Untouchable," Space ♂)

Lone Hunter

Simple Simon
Street Preacher

Quote: *God has a plan for all of us!*

Background: Simon was a business executive with a strong marriage and two children. He had a modest home in the suburbs and was well liked by his co-workers. He started losing this idyllic life on a family trip one rainy night. Police later told him that the drunk was traveling in excess of 100 mph when he struck Simon's car. By sheer chance, or the whim of God, Simon alone was spared in the accident that killed his children and his wife. Devastated, Simon began to drink heavily and showed up less and less frequently to work until they were forced to let him go. One by one, concerned family and friends were driven away by Simon's rage and grief, until he was left alone to wallow in his drunken misery.

When the bank foreclosed on his home, Simon refused all offers of help and moved into a cheap motel. When the last of his money ran out, Simon was evicted from his motel room and began sleeping on the streets, begging passersby for spare change. Years passed. Simon adapted to his new homeless life, and

he survived. Then, one morning, Simon's sleep was interrupted by the sounds of a struggle. Looking out into his alley from behind the Dumpster where he slept, Simon witnessed a mage battle. Because of the intensity of the fight (and the Sleeper witness present), as Simon watched, one mage attempted to cast a spell and suffered a Branding Paradox.

Simon Awakened as a result of the Paradox with a sickness in his soul. He assaulted and killed the mage who had suffered the Branding (the other mage had already retreated), convinced he was killing a demon in human form. After Simon had staggered away from the scene of his crime, he had plenty of time to reflect on what had just happened to him. His Awakening had produced clarity of thought in him that he hadn't experienced for years. He swore, then and there, never to drink again.

As he wandered the city, thinking, he passed a Catholic church that he regularly visited for food. Simon went into the church and asked to confess to a priest. Under the seal of confession, Simon told the priest what he had seen and done. Expecting the priest to express some sort of disbelief or outrage, Simon was surprised when the priest told him he, Simon, had done God's work that day. The priest gave Simon a piece of paper with an address on it and told him the people there would help him.

The address turned out to be a house for the faithful of the Opus Dei. Simon was welcomed into the house and given a simple cell and some clean clothing. Simon spent several months in the house praying for guidance and speaking with other visitors about God and His work for them. The laymen who ran the house also taught Simon their forms of discipline and when he was ready to leave, gifted him with a cilice.

This was the start of Simon's life as a street preacher. He wandered the streets of the city, haranguing people to return to God and offering to pray for them. He lived off the donations given to him and kept his eyes open for more demons disguised as men. At the end of one long day spent working the streets, when Simon gathered up his scarce belongings, he noticed something unusual in the lunch box he used to collect donations. Buried beneath the bills of various denominations was a large gold key. He picked it up and felt the power inside it call to him. Simon couldn't remember anyone dropping such an obvious item into his box and decided it was a gift from God. He strung the key on a chain and wore it around his neck.

Simon believed the stirring of magic within him to be God's Blessing and kept notes on his observations

about his new power. He accumulated a ratty pile of paper filled with his ramblings that served him as grimoire and journal. He hoped to someday pass on his wisdom and inquired at several shops about the price of having a small book run printed.

When he finally spotted another demon, Simon knew what God expected of him. Simon followed the mage to his apartment and confronted the man. A struggle ensued, and Simon was forced to kill the mage when he wouldn't admit to being a demon. This killing began a series of encounters with mages that eventually resulted in a citywide manhunt for Simon. The papers picked up the story and called him Simple Simon in the headlines. The police described him as a serial killer and spread pictures of him.



The Demons Amongst Us

As noted in his background, Simon sells copies of his book to people on the streets and to used bookstores. Anyone with a copy of his book can make an extended Intelligence + Occult roll after studying it. With at least 10 successes, the reader can puzzle out some real meaning hidden in the ramblings. Bits of fact that can be picked out include Simon's detailed description of the Abyss, information about St. Peter's Key, hints about rites devised by Simon and whatever else the Storyteller would like to add.

Storytellers who wish to use Simple Simon in their chronicles could allow players to find a copy of his book before actually encountering Simon. The book, along with other types of research about Simon himself, can provide an element of foreshadowing to the chronicle and can induce some paranoia in player characters at the thought of a known Banisher running loose in their city.

Simon was forced into hiding, but refused to leave the city with his work unfinished. He knew there was a single remaining survivor of the band of demons still alive. The survivor was placed under heavy police protection, and when Simon finally managed to track her down and kill her, he was himself shot and killed by police.

Shortly after his "death," Simon's body disappeared from the city morgue, and his writings vanished from the evidence locker. A small print run of *The Demons Amongst Us*, written by Simon Barnes, appeared in several secondhand book shops around the city. Police were reluctant to put out an APB for a dead man and ruled it a case of imitation (book) and theft (body and writings).

Simon had, in fact, survived, but not even he was sure how. He remembers being shot by police, then waking up in the morgue just before an autopsy. Simon managed to retrieve his writings and escape from the city, after commissioning the print run of his book. Since this experience, Simon is even more dedicated to his cause, believing God raised him from the dead, like Lazarus, to continue his mission.

Description: Years of hard drinking and life on the streets have left an impression on Simon's appearance. His face is craggy, and his pale blue eyes seem slightly

watery. Simon stands a modest five foot six and has brown hair that is turning to gray at the temples. He dresses in the best clothing he can find at thrift shops and hawks copies of his book to people on the street, where he continues his ministry and his mission.

Simon's nimbus is the feeling of a cold shiver running up your spine. He has managed to stay off the booze and still wears his cilice nearly everyday.

Storytelling Hints: Simon comes across as genial and somewhat eccentric most of the time. He believes he finally understands why God took his family from him and knows they await him in Heaven. When at "work," he is very sincere in his attempts to save people from themselves. As an opponent, he is dogged and seems tireless. Simon won't back down from overwhelming odds, but he won't charge in headfirst either.

Real Name: Simon Barnes

Path: Obrimos

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 1, Crafts 2, Investigation (Unusual Occurrences) 4, Occult 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Street Fighting) 4, Firearms (Pistols) 4, Stealth 3, Survival (Urban) 4, Weaponry 3

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression 3 (Proselytize), Persuasion 3, Socialize 2, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge (Disguise) 3

Merits: Artifact 10 (St. Peter's Key), Eidetic Memory, Enhanced Item 3 (.44 Magnum; persistent equipment bonus +3), High Speech, Quick Draw, Quick Healer

Willpower: 8

Wisdom: 5

Derangements: Depression (mild)

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 7

Gnosis: 3

Arcana: Forces 3, Life 2, Prime 5, Space 2, Time 2

Notes: *Forces* – Unseen Shield (●●); *Life* – Body Control (●●), Self-Healing (●●); *Prime* – Inscribe Grimoire (●), Supernal Vision (●), Magic Shield (●●), Transform Aura (●●), Imbue Item (●●●), Price of Hubris (●●●), Curse of the Fallen World (●●●●), Supernal Dispellation (●●●●); *Space* – Conceal Sympathy (●●), Scrying (●●); *Time* – Postcognition (●●), Shield of Chronos (●●)

Mana/per turn: 12/3

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
.44 Magnum	3	1	Imbued Item	13

Armor: 3 ("Unseen Shield," Forces 3)





CHAPTER FOUR: WIELDING THE WITCH-HAMMER

Simon Barnes woke up in a dirty alley to the sound of a strange high whine. Rousing himself, he peered around the Dumpster he had passed out behind just in time to see a well-dressed woman throw a ball of incandescent energy at a fleeing man. As Simon shook his head, trying to blink away the unbelievable sight, the ball of energy vanished mid-flight, and the woman screamed. Blood gushed from her fingertips, forming strange patterns where it collected in the cracks of the broken cement, as black talons erupted from her fingers.

Simon closed his eyes against the sight, the last vestiges of the cheap whisky burning away in his fear. He felt light-headed and tingly, like his whole body had fallen asleep, like it had shut down to let his mind process the thoughts pounding through his head. Simon opened his eyes, expecting to find himself lying on the ground in a dead faint. He was — but he was astonished to see it dwindling quickly away below him. His soul had come untethered from his body and was soaring toward the heavens.

At first, Simon glorified in the feeling of flight. So much better than any drunk or high he'd ever experienced — this was real, true freedom, absolute contentment as he looked down on the Earth and saw that it was good. But as he passed beyond the Earth, the first note of discord sounded in his soul. Now he was flying over a great inky void. And things lived in that void. He saw them, knew they saw him as well, knew they hungered for his flesh, hungered for his reality.

His flight faltered and stopped. Simon looked at the universe and saw that it was broken. The things in the void chuckled obscenely at his dismay and clawed at him with bloody talons. His mind snapped.

"Back, demons!" Simon cried. "In the name of God, I command you back!"

A flash of white light in the dark of the void, a scream, and then Simon was falling back to Earth, back to his body.

His consciousness slammed back into his body. No time had passed. He gaped at the talons protruding from the woman's fingers.

"*Deamon,*" something whispered in his head.

He had to do something.

When he staggered out of the alley, covered in the blood of a woman, it seemed somehow appropriate.

Fear is the beginning of wisdom.
—William Tecumseh Sherman

Mage: The Awakening is a game of magical curiosity and wonder, in which the protagonists work miracles and shape their destinies. The stories of Banishers are stories about the denial of all that wonder. The Banishers aren't interested in miracles, destiny or the glories of mystical power. For a Banisher, magic is a curse, and mages are the perpetrators.

According to the lore of the Timori, the world and the Supernal Realms were created as a perfect whole. The workings of one complemented the workings of the other. The natural order of the world is harmony and balance, in which every inhabitant, human to insect, knows its place and plays its role. When mages stepped outside of the natural order by learning magic, the harmony was muted, and when mages sundered the worlds, the balance was shattered.

Banishers seek, even unconsciously, to repair the balance and mend the worlds. Unfortunately, when Banishers Awaken the first thing they witness is the horror of the Fallen World, and they instinctively blame this horror on mages. Banishers have misinterpreted their role in the natural order, partially through ignorance and partially through mental disquiet. What Banishers fail to see is that the solution to the problem of the sundered cosmos isn't as simple as the destruction of magic. Magic played a part in the destruction of the natural order and must play a part restoring it.

Banishers who understand this truth become more selective in their assassinations. While the majority of mages *do* continue to upset the balance of the world with their games of power, there are a few mages who labor to heal the gaping wound of the Abyss. This minority of mages works toward the same end as the Banishers, and the Banishers are foolish to destroy such valuable assets.

This section presents rules and ideas for portraying the type of Banisher who has come to understand how the natural order might be restored. This material can be used for more elaborate Storyteller-controlled antagonists and, if the players and Storyteller are willing, also as a possibility for using Banishers as player characters. The latter option certainly isn't for every group, but it may make for an interesting change of pace, or as an exploration of the darker side of **Mage**. In any event, hopefully the material here will open up new avenues for your stories.

Mages in Black Hats

Let's be honest from the start. Banishers are not the good guys. Every Banisher cell, cult and cabal is as much a terrorist organization as anything else. Banishers claim a higher moral responsibility for their actions that transcend notions of right and wrong. If Banishers conclude that the only way to kill a cabal of order mages is by destroying an entire city block, Banishers will not hesitate to do so. Loss of innocent lives as a result of Banisher actions is periodically waved away as being for the greater good.

Regardless of those truths, portraying Banishers only as mindless zealots does them a disservice. They are more complex an idea than simply mages in black hats. Every Banisher has a story. Every Banisher had a life, dreams and maybe a family before she Awakened to the horror of her current existence. Banishers commit the atrocities they are guilty of because they truly *believe that* what they are doing is right. As has been said before, the difference between a freedom fighter and a terrorist depends on your point of view.

Other than a deeper understanding of the problems confronting them, a Banisher under player control should be different from your "average" Banisher in other ways. Most Banishers use a hammer in situations where a scalpel would work just as well. Typical Banishers are happy to target anyone or anything associated with order mages. These types of Banishers fight what military scholars call total war — using any and all resources not just to target enemy soldiers but to destroy an enemy's capacity to make war. Banishers who fight this kind of war are often short-lived, particularly if their compulsions drive them to strike at targets whenever an opportunity arises rather than prioritizing. Unfortunately, those least interested in self-preservation tend to drag many others down with them.

Recurring Banisher characters, whether player-controlled or longer-lived antagonists, owe their survival to the adoption of a bit more finesse. They identify how a mage is affecting the grand scheme of things before launching an offensive. They frequently take into consideration the effects of such variables as the cabal of a mage, the Consilium the mage has to deal with and even the Sleeper associates of the mage. If the witch-hunters believe a given target might

actually do their cause good instead of harm, given a little selective pruning of a few branches that surround the target, the Banishers may make that their objective.

Playing in a Banisher chronicle is a much darker experience than most **Mage** games. Characters will be strongly tempted to act in ways that are decidedly callous or cruel to complete their missions, and it's the sort of game in which the Storyteller shouldn't prevent them from giving in to that temptation. The balance slips further away from natural order with every day that passes, which doesn't leave the characters with much time for half-measures. Clarity of purpose and expediency in action are the watchwords of the characters. If the characters really need to get a source of information to talk, torture is a time-proven method of quick extraction. Mages who further the slide of the world into chaos must be killed. Banisher player characters needn't act with casual brutality, though. They may be capable of walking a line between what is necessary and what is easy. Every action should have a purpose, every misery inflicted a cause. That's the ideal, at any rate. Most Banishers fall very, very short of that.

Magic

Banishers have an interesting relationship with the magic they wield. During their Awakening, Banishers connect briefly with a greater world and touch the Supernal Realms. That glimpse into the cosmos is terrifying and seductive to the Banishers. The Supernal felt strangely comfortable to them, and the sensations they felt there were strong and pure. With the Abyss separating them from the Supernal, the only way Banishers have to relive the sensations they experienced is by using magic. Their longing for the Supernal causes an internal conflict when set against the knowledge that it was magic that upset the natural order.

When a Banisher casts a spell, he feels equal parts guilt and elation. Pentacle mages may use small magics in their daily lives with no sense of wrongdoing. Banishers fear magic too much to use it in such a casual fashion, yet they can feel in their souls that they would love nothing more than to surround themselves with the feel of the Supernal.

Magical Repositories: Artifacts, Enhanced and Imbued Items

According to the more philosophical Banishers, everyday materials that have had their Patterns infused with magic are prime examples of magic gone wrong. Some believe that every item that is reinforced with magic pushes the cosmos further out of alignment. By taking ambient magical energy and forcing it into a static form, a mage causes a greater imbalance in the natural order. Therefore, it is standard procedure for Banishers to destroy Enchanted Items whenever they find them. Depending on the inherent mystical power of the author, grimoires can also fall into this category. Banishers are certain that by destroying

such items, they release the magical energy stored within and return that energy to its proper place.

Banishers also believe that destroying Artifacts provides a special boost in returning magic to the Fallen World. Because many Artifacts were made in the Supernal Realms, the destruction of one of these items looses a purer form of magic into the Pattern of the world. They theorize that if the number of harmful mages was reduced by a serious margin, the destruction of every Artifact might release enough energy into the world to heal the cosmos or at least to reduce the size of the Abyss.

So why, then, do some Banishers keep Artifacts and the like?

For some Banishers, their reasoning for keeping an item that should be destroyed is pretty obtuse. Captured Artifacts, especially, are frequently kept as trophies by the Banisher who stole them. Some items just seem too useful to destroy, and the Banisher always promises himself he get rid of it eventually. In the case of Banisher player characters, the ownership of magical items should cause some raised eyebrows among his peers. The character should be ready to defend his possession of the item with solid arguments. In truth, the character may not really know why he has kept the item as long as he

Magical Vice

Whenever a character finds or loots an Artifact, Enhanced Item or imbued item that calls to the character's Vice, he suffers an internal conflict over the fate of the item. If the item has a Merit rating higher than the character's permanent Willpower, the Storyteller may find it appropriate to require the character to succeed at a Resolve + Composure roll to destroy the item rather than keep it for himself. Magical Vice represents the paradoxical nature of the Banishers. They hate and fear magic, while simultaneously suffering a secret longing for the feel of the Supernal. If the character fails the roll, he may regain a point of Willpower for giving in to his Vice, and he must attempt to take possession of the item.

As an example, items that provoke the Magical Vice response for Envy are items the character already possesses, but are better, *shinier*. Say a character is inordinately proud of his computer. He spends far too much time messing with it and can almost constantly be found in front of it. If the character were to encounter a computer that was magically enhanced, he would have to roll Resolve + Composure to overcome his envy of the new, better toy in front of him and not take and keep it for his own.

has, but is still unwilling to destroy it. In game terms, this is referred to as a Magical Vice (see sidebar).

In the specific case of grimoires, Banishers are forced to make a difficult decision. If they simply destroy the grimoire, they are decreasing the chances of another mage finding it and making use of the dangerous knowledge the grimoire contains. If they keep the grimoire for personal use, are they contributing to world decline? Often the information contained within a grimoire will be the deciding factor in whether it is destroyed or not. If the grimoire is simply a listing of rote and spells, Banishers will probably destroy it. If it contains other information that could be useful to the Banisher, such as the true names of order mages, the grimoire is more likely to survive.

Playing as Banishers

Good Banisher stories should be more about making difficult decisions, and living with the consequences of those decisions, than about killing mages. Certainly a Banisher chronicle can be run as a sort of hack-and-slash fest with order mages as the victims, but by doing so you miss out on a good portion of the potential for roleplaying that a Banisher chronicle presents. Banisher characters are complex individuals. A very short time ago, most Banishers were living ordinary lives, completely unaware of the greater truths of the world around them. Then, through no doing of their own, they were thrust into a life-or-death struggle for the fate of the world. The stories involving Banishers should reflect the changes a regular person would undergo when placed in this position, even when Banishers appear only as antagonists.

Mood

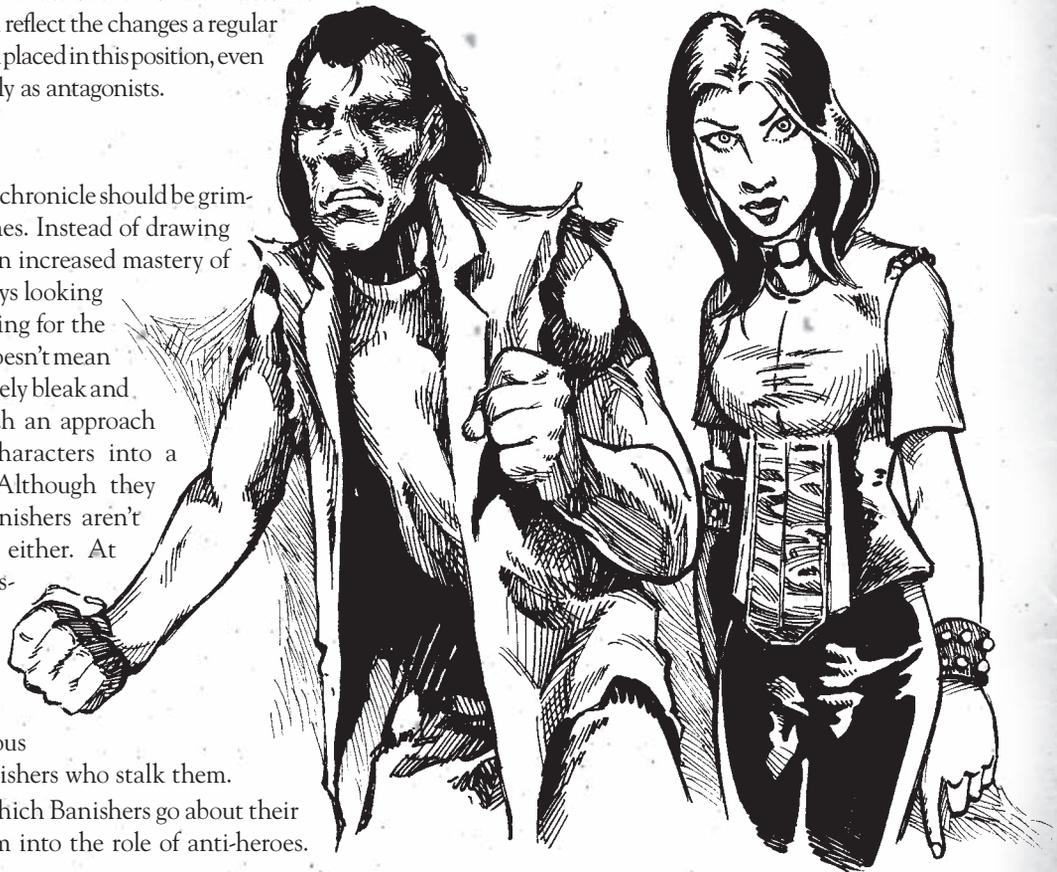
The mood of a Banisher chronicle should be grimmer than most **Mage** games. Instead of drawing pleasure and pride from an increased mastery of magic, Banishers are always looking over their shoulders, waiting for the other shoe to drop. That doesn't mean a chronicle should be entirely bleak and foreboding, however. Such an approach would force Banisher characters into a one-dimensional mold. Although they aren't the good guys, Banishers aren't necessarily the villains, either. At the very least, it's very possible for them to run into mages—be they Scelesti or Pentacle mages—who are considerably more indiscriminately murderous and callous than the Banishers who stalk them.

It is in the manner in which Banishers go about their business that pushes them into the role of anti-heroes.

Murder, torture and violence aren't socially acceptable methods of dealing with your enemies in most civilized cultures, but other media have certainly explored the question of when hideous means may be put to "nobler" ends. Examples of anti-heroes in fiction consist of characters such as V from *V for Vendetta*, Thomas Covenant the Unbeliever and Sam Spade. Roger Zelazny's *A Night in the Lonesome October* actually casts Jack the Ripper in the role of attempting to protect the world from unbidden horrors by doing his gruesome work — a very Banisher concept.

Theme

A continuing theme of any Banisher chronicle is that of choice and consequence. Characters are repeatedly placed in situations in which they must make judgment calls based on sketchy information. What is right and what is wrong are often difficult to determine. The characters might learn that by killing the local Hierarch they can stop a dangerous magical experiment before it gets started. The characters also know that this mage is the sole breadwinner for his family and that he gives freely of his time and money to various charities. The short-term consequences caused by the death of the Hierarch *will* negatively affect hundreds of people, but the long-term consequences of allowing him to live *could* affect millions. Further, what if the characters are wrong in their assumptions about the magical experiment? This is the sort of decision that should confront Banisher characters.



Storytellers should never make it too easy for Banisher characters to justify their actions. It might be tempting to portray order mages as arrogant, mustache-twirling villains, but that should rarely be the case (unless indulging in a rather more action-movie themed take on hunting supernatural enemies). Rather than just presenting an anonymous mage to be killed, give that mage a story. As the cabal hunts the mage, give the members insights into the character of that mage that make him a real person. The act of murdering another human being is highly personal; the Storyteller should strive to create mage antagonists that the Banishers as well as the players can relate to.

Banisher Cabals

Most Banisher cabals form out of necessity rather than a shared sense of purpose. Close proximity with other mages, of any type, causes a deep unease in the Banisher psyche. Banisher cabals fall into two categories: temporary and fixed.

- **Temporary:** This type of cabal forms when Banishers bump into each other during the hunt for the same target. After the initial confrontation is resolved, the Banishers fall into an uneasy alliance for just long enough to complete their goals. Trust is a precious commodity in this type of cabal and is rarely present. One way to think about these sorts of alliances is to picture two soldiers from rival armies faced with a common enemy. Any two reasonable people placed in this situation will work together to ensure their own survival. Once the common enemy is destroyed, though, the partnership has served its purpose and is dissolved.

From a player perspective, this type of cabal works well for one-shot or short-duration chronicles. Feelings of paranoia and the possibility of betrayal from within the group should be played up. Players should always wonder about the true motivations of their comrades. Tension levels should increase as the cabal nears its goal, and group infighting should be expected. By passing notes to players, or taking them aside to impart information one-on-one, Storytellers can help to increase the atmosphere of mistrust. A Storyteller might even allow one player to play an order mage sent to infiltrate and disrupt the Banisher cabal.

- **Fixed:** These cabals may form out of a successful temporary partnership, or the characters might have known each other before they Awakened. Whatever the reason, the characters in a fixed cabal have gained a level of comfort with each other that allows them to work together. Even though they have managed to find ways to work together, the members of the cabal are still unlikely to be best buddies. The ability to work with a group to right the wrongs of the world only does so much to mask the discomfort Banishers feel by being around each other.

Only after long association, through shared trial and tribulation, do Banisher cabals form the sort of camaraderie known to soldiers around the world. The trust formed as a result of dangers overcome, of knowing you can depend on

the person behind you to watch your back, creates a different sort of friendship from what is experienced by civilians. Sure, that guy in your cabal may need a shower and have the mental wattage of a shattered bulb, but he's saved your ass and you've saved his. This type of bond has a special magic of its own and is enough to allow the Banishers to overcome their natural distrust of other mages.

The fixed cabal forms the base of any long-term chronicle. The group gels more over time and begins to spin stories of their own from the interactions of the cabal. Questions such as, "Who is in charge? What the hell were you thinking?" and "Who drank the last beer?" all combine to bring a life of its own to the group. At the most basic level, Banishers are just regular people with distasteful jobs. Playing up everyday life to reinforce this idea is encouraged.

Antagonists

The worldview of the Banishers usually registers in stark black-and-white. Either you are with them or you are against them. Allies are difficult to find, even among other non-mage supernatural beings, and Banishers are so paranoid that they find it difficult to trust each other, let alone a bloodsucking fiend. Most Banisher stories revolve around conflict of some sort, either metaphorically or literally.

Order Mages

The majority of the enemies faced by Banishers consists of order mages. There are simply more order mages than any other type of mage. Order mages practice magic in ways the Banishers find unacceptable, and in return, order mages find the slaughter of their own by Banishers unacceptable. Both sides are responsible for atrocities committed against the other, and neither side is likely to suddenly change their point of view. Humans being the curious animals that we are, though, both sides have taken prisoners to question them about their habits. This has led to some greater understanding of the opposition, but this information is most often used solely for offensive purposes.

Very rarely, an order mage defects to the Banishers. Defectors are almost never fully trusted by other Banishers, possibly because defectors lack the instinctive methods of communication possessed by natural Banishers. Paranoia also plays a large role in Banisher distrust of a defector. Even if Banishers have the means available to them to search the mind of a defector for duplicity, Banishers can never really be certain that the traitor wasn't sent to infiltrate their ranks.

Seers of the Throne

No two groups of mages are more diametrically opposed than the Banishers and the Seers of the Throne. Even more than order mages, Seers epitomize everything that is wrong about mages and magic. Those Banishers who've learned the nature of the Seers view them as little more

than boot-licking dogs with a thirst for personal power or at least, they would be little more than that if not for their magical ability. That ability makes them possibly the most dangerous human beings alive. Seers provoke even the most reasonable Banishers into acts of cruelty and hatred that dwarf the most violent actions taken against other mages. The Banisher mind is unable to fathom how anyone could venerate the hubris that led to the Fallen World. They can understand well enough the desire to experience the Supernal Realms again, but simply cannot comprehend why any mage would choose to serve the Exarchs.

In the city of Montreal, when a powerful Seer cabal seemed on the verge of breaching the Abyss to communicate directly with their dread masters, Banisher agents actually contacted the local Consilium, under a banner of truce. In one of the very few instances of co-operation between Banisher and order mages since the fall of the Celestial Ladder, the two groups systematically hunted down and killed every Seer in the city. Only the shared threat posed by the Exarchs made this possible, and as soon as the Seers were destroyed, the Banishers returned to hunting order mages and vice versa. Mages on both sides were saddened by the return to the status quo, and a few maintain secret contact with each other.

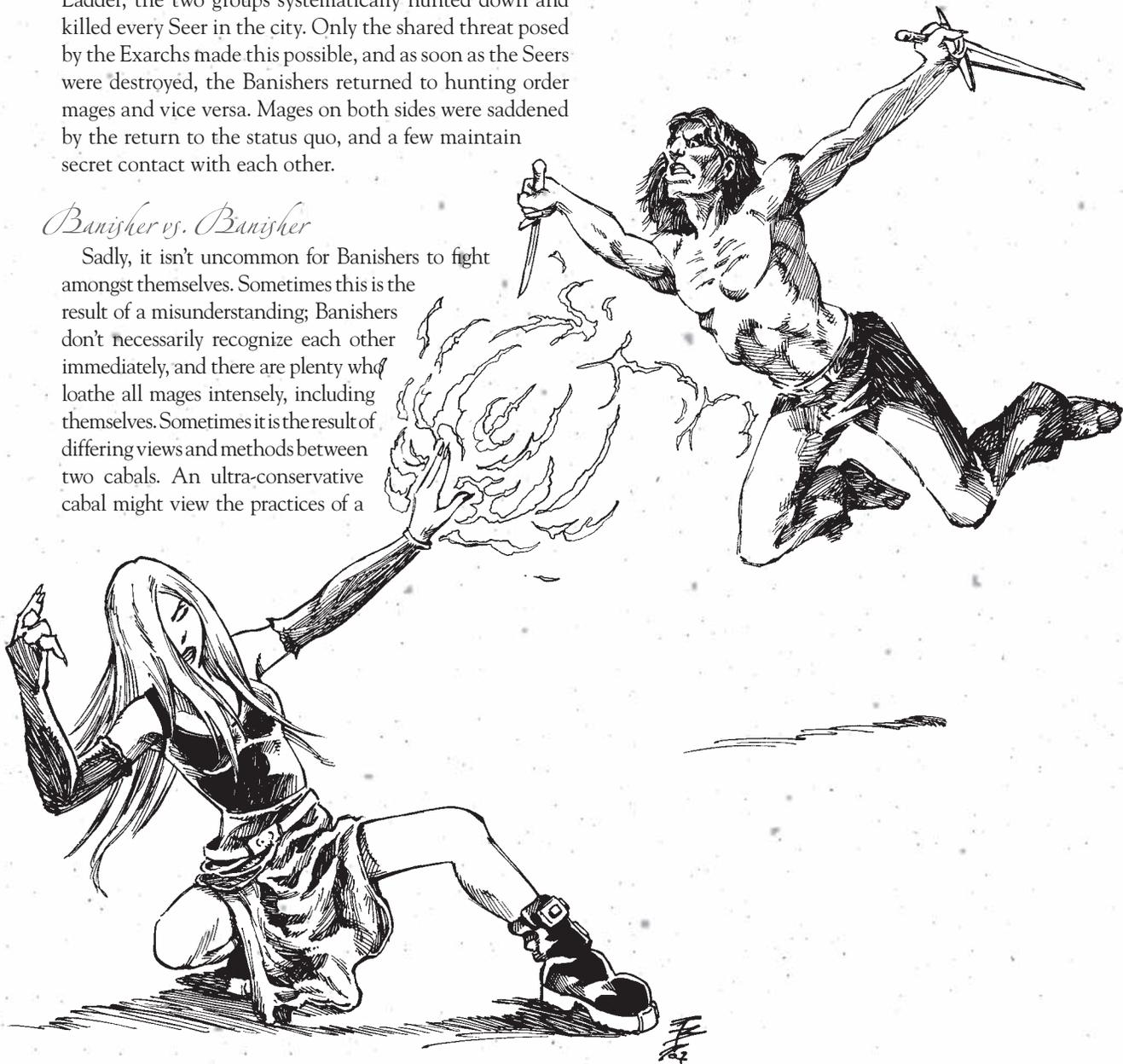
Banisher vs. Banisher

Sadly, it isn't uncommon for Banishers to fight amongst themselves. Sometimes this is the result of a misunderstanding; Banishers don't necessarily recognize each other immediately, and there are plenty who loathe all mages intensely, including themselves. Sometimes it is the result of differing views and methods between two cabals. An ultra-conservative cabal might view the practices of a

more radical cabal as akin to heresy. If the two cabals can't solve their differences peaceably, or if no one attempts to, the cabals declare war on each other. Battles between Banisher cabals are ugly and short. Mercy is rarely asked for, or given, and in the end only one cabal will survive.

The Others

Not every Banisher chronicle needs to be about the battle between the Banishers and other mages. There are plenty of other unnatural beings present in the World of Darkness that can cause problems for the characters. Vampires, werewolves, Prometheans and changelings all have special kinds of "magic" of their own. It wouldn't be out of character for a Banisher cabal to decide that these other beings are contributing to the downfall of the natural order and add them to the Banishers' list of targets.



Creating Banishers

Banisher characters are created using the regular Mage rules, but necessitate a different style of approach. Consideration must be given to the peculiarities of the Banisher condition. Aspects of character creations, such as the prelude, take on very different overtones for Banisher characters. Chapter One details many of the adjustments made to the character creation process (beginning on p. 35); some additional material for further roleplaying fodder can be found here.

Question and Answer

When creating any character, it is helpful to know some basic facts about the character before you begin filling in dots and selecting rites or Merits. In addition to some of the questions presented in **Mage: The Awakening**, answering the following questions can add some extra focus to the personality of a Banisher.

- **Who were you?**

Banishers undergo even more drastic changes in thought and behavior after Awakening than other mages. Who were you before Awakening? Did you have a family, a job, hobbies?

- **Who have you become?**

After you Awakened, how much of your old life were you still able to maintain? How has your personality changed? Do you think of these changes as for better or for worse?

- **How did you Awaken as a Banisher?**

Not every mage Awakens as a result of the same stimuli, and Banisher mages are no exception. Did you Awaken as the result of witnessing a Paradox? Did you fail your tests in a Watchtower and become a Banisher out of spite? Did you witness the horror of the Abyss and turn back on your journey to the Supernal Realms?

- **How do you feel about magic? Other mages?**

Every Banisher feels differently about the magic that possesses them. They all fear it in some way, but different Banishers have different problems. Do you fear the power it gives you? Do you hate magic because it changed your life? Do you look on other mages with pity? Fear? Rage? Something else?

- **What are your goals?**

What motivates you? Is it a desire for revenge? Hope for the future? Fear?

Merits

Obviously, most Banishers aren't going to have access to the same sort of resources enjoyed by order mages. Presented below are some ideas about how a player or Storyteller might translate various mage Merits through the Banisher filter.

Other Merits for Banishers (and often for Banishers only) are listed in Chapter One, pp. 39–43.

Destiny

History is littered with the names of individuals who left their mark on the world through destruction and negation, even if such achievements were allegedly in the name of building something better. A Banisher's Destiny is almost always one of these: marked to remove something immense from the world, and to change the world by that act of obliteration. A Banisher with a Destiny tied to creation may not be destined to end his days on the path of the Timori.

Dream

The Dream Merit can be interpreted by Banishers in a variety of ways. They might believe they are being sent messages from God (or another greater power), they might believe their dreams represent their unconscious mind at work or they might feel their dreams are a kind of curse. In the last case, a Banisher probably treats his dreams as a symptom of the disease of magic and tries to repress them. Whatever the reasoning, the prophetic dream experience is unlikely to be a comfortable one for a Banisher.

Hallows

Hallows represent the natural order of magic appearing in the world, but are no more comfortable for Banishers to visit for all of that. Banishers view Hallows sort of like the calcium deposits of the world. When too much magic builds up in one place, the raw essence of power begins to bleed off into the atmosphere to balance the area. Visiting a Hallow is also the ultimate form of temptation for Banishers. Hallows are among the few places on Earth that echo the glories of the Supernal Realm. The temptation to give in to the magic, to wallow in it like order mages, is very great for a Banisher at a Hallow. For these reasons, Banishers who claim a Hallow visit it as little as possible. Another possibility for a Banisher cabal with the Hallow Merit is that they use it as a lure for order mages.

High Speech

It is possible to learn High Speech without a teacher. Some mages find they have a natural affinity with the language, and a few Banishers prove to possess that ability. The ability to speak and use High Speech can travel almost like a virus through a Banisher cabal. Many Banishers have no ethical dilemma with using High Speech, especially if they understand it instinctively. Other Banishers, Simple Simon for example, don't recognize High Speech as the language of Atlantis and believe they are speaking in tongues.

Note that Banishers don't automatically gain High Speech as a free Merit as other mages. For more details, see p. 39.

Library

The occult texts gathered by a Banisher are likely to be spoils of victory or random finds in secondhand bookstores, rather than gifts or leavings from other mages. Studying these texts is something of a guilty pleasure for most Banishers, to be rationalized by the axiom of knowledge is power. A Banisher who belongs to a cabal might have to justify his reasons for keeping the works of the enemy rather than burning them.

Sleepwalker Retainer

Sleepwalker assistants are perhaps even more treasured by Banishers than by other mages. A Sleepwalker requires no additional magic or enchantments to assist in the prosecution of order mages. Sleepwalkers are more difficult to spot than Banishers themselves and don't disrupt the magic of their master when confronting a mage. Banishers may go to great lengths to woo a Sleepwalker into their service.

Status

Status is a two-edged sword for Banishers. On the one hand, remaining unknown and striking with the benefit of surprise presents the best chance of survival for most Banishers. On the other hand, a famous Banisher might attract a cult following, and there is strength in numbers. Status should come with consequences for a Banisher.

The equivalent of Order Status for Banishers is Status in a specific cult or cabal. Status 1 indicates the Banisher is a known and trusted agent, while Status 5 makes the Banisher the leader or most prominent figure of the cult or cabal.

Thrall

This is a complex Merit for Banisher characters. Banishers are unlikely to make their own soul stones, so any soul stone controlled probably belongs to an order mage. The power over another mage that comes with controlling her soul stone is very nebulous. In the end, this Merit comes down to story considerations and should be discussed between the Storyteller and player. Just as many of the other mage Merits, the character should have a compelling reason as to why he hasn't simply destroyed the soul stone.

Atonements

Most people have some sort of routine they follow every day. It might be a morning cup of coffee while reading the paper or kicking back to play a video game after a hard day at work. Humans are creatures of habit, especially when those habits bring a measure of control to their lives. Banishers are no different from Sleepers in their need to exert control over some aspect of their lives. But, unlike Sleepers, Banishers live every day, every hour, with a mystical power inside them that they hate and fear. Their lives are punctuated by the horrors they commit on others to leech

the Fallen World of the poison that is magic. Because of these differences, the daily routines of Banishers take on a more weighty significance.

The most significant actions taken by Banishers to establish control and equilibrium in their lives are atonements. Many Banishers (who aren't immediately killed or driven insane by their new powers) find some way to atone for their use of magic and for the violence they commit toward others. Many Banishers perform atonement unconsciously by acquiring a habit that brings them comfort or by behaving in some way that just feels right. A Banisher who was a heavy drinker as a Sleeper might not be able to explain why he took the Pledge after Awakening. He just knows it felt right to do so.

Banishers who realize that their acts of contrition help them to maintain a relatively stable mental balance are fanatical about performing them. This type of Banisher was frequently an intensely religious or spiritual person before Awakening and sees atonements as an extension of her faith. Such Banishers believe their actions are guided by a greater power and perceive their atonements as veneration and absolution. This practice is obviously not absolute to all Banishers, but it may add a certain extra element of zealous fanaticism in a situation in which such a theme would quite appropriate for witch-hunters.

Major Atonements

Major atonements represent daily, nearly daily or long-term acts of contrition that serve as a serious counterbalance to the wrongs (real and imagined) committed by a Banisher. A Banisher who rigorously adheres to the demands of her chosen major atonement may roll Resolve + Composure once per session. Keep a written tally of successes rolled. When the total number of successes gained is greater than the Banisher's current Wisdom score x 2, the Banisher may claim to have fulfilled a major atonement. As a result of her dedication, she may raise her Wisdom score by one dot for the reduced experience point cost of new dots x 2.

Banishers may change the focus of their major atonement at any time, but any successes gained from their previous major atonement are lost when Banishers switch. Only Banishers with a Wisdom score of 6 or less may benefit from the reduced experience point cost associated with adherence to a major atonement. Atonement is a way to cope with the frequently precipitous loss of Wisdom that accompanies a Banisher's methodology; it makes it easier to amend mistakes, but it provides no enlightenment on its own.

Example: Simple Simon's current Wisdom score is 4. He wears a cilice every day as his act of atonement. Once Simple Simon has gained nine successes, he may raise his Wisdom to 5 by spending 10 experience points.

The downside of using a major atonement to increase Wisdom is that any derangement gained when the Wisdom was originally lost is not erased from the character sheet when



Wisdom is brought back up. The act of atoning for perceived and actual wrongdoing differs dramatically from the intense personal scrutiny and soul searching that usually go hand in hand with an increase in Wisdom. Atonement places the weight of sin, even unconsciously, in the metaphorical hands of some greater being or ideal rather than in personal accountability and recognition of errors made. In short, the act of atonement provides a sort of mental balance for Banishers, rather than the type of closure that leads to relief from the psychological scars inflicted on themselves as a result of their actions. For a Banisher to truly heal, she would have to stare directly into her own soul without leaning on a psychological crutch.

Minor Atonements

Minor atonements are one-time or short duration acts of contrition that act as a reminder to a Banisher that they are more than the base matter from which they are made. By reinforcing in their psyches the ideals and purpose of their society and beliefs, Banishers aid themselves in overcoming psychological trauma that might threaten their goals. A Banisher who has performed a minor atonement in the last week gains a +2 dice bonus, once per session, to any Resolve + Composure roll to resist behavior brought on by a derangement.

The atonements presented below are broken down into the two broad categories of corporal mortification and vows. Examples are provided for each type of atonement, including major and minor atonements in each category. The lists that follow are in no way meant to be comprehensive. Players and Storytellers are encouraged to design their own unique forms of atonement, perhaps inspired by the Banisher's cultural background, perhaps devised by the twisted imagination of a mage wracked with self-loathing.

Corporal Mortification

Corporal mortification translates as “putting the flesh to death.” These are acts that deny the pleasures of the flesh to gain the enlightenment of the spirit. When performed by Banishers, corporal mortification provides a measure of relief, through pain and dedication, for the feelings of guilt suffered as a result of their work to rid the world of mages and magic.

Major Atonements

Cilice: The modern cilice is a spiked metal chain worn strapped tight around the upper thigh. Unlike some popular movie depictions, the cilice is not actually tightened to the point that it causes blood loss or cuts into the flesh of the wearer. The cilice should be tight enough to be uncomfortable and, at the worst, might give the wearer the feeling of fingernails digging into his skin. Worn daily, the cilice will chafe and eventually lead to callous buildup in the area in which the cilice is worn. When this occurs, serious penitents will switch the cilice to the other thigh. In game terms, the cliché causes no damage but imposes a -2 dice penalty to any actions that might be

hindered by wearing the cilice (long distance running, climbing or kung fu maneuvers, for example). Wearing a cilice for only a day or two can be considered a minor atonement.

Devotional Crucifixion: An extreme act of faith, this atonement is generally found only among certain Christians and followers of other religions that believe in the wounded god archetype. In the Christian-specific case, this atonement is typically performed by duplicating the wounds of Christ on the cross. The supplicant drives a nail through the palm of her hand and then removes the nail, leaving a bloody hole. Most practitioners of this rite choose to mutilate their off-hand, but the most devout pound holes through both hands and sometimes through their feet as well.

This type of atonement is repeated only once the self-inflicted wound has healed (see p. 175 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for healing times). The Banisher is still considered to be following a major atonement during the healing process. When a character performs a devotional crucifixion, he rolls Intelligence + Medicine to properly align the nail so that as it is driven through the hand the nail doesn't accidentally break bones as well as flesh. If the roll succeeds, the character takes one point of lethal damage and suffers a -2 dice penalty on any rolls that would require use of that hand. If the roll is failed, the character suffers one point of aggravated damage, and the dice penalty is increased to -4. If the character rolls a dramatic failure, the hand may be permanently crippled. The character suffers the penalties associated with failing the roll and gains the One Arm Flaw (see p. 219 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), though this condition may be treatable with the proper physical therapy.

Flagellation: The act of flagellation can be as simple or complex as the penitent who performs it. The time-honored method is to beat one's chest and back with either a leather strap or an actual scourge. In general, any method of causing self-inflicted pain with a device or instrument dedicated to that task can be considered scourging. Common devices used for flagellation include whips, rods, lashes, knouts as well as a variety of natural implements such as birch branches and bamboo canes.

To derive a major atonement from flagellation, a Banisher must cause actual damage to himself on a regular basis. Either one point of lethal damage or five points of bashing damage must be self-inflicted at least every other day. Flagellation used infrequently to redeem specific sins is considered a minor atonement.

Scarification: This type of atonement takes a multitude of forms depending on the society and culture of the penitent. In some areas, the fresh wounds of the scar are packed with ash to give them greater prominence when healed. Some societies rub ink into the scars to form tattoos, while other practices remove thin strips of flesh to produce thicker scarring. The most modern form of scarring is cold branding in which the skin is treated with a piece of metal that has been treated with liquid nitrogen. Cold branding leaves no keloid evidence of the procedure, but any body hair present in the branded area grows back white.



Among Banishers, scarification is a form of atonement that acts as a constant reminder. The outward signs of pain inflicted are intended to align the base material of the flesh with the divine light of the spirit within. Damage caused varies depending on the size of the scar and the care taken while making it. For every two square inches of scarring, roll Dexterity + Crafts. With a success, the character suffers only one point of bashing damage. If the roll is a failure or dramatic failure, the damage caused is upgraded to one point of lethal damage.

Scarification is only considered a major atonement if it is an ongoing act. A character must spend at least four days a week working on his scars. Simply cutting into your flesh every now and then is considered a minor atonement.

Minor Atonements

Asceticism: Asceticism as an atonement often goes beyond simple austerity or renouncing pleasures. As an atonement, asceticism covers a broad range of practices designed to bring discomfort to the body. Ranging from wearing a hair shirt to sleeping on a bed of rocks to walking on hot coals, the philosophy of asceticism is the belief that the renunciation of worldly comfort brings the soul closer to divinity. Unlike the corporal mortifications of major atonements, asceticism causes no direct in-game penalties.

Fasting: The term fasting is commonly interpreted as abstaining from food, but a true fast includes refraining from food and drink for a limited period of time (often no longer than one day). Time usually spent eating and drinking is instead filled with prayer and meditation. To claim a fast as a minor atonement, the character may not have eaten or drank for at least 12 hours. Note that going too long without food or drink can have deleterious effects on a character (see p. 175 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Sacrifice: Most modern religions frown on the idea of blood sacrifices, and instead instruct their followers to give freely of their time and money to the church and to the less fortunate. The idea of a sacrifice doesn't necessarily have to include dropping coins into a collection tin, however. Making drastic changes in personal appearance to present the proper image of obeisance can also be considered a sacrifice. A woman with long hair might take notable pride in her appearance. By shaving her head, she has offered up a sacrifice. Exactly what counts as a sacrifice for the purposes of a minor atonement varies from character to character; the Storyteller can usually decide whether an offering is made whole-heartedly or not.

Vows

A vow of atonement is a spiritual promise not to indulge in a specific type of behavior or activity. By holding themselves to some higher standard of conduct, Banishers establish a balance with their other, less virtuous, activities. Vows typically differ from mage oblations by virtue of the nature of the promise made and how that promise is fulfilled. In general, a Banisher's vow of atonement is rather more severe. A mage might promise not to drink alcohol on Fridays as an oblation, while a Banisher who takes a vow of sobriety (as a major atonement) is promising not to drink, ever again. Vows can and should be difficult to uphold, so Storytellers should attempt to strictly interpret vows and provide situations in which characters might be tempted into breaking their vows.

The main difference between a vow selected as a major atonement and a vow selected as a minor atonement is the length of time the vow is taken for. Included below the description of each vow is the length of time required for a vow to be considered either a major or minor atonement.

Chastity: Simply put, this is a vow not to engage in sexual activity of any kind, including masturbation. By redirecting the energy usually expended on sex, the penitent can focus on more important matters of spiritual health and awareness. A Banisher who takes a vow of chastity must also attempt to quiet his mind. Impure thoughts are nearly as great a violation of this vow as the actual deed.

When a vow of chastity is taken as a major atonement, a Banisher must abstain for at least six months. A minor atonement requires a single month of dedication.

Poverty: A more complex idea than the simpler vows of chastity or sobriety, a vow of poverty doesn't mean selling all your possessions and living as a beggar. To do so would create a

burden on your friends, family and society. Poverty, in this case, means living with only the very basic essentials necessary for daily survival. By refusing to be tempted or distracted by the materialistic norm of modern society, you dedicate yourself to revel in the wonders of creation and of your own spirit.

When a vow of poverty is taken as a major atonement, a character may not ever have the Resources Merit. She also may not accept gifts or loans that would result in making her life more comfortable. Poverty as a minor atonement requires that the character set aside her conveniences and comfortable bed for at least a month. During that month, it is assumed that any extra cash she may be entitled to from her Resources Merit is donated to a charity or church.

Silence: Maybe the most difficult vow to uphold in modern society, a vow of silence is really a vow of non-communication. It goes unsaid that a Banisher who chooses this vow may not speak for the duration of the vow, but communication is made up of many more elements than simply speaking. Hand signals and shrugs are technically permissible, although really only to convey "I understand" or "I'm listening." Even a "yes" or "no" gesture communicates too much. The written word, including text messaging, email and instant messaging, is forbidden. The time spent in silence is intended to encourage introspection and aid in an internal dialogue with God.

When a vow of silence is taken as a major atonement, a character must be silent for at least a month. The character may follow instructions and participate in everyday activities, but may not provide feedback or communicate in any manner during that time. When a vow of silence is selected as a minor atonement, the character must only remain silent for three days.

Sobriety: Drugs such as marijuana, LSD, alcohol and tobacco all distort perception. They relax, stimulate or enhance ordinary sensations and give the user a false and fleeting feeling of enlightened detachment. By choosing to abstain from chemically induced euphoria, a supplicant can dedicate her senses to the works of God and to the natural order of the world. Many Banishers find comfort in this vow and believe that magic is just another drug, though a very dangerous drug, to wean themselves free of.

When taken as a major atonement, a vow of sobriety is a life-long commitment. The body is kept pure at all times from drugs and the spiritual toxins they carry, even drugs as seemingly innocuous as aspirin or caffeine. If the vow is

selected as a minor atonement, the character must abstain from every type of non-essential drug for a month.

Expiation

Expiation is a different type of atonement that Banishers can gain a benefit from only at specific times. For centuries, the practice of sacrificing an animal or human to placate the gods was widespread. A number of religions believed that forgiveness could only be found through sacrifice, that a god could only be pleased through the offering of a life.

The religions taught, and their followers believed, that sin could be transferred to a sacrificial vessel. Only the most perfect of specimens could be used for this transferal of sin. The vessel must be without blemish and of worth to the offerer before the gods could be appeased. Echoes of this idea can be seen in the Christian faith and the crucifixion of Christ. Christ is said to have taken on the sins of all humanity and then sacrificed himself to absolve those sins.

In the case of the Banishers, there exists no more perfect vessel for their sins than order mages. The whole of the life of a Banisher is dedicated to the extermination of the mages who destroyed the natural world and condemned the Banishers to lives of torment and anguish. Keeping these ideas in mind, is it any surprise that the greatest feeling of joy, of accomplishment, of *redemption*, comes when a Banisher slays another mage? With every Awakened life Banishers take, every bit of magic they return to the world, Banishers feel they are fulfilling their part in returning the world to its intended order.

The first time in each story a Banisher succeeds on a check for Wisdom degeneration after killing a mage, the Storyteller may allow him to have fulfilled a major atonement. The act of the kill and the realization of their murderous deed are buried under the mad elation of succeeding at their most important goal. Banishers may indeed feel regret after they cause a death, but in killing what is essentially a mirror of themselves Banishers have expiated their sins, and know the relief the blood sacrifice can bring. This option is particularly appropriate for chronicles in which Banishers are depicted as trapped in a self-perpetuating cycle of violence. In chronicles in which the Storyteller wants more emphasis on the dangers of losing Wisdom, however, this form of atonement may not be suitable.

TIMORI: THE FEARED

The syntax of the spoken language of Atlantis isn't fully understood by any mage alive today. Small nuances in how a word is spoken, or used, can create major differences in meaning that would be almost impossible to comprehend just by studying the writings of a dead language. This is especially true in a tonal language (such as Chinese) in

which the same word can have multiple meanings depending on how the syllable is stressed. It is no wonder, then, that some Atlantean words are difficult to translate properly into modern languages built on comparatively limited concepts. There are some who claim that Timori is one such word that has likely received an incomplete translation.

Feared vs. Fearful

The mages of this Legacy do indeed refer to themselves as Timori, instead of differentiating themselves by calling themselves "the True Timori" or some such. The confusion works in their favor. It's easy for one of the enemy to mistake the Timori for fearful rather than the Feared. We hope this isn't too confusing for readers. Within the context of this Legacy's section, the phrase Timori will be used to refer to this Legacy in particular, as they do. Throughout the rest of the book, Timori is used in the usual fashion, as another term for "Banisher."

Timori can certainly be translated as fearful. The word probably *was* used in association with the Locust-Eaters, who forsook magic to take their place in what they perceived as the natural order of the world. But those who tread this path state that another possible translation for Timori, one that has been overlooked or suppressed by modern scholars, is "feared."

History

According to the Legacy's lore, their forebears weren't content to simply take their leave of Atlantis and hope that the natural order sorted itself out. These mages had much more in common with their contemporary Banisher fellows than the more peaceful types who simply abandoned Atlantis. Those who refused to abandon Atlantis fought against the intrusion of magic into the world. They attacked magical constructs, destroyed repositories of magical knowledge and killed any mage they thought they could safely target. Although they disliked the use of magic, the Atlantean Banishers reluctantly concluded that it was necessary to use fire to fight fire. Citizens of Atlantis began to whisper about the traitors in their midst, calling them Timori, the feared, and the Banishers took up the name with pride. Eventually, the Timori cabals were uncovered by the Ungula Draconis and were either killed or forced into exile.

Various records of the Atlantean era speak of the armies of Atlantis marching against the poorly developed tribes and city-states of the time. These attacks are usually explained by Awakened scholars as a symptom of the hubris that led to Atlantis's fall, but there are hints in the writings that suggest other possibilities. Here and there in the tales of the Atlantean armies' exploits, a determined researcher can see a pattern. Phrases that are routinely translated as "*And the fearful lived among the lesser people of the tribe and taught them to fear and hate us*" take on a different meaning when fearful is translated as feared. It certainly seems likely that

exiled Timori raised Sleeper armies to attack Atlantean shipping and outposts. When viewed in this light, not every action taken by Atlantis against the primitive societies seems like such an overt act of hubris.

Years passed, and the Timori continued their harassment of Atlantean assets. Ungula Draconis teams sent out to deal with the Timori met with limited success, never managing to completely stamp them out. The Timori had resigned themselves to the idea that their battle might take centuries, when the first Mage War occurred. After celebrating their victory, the remaining mages of Atlantis raised their Ladder to the Heavens, and the worst nightmares of the Timori seemed to have come true.

The Timori sought meetings with the newly exiled mages, to convince them anew of the Timori's position. Reluctant at first to even speak to the Timori, let alone meet with them, the Exiles finally agreed to a temporary alliance when reality began to crack. Using the Sleeper armies of the Timori to assist, the Exiles took their fight back to Atlantis. While the Exiles fought their way up the Ladder into the Supernal, the Timori began to attempt to unravel the spells holding the Ladder together. Then came the explosion that sundered the world.

The majority of the Timori at ground zero of the explosion were killed instantly by the collapse of the Ladder. Those who survived wept in despair. Despite their best efforts, the natural order of the world was destroyed, seemingly for good. The Timori went to the leaders of the surviving exiled mages and begged them to give up magic.

"Look," the Timori said, "at what our power has wrought. This is the awful cost of magic!"

The Exiles, not seeing how they could possibly survive without their magic, refused the Timori's entreaties and drove the Timori from them; the short alliance forever ended.

With the Awakened community scattered and the members of the Timori reduced to a mere handful, the Timori decided on a new course of action. It would be impossible for them to watch each new mage settlement, let alone stage successful attacks, at their current numbers. New Banishers who attempted to seek the Timori out for wisdom were also unlikely to survive such a quest if the Timori remained concentrated in one place. After much debate, a solution was agreed to; the Timori must become immortal. Only by avoiding the gaze of death did they have any chance at replenishing their numbers and continuing their battles.

The search for immortality was not a new idea for any mage community. Immortality was, indeed, one of the reasons the mages of Atlantis stormed the Supernal Realms. Abandoning, for now, their war against other mages, the Timori began to research how they could achieve their goal. Years stretched into decades as the Timori continued on their quest. The members of the cabal were growing older and older, and soon it turned into a race to see whether they could succeed in their task before they vanished from the Earth. Finally, the Timori discovered that the secret to



immortality lay at the very core what makes a mage. They discovered that by ritually devouring Mana and Gnosis from a living host they could infuse their Patterns with enough raw magical energy to stop or even turn back the clock.

This solution delighted the Timori. It furthered their fight against mages and also ensured that if they were ever successful in completely eliminating magic from the world that, they, too, would then die. Newly empowered by their discovery, the Timori split their forces to ensure a large enough supply of Gnosis for each of them to survive and went back to war.

By the time the Feared began to prey on the fledgling magical communities, the Exiles believed the Feared to be long dead. The Exiles now blamed mage slayings on a group the Exiles called Banishers. Puzzled by this, the Timori investigated the Exiles' claims and discovered that the old order of peaceful naturalists had given way after the sundering. Those who might once have become like the Locust-Eater seemed driven by an almost instinctual fear and hatred of magic. The word Timori was now used exclusively to describe these new killers of mages, and the true Timori saw the advantage in maintaining in this belief.

Since the rest of the Awakened believed the more organized factions to be dead, the Timori hid themselves from view. They worked from the shadows, using Banishers as pawns, to divide mages from their cabals where they were more easily captured and their Gnosis harvested.

Such is the history claimed by those Timori who call themselves Feared. They allow other Banishers to cause an uproar, prodding and herding them in the proper directions, then swoop in to collect their prey. Every once in a while, a Banisher Awakens with more than the usual instinctive hatred of magic, and the Timori keep their eyes open for those rare individuals to train as apprentices. Though their numbers are still small compared to order mages, the number of Timori grows more often than it shrinks, setting the stage for the time when the Feared are ready to emerge from hiding and declare open war on the Awakened once more.

Parent Path: Any; Obrimos comprise the majority

Nickname: The Feared

Appearance: The Feared look just like everybody else — part of the reason for their success. They frequently employ spells such as Transform Aura as part of their camouflage and tend to frequent places with large crowds where it is easier to hide their true nature among the throngs. Even when viewed with Mage Sight, the Timori don't look any more unusual than any other mage. Only when the Timori begin to age due to lack of feeding do they begin to reveal their true nature. Viewed under these conditions, with the Life spell "Pulse of the Living World," the life forces of the Feared seem sluggish, comparable to an animal that has just awoken from hibernation.

The Feared don't use the word lich to describe themselves and take offense at any comparison to the Tremere

liches. The Feared are, however, pleased by the existence of Tremere lichs. The Tremere provide a ready cover story or explanation for the Timori's behavior if a Timori is captured or killed.

Background: Candidates for apprenticeship are studied carefully before they are contacted. Only Banishers who demonstrate considerable forethought in their activities are ever approached. New apprentices must be able and willing to learn and perform Prime and Mind magic beyond that which is normally considered acceptable among Banishers. Apprentices who fail to live up to the expectations of their masters risk becoming the Timori's next source of Gnosis.

Organization: Each Timori has a defined area that he works in, akin to the hunting territories of wolves or other predators. Because the demands of the Timori's continued existence are so high, no Feared would ever even consider poaching in the territory of another Timori. Once a territory has been cleared, the Timori will pack up and move to a new area that is unclaimed. A large city is usually a single territory, but in more sparsely populated areas, the size of a territory may increase to cover 100 miles or more.

The Feared have a secure network of communications they use to talk about their work and to keep each other apprised of discoveries, triumphs and new apprentices. Once every five years, all the Timori on a continent meet in one place to review their plans and discuss progression.

Suggested Oblations: Sitting in complete darkness for at least an hour and remaining completely alert, without the use of magic; fasting for a day, successfully following a mage to their sanctum without being discovered; destroying an imbued item; turning all the clocks in a stranger's house back 12 hours; completing the taxidermy of a predator-type animal

Concepts: Taxidermist, assassin, twisted scholar, naturalist, Tremere imposter, watchmaker

Attainments

Thanks to the theft of Mana and Gnosis from the living bodies of other mages, the Timori are able to extend their lifespans. Nothing comes without a price, however, and the Timori suffer from a couple of ailments as a result of meddling with their Patterns.

Because their bodies are more like preserved corpses than normal, healthy bodies, the Timori have effectively removed their bodies from the Life Arcanum. As they saturate their Patterns with raw infusions of magical power, their bodies begin to crystallize. The result of the crystallization is that the Timori cannot be affected by any Life spell that changes their Patterns in a significant manner. Any attempt to transfigure, hone, heal or wound the Timori, as the result of a Life spell, automatically fails.

The other condition suffered by all Timori is addiction. From the first time a Timori tastes Mana that has been

harvested from a living host, he longs to relive the experience. No high, not that of drugs or sex, can compare with the sensation of stolen Mana. The addiction only worsens when the Timori first tastes Gnosis. Mana addiction is only a mental addiction, but addiction to Gnosis is a true mind and body addiction. All Timori gain the Flaw: Addiction (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 218) from the moment they use their Quintessal Harvest Attainment. This Flaw may never be overcome regardless of how long a Timori goes without consuming Mana or Gnosis.

Use of Timori Attainments damages the minds and bodies of the mages the Timori target. A mage may only be subjected to an Attainment, or any combination of Attainments, a number of times equal to his Stamina + Gnosis. Once this total has been exceeded, the mage becomes a shattered wreck that is of no further value to the Timori and is disposed of. Mages who have been so thoroughly violated in this manner (who manage to escape their tormentors) are broken people. A very small percentage of these pitiful figures may eventually be able to recover from their ordeal, but most simply go insane and frequently end their own lives.

The use of the Attainments listed below is not strictly considered spellcasting, and any call for an extended roll does not follow the usual rules for the length of an extended casting.

1st: *Plundered Lore*

Prerequisites: Gnosis 3, Mind 4

The first real step on the Timori path to power is the accumulation of the knowledge required to understand the forces of magic they will deal with as part of their transformation. The master passes much of this knowledge on to an apprentice, but there are some things that a student must simply understand. If such understanding is beyond them, the Timori long ago discovered a method of gathering information from their foes.

Apprentices often require years of training and study to reach the point at which they can use this Attainment. Once they have mastered it, however, they have nearly completed their apprenticeship. Even when an apprentice has become a master, he still finds this Attainment to be useful in the imprisonment of order mages. This particular Attainment is the source of many of the stories about Banishers stealing magic from the minds of mages.

The Timori use this Attainment to steal magical knowledge from another mage. Activating the Attainment costs a point of Willpower. The Timori then enters into a battle of wills with her target in an extended contested action. The player rolls Resolve + Intimidation + Mind versus the target's Resolve + Subterfuge + Gnosis. Each roll represents five minutes, and the first mage to reach 20 successes is declared the winner.

If the Timori wins, she reaches into the mind of the mage and may steal either:

— all knowledge of a rote, allowing the Timori to add that rote to her list of rotes (if she has met the usual Arcanum requirements to cast it)

— some of the accumulated knowledge of the target, allowing the Timori to rob the mage of one dot of Occult and add it to her own (within normal limits)

— steal an amount of Arcane Experience from her target equal to the target's Gnosis rating

If the targeted mage wins, the Timori is unable to use this Attainment against that mage for a number of days equal to the difference in successes of the final total. If the target, for example, won by a total of five successes, the Timori would be unable to use Plundered Lore to affect that mage for five days.

Use of this Attainment is considered an act of hubris and requires a degeneration roll for mages of Wisdom 4 or higher (roll three dice).

2nd: *Quintessal Harvest*

Prerequisites: Gnosis 5, Prime 5

After more long, hard years of study, when the apprentice is finally able to perform the second Attainment, he passes from the rank of apprentice to that of master. Although this Attainment doesn't provide true power over natural aging, it does slow the process considerably. The Timori reaches into the Pattern of a mage and extracts by force the Mana stored in her Pattern, similar to the function of the spell "Siphon Mana" (see p. 231 of **Mage: The Awakening**).

Activating the Attainment requires the Timori to spend one Mana. The player then rolls Resolve + Intimidation + Prime – the Stamina and Gnosis of the target. If successful, the Timori steals Mana from his target equal to the number of successes rolled. The Timori may not gain more Mana than the target has in her pool. Timori mages may not "steal" Mana from their own pools.

Rather than just adding the pilfered Mana to his own pool, the Timori weaves it directly into his Pattern. The Timori may store up to twice their maximum Mana pool in stolen Mana in their Patterns, but if the Mana isn't used immediately, it bleeds out of their Patterns at a rate of one Mana per day. The Timori can spend stored Mana at a rate per turn equal to their Gnosis rating (with Gnosis 5, the Timori can spend five stored Mana per turn). Stored Mana may be used for one of the following effects:

— The Timori may reinforce their Patterns with Mana to resist the effects of aging. The Timori age one day for every week that passes for each point of Mana used in this way.

— Because their bodies are so heavily fortified with magic, the Timori may spend stored Mana to heal themselves. The Timori may spend one Mana to heal one point of bashing damage, two stored Mana to heal one point of lethal damage or five stored Mana to heal one point of aggravated damage. Spending stored Mana to heal is considered a reflexive action.

— If a Timori manages to completely saturate his Pattern (i.e., reach his maximum allowance) with Mana, he may choose to convert all of the stored Mana in one fell swoop to increase his magical prowess. For each five Mana spent in this way, the Timori gains one Arcane Experience point. Use of stored Mana in this fashion ignores the normal restrictions for how much stored Mana may be spent per turn.

Many Timori will feed captured mages regular sources of Mana so the Timori can prolong the pleasure of Quintessal Harvest for as long as possible. Mages that attempt to thwart the Timori by wasting their Mana are severely punished for their defiance, often by the torture and deaths of friends or loved ones.

Use of this Attainment is considered an act of hubris and requires a degeneration roll for mages of Wisdom 4 or higher (roll three dice).

3rd: Quintessal Theft

Prerequisites: Gnosis 7, Prime 5

Once the Timori have discovered the secrets of the second Attainment, most Feared rapidly ascend to the final Attainment. Rather than the petty theft of Mana, this Attainment targets the very center of a mage, their Gnosis. With mastery of this Attainment, the Timori finally discover the secret to true immunity from aging.

Activating this Attainment requires the Timori to spend one point of stored Mana (see above). The Feared then enters into an extended contested action with his victim. The player rolls Resolve + Occult + Prime versus the target's Resolve + Stamina + Gnosis. Each roll represents five minutes, and the first mage to gain 20 successes is the winner.

If the target wins the contest, the Timori may never attempt to drain that particular mage of her Gnosis again. The target has proved herself the master of her mystical soul. If the Timori wins the contest, he drains the target mage of one Gnosis.

Drained Gnosis must be spent immediately for one of the following effects:

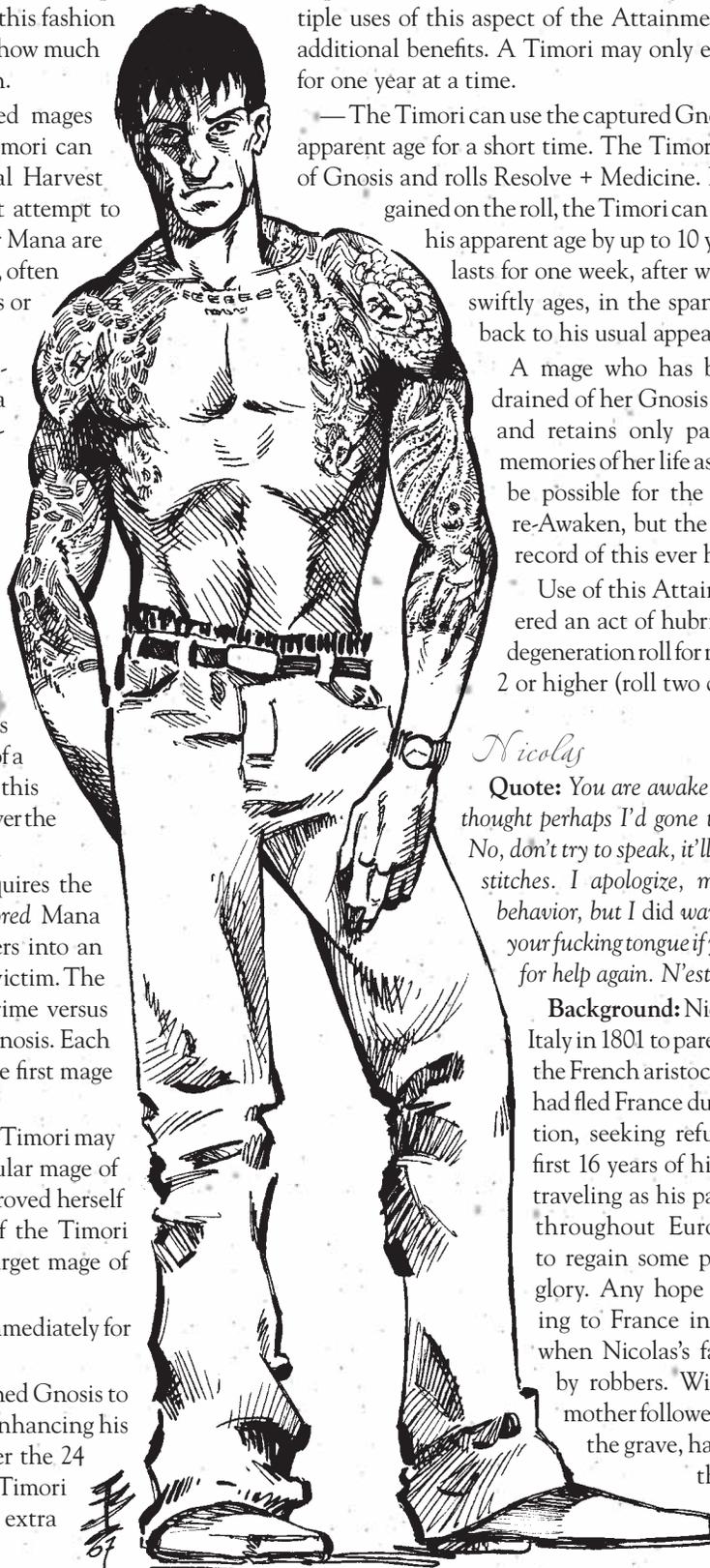
— The Timori may add the drained Gnosis to his own Gnosis rating, artificially enhancing his Gnosis for the next 24 hours. After the 24 hours is up, the Gnosis rating of the Timori returns to its usual rating, and the extra Gnosis dissipates.

— The Timori can infuse his Pattern with the stolen Gnosis to halt the aging process. If the Timori chooses this option, he spends the dot of Gnosis and rolls Stamina + Occult. With a single success, the Timori has managed to process the Gnosis and ceases to age for one year. Multiple uses of this aspect of the Attainment don't provide additional benefits. A Timori may only ever dodge death for one year at a time.

— The Timori can use the captured Gnosis to reduce his apparent age for a short time. The Timori spends the dot of Gnosis and rolls Resolve + Medicine. For each success gained on the roll, the Timori can choose to reduce his apparent age by up to 10 years. This effect lasts for one week, after which the Timori swiftly ages, in the span of a few hours, back to his usual appearance.

A mage who has been completely drained of her Gnosis returns to Sleep and retains only partial dream-like memories of her life as a mage. It might be possible for the new Sleeper to re-Awaken, but the Timori have no record of this ever happening.

Use of this Attainment is considered an act of hubris and requires a degeneration roll for mages of Wisdom 2 or higher (roll two dice).



Nicolas

Quote: *You are awake, no? Ah, good. I thought perhaps I'd gone too far that time. No, don't try to speak, it'll only loosen those stitches. I apologize, monsieur, for my behavior, but I did warn you I'd rip out your fucking tongue if you started yelling for help again. N'est-ce pas?*

Background: Nicolas was born in Italy in 1801 to parents belonging to the French aristocracy. His parents had fled France during the Revolution, seeking refuge abroad. The first 16 years of his life were spent traveling as his parents journeyed throughout Europe attempting to regain some part of their lost glory. Any hope of their returning to France in triumph ended when Nicolas's father was killed by robbers. Within a year, his mother followed her husband to the grave, having abandoned the will to live. Nicolas swore he wouldn't

follow his parents into the grave and spent the last of the family fortune on a ticket to America.

Living mainly by his wits and good looks in the fledgling country, Nicolas eventually married the daughter of a wealthy New York businessman in 1820. Expected to take up the family business, Nicolas was visiting a factory with his wife and father-in-law when two men entered the building and attacked his family. To Nicolas's astonishment, his father-in-law fought back with arcs of lightning that sprang forth from his fingertips. The air crackled with energy as the men responded to this assault with magical attacks of their own, until a misfired spell caused an explosion. As he was buried under the collapsing building, Nicolas Awakened.

For one awful moment that seemed to stretch into infinity, he saw the unnatural void that separated the worlds and understood that magic was the cause. His screams of terror were swallowed by the void, and he continued to scream as he woke sitting bolt upright in a hospital bed.

Inheriting the family wealth, Nicolas set to the business of discovering and killing mages in the New York area. One evening after slaying a particularly troublesome opponent, he was approached by a man with an English accent. The man offered Nicolas immortality and training. Intrigued, Nicolas agreed to become an apprentice and in 1843 became a Timori.

Careful investment left Nicolas with large sums of money that allowed him to live in a style his parents would have envied. He rode out the storms of the Civil War, the Depression and both world wars and continues his task of killing mages to this day.

Description: Born of southern French stock, Nicolas has dark brown hair, blue eyes and light brown skin. He keeps up with modern trends and wears classy casual clothing of the latest styles. Nicolas appears to be in his late 30s and works to maintain a healthy appearance. Beneath the expensive clothing, Nicolas' body is covered by extensive tattoo work that he designs and performs himself in the Japanese "irezumi" style. His nimbus is the sound of screaming echoing faintly in the distance.

Storytelling Hints: Nicolas appears very smooth and sophisticated, deliberately maintaining and even playing up his French accent when dealing with people who would be likely to be impressed by it. Nicolas is vain about his appearance and enjoys the company of beautiful women. Just as his clothes conceal his tattoos, this outer layer of

personality conceals a burning pit of anger and hatred for mages and possibly for himself. He frequently seems on the verge of losing control, and when he does, the consequences for the targets of his ire are seldom pretty.

Real Name: Nicodème D'Aubigne

Path: Obrimos

Order: Banisher

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 5, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 1, Investigation 4, Medicine 2, Occult (Supernal Realms) 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 4, Weaponry (Rapier) 5

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Empathy 2, Expression 3, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 4, Socialize 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 5

Merits: Allies (The Feared) 2, Barfly, Disarm, Fighting Finesse (Rapier), Language (English, French, Spanish, Italian, German) 5, Quick Draw, Resources 5, Striking Looks 4, Weaponry, Dodge

Willpower: 6

Wisdom: 4

Derangements: Schizophrenia (severe), Megalomania (severe)

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 8

Health: 8

Gnosis: 7

Arcana: Forces 4, Mind 4, Prime 5, Time 3

Notes: *Forces*—Invisible Object (••), Kinetic Blow (••), Personal Invisibility (•••), Unseen Shield (•••), Thunderbolt (••••); *Mind*—Emotional Urging (••), First Impressions (••), Augment the Mind (•••), Breach the Vaults of Memory (••••); *Prime*—Dispel Magic (•), Supernal Vision (•), Transform Aura (••), Unseen Spy (••), Channel Mana (••), Imbue Mana (••), Price of Hubris (••), Supernal Dispellation (••••), Siphon Mana (•••••); *Time*—Shield of Chronos (••), Acceleration (••), Shifting Sands (••)

Mana/per turn: 20/7

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Size	Special	Dice Pool
Rapier	2(L)	2	Armor Piercing 1	13

Armor: 4 ("Unseen Shield," Forces 4)



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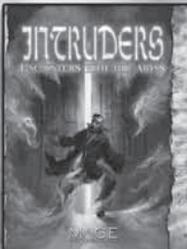
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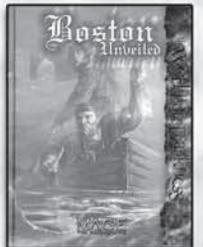
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*It wasn't supposed to be like this.
The world is supposed to make sense.
It's not supposed to have this... this disease infecting it,
turning things the wrong way.
People shouldn't be infected like this.
It shouldn't have happened to me.
But it did.
And if I have to burn this disease out of me,
I'll burn it out of you first.
— Seth Miles, Banisher*

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