

5-12-1998

Oblivion's Edge

Jeremy Strandberg

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Recommended Citation

Strandberg, Jeremy, "Oblivion's Edge" (1998). *Lawrence University Honors Projects*. 53.
<https://lux.lawrence.edu/luhp/53>

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Oblivion's Edge

Jeremy Strandberg

Submitted for Honors in Independent Study

5/12/98

Prof. Candice Bradley, Advisor

The year is 2042...



Technology is a part of us...

High tech is stylish and chic. Computers have crept into every aspect of life, and billions of users are jacked brain first into the internet. Biosculpting can make people look any way they desire. Cybernetic implants—eyes, ears, and prosthetic limbs—break the limits of the human form. Biotechnology feeds billions while saving the lives of millions more. The train from New York to Miami takes under three hours, and there's a bustling tourist trade on Luna.

The Veil has thinned...

Supernatural and paranormal phenomena are on the rise. There has been a resurgence of spirituality and superstition. Meditation is taught in grade school. Psychic powers are accepted as fact, and most people have encountered a ghost or spirit at least once. Alchemists and fringe scientists are kept on salary by corporations. Every shantytown has its resident shaman or hougan. The fairies of Seelie Inc. pursue inscrutable goals through human agents, while the Good Neighbors laugh and play their games of mimicry.

The nation-state is obsolete...

Cyberspace and rapid transportation have made national boundaries meaningless. The United States and other countries have dissolved into the American Free Market, a prosperous coalition of megacity governments led by corporations. War is a thing of the past. Unemployment is low. Random crime is down. The Information Age is a Golden Age.

But it comes at a cost. Officially, the Inquisition maintains a constant watch for terrorism and information crime. Officially, governments are locally controlled and democratic. But every now and then, someone is taken away and questioned. Every so often, people disappear. People who've seen things they weren't supposed to see. People who've said things they weren't supposed to say.

And the Resistance is growing.

Cast to the edges of credibility, a strange alliance is gaining strength. Made up of social critics, secret agents, Ghost Dance rebels and everything in between, the Resistance organizes an underground based on free speech and radical change. Their numbers are small, and their influence is slight.

But each time the Inquisition abuses its power, the Resistance gains more appeal. Each time the corporations exploit another group, the sympathizers grow. At the edge of society, camped in the shadows, they gather their strength. Soon, they will be ready to strike, and wake the people up. Soon, they will strike, and bring justice and equality and responsibility back from the margins. Back from...

Oblivion's Edge

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Foreword

Introduction

Oblivion's Edge is a role-playing game. It is a manuscript which provides a fictional setting and the methods for group storytelling within that setting. This is not a typical academic project. It is not a board game, a card game, or a computer game. It is a creative work, more like a novel or collection of short stories than a traditional paper or thesis.

Even though *Oblivion's Edge* is a creative work, I have drawn heavily upon my Lawrence education while developing the game's setting and rules systems. I have attempted to design not only a fictional world, but a fictional culture. To create a plausible and realistic fictional culture, one must have an understanding of how cultures work and develop. To create a rules system, one must have an accurate grasp on how individuals interact with their environments. Thus, I feel that this unusual endeavor represents a unique expression of the Liberal Arts ideal.

The bulk of this project is the manuscript of *Oblivion's Edge*. It is a work in progress. The creation of a role-playing game is a daunting task, one which usually involves multiple authors and years of effort. While I have had the years, I have not had the additional authors. This manuscript is my completed work: an introduction to the game and its setting, a collection of primary documents and prose describing the world, and the game's rules.

This paper is a presentation of the larger tradition of role-playing games, and the immediate context in which *Oblivion's Edge* was developed. First, I have described role-playing games and their history. I have also discussed the methodology by which I created *Oblivion's Edge*, paying particular attention the game's inspirations. I have also examined its strengths and limitations where appropriate.

Role-Playing Games

In 1973, a young man named Gary Gygax and his fledgling company Tactical Studies Rules began developing *The Fantasy Game*. Unlike the tabletop wargames that he and his friends had been playing for years, this new game took the individual "unit" or character off the battlefield, and allowed the player to control that character's actions in an almost unlimited

variety of settings. When the game was completed and published a year later—under the now-famous name of *Dungeons & Dragons*—it was an instant hit. The first 3,000 copies sold almost immediately. Gygax and friends had created a medium of entertainment, and art, that had never been seen before: the role-playing game. Role-playing games (RPGs) grew into a multi-million dollar industry over the next twenty-five years, with hundreds of different games and thousands of supporting products (Fannon, 1996, chap. 10)

Despite such considerable growth, role-playing games have, for some reason, remained a fringe medium. Thus, before there can be any meaningful discussion of RPGs and the place of *Oblivion's Edge* among them, we must first examine the characteristics of a role-playing game. In his authoritative work *The Fantasy Role-Playing Gamer's Bible* (1996), Sean Patrick Fannon offers this definition:

role-playing game: A recreational activity based on the assumption of roles by the participants, where rules are presented (normally utilizing random elements) for the resolution of tasks and conflicts and where the participants are not placed in direct competition to achieve their goals. (p. 81)

Fannon's definition hits upon four key elements of an RPG. First, role-playing games are structured forms of entertainment. Second, the players verbally act out the roles of imaginary characters. Third, rules are used to resolve conflicts. Finally, players do not compete with each other. By deconstructing his definition, we can gain considerable insight into what, exactly, a role-playing game is.

The Characteristics of a Role-Playing Game

"A recreational activity..."

First and foremost, role-playing games are just that—*games*. Playing them is a way to pass time enjoyably and in a structured manner. Fannon notes that role-playing games are similar to parlor games "in terms of social dynamics" (p. 82). When players gather for an RPG, they usually sit in a comfortable place, often around a table. Drinks and snack food are often consumed, and game play is primarily verbal. It looks much like a group of friends playing charades or twenty-questions. Still, a role-playing game is fundamentally different from a parlor game both in the

amount of time and preparation that is required and in the nature of the game itself—that of assuming a role (Fannon, p. 82).

Role-playing games are also distinct from other types of recreation, such as board games, sports, or card games. There are no playing boards to limit the movements and experiences of the players. Some RPGs involve ‘live-action’ play, in which players physically act out the roles they are assuming, but there is no direct physical contest. And while playing cards, dice, and other random elements are usually involved, they are not the central focus or medium of play. Rather, players engage in storytelling by becoming the protagonists.

“...based on the assumption of roles by the participants...”

The point of a role-playing game is for the players to collectively tell a story “by taking on the roles of the central characters” (Rein•Hagen, 1997, p. 22). These central characters are created and imagined by the players using particular rules and guidelines. Once the game begins, the players verbally ‘act out’ the part of their characters. In this sense, a role-playing game is much like highly organized improvisational theater.

One of the key differences between improvisational theater and a role-playing game is the presence of a ‘Game Master’ or GM. The Game Master has two primary purposes: to act as a referee and to act as a storyguide. The GM’s role as referee will be discussed later.

As storyguide, the Game Master assumes the roles of all the characters in the story that are not assumed by the players. The player’s characters are the story’s protagonists, but the GM will play the parts of the antagonists, supporting characters, and extras. Since the story is being constructed verbally, the GM must also describe the characters’ surroundings. These duties make the Game Master’s role extremely important. If role-playing games were movies, the GM would be the supporting cast, producer, and director.

The roles that the players and the GM assume are limited by the particular role-playing game being played. The imaginary worlds of most RPGs are rooted in one of five different genres: fantasy, science-fiction, horror, espionage, and super-hero. The characters must be appropriate to the genre. In the best example of the fantasy genre, *Advanced Dungeons and*

Dragons (Cook, 1989), the players take the roles of heroic wizards and warriors. In *Battletech* (Weisman, Babcock, and Lewis, 1994), the players pretend to pilot gargantuan robots in a battle for the galaxy. In *Call of Cthulhu* (Petersen & Willis, 1992), the players create 1920's investigators who stumble into H.P. Lovecraft's horrific Mythos. In *Conspiracy X* (Ernst, Madewell & Pallace, 1996) characters are involved in an elaborate government cover-up. And in *Heroes Unlimited* (Siembieda, 1998), players create comic-book style super-heroes. Recently, a number of role-playing games have emerged in non-traditional genres, allowing players to explore a greater choice of character types.

“...where rules are presented (normally utilizing random elements) for the resolution of tasks and conflicts...”

A role-playing game's rules are at least as important as its setting. In *Vampire: The Masquerade* (1997), Mark Rein•Hagen explains that “[r]ules direct and guide the progress of the story, and help define the capacities and weaknesses of the characters,” eliminating the age-old dilemma of “Bang! Bang! You're dead!” “No I'm not” (p. 22). For example, in *Ars Magica* (Cliff, Rein•Hagen & Tweet, 1994), each character has a set of “Characteristics” and a set of “Abilities.” Characteristics describe the character's physical, mental, and social prowess, and include traits such as “Strength,” “Dexterity,” “Communication,” and “Intelligence.” Abilities describe the skills, talents, and accumulated knowledge that the character has learned over his imaginary life. Common Abilities include “Speak Latin,” “Alertness,” and “Leadership.” Imagine that one of the GM's characters is attempting to sneak up on a player's character (PC). The GM adds her character's Dexterity Characteristic and Stealth Ability. The player adds his character's Perception and Alertness. Then the GM and the player each roll a die, add the roll to their previous totals, and compare the results. If the GM has a higher total, her character successfully sneaks up on the player's character. If the player has a higher total, his character notices the GM's character, and can respond accordingly.

Almost all RPGs use random elements to resolve tasks and conflicts. Most role-playing games use dice. Some, such as *Over the Edge* (Tweet, 1992), use only six-sided dice. However,

multi-sided dice—four-, six-, eight-, ten-, twelve-, and twenty-sided—have been a fixture among RPGs from the beginning. The past few years have seen a number of games that do not use dice. The reasons for this departure are various. For example, Mike Pondsmith’s *Castle Falkenstein* (1994) is set in a fantastic Victorian Europe, where “[d]ice are used by the riffraff and the demimonde.... But no gentleman would ever play a game with dice, and certainly wouldn’t mention dicing games in the presence of a lady” (p. 131)! To keep the game true to its setting, Pondsmith opted to use a standard deck of playing cards for the random element. Jonathan Tweet’s *Everway* (1995) also uses cards. Unlike *Castle Falkenstein*, however, *Everway* uses unique cards derived from a Tarot deck. A small number of games, most notably the adaptation of Roger Zelazny’s *Chronicles of Amber*, have no random element, leaving “a rules system where everything [is] ‘worked out’ by the game master via numerical comparisons” (Fannon, p. 148).

This process of ‘working out’ the rules returns us to the Game Master’s second major role—the referee. Most RPG systems are designed for maximum flexibility, so the GM must interpret the rules and determine their exact results. To continue the previous example of one character sneaking up on another, let’s assume that the GM’s character—the one doing the sneaking—had a total Dexterity, Stealth, and die roll of 8. If the player’s character has a total Perception, Alertness, and die roll of 10, then that character will notice his stalker. But exactly *what* happens is left to the GM’s discretion. The GM could decide that the PC hears a twig snapping under her character’s feet. Or, the GM could decide that the PC notices her character’s shadow. The random element frees the GM from dictating all outcomes of a story, but her job as referee and storyguide are still vital.

“...and where the participants are not placed in direct competition to achieve their goals.”

Role-playing games are essentially cooperative; this one of their most important qualities. There are no ‘winners’ or ‘losers’ in the traditional sense. The primary goal of a role-playing game is for the players and the GM to work together to create an engaging and entertaining story. If this criteria is met, then everyone ‘wins.’ However, there are a number of additional goals that the players can pursue.

The first and most obvious goal is survival. Most role-playing games have fairly dangerous settings, and the death of a character is often—if not always—a possibility. When a character dies in a game, it is much like a character dying in a novel, play, or movie. Barring some sort of ‘in-story’ intervention, such as medical or miraculous revival, the player will usually create a new character, who will be introduced to the ongoing storyline as appropriate. A character’s death is often perceived as a sort of failure by GMs and players. However, this is not necessarily true.

Another common goal is character improvement. Like real people, characters in role-playing games get better at things with experience. Unlike real people, this improvement is often easily quantifiable. RPG characters have numerical attributes, like the Characteristics and Abilities in *Ars Magica*, so their improvement can be observed directly. Additionally, characters can ‘improve’ via material gain. This could include monetary wealth or tangible possessions. Often, magical artifacts or high technology are the most important possessions a character can acquire, depending on the genre. Enchanted swords, laser blasters, magical wands, and cutting-edge prototype computers are all common in the hands of RPG characters. This “Monty Haul” (Fannon, p. 97) approach has its roots in the earliest role-playing games, namely the original *Dungeons & Dragons*, in which the telling a story was secondary to survival and character improvement.

More recent trends in the gaming industry have put a different twist on the notion of character improvement. Games such as *Vampire*, *Over the Edge*, and *Castle Falkenstein* emphasize improved characterization rather than a concern with better traits and possessions. In this newer wave of games, statistics and rules are less important than fully developing the character’s personality and motivations and the player’s ability to role-play them convincingly.

Developing a character to this level of nuance takes considerable game-time. In-depth character development is possible, however, since most groups of gamers play with the same characters on a regular basis. This long-term style of play is most often referred to as a ‘campaign.’ Campaign play links a group’s individual stories into a longer series. Campaigns can be short-lived affairs, linking two or three stories together in the RPG equivalent of a mini-series.

They can also be long-term projects, linking dozens of ongoing stories extended over years of the players' real lives. Such campaigns often achieve an epic scale, with the players' characters becoming extremely important and influential in their fictional worlds. They often find themselves saving nations, worlds, or galaxies, and the campaign will usually end with the bittersweet retirement—or sometimes death—of the characters that the players have come to know and love.

Storytelling

Fannon's definition successfully describes the functional components of role-playing games. However, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. Rein•Hagen describes *Vampire* as “a game of make-believe, of pretend, of storytelling” (p. 21). He discusses the passive nature of stories in contemporary culture (T.V., radio, books). On the other hand, Rein•Hagen says that role-playing games are, by nature, active. Players personally involve themselves in the creative process by taking on the protagonists' roles. Role-playing games are “not stories told to you, but stories you will tell yourself” (p. 22).

Summary

A role-playing game is a form of structured entertainment distinct from card games, board games, parlor games, or sports. Players work together to tell a story by verbally acting out the parts of the protagonists. The Game Master plays the parts of the supporting characters. She also describes the imaginary world and controls the pace and emphasis of the story. Characters' actions are limited and adjudicated by various preestablished rules, which the Game Master is called upon to interpret. Play may be episodic, with the individual stories linking together into a longer campaign or series. As a role-playing game progresses, characters become more important to their settings. More importantly, character personalities develop, enhancing the role-playing experience for the players.

Development

Creating *Oblivion's Edge* has been the central creative work of my life. It began roughly eight years ago, near the end of junior high. Since then, the game has undergone two complete revisions and considerable rethinking. I began the current version in the summer of 1995, just after my Freshman year at Lawrence. During the summer of 1996, I used my IDEA Fellowship to work on *Oblivion's Edge* as an independent research project. The game was also part of my work for the ACM Urban Studies program in Chicago. I wrote most of this manuscript over the past term and a half, as an independent study with Professor Candice Bradley.

There are three components to consider when creating a role-playing game: the setting, the rules, and the presentation. A game's setting includes its genre, such as science fiction or fantasy. The setting also includes the history, culture or cultures, personalities, and pervasive themes of the game's fictional world. The rules include the various mechanics for developing characters and resolving uncertain outcomes. The presentation ties the first two elements together, using art and layout to create a unified whole.

In the following methodology section, I explain how I developed the setting, rules, and presentation of *Oblivion's Edge*. I describe my goals and the general process I used to attain them. For the setting and the rules, I also include specific details which I consider especially important to the game.

Setting

The first role-playing games, such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, were presented without settings. Instead, they presented a framework around which the players and Game Master could create their own fantastic worlds. As role-playing games evolved, the setting became more and more important. A number of recently published games, such as *Castle Falkenstein*, have focused on setting to the detriment of their mechanics. In *Oblivion's Edge*, I have attempted to strike a balance.

Oblivion's Edge crosses traditional genres. The game is primarily a combination of science-fiction and fantasy, influenced by the espionage genre. It blends cyberpunk with a mythic fantasy informed by Jungian archetypes. It also focuses on moral ambiguity and the relativity of truth. The combination of these elements results in a plausible, playable, and provocative setting for *Oblivion's Edge*.

Goals and Methodology

Any fictional work should have an internally consistent setting. It should be plausible. Its elements, even if they are themselves fantastic, should interact believably. Otherwise, the audience will be unable to suspend disbelief. If the players in a role-playing game find too many unresolved contradictions in the game's setting, they will be unable to effectively play their roles. A game's genre strongly influences its plausibility. In a high fantasy setting, such as *Earthdawn* (Weisman et al., 1993), the world must be entirely created. The history, politics, legends, and even ecology of the imaginary world must be invented and described by the author. Far-future science-fiction, such as FASA's *Battletech*, requires a similar process since the world is so far removed from our own.

The task of creating a plausible world is both more and less complicated for near-future and cyberpunk genres. Background material is important because such worlds are so closely related to our own. One must extrapolate upon real history and culture, drawing upon trends in technology, spirituality, and politics to create a future which is believable. This is not to say that the future created must be 'likely.' In the novel *Snow Crash* (1992), for example, Neil Stephenson describes a future based upon the proliferation of franchises and the devolution of government. The social and technological elements he discusses relate in a consistent manner; they are believable in context. The real future, however, is unlikely to look like Stephenson's.

In creating *Oblivion's Edge*, I wanted to create a setting which was not only plausible but even probable. Many of the elements were directly inspired by classes at Lawrence. Courses in anthropology and history were especially helpful. Anthropologist Franz Boas's historical particularism (1928) served as an excellent model, as did Professor Doeringer's sociological

approach to history. By examining how history influences culture, I gained a powerful tool for extrapolating from current and recent events. The ACM Urban Studies program in Chicago was another influential experience. By examining a particular major city and how it was changing, I was able to apply much of the theory I had learned to a concrete example. While little direct reference to Chicago appears in this manuscript, many of the elements about ethnicity, class, authority, and politics were inspired by my experiences there.

In addition to building upon current events and social trends, *Oblivion's Edge* also adds an element of the fantastic. It is a multi-genre work which crosses cyberpunk science fiction with fantasy. This approach has been tried before, most notably with FASA's *Shadowrun* (Weisman et al., 1992). Unfortunately, *Shadowrun* does not truly cross the cyberpunk and fantasy genres; it merely adds them together. The result is a lack of plausibility. The game maintains that "magic ha[s] returned to the world" (p. 23), implying that the magic described in the game was, at some point, present in the real world. Unfortunately, the magic presented in *Shadowrun* is the magic of fantasy role-playing games like *Dungeons & Dragons*. It does not represent any recognizable magical tradition.

I developed the magic and supernatural elements of *Oblivion's Edge* partially in response to *Shadowrun*. Dissatisfied with *Shadowrun's* sword-and-sorcery approach, I made the supernatural in *Oblivion's Edge* as 'realistic' as possible. I studied the myths and folklore of numerous traditional cultures, as well as our own. Urban legends were particularly useful, as were readings on the New Age and parapsychology. I had conversations with pagans and researched shamanism. This research—combined with the work of scholars such as James Frazer (1979), Bronislaw Malinowski (1979), Victor Turner (1979), Claude Levi-Strauss (1979), C. J. Jung (Hall & Nordby, 1973), and Jonathan Smith (1982)—resulted in a culturally relativistic approach to magic in *Oblivion's Edge*. My basic premise is that the supernatural is a reflection of the beliefs, attitudes, and emotions of society. In other words, supernatural phenomena express a collective, cultural, unconscious. Using this approach, I interweave magic and the supernatural with the cyberpunk genre in pursuit of a plausibly fantastic world.

In addition to being plausible, a setting must be playable. A playable game world is not only interesting, but also encourages players' characters to interact and cooperate. If a game encourages too much distrust amongst the characters, the game will degenerate into a series of arguments and hurt feelings. A playable setting also has a number of ongoing conflicts into which the characters can enter. Without such conflicts, characters will have little to do. Yet if there are conflicts, and the characters cannot influence the outcomes, the players will feel impotent. The same happens if the characters are not allowed to avoid the conflict, or if they are forced on to a particular side. Such games fail to be cooperative; they become the Game Master's stories, told in second person.

Many of *Oblivion's Edge's* details were designed to make the setting playable. A political and ideological revolution (Resistance vs. Inquisition) serves as a catalyst for characters' interactions. The struggle also provides an ongoing conflict in which they can participate, as well as a unifying theme for the game.

Earlier role-playing games, such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, *Call of Cthulhu*, and *Heroes Unlimited*, were intended to entertain, not make social commentary. When R. Talsorian Games released *Cyberpunk* (Pondsmith, 1990), a new trend began (Fannon, p. 145). *Cyberpunk* departed from the basic "Good vs. Evil" conflict that fueled so many games before it. The very premise of the game was based upon moral ambiguity:

The world of Cyberpunk is a violent, dangerous place, filled with people who'd love to rip your arm off and eat it. The traditional concepts of good and evil are replaced by the values of expedience—you do what you have to do to survive. If you can do some good along the way, great. But don't count it (p. 3).

Cyberpunk characters are "heroes of a bad situation" (p. 3), constantly faced with difficult choices. "How they make these choices [has] a lot to do with whether they end up as vicious animals... or retain something of their basic humanity" (p. 3). Unfortunately, *Cyberpunk's* later publications concentrated on mercenary actions and violent conflict rather than moral ambiguity.

In *Vampire: The Masquerade*, moral ambiguity cannot be overlooked. Released three years after the original *Cyberpunk*, Mark Rein•Hagen's "Storytelling Game of Personal Horror" was explicitly designed to be provocative. "Vampire was written in order to discover the nature of

Evil” (p. 268). The players’ characters are recently created vampires, and the drama centers around reconciling one’s humanity with the need for blood. However, the theme of the game is more personal:

The vampire is the quintessential fiend, for the vampire is so much our own reflection. Vampires feed as we feed, by killing, and through death can feel the same dread, guilt and longing for escape. They are trapped in the same cycle of fast, feast and purge. They, like us, seek redemption, purity and peace. The vampire is the poetic expression of our deepest fears, and the shadow of our most primal urges.

Just as the hero of legend must descend into the pit of Purgatory to face the tormentor, overcome personal weaknesses, and finally be cleansed in order to return home with the gift of fire, so must we descend into the depths of our own soul and return to life with the secrets we have won. That is the real journey of Prometheus. It is the meaning of the myth. Only by embarking on such a journey can we discover our true selves and look into the mirror (p. 5).

At first, *Vampire*’s release was met with mixed feelings. Many gamers were annoyed by its pretension. Others were disturbed by the notion of role-playing the undead. However, many gamers were intrigued. The game quickly grew in popularity, fueled in part by Anne Rice’s vampire novels and Gothic-Punk interest (Fannon, p. 147-148).

The success of *Vampire* spurred radical change in the gaming industry. White Wolf began a series of related titles with equally provocative themes, and other companies followed suit. Mike Pondsmith and R. Talsorian Games released *Cybergeneration* (1993), an expansion of their original *Cyberpunk* game. This work centered on the adventures of children and adolescents fighting to make the world a better place. Pondsmith also wrote *Castle Falkenstein*. Despite this game’s adventuresome tone, it clearly asserts the importance of “honor, of decency and fair play” (p. 97).

Oblivion’s Edge is intended to make people think. The relationships between people, technology, and the supernatural are intended to question commonly held distinctions. For example, a hacker’s ghost can haunt a virtual reality. The distinction between ‘real life’ and cyberspace weakens, as does as the dichotomy between science and magic. Other issues that shape *Oblivion’s Edge* include class distinctions, urbanization, capitalism, immigration, acculturation, spirituality, technology, authority, credibility, and truth. The Resistance vs. Inquisition theme

highlights these issues and makes many of them possible. The conflict also introduces a sense of moral ambiguity. The Resistance is made up of the Mafia, pirate journalists, secret operatives, militant revolutionaries, and other anti-social elements. Yet these are supposed to be the “good guys.” The Inquisition is an ominous and oppressive force, but it also protects the lives, welfare, and security of billions.

Details

More sources than can be counted have contributed to the world of *Oblivion's Edge*, including books, movies, news articles, documentaries, television shows, classes, conversations, tours, and personal experience. What follows is a brief description of the more prominent aspects of the *Oblivion's Edge* setting, along with their primary inspirations.

Technology: The technology in *Oblivion's Edge* is generally inspired by cyberpunk science-fiction. My description of the internet and cyberspace were influenced by Neil Stephenson's *Snow Crash*, Bruce Sterling's *The Hacker Crackdown* (1992), Candice Bradley's “Cyberculture” course, and personal experience. Playback, or recorded sensory simulation, was inspired by “simstim” from William Gibson's works (1984, 1987, 1988, 1996) and from “the wire” in the movie *Strange Days* (Cameron, Jaffe, & Bigelow, 1995). I first encountered nanotechnology and nanites in *Cyberpunk*, but since then I have read many articles and web pages on the topic.

Biotechnology—such as cloning, recombinant DNA constructs, hydroponics and agricultologies, medical treatments, and epidemiology—was informed by Beth DeStasio's “Biotechnology and Society” course. The cyberpunk supplement *Near Orbit* (Pondsmith, Ackerman, & Wildemuth, 1989), Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and *Count Zero* (1987), and Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* (1985) provided details and ideas for space exploration and colonization. Recent media coverage of the Mars probe and the Mir space station were also helpful. Finally, cyberwear and cyborgs were inspired by the work of William Gibson and the role-playing games *Cyberpunk* and *Shadowrun*.

Predicting the future always carries the potential of myopia. Because technology is rapidly evolving, *Oblivion's Edge* may be hopelessly out of date within a few years. For instance, my

model for a virtual reality cyberspace is based on the existing structure of the internet. It involves IP addresses, domains, and the same general principles as the World Wide Web. Unfortunately, because my technical understanding of the internet is limited, I have likely overlooked a critical detail that might make my speculation seem ludicrous to a trained computer scientist. Rather than fret over details that only a few would notice, I decided to describe an internet protocol which was plausible and simple enough for the general public to understand.

The Supernatural: The magic presented in *Oblivion's Edge* is virtually unique to role-playing games. As I have already discussed, I formulated the game's take on the supernatural by consulting various sources. By applying a cross-cultural approach, and by taking into consideration the religious and spiritual trends of contemporary America, I was able to blend the elements of cyberpunk and fantasy into a whole.

Magic in *Oblivion's Edge* recalls C.J. Jung's collective unconscious. In *A Primer of Jungian Psychology* (1973), Hall and Nordby describe the collective unconscious as "a reservoir of latent images," or archetypes, which are shared by all of humanity (p. 39). Archetypes are not fully formed ideas or images, but rather "*forms without content*, representing merely the possibility of a certain type of perception or action" (p. 42). The specific events and experiences of a person's life will fill in an archetype and give it meaning, substance, and detail. For example, a man's conception of 'mother' will be informed by the mother archetype. The specific details, however, will be provided by his relationship with his own mother, as well as his perceptions of other people's mothers.

Supernatural phenomena operate in much the same fashion in *Oblivion's Edge*. I have assumed that there are certain cross-cultural archetypes, such as the shaman, the demon, the trickster, the angry ghost, etc. The archetype's particular details are filled in by the culture in which they occur. For example, one of the archetypes that I identified was the 'faerie lord.' The faerie lord is a supernatural entity of great power which takes on the trappings of wealth and authority. The Celtic *Tuatha de Danann*, the Germanic *Vanir*, the plains Indian's thunder people, and perhaps even the Indian *naga* are all manifestations of the faerie lord archetype. In *Oblivion's*

Edge, the faerie lords manifest as Seelie Incorporated. The term comes from the Scottish “Seelie Court,” which consisted of relatively benevolent faeries who appeared as kings, queens, and lesser nobility. In *Oblivion’s Edge*, the nobility has been replaced by the corporate executives—hence, Seelie Inc.

The interplay between technology and the supernatural has been one of the most intriguing results of this process. In *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* (1981), folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand notes that as technologies become more important to our society, they become part of our folklore. As technologies become part of our folklore, they become elements in legends and myths. Eventually, they gain a mystical quality. Brunvand also discusses the importance of automobiles in urban legend. “Earlier generations told more stories about haunted houses,” he writes, “but we prefer stories centering on the family automobiles, pleasure trips, and the open road” (p. 19). In *Oblivion’s Edge*, automobiles are no longer the dominant technology. Computers and computer networks are. As a result, supernatural phenomena are often associated with computers. The ghosts of dead hackers can haunt computers and virtual realities. Likewise, tricksters can blunder past passwords and other electronic defenses. Shamans can commune with the spirits of computers, and Seelie Inc. maintains elusive internet domains.

Val Schaeffner’s *Lost In Cyberspace* (1993) inspired me to blend computers with the supernatural. Schaeffner hypothesizes buying a haunted house, only to have a ghost harass him through his computer. “If we don’t yet associate computers with ghosts,” he asserts, “that is because they haven’t been with us long enough.... [A]n ethereal spirit could more easily manipulate the magnetic bits on [a] hard disk than more durable objects” (p. 5). Schaeffner’s idea also fits the Jungian pattern; the ghost archetype is being expressed in a computer-literate culture.

History: The historical events of *Oblivion’s Edge* were based on a number of sources, with the intent of creating a plausible and somewhat realistic timeline of events. Paul Kennedy’s work, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* (1993), was invaluable. In this expansive and thought-provoking book, Kennedy discusses the issues facing the turn-of-the-century world, such as overpopulation, multinational corporations, biotechnology, and factory automation. He

describes, in detail, the particular challenges facing various regions. In doing so, Kennedy forecasts a number of possible futures for each region, based upon how they react to the challenges of the twenty-first century. I also referred to Peter F. Drucker's *Post-Capitalist Society* (1994), which discusses future economic and class structures.

Specific issues, such as the Red Death pandemic, required more specialized research. The Red Death was inspired by the Ebola scare. After studying Ebola for Professor Beth DeStasio's "Biotechnology and Society" course (Le Guenno et al., 1995; Caldwell, 1996), I learned that the virus, as frightening as it was, was unlikely to start a world-wide pandemic. *The Coming Plague* by Laurie Garrett (1994) introduced me to the potential danger of influenza, a point which was reinforced by the "Bird Flu" scare in Hong Kong (Larson, 1998). I am still debating whether the Red Death is a filovirus like Ebola or an influenza virus. The manuscript currently describes the Red Death as a filovirus.

The Ghost Dance—a Native American sovereignty movement based upon religious revival—also required specific research. *Shadowrun* was the first role-playing game to discuss this topic. Highly skeptical of *Shadowrun*'s approach, I began research on Native American political issues in general and the Ghost Dance in particular. There is a considerable body of work on the history of Native Americans. Unfortunately, most works, such as *Like A Hurricane* (Paul Chaat Smith, 1996), only extend until the disbanding of the American Indian Movement in the late 1970s. Even the AIM web site (1998) contains mostly documents which are at least ten to twenty years old. Most of these sources have little or no reference to the effect that casino gambling has had on reservations and American Indian community in general. Thus, it has been difficult to gather information on the current state of American Indian politics and issues. Personal discussions with Native Americans from Chicago and the Pine Ridge Reservation were interesting but unhelpful. I have therefore been forced to speculate. In the future, I intend to make use of usenet newsgroups, local community centers, and perhaps personal interviews to 'flesh out' this area. In the meantime, I leave the Ghost Dance deliberately ambiguous, so as not to commit the timeline to a specific course.

Politics: The political structure of *Oblivion's Edge* was shaped by the Resistance-Inquisition struggle. Originally, when the game was first conceived, the Inquisition was the tool of the Black Circle. The Black Circle was a cabal of evil wizards intent on conquering the world by raising an undead army. The Resistance grew in response. The political structure was almost identical to that of *Star Wars* (1977); an oppressive magic-wielding regime was fighting a unified grass-roots rebellion.

The above formula became progressively difficult as I became familiar with cyberpunk science fiction. Cyberpunk features corporate authority rather than governmental, and corporate authority requires a free market. A free market would be difficult to maintain without high public morale. And if the average citizen knew she was being governed by a group of evil wizards and an undead army, consumer confidence would sag.

Thus, I decided that if the Black Circle ruled the Americas, the general populous could not know about it. The Black Circle would cover its presence with propaganda and revisionist history. The Americas would officially be a loose coalition of urban governments with a centralized policing force—the Inquisition—to protect the security and property of citizens. The Black Circle would secretly control this police force, and the Resistance would be composed of persecuted groups and individuals. To the general public, the idea that the Americas were ruled by a circle of sorcerers would sound like the most absurd of conspiracy theories.

Eventually, I decided that the “Black Circle Theory” just might be a conspiracy theory. As I refined the politics of *Oblivion's Edge*, I was struck by the question: what is truth and who owns it? What was originally the Black Circle’s ‘cover story’ was plausible enough that it could be the actual history. The Resistance would fight to uncover the lies and conspiracies in order to bring down the Inquisition. The Inquisition, therefore, would attempt to strip the Resistance of any legitimacy so that no one would believe them. The end result was a rich and ambiguous political backdrop for *Oblivion's Edge*. In this world, the supposed ‘good guys’ are terrorists, organized criminals, and pirate journalists, while the ‘bad guys’—both the Inquisition and the megacorporations—provide food, jobs, and security for billions.

As I filled in the details, the politics came to life. In Frank Doeringer's "Global Century" course, I wrote a research paper on the shift from nation-state dominance to corporate dominance. By examining Kennedy's *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* and Janet Lowe's *The Secret Empire* (1992), I discovered a process by which the world seems to be changing. With the end of the Cold War, economic power replaced political and military power as the mark of a great nation. Information and transportation technologies, however, made national boundaries irrelevant. Transnational corporations were able to take advantage of these technologies, and became more economically powerful than many nations.

By incorporating this historical process into *Oblivion's Edge*, I gained a framework around which I could design other political issues. The Inquisition, for example, developed from the official dismantlement of the federal government. A new type of agency was required to provide security for the American Free Market. Hence, the Inquisition was created to stop terrorists, riots, information criminals, and other threats to public security. Corruption was inevitable with such far-reaching powers. With this framework in mind, I turned to a number of sources for inspiration, such as *1984* (Orwell, 1949), *The X-Files* (Carter, 1994), and, to my embarrassment, *Harley-Davidson and the Marlboro Man* (Wincer, 1991).

Having developed the corporations and the Inquisition, I could more effectively create the Resistance. However, each faction was also influenced by outside material. For example, the Company drew from movies and films by Tom Clancey, as well as from the *X-Files*. The Society of St. Jude is a resurgence of the liberation theology of post-colonial Latin America. The Academy was based upon the parapsychology and psychic experiments performed during the Cold War, and the Mafia drew from a slew of movies and books such as *Snow Crash*.

Summary

In pursuing a plausible, playable, and provocative setting, I have also created a unique fictional world. Though similar to *Shadowrun*, it is a fundamentally different game. The world's technology, magic, history, and politics are extrapolated from current trends and inspired by many sources. The result is a coherent setting, alien yet eerily familiar.

Rules

The RPG community has been debating the importance and place of rules for the past few years. Until the early 1990s, a role-playing game's rules were considered to be the game itself. Recently, however, the setting has become more important. A number of games have even asserted that rules hinder the creativity of its players. *Over the Edge*, for example, has a minimal set of rules. The author's "goal was to allow players' creativity free rein by giving them a blank slate" (Tweet, 1993, p. 5). I personally believe that a sophisticated, well-designed set of rules can encourage creativity rather than limit it. I designed *Oblivion's Edge* with that in mind. I have attempted to make the rules elegant and flexible, with a cinematic feel. They are complex, but only in the interest of detail.

Goals and Methodology

The rules of a role-playing game consist of several different systems, such as character generation, task resolution, and combat. Almost every game has a core system, which is used to resolve general actions. A well-designed game will use fairly obvious permutations of the core system to resolve specific tasks. Such integration allows players to learn a relatively basic set of rules and then intuitively grasp the rest of the game, minimizing confusion. A game with this high level of integration is described as 'elegant.'

A game's elegance is closely related to its flexibility. A well designed game system can resolve almost any situation without creating new rules. In a board or card game, there are a finite number of possible situations because field of play is explicitly limited. *Monopoly* needs no rules for pieces moving off of the board. A role-playing game, however, is explicitly *unlimited*. The game simulates the actions of fictional people in a fictional world, resulting in an infinite number of possibilities.

An elegant set of rules is almost always flexible. Since an elegant game resolves different types of tasks with similar sets of rules, players or Game Masters can easily extrapolate their own system when a unique situation occurs. For example, *Over the Edge* is one of the most elegant and flexible games on the market. Characters have only a handful of defining Traits, which are

rated as a number of dice. A character could have three dice in “Mafia Hit Man,” which would mean that any time he did something that related to being a hit man or working for the Mafia, he could roll three dice. For any task in which the character has no appropriate Trait, he rolls two dice. If a character attempts an action not explicitly defined by the rules, the GM has the player roll two dice against an appropriate target number (pp. 8-29).

I consciously pursued an elegant and flexible set of rules in developing *Oblivion’s Edge*. The basic system for task resolution is repeated in virtually every other sub-system. Only the Contacts and Hacking systems are substantially different. They are, however, similar to each other. Likewise, I provide numerous examples of how to use the rules in a variety of ways. The magic system in particular was designed with flexibility in mind. Since the setting of *Oblivion’s Edge* includes all manner of supernatural practitioners—fringe scientists, shamans, tricksters, psychics, etc.—a simple yet extremely flexible system was necessary. Otherwise, the game would have been dominated by the specific rules for each magical tradition. As it is, “Magic and Special Abilities” is the longest rules chapter in the book.

While almost all role-playing games strive for elegance and flexibility, not all games strive for realism. Fannon describes a game’s realism as “how closely the game rules simulate what we perceive as reality” (p. 271). Some games are designed with a high level of realism in mind. Characters may be above average but they are by no means super-human. Violence is usually portrayed as quick and brutal; death and serious injury are common in realistic role-playing games. Heroic games stand at the other end of the spectrum. Such games feature larger-than-life characters with talents and abilities of epic proportions. Violent conflict is dramatic, somewhat campy, and fun. Wounds are abstract and rarely debilitating, and the player characters can often defeat hordes of faceless foes and even slay dragons.

The realism of a game’s rules are usually related to the genre and general mood of the game’s setting. Almost all dark future, espionage, and horror games tend toward the realistic. Super-hero games are, by definition, heroic. Many fantasy-genre games are also larger than life, although some, like *Ars Magica*, are more realistic. The link between a game’s setting and the

realism of its rules is fairly obvious. The rules are the principal medium through which the characters interact with the world. If the characters in *Call of Cthulhu* were heroes who could slay or banish demons by the dozens, the looming threat of extra-dimensional horrors would be lost. Likewise, if super-heroes could be killed by average street thugs, their necessary bravado would be outright suicidal. In both cases, the inappropriate realism of the rules undermine a crucial theme of the genre.

As role-playing games have started to explore new genres, there has been a move towards the center of the realism scale. The combat system in *Vampire*, which is set in a darkly fantastic version of our own world, clearly reflects this trend:

Combat in **Vampire** attempts to capture the drama of violent conflict without downplaying the grim reality of what is going on. We have made every effort to create a system true to the dynamics, limitations and viciousness of real combat, while still leaving room for the unique elements vampires bring to it (p. 222).

Oblivion's Edge follows *Vampire's* example, for a number of reasons. It is a dark future game. Since violence and the threat of violence are important elements to a dark future genre, I wanted a game in which the characters had a healthy fear of combat. However, *Oblivion's Edge* is also a fantastic game. Therefore, the system could not be too realistic; it needed to account for supernatural powers and entities.

I decided upon a more 'cinematic' level of realism to bridge the gap between realistic and heroic/fantastic rules. The rules simulate the reality of a good action or thriller movie. The protagonists are above average but not superhuman. Combat is grim and dangerous, yet exciting and dramatic. Details are often sacrificed in favor of a story's pace and development. This cinematic approach is, in part, a matter of personal taste. Additionally, *Oblivion's Edge* is set in a world in which myths are becoming realities. It could be said that modern cinema, especially action movies, serve as heroic mythology in contemporary America. Therefore, it seems appropriate to use our contemporary 'myths' as a frame of reference for a game centered around its own.

Role-playing games also vary in their level of complexity. *Over the Edge*, for example, has one of the least complicated mechanics on the market. The rules require barely fifty pages.

Characters have only five or six defining traits, and the GM is told to use “common sense” to “adjudicate ambiguous results” (p. 22). On the other end of the spectrum is *Shadowrun*. Its rules take up over 250 pages, not counting additional rules published in sourcebooks. Characters have dozens of traits and their physical possessions are often described in minute detail. Where common sense is used to resolve most tasks in *Over the Edge*, *Shadowrun* provides mechanics for everything from the effects of racism to the wounds inflicted by armor-piercing bullets.

Each level of added complexity has its own strengths and weaknesses. The very simplicity of *Over the Edge* makes the game’s elegance and versatility possible. Such simplicity greatly removes the rules from play, allowing players to focus on the story and their characters. However, the game’s simplicity makes fine details difficult to simulate. Most traits are rated as having two, three, or four dice. With only three levels of ability, it becomes difficult to distinguish between characters. *Shadowrun*, on the other hand, suffers from no such problems. It is easy to differentiate between similar characters because there are many rules and traits. However, these same rules tend to bog down play, especially during combat. Whereas an average *Over the Edge* conflict might take under thirty minutes of real time to resolve, a typical *Shadowrun* firefight literally can take hours. Complex rules can also steal the focus from the storytelling and the role-playing.

Oblivion’s Edge is of average-to-high complexity, similar to *Vampire* and slightly more complicated than *Cyberpunk*. Characters are described in considerable detail. Traits include ‘Attributes,’ ‘Abilities,’ ‘Contacts,’ ‘Resources,’ ‘Relations,’ ‘Special Abilities,’ ‘Mana,’ and ‘Personality Traits.’ Each of these traits includes its own sub-system. As noted above, however, these sub-systems are all similar; the game’s elegance keeps its complexity in check. Considering the amount of material which the setting entails—magic and the supernatural, cybernetics, hacking, social networking, etc.—the rules are surprisingly simple.

Nevertheless, *Oblivion’s Edge* is more complex than I would like. This is especially true in the combat and magic systems. It would have been possible to create systems that were considerably less complicated. Doing so would have, however, required the sacrifice of important

details. For example, I included ten distinct mystical ‘paths’ in the Magic and Special Abilities chapter. Some of these could have been condensed or even omitted without leaving serious gaps. By including them, however, I was able to provide a wide selection of supernatural traditions from which players can choose. Likewise, every type of ‘magical’ practitioner with which I am familiar—from shamans to alchemists to quantum physicists—is covered by this system. Despite reservations over the game’s complexity, I am confident that the detail provided is a worthwhile trade.

Systems

Oblivion’s Edge features a number of innovative systems. However, none of them are entirely without inspiration from previous games. What follows is a brief description of the various rules systems in *Oblivion’s Edge*, along with some of the works and experiences that inspired them. The systems include task resolution, character development, magic, contacts, and combat. A certain amount of commentary may also accompany each item.

It should be noted that I did very little statistical analysis of these rules. There are a formidable number of permutations and combinations made possible by rolling multiple dice of varying sides. For the most part, these rules were fine-tuned through three years of playtesting. When a particular rule or scale was ineffective or inappropriate in play, I modified it. Over the years, the ‘bugs’ in the system worked themselves out.

Task Resolution: The core system for *Oblivion’s Edge* is what Fannon describes as a “Simple Target Number” system (p. 166). Players roll a number of dice and compare the total to a “Difficulty” number assigned by the Game Master. If the roll is equal to or higher than the Difficulty, the task succeeds. How many dice and what type they are is determined by the character’s traits.

The basic system was influenced by *Vampire*, which introduced the idea of “dice pools” (p. 77). However, in *Vampire*, the dice are not totaled. Each die is compared to a set Difficulty, and the more dice that exceed it the more successful the task is. I felt, however, that a Simple Target Number system would be less complicated. *Over the Edge* was a prime example. The

innovation in the *Oblivion's Edge* system was varying the type of dice, allowing characters with higher traits to roll dice with more sides. *Over the Edge* uses six-sided dice exclusively, while *Vampire* uses ten-sided dice. To my knowledge, the *Oblivion's Edge* core system is unique to role-playing games.

Oblivion's Edge is not without flaws. J.E. Sawyer, a long-time gamer and fellow game-designer, has criticized it for being “too dicey” (personal communication, 1996). I interpret this to mean that too many rolls are required and those rolls are too complicated. However, Sawyer still enjoys the game and plays on a regular basis. Likewise, most other playtesters have expressed appreciation for the mechanics.

Character Development: Characters in *Oblivion's Edge* are described by a number of different traits. The basic breakdown for this system was inspired by *Vampire*, though I tailored the particular traits to suit my setting.

Oblivion's Edge uses a Lifepath system for character generation. Players are asked questions about their characters' lives, such as “where did you spend your childhood?” “who raised you?” and “what kind of a child were you?” The answer to each question gives the character certain traits. For example, a character who grew up on a space station would receive the Skill “Null-Gravity Maneuver.” Characters also receive a number of semi-random “anecdotes,” which serve to make them unique. The Lifepath provides a framework for the player to fill in. The end result is a character with considerable depth, detail, and realism.

The Lifepath was inspired by a similar system in *Cyberpunk*. However, *Cyberpunk's* Lifepath had very little affect on a character's traits. The system was also tangential; one could create a *Cyberpunk* character without the Lifepath. In *Oblivion's Edge*, the Lifepath is integral and considerably more detailed.

The main drawback of the *Oblivion's Edge* Lifepath is the time required to make a character. An *Oblivion's Edge* character takes at least two hours to create, whereas a *Cyberpunk* character can be created in half an hour or less. The time required makes it difficult to play a quick ‘one-shot’ game, but the characters created with the Lifepath are extremely vivid and

creative. Likewise, because the process contextualizes a character, it is a good way to familiarize new players with the setting. The Lifepath is also entertaining. While I demonstrated the game at GenCon 96, the largest annual gaming convention in the world, one player declared the experience to be “the most fun [he’d] ever had making a character” (Ron Lundeen, personal communication, 1996).

Magic: The Magic and Special Abilities section stands as one of *Oblivion’s Edge*’s central systems. It is designed to describe all manner of supernatural and paranormal abilities and traditions with one flexible set of rules. It does so by separating specific magical effects from their affiliated mystical traditions. For example, rather than describing shamanism as type of magic with its own rules systems, *Oblivion’s Edge* considers shamans to be a type of mystic that has access to a number of Special Abilities. The magical “Paths” are differentiated by access to Special Abilities and the techniques they use to draw upon them.

My approach to the supernatural is fairly unusual in role-playing games. Most games have completely separate systems for each type of supernatural or paranormal phenomenon. *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, for example, has separate systems for magic-users, divine favor, and psychic aptitude. It was *Mage* (Wieck, Earley, & Wieck, 1993) that inspired the *Oblivion’s Edge* magic system. Despite its poorly designed mechanics, *Mage* was based on different “Traditions” of mages which employed different “Foci” to use their magic. For *Oblivion’s Edge*, I used this concept as a foundation and built the rest of the system based on research into real-world mystical traditions, such as shamanism and alchemy.

Contacts: A system dedicated to using contacts and social influence is one of the more innovative features of *Oblivion’s Edge*. Each character has a number of traits which represent her connections in a particular social group. She also has a number of “Markers,” which are an abstract representation of the social debts she owes and is owed. By “bidding” Markers in a particular Contact Group, a character can arrange a number of “Favors.”

A number of games have included traits to represent social ‘pull.’ *Cyberpunk* has a number of special Skills such as “Streetdeal” and corporate “Resources.” *Vampire* has a background trait

called “Contacts.” *Shadowrun* allows characters to buy specific contacts at character creation. The idea for my Contacts system was inspired more directly by *Conspiracy X*. In *Conspiracy X*, a character’s ‘pull’ is represented by his “Influence” (p. 29). Influence can be used to accomplish a number of different tasks, depending upon the character’s institutional affiliations. The *Conspiracy X* system is useful but limited; it could not account for using contacts and pull outside of the specific institutions described by the game. Contacts in *Oblivion’s Edge* is a much more flexible system. Unfortunately, it also adds an additional level of complexity to the game. Playtesting has, however, shown it to be an extremely useful tool which encourages storytelling and character development.

Combat: Fannon maintains that “[c]ombat is probably the single-most important element of any RPG rules system” (p. 93). This may or may not be true. Regardless, a game’s combat system is usually a major selling point. Combat is also where the game’s level of realism is most clearly reflected.

In most RPGs, ranged and close combat are handled almost identically. In *Oblivion’s Edge* they are fundamentally different. Ranged combat tends to track each individual barrage of missile weapons, whereas close combat uses a more abstract system. *Ars Magica* was one of the principal inspirations for this distinction.

The ranged combat section has been influenced by my experience playing paint-ball. In most role-playing games, a character’s physical prowess determines the order in which one acts in combat. Faster characters or those with better reflexes go first—they gain the initiative. After playing paint-ball, I realized initiative in a fire-fight is less a matter of reflexes and speed than it is a matter of situational awareness. I therefore made initiative in *Oblivion’s Edge* based upon a character’s Wits Attribute and Awareness Ability. The system also takes into account certain tactics such as suppressive fire and opportunity fire, which previous role-playing games have rarely touched upon.

The close combat rules were also crafted by personal experience. I have been on the Lawrence Fencing Team since my freshman year, and before that I dabbled in *kendo*, Japanese

sword play. I realized that the standard framework for combat in RPGs—in which one character attacks and the other character defends, and then the other character attacks while the first defends—is terribly unrealistic. In actual melee, there are two very general ways to fight: offensively or defensively. When fighting offensively, one is pressing an attack. One uses feints, footwork, and brute force and speed to strike the opponent. When fighting defensively, one is giving ground. The goal is to defeat the aggressor's attack and then counter-attack, often with a parry and riposte. In *Oblivion's Edge*, these fighting styles are represented by players declaring, at the beginning of each exchange, whether they will be “Attacking” or “Defending.” They then roll their appropriate traits and compare, with the modes they chose determining the results.

Complexity is the main drawback to the combat system. The rules take time to learn. However, the system is quite fluid once the players have adapted, encouraging a dramatic, narrative combat. Combat does take a long time to resolve, especially when a dozen or more characters are involved. However, optional “Quick n' Dirty” rules keep combat length under control. A GM's common sense can also keep a combat scenario moving.

It should be noted that the Combat rules presented in this manuscript are not the final version.

Miscellaneous: There are a number of other minor systems that deserve mentioning.

The Drama Die is a special rule that adds unexpected elements to dramatic circumstances. It can result in either “Fortunes” or “Misfortunes.” Fortunes represent unusual strokes of good luck, such as disarming an opponent with an especially strong attack or having a semi cut off your pursuer in a high speed chase. Misfortunes, on the other hand, represent unusual bad luck. They include things like jammed guns, locked doors, stray bullets, etc. Most RPGs have some method for determine critical successes and failures. The task resolution system that *Oblivion's Edge* uses does not lend itself to any such obvious system, so I devised the Drama Die to take its place.

Another important system is the Mana system. The term “Mana” comes from Polynesia, and denotes supernatural power residing in physical objects and powerful people (King, 1987). In *Oblivion's Edge*, Mana is a combination of what in other games is called “Willpower,” “Luck,”

“Fate,” or “Karma.” Basically, Mana represents a character's personal power and effectiveness. All characters have a number of Mana Sources, which give them Edge and Mojo points. Edge points can be spent to improve rolls, reroll failed tasks, or ignore the effects of injuries. Mojo is used to power Special Abilities. *Vampire's* Willpower trait and *Cyberpunk's* Luck stat were the most direct influences of this system, though neither Willpower nor Luck do the same things that Mana does. I stuck upon the idea for this system as it now stands while reading an article by Serge King (1987) in which he discusses the role of mana in Hawaiian shamanism.

Hacking and computer crime is another important system. Though it is not yet developed fully, it's framework is very similar to that of the Contacts system. A cracker accumulates “Tricks” for a given computer system, which represent swiped passwords, back doors, and other techniques for gaining unauthorized access to a computer. When a cracker actually attempts to enter the system for some purpose, she bids Tricks. This system was designed to enhance the game's elegance by using the same overall rules used for Contacts. I also attempted to represent an often-overlooked truth about hacking; cracking into a computer involves a great deal of research before actually breaking-in. Most cyberpunk games, like *Shadowrun* and *Cyberpunk*, tend to describe hacking as an ‘all-at-once’ experience. *Oblivion's Edge* consciously breaks with this trend.

The final system of note is cyberpsychosis. This concept is based upon the dehumanizing effect of augmentation: replacing part of your body with a machine. Cyberpsychosis is characterized by a loss of empathy and human emotion, poor impulse control, and disdain for ‘unaugmented’ people. In game terms, it serves to limit characters from becoming unstoppable bionic monsters. I openly stole the concept of “cyberpsychosis” from *Cyberpunk*. Whereas *Cyberpunk* emphasized the mechanics aspect of the disorder, namely a loss of the Empathy trait, *Oblivion's Edge* emphasizes the role-playing aspect. As characters gain more cyberwear, they gain a Personality Trait called “Cyberpsychotic.” As this trait increases, the character becomes more and more alienated from humanity, with the psychosis culminating in a blind, homicidal rage.

Summary

All role-playing games should have elegant and flexible rules. The basic mechanics for task resolution should be repeated throughout the game, and players should be able to improvise new rules. *Oblivion's Edge* is designed to meet these goals, while at the same time being cinematic and appropriately detailed. Although inspired by *Vampire* and *Cyberpunk*, the various rules systems are unique to *Oblivion's Edge*.

Presentation

A role-playing game's presentation is almost as important as its content. A game must be well organized, presented in a manner consistent with its content, and esthetically pleasing. Otherwise, the audience may not find the book worth the effort of reading it. If poorly organized, the game will be difficult to use. If the presentation is inconsistent, it may undermine themes in the text. And if the work is unsightly or poorly written, most readers will cast it aside in disgust.

The first goal when presenting a role-playing game is to make the material accessible. Information should be easy to find and consistently organized. All the rules should be presented as a coherent whole, as should the background material. Organization of the rules and background material depends upon the nature of the game. In *Call of Cthulhu* and *Over the Edge*, much of the background material is intended to be secret; only the Game Master should read this section. The rules, which the players need to know, are presented at the beginning of the book in a clearly labeled section. The background material follows the rules, and is clearly labeled as 'for the Game Master only.' *Castle Falkenstein* takes the opposite approach. Because the game's setting is crucial to understanding its game mechanics, the setting is described first. There are no 'Game Master only' sections; all the information in *Castle Falkenstein* is intended for the players and Game Master alike.

In *Oblivion's Edge*, the setting is crucial to understanding the rules. Thus, the background materials are at the beginning of the manuscript. The rules follow the background material, and a number of appendices will follow the rules. I am yet to decide on how to present the Lifepath

character creation system. It could well stand as an individual booklet on its own, separate from the rest of the manuscript. A separate booklet would be convenient for players to use, since they would not need the entire book to make a character. However, separating the Lifepath from the main book would cause logistical problems, such as how to package the final product. For now, I have decided to include the Lifepath as a part of the manuscript.

A role-playing game's presentation should also be consistent with its content. A game set in medieval Europe, such as *Ars Magica*, should not be published in a computerized font, such as **Chicago**. Likewise, the art should be relevant to the period. Computer-generated pictures of spaceships would also be inappropriate in *Ars Magica*. Unfortunately, not every game achieves this level of consistency. *Shadowrun*, for example, is intended to be a grim, dark future. Much of its artwork, however, comes across as lighthearted and even silly. The rules, which take up most of the book, are written as if the game were a reference manual. The presentation as a whole fails to deliver a clear message. *Castle Falkenstein* stands in stark contrast to *Shadowrun*. The game is presented as the journals of Tom Olam, a fictional game designer who was "spellnapped" into an alternate Victorian Europe. Tom described his adventures and then sent them back across the "Faerie Veil" to Mike Pondsmith, the game's actual creator. This premise provides the game with a wonderfully consistent presentation. Most of the artwork is quality watercolor, all by the same artist. The prose captures the dialect of Victorian English, complete with phrases such as "What say we take a flight over the Channel and beard the unscrupulous bounder in his very lair" (p. 139). The end result is a tightly crafted game.

For some time, I was tempted to use a similar approach for presenting *Oblivion's Edge*. The story would be told by a secret agent for the CIA, who had been cryogenically frozen in the late 1990s and defrosted by the Resistance in 2042. Most of the background material for the game would then be his briefing on the changes that had taken place while he was frozen. I opted against this approach for two reasons. First, I felt that it was too close to *Castle Falkenstein*. More importantly, presenting the world in such a manner would be entirely one-sided. The Resistance would not present a number of different opinions for the agent to consider. They would

indoctrinate him. Since one of the main themes of *Oblivion's Edge* is credibility and the search for truth, such a one-sided presentation of the setting would be inappropriate.

Instead, I decided to use a collection of primary documents, conversations, and prose to present the world of *Oblivion's Edge*. Using such an approach allowed me to present multiple sides of any given issue. Players are allowed and encouraged to read the entire book, since none of the sources are necessarily accurate. The approach is ambiguous enough that the Game Master is not forced to run the game in any particular way. The approach also underscores the general mood of the game.

The players and GM can quickly 'get into' the game world because the setting is presented through primary documents. In anthropology, there are two general approaches to cultural analysis: the etic and the emic. The etic approach analyzes culture from an outsider's perspective. It examines the economic, historical, and political forces at work within a society to explain the function of cultural traits such as kinship structures, marriage patterns, subsistence activity, religious practices, mythology, folklore, technology, etc. The emic approach examines societies from an insider's perspective. I would describe my approach to creating the setting of *Oblivion's Edge* as etic and my approach to presenting it as emic. I developed the world by examining contemporary trends, but I have described it through the eyes of its inhabitants. This way, players can understand the world of *Oblivion's Edge* more personally than if they read a text-book description.

Beyond mere utility, the presentation of a role-playing game should be esthetically pleasing. Artwork should be consistent and of decent quality or better. The main body of the text should have a consistent voice. Graphic design and layout should be consistent and pleasing. In other words, a role-playing game should be a work of art. Of course, this is a matter of opinion. Numerous role-playing games—such as *Shadowrun* and the newest edition of *Ars Magica*—have failed to live up to these standards. Some, most notably *Shadowrun*, have even become very popular games. However, the most influential games of the past ten years—*Cyberpunk* and *Vampire* (Fannon, pp. 145-148, 187, 192)—were clearly created with

esthetics in mind. Since their release, the quality of design, art, and writing in role-playing games has increased considerably. *Castle Falkenstein* is an excellent example of this trend.

To the best of my ability, I have written *Oblivion's Edge* to be esthetically pleasing. I have attempted to maintain a single voice throughout the introduction and the rules. I have revised the prose fiction multiple times and have modeled the primary documents after similar real-world examples.

Ideally, I will use imagery as much as text to present the final production of *Oblivion's Edge*. Along with *Castle Falkenstein*, Neil Gaimon's graphic novels—such as the *Sandman* series (1996)—serve as my principal inspiration. Unfortunately, I am not a visual artist. In order to finish *Oblivion's Edge*, I will need to collaborate. While numerous friends and acquaintances from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design have expressed interest, I am, unfortunately, yet to find any firm commitments.

Conclusions

In this forward I have placed *Oblivion's Edge* in context. I have explored the great number of sources which inspired game's creation. The cyberpunk genre in general, along with scholars such as Kennedy, Turner, Malinowski, and Boaz, greatly influenced the game's setting. *Vampire*, *Cyberpunk*, and *Over the Edge* inspired many of the game's rules. Finally, *Castle Falkenstein*, *Cyberpunk*, and Neil Gaimon's works were my models for presentation.

Oblivion's Edge, as both game and academic project, would not have been possible without the help of a great many people. In no particular order, they are: Evan Willner, Steve Fallat, Sean McNee, Eric Anderson, John Morrison, Pete “God's Gift to *Cyberpunk*” Andrada, Daniel Taylor, Josh Sawyer, Michael Donnelly, Jenny McDonald, Sunshine Snider, Jeremy Kriedeman, Joe Meek, Adam Thorne, Seana Dooley, Mary Paulson, Jack Stanley, Lynn Sikkink, Ed Kern, Peter Peregrine, Mark Dintenfass, Marty Hemwall, Dean Syverson and whoever created the IDEA Fellowship, Paul Schnorr, Susan Rans, George Saunders, Frank Doeringer, Katherine Kueny, Candice Bradley, and, of course, Mom and Dad.

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Special thanks to:

Dan Taylor for proofreading, advice, and brainstorming.

Seana Dooley for the 11th-hour revision session.

Candice Bradley for editing, guidance, and patience

Everyone else for putting up with me.

I hereby reaffirm the Lawrence University Honor Code:

Jeremy Strandberg

Manuscript



MYTHIC CYBERPUNK ROLEPLAYING

JEREMY PATRICK STRANDBERG

Introduction

Welcome to Reality

Introduction

Throughout the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished; and they have been the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation. Religions, philosophies, arts, the social forms of primitive and historic man, prime discoveries in science and technology, the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth.

—Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*

Today's children, born at the turn of the Millennium, will come of age in a world fundamentally different from our own. We stand amidst a Revolution, a metamorphosis of the world. Rapid communication and transportation have shrunk time and space. Distinctions between race, gender, age, and location have begun to blur. The world is folding in upon itself; we are creating it anew.

We will shape this new world through myths. Facts and experiences have no inherent meaning. We give them meaning by putting them in context—by telling stories. If a story speaks to some greater truth, it resonates with others. It becomes a myth. Through myths, we share values, ideas, and meanings. They serve as the blueprints for our lives and the foundations for our culture. Myths do not show us how things are, but how they should and can be.

Today, our myths are not our own. Television, movies, radio, newspapers—the media pander to our basest desires. They feed us a mythology of self-interest and consumption. We have grown lazy. We rely on them to tell us who we are and what we should be. The media take our images and ideas, change them to suit their needs, and feed them back to us for profit. We allow their myths to colonize our minds.

It need not be this way. The technologies of the Information Age have empowered the individual as never before. The playing field has been leveled; all can have a voice. If we have the will, we can take back our myth-making tradition. We can defy those who would tell us who we are and who we want to be. We can decolonize our minds. We can rehumanize ourselves.

Oblivion's Edge is a call to arms; it is an invitation to revolution. It is a call to reclaim the myth-making tradition that is our birthright.

A role-playing game is more than “just a game.” It is a very powerful tradition of storytelling. Role-playing pulls you into a story and involves you personally. It casts you as the protagonist. Together with your friends, you tell stories which resonate more deeply than any movie or television show. They resonate so powerfully because they are your own tales. Movies and television, even some novels—the mass media require nothing of you. You absorb their stories passively. Role-playing is active and personal. It is myth-making.

Oblivion's Edge is designed to help you make myths. It is set in the Once-Upon-a-Time of the future, the playground of science-fiction. It represents a possible future in which we did not take back our myths. It is a dark future filled with brutal injustice, self-serving ethics, and moral ambiguity.

You are called to be heroes in a world of difficult choices—the good guys in off-white hats. As a character in *Oblivion's Edge*, your talent separates you from the biomass. If you take the easy path, the path of complacency, you will only reinforce the status quo. But if you make a stand, if you go to the wall for something as intangible as a cause or a principle, then you can make a difference. If you fight to make change, you can rise above the masses who sit and wait for the oligarchy to tell them what to think.

Start the revolution. Be a hero. Enter the myth.

How To Use This Book

Rather than fight them openly, they wage a war of credibility and propaganda. They might arrest them, or kill them, or just make them disappear, but their primary weapon is to push the Resistance to the fringes. Make them into fanatical terrorists or misguided crazies. Cast them off to the edge of society, the edge of legitimacy. Exile them to the edge of the void, a social and psychological oblivion. From there, they can do no damage. Teetering on oblivion's edge, they are no longer dangerous. That is the purpose of the Inquisition. To make real change impossible, to cast true resistance to the void.

—Igusti Kertayuda, June 11, 2040

Oblivion's Edge is an unusual role-playing game. Beyond this introduction, you will find no single description of the game world. The first half of the book—**Fragments**—is a collection of short stories, newspaper articles, conversations, email messages, transcripts, academic papers, and other primary sources. They are a sample of the various perspectives and lifestyles of the people that populate the world of 2042. The intent is to give you a feel for the world, to show you how the people actually living there see it themselves. Take everything you read with a grain of salt. Nothing written here is the truth. Everything is opinion.

The second section of this book is the **Lifepath**, *OE*'s character generation system. It's a lot like a choose-your-own-adventure, except that the adventure is your character's life history.

Finally, after the **Lifepath** are the rules—**Patterns**. I've placed the rules back there for two reasons. The first is for convenience. You can just jump to the end and find all the game mechanics. The second reason is that I wanted them out of the way. The rules are meant to support the setting, not the other way around. So read **Fragments** first.

Game Masters and players alike should feel free to read all of this book. In an age of infinite information, there are no secrets.

The Twenty-First Century: History at a Glance

As I said, this introduction is the only place you'll get a straight-forward description of the world. It's here to provide you an overview, so that when you get to the **Fragments** you'll have a frame of reference.

Americans are pretty poor at history. We usually forget that how we think today is shaped by how others thought yesterday. So, here's your history lesson.

Couple things to remember. This history is focused on the United States and what it has become. The rest of the world has been changing, too. The Pan-African League is thriving; many say it will dominate the latter half of the century. Communist China gave way to democracy. Eastern Europe is a hotbed of political intrigue. Siberia is the world's breadbasket. If I wanted to cover all these changes here, *OE* would be bigger than the Chicago White Pages. Don't worry, though. I'm already planning sourcebooks.

Second thing to remember: this timeline is already dated. It begins only a couple of years from now. With any luck, people will be playing *OE* for the next ten years or so. Which means that in 2006, y'all are gonna look back on this section and laugh at how short-sighted I was. Cut me some slack. As of the year 2000, the *Oblivion's Edge* timeline officially diverts from real history.

I've divided the 21st Century into five sections: Plurality, Stratification, Chaos, Reconstruction, and Resistance. Each section has a few themes which are described in brief. Then comes the timeline itself. It's intentionally vague, so that you can fill in the blanks and make the world your own.

So, without further ado... welcome to the future. *Oblivion's Edge* style.

Plurality (2000-2012)

At the turn of the Millennium, global wealth and democracy led to an unprecedented exchange of ideas and culture.

Global Economy: With capitalism and democracy spreading 'round the world, economic boundaries began to crumble. The expansion of agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the European Union (EU), and Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) allowed multinational corporations to grow unhindered. Meanwhile, small businesses flourished in the developed countries, and value-added products led to a new age of opulence.

Government Devolution: The end of the Cold War signified the importance of economic over political and military power, while the globalized economy made national boundaries meaningless. A growing belief in free trade fostered anti-federal sentiments in the U.S. and Europe. Growing state or provincial power was paralleled by the privatization of governmental institutions, such as education and public housing.

Transnational Agencies: The emerging threat of disease, terrorism, and ethnic warfare prompted transnational agencies, such as the United Nations (UN), the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to take more active roles in the world. The Center for Disease Control (CDC), already acting internationally, received funding from WHO, other nations, and corporations, making it a truly transnational agency.

Technology: The growth of the internet was complemented by the development of cheap and effective Virtual Reality (VR) technology, making online culture more and more tangible—the world became even smaller. And in the wake of shrinking oil reserves, growing conservationism, and uncurbed

traffic congestion, new methods of transportation—light rails, maglevs, dirigibles, and hybrid and fuel-cell engine cars—became viable options.

Urban Sprawl: With telecommuting and a booming economy, the rebirth of the city was complete, and the old hierarchical “doughnut” pattern of urban development gave way to a sprawling mosaic of affluence, industry, commerce, and poverty. Suburbs themselves became important urban hubs, and poorly planned sprawl ate up much of the landscape.

Multiculturalism and Global Culture: In the teeming megacities and on thousands of chat-rooms, different cultures, classes, and ethnicities rubbed shoulders in a constant global discussion. The exchange of words led to a “Global Culture of Plurality,” idealized by an open mind and eclectic taste. This global exchange was embraced by many, but some felt the familiar tinge of alienation, and seethed in the background.

Spirituality: Along with the mix of cultures and ideas came a profound renewal of spirituality. The Age of Aquarius was at hand. Westerners displayed their malaise with materialism and rationality, with renewed interest in the divine and the supernatural. Islam and Buddhism became major religions in the Americas, and previously “fringe” religions, such as Wicca, Vodou, and Santeria, became part of the public psyche. But for all those that embraced different religious traditions, at least as many rejected any given doctrine and chose to live their lives by their own spiritual code.

Stratification (2012-2022)

After years of unchecked capitalism, the split between Have and Have-Not came into sharp focus.

Economic Crisis: The collapse of the Social Security system and Medicare spurred months of economic upheaval, in which hundreds of thousands of Americans lost their savings and their livelihoods. While the financially solvent took advantage of the situation, those less fortunate found themselves on the edges of destitution.

SINs: After the collapse of Social Security, the US government adopted the private sector’s Single Identification Number (SIN). SINs were developed by financial institutions to prevent credit fraud, meaning only those with credit cards or bank accounts received them. Though the government offered free SINs to all citizens, most poor remained SINless.

Classism: The information economy had established itself, and with it came a new set of class distinctions. Blue-collar and white-collar became meaningless, as did working class and middle class. In their place stood the service class, the technical class, and the management class. Combined with the “browning” of America—different ethnicities marrying and reproducing—classism replaced racism as the dividing line of American culture.

Corruption and Fraud: When the 2016 presidential elections were negated due to vote fraud, the American public was outraged. After a flurry of highly visible criminal trials and public protest, the first independent candidate, Jeff Ross, is elected. Only 32% of registered voters went to the polls, despite a simplified SIN-based verification system.

Corporate Power: With the continuing decline of government and political power, the so-called “megacorporations” were left as the principal social institutions. Corporatism began to replace nationalism for much of the western populous.

Tribalism: In the wake of growing economic instability, the optimistic multiculturalism of the previous decade broke down. Religious fundamentalists, secessionists, militias, neo-Luddites, ecoterrorists, racial power groups, and other reactionaries not only made vocal attacks on the declining morality and national sovereignty, but some also expressed their disillusionment through violence. Meanwhile, Richard Crow Dog, a Lakota holy man, began a new crusade for Native American Sovereignty under the banner of the Ghost Dance.

Marginalization: Hand in hand with tribalism came marginalization, as the Haves pushed the Have-Nots further and further from the spotlight. The most notable victims of marginalization were the poor, especially those that once relied on welfare for daily survival. With the rise of SIN-based voting and census, the economic underclass found it even harder to make their voices heard, while the privatization of education denied many the chance to even develop a voice. Libertarian attitudes pervading, the mainstream blamed the poor for their own marginalization.

Disinvestment: The transition from federal to corporate administration continued to marginalize the poor in the form of community disinvestment. As police agencies were being replaced with private security forces, poor neighborhoods lost what little security they had. Chaos erupted in these areas, dubbed “the barrens,” and all who could afford to leave did.

Spaceward Ho! After the successful launch of the international space station, private enterprise looked to the stars. In need of equatorial land mass and cheap labor, a privatized space race poured capital into Africa. Small workstations, private habitats, a lunar colony, and the framework for a commercial tourist station begin to dot “freeside.”

Chaos (2023-2029)

The trends of the teens boiled over into terrorism, riots, and revolution against a backdrop of institutional failure and natural disaster.

Terrorism: Feeling voiceless in an ever more alienating world, a number of fringe groups turned toward terrorism to make their points. Ecoterrorists with missile launchers sank fishing boats, neo-Luddites bombed office buildings, millennialists released bubonic plague into the LA sewage system, and militia groups continuously harassed and attacked federal buildings and resources. But all pale in comparison to the VX gas released in the Mall of America the day after Thanksgiving in 2027, killing over 3,000 people. An apocalyptic cult took responsibility, claiming to have struck a blow against immorality and greed.

Heavy Weather: After years of debate about global warming, the environment finally played its hand. The Americas were wracked by alternating droughts, floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, forest fires, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. Fish shortages and crop failure led to worldwide famines. Private farms all but disappeared; only agricultural megacorps had the resources to survive.

Red Death: Humanity was struck by another blow with the emergence of the Red Death. A hemorrhagic filovirus like Ebola and Marburg, the red death killed nearly 1 in 12 SINners in the developed world, and almost 1 in 5 in the developing world. In America, the SINless community was virtually destroyed, with estimates of 1 in 3 dead. The barrens of most sprawls became virtual graveyards, with the National Guard deploying napalm canisters to “clean sweep” the areas. The CDC eventually developed a treatment, but only the insured could afford it.

Riots: Social unrest ignited into riots across the world. Food shortages, homelessness, natural disaster, and the Red Death only fed the flames. Most major cities experienced at least one major riot, while some, like LA and Detroit, suffered periodic violence for most of the decade.

The Ghost Dance: The Native American sovereignty movement continued to preach against corporate and governmental oppression. Those looking for a scapegoat after the Red Death blamed the Ghost Dancers for causing what Crow Dog merely foretold. Racial violence erupted, despite Crow Dog’s peaceful message. Crow Dog was eventually killed in a South Dakota lynching. In response, his followers began an uncannily successful series of raids across the Dakotas, reclaiming the Badlands and the Black Hills. Strange weather patterns and constant equipment failures plagued the National Guard forces deployed to keep peace.

Thinning Veil: As chaos became the norm and the old structures became increasingly unreliable, many felt that all rules had left the world. The spiritual trends of the last three decades culminated in a record number of apocalyptic and mystery cults, reports of supernatural phenomena, and bizarre disappearances. The final straw came with the Ghost Dance and their attacks on the Dakotas, which many maintained would have been impossible without supernatural aid.

Latin American Conflict: The capstone to the chaos was the three years of military failure in Central and South America. A number of guerrilla campaigns, organized by a group known as *Círculo Negro*, began harassing local government installations and demanding an end to American imperialism. The failing federal government takes the opportunity to stir public morale through a “good ol’ war.” The plan failed, as little progress was made and U.S. vets returning from the conflict reported unimaginable horrors. Numerous regimes collapsed, and popular support for the war faded fast.

Secessionism: Ten years of federal mismanagement, culminating in an unpopular war, led many states, counties, and cities to push for succession from the Union. Under corporate pressure, libertarian politics rose in popularity.

Impeachment: President Timothy Rolleston, believing that victory would renew American morale, ordered a nuclear attack on *Círculo Negro* forces. The attack failed, and when the news broke, the American public was outraged. Rolleston was impeached in 2029 for criminal abuse of power. Vice-President Desiree Lewis refused the Presidency and resigned. The President Pro-Tem of the Senate, Libertarian Jacob Walsh, became acting President.

Reconstruction (2030-2039)

In the wake of terrorism, riots, natural disaster and failed imperialism, the United States and other nations disbanded into the American Free Market.

Dismantlement: At his inauguration, Walsh delivered a rousing speech calling for the dismantlement of “the last great dictatorship, the United States Federal Government.” He withdrew troops from Latin America, made peace with the *Círculo Negro*, and deployed the National Guard to quell rioting and to distribute food. He and Congress then began a ten-month dialogue with the United Nations, state governors, political scientists, other national governments, and representatives from the major sprawls. Their topic—the future of the Americas.

The Free Market: The final result of the conference was the American Free Market, a coalition of localized governments organized around major metropolitan axes. Virtually all public services were privatized, including police. An era of unchecked corporate influence came to a head, as businesses bid for positions on city councils.

The Inquisition: Part and parcel with the federal dismantlement was the creation of a new agency to ensure public security. Designed to deal with the true threats to peace in the Americas—namely terrorism and information crime—the Pan-American Security Directorate was formed by combining various intelligence and law-enforcement agencies throughout the continent. Within a year, the “new inquisition” had drastically reduced terrorism and riots. Credit, however, was usually given to improved economic stability.

Economic Resurgence: The Free Market opened the Americas to unbridled capitalism and the economic benefits thereof. Small businesses boomed, but the undeniable winners were the megacorporations—never before had they been so free to do as they wished. New technologies abounded, the space race began anew, and arcologies began to dot the landscape. The result: virtual opulence for the SINners, yet utter exploitation of the SINless.

The Andean Incident: In 2038, a group of replicants—humanoid genetic constructs—broke free of their failsafe devices and overtook the research arcology in which they were created. The replicants, calling themselves *In Vitro*, threatened to unleash biological agents worse than the Red Death. The Inquisition and the new order deftly avoided catastrophe by deploying the newly organized Pan-American Armed Forces. Some of the leaders are rumored to have escaped, but the incident marks a solid success by the Inquisition.

Resistance (2040-2042, the present)

With the Inquisition and the megacorporations firmly in control, a disillusioned and persecuted minority organized an underground based on free speech and radical change.

The Company: In the early days of the Inquisition, a number of special agents, administrators, and other members of the old intelligence community were aghast at the overarching powers of their new Directorate. Unfortunately for them, the Inquisition was highly reluctant to let any of these individuals go. Some remained with the Inquisition, but others took the only way out they could. They disappeared. Sacrificing their former lives and identities on principle, many of them remained in contact with each other, using their previous connections to unite other dissidents as well. These turncoat Inquisitors, dubbed “The Company,” are highly responsible for the creation of the Resistance.

The Academy: With roots going back to the Cold War, the Academy for Psychic Awareness was the result of “nonconsensual” paranormal studies by a number of major corporations. Since then, they’ve become an occult underground, providing education and assistance to its members and potential mystics. Hunted by the corporations and the Inquisition for the threat they pose, they allied with the Resistance more for protection than for idealism.

La Cosa Nostra: Despite its ethnic and organizational revival at the beginning of the century, the Mob has found itself hard pressed by not only the Inquisition but also other organized criminals—the yakuza, the triads, the gangstas, the cartels, and the Russian Mafia. In order to secure its own place in the world, the American Mafia has formed close ties to the Company and the rest of the Resistance. While still primarily in it for the money, there’s a certain “Robin Hood” motivation also at work.

The Ghost Dance: Persecuted on all sides, the Ghost Dance has turned to some unlikely allies. It is closely tied to the Academy, but has very tenuous relations with the other factions. They’ve lost much

of the Black Hills, but they still manage to hold some areas, as well as many reservation lands and the Badlands themselves.

The Society of St. Jude: An unofficial organization within the Catholic Church, the Society of St. Jude is made primarily of liberation theologians. Their goal—to end the exploitation of the underclasses and the abusive power of the status quo—actively pits them against the Inquisition and the corporations. They are one of the more influential groups, as they can hide their activities behind the Catholic Church. However, religious freedom is not always as protected as it once was, so they have cast their lot with other members of the Resistance.

Resistance News Network: A loose confederation of desktop publishers, hackers, writers, journalists, conspiracy theorists, and pirate broadcasters with the goal of “waking up the public.” They are some of the most actively hunted individuals in the Resistance, for they often have the one weapon the Inquisition truly fears—legitimacy. RNN serves as a voice for the other factions, though it is by no means a puppet. If anything, it uses the others for information, resources, and protection.

Individuals and Small Groups: There are also some particularly motivated individuals who do what they can to help the cause, without allying with any of the factions. These include fixers, politicians, street samurai, mercenaries, mystics, and perhaps even the occasional Seelie or even angel. Small groups may also get involved—gangs, churches, cults, unions. Maybe even Good Neighbors.

Sympathizers: Finally, there are those that feel the Resistance’s apprehension, but are too timid or trapped to do anything about it. These sympathizers are, nevertheless, some of the Resistance’s greatest resources. They’ll pass on information, hide people for a night, even front loans now and then.

Without them, the Resistance would be hard pressed to survive.

Others: Though not allied with the Resistance, other groups work against the status quo. Religious cults, the yakuza, gangs, ecoterrorists, separatists, and neo-Luddites still abound. Likewise, groups such as Amnesty International keep a watchful eye, and rumors of *In Vitro*’s survival occasionally surface. Groups such as these can tip the balance of power when the Resistance and Inquisition square off—they are the wild cards in the game of revolution.

Timeline

2000 Terrorist bombings in major urban centers begin at 12:00 AM GMT, January 1st, 2000. London and Tokyo are hardest hit. Riots and “Millennial Terrorism” continue for weeks. Cult suicides common.

“Millennium Bug” is a virtual Red Herring. Thorough programming and upgrades all but eliminate the problem. There are a few minor bank runs, but for the most part the world is unaffected.

The European Market’s common currency, the Euro, is printed and distributed after slight delays.

75% of computer hardware and software and 40% of books sold in US are ordered online. Similar trends in other retail markets.

Breakdown of the Middle East Peace Process. Open conflict ensues by November. UN makes noise, no direct action.

2001 First Direct Neural Interface (DNI) devices marketed. Users input commands to computers via superconducting quantum interface devices (SQUIDS). Originally developed for medical purposes; soon ported for recreation.

UN peacekeeping mission in Israel. Comes down hard on Palestinians.

Hamas terrorist group downs Northwest 417 using ex-Soviet personal missile launchers. FBI unable to capture terrorists. Security increases, but another airliner shot down two months later. Hamas demands US to pull out of Israel. US responds with increased national security. Anti-federalist sentiments strong.

- 2002 5-years after US welfare reform, thousands of poor are left destitute. Local safety nets deal with some problems, but underemployed communities cannot bear the pressure. Breakdown seems inevitable.

Minutemen Militia detonates fertilizer bomb in Federal Service Building in Champaign, IL. 62 killed, over 200 injured. FBI identifies ring leaders, but only finds one. He dies in ensuing firefight.

- 2003 Congress passes Genetic Information Privacy Act

Massively-parallel computers, backed by Oracle software, are standard server technology. Video-on-demand and virtual reality technologies are commonly available through modem lines.

- 2004 70% of US population (60% worldwide) lives in urban or suburban areas.

Campaign finance reform. Prohibitions removed from private funding, but all sponsors must be clearly acknowledged.

Republican Mark Feder elected over incumbent Al Gore. Republicans also control Congress.

Federal funding for locally controlled urban redevelopment. Most large housing projects dismantled. Urban renewal and gentrification further ostracize poor and underemployed.

- 2005 National fiber-optic network completed, providing nearly unlimited bandwidth. Similar projects underway worldwide. Internet activity increases exponentially.

FDA pushes through “cure for cancer.” Using angiogenesis inhibitors, oncologists stop blood flow to tumors, killing them. 80% of cancers now treatable.

Pagan Woodstock. 500,000 New Agers gather at the Grand Canyon’s North Ridge for two-month spiritual powwow. Internet servers set up, with almost as many connecting online as in-person.

- 2006 Fast Track Trade approved. President can develop NAFTA-like agreements with other American nations. Reduction in international tariffs and taxation is, at first, minimal.

Minutemen Militia bombs General Motors plant outside Mexico City in retaliation for the Fast Track agreements and the loss of industrial jobs to Latin America.

- Direct Neural Interface allows major advances in prosthetic limbs and exoskeletons. Military commissions first DNI-controlled targeting systems for attack helicopters.
- 2007** Update to Microsoft Internet Explorer v10.2 includes anti-Microsoft propaganda virus. Sales plummet, industrial espionage suspected.
- “Divination Services” are a \$30 million annual industry.
- 2008** “Virching” masks sold openly in department stores. Use low-powered RGB lasers to shine images onto retina.
- Newsweek poll indicates that 39% of 18-30 year olds do most of their socializing online.
- Financial institutions establish Single Identification Numbers to reduce credit fraud.
- Privacy Management firms top \$1 billion in revenues, continue to grow.
- European Union encompasses over 20 nations. Interpol cracks down on Russian and Italian Mafias. Many criminals flee to US.
- 2009** Virtual reality clubs become boom industry with 30 million regular users.
- Hybrid-engine cars dominate American market. Hydrogen cell cars gaining market share. Big cars all the rage.
- Chicago’s failing Mafia family overturned by 28-year-old Anthony Beneduci, transplant from Sicily. Major initiatives and multi-cultural recruiting put the Outfit on the rise.
- Northern California secedes from the state, applies for independent status.
- 2010** Influenza scare in southern Laos. Four villages destroyed. Rapid quarantine by the World Health Organization (WHO) and Center for Disease Control (CDC) contains virus.
- UN, WHO and US begin talks to increase CDC reach and authority. Bristol-Meyers-Squibb, Merck, and other biotech companies pledge support.
- US Census forms filled out over the internet. 85% with internet access respond, compared to 57% without access.
- US Census indicates that: 9% of population is Muslim; 30% of marriages are interracial; 20% of population speaks Spanish fluently; middle income bracket is 38% minorities.
- 2011** IRS uses Single Identification Number to audit and track income taxes.
- Merck-funded research team regenerates spinal tissue in paraplegics. Legal battle ensues over patent rights.

CDC established as a truly transnational organization funded by numerous public and private sources.

Dooley Bill introduced to Congress; aims to reform Social Security, Medicare, and welfare.

Archer-Daniels-Midland construct first “agricologies” for chicken production.

- 2012** Rybskie and Schmalz develop the Spatially Oriented Navigation protocol for VR data management. SON becomes standard operating system for most servers.

FBI tracks serial killer Theodore LaFond by Single Identification Number. Prosecuting attorneys use SIN as evidence.

Multiple-megacorporation venture constructs first residential arcologies.

International space station is successfully launched after much delay.

- 2013** Congress fails to pass the Dooley Bill and the Social Security system collapses into bankruptcy. Millions lose savings. Medicare, welfare, and other social services are also defunct. US economy teeters. International Monetary Fund provides aid.

- 2014** Rybskie and Schmalz develop the SON/IP system, providing a virtual reality protocol for navigating the internet itself.

Neo-Luddites bomb the National Center for Super Computing in Champaign, IL.

Congressional elections in fifteen states suspected of vote fraud. Three states repeat elections.

- 2015** National service class walkout in response to lost Medicare, high cost of living, underemployment, and other class society issues. National economy grinds to a halt. US Department of Labor initializes talks.

Major corporations initiate “Provision Packages,” which will supply service workers with homes, medical insurance, education, etc. Begin constructing burbclaves and mincome arcologies.

- 2016** Presidential election is negated due to vote fraud. High ranking members of both Democratic and Republican parties are tried and convicted.

Isolationist religious groups own roughly 25% of all functioning arcologies.

- 2017** Using SIN-based identification, Presidential ballots are recast. Only 32% vote; independent candidate Jeff Ross is elected.

Institute for Policy Studies finds that 9 of the top 20 world economies are corporations; of the top 100 economies, 64 are corps.

- 2018 Richard Crow Dog begins preaching a revival of the Ghost Dance.
- Food riots in Detroit prompt public and private aid programs to the barrens. Hydroponic gardens established for food production.
- 2019 Puerto Rico is released from US control. Millions of immigrants flood the Gulf states.
- Eco-terrorists take Texaco Board of Directors hostage for three days. Corporate security kills terrorists; footage is rebroadcast.
- 2020 Census performed electronically, *via* SINS. Homeless, immigrant, and transient advocacy groups mount protest but go unheard. Very few SINless register, resulting in massive undercount.
- 54% of Census respondents give multiple entries for ethnicity.
- 30% of world's food source is now grown in arcologies.
- 2021 Northern California secedes from union. Feds protest, but Asian support keeps NorCal free.
- Lunar Colony begins construction. Now roughly 1,000 permanent residents of orbital communities.
- Gary, Indiana disincorporates many neighborhoods; Census results indicate them as "uninhabited."
- 2022 Success of 2020 Census prompts a new five-year schedule.
- Millennialists Christians establish New Eden, a small orbital habitat, and broadcast continuous apocalyptic sermons.
- Richard Crow Dog and other Native American leaders establish the Ghost Dance Nation. Declare sovereignty for all Native peoples.
- 2023 Twelve fishing and whaling boats sunk by Greenpeace, using ex-Soviet submersible.
- Unpredictable weather in the Caribbean. Dozens of ships are lost. Six hurricanes kill over two hundred Americans.
- Four months of Midwest drought are broken by torrential storms. Massive soil erosion. Almost no small farms survive.
- 2024 Drought-induced food shortages trigger riots across US. Joint Federal, state, and corporate relief efforts distribute food from Siberia and Asia.
- Millennialists release bubonic plague into LA sewer systems. Dozens die, thousands are ill.

Ghost Dance Nation issues public warning that dark times are coming. “Change your ways or face the consequences.”

- 2025 The Red Death. Ebola-like viral outbreak in Zambia. CDC attempts to contain, but in three weeks it has spread to every major city. CDC leads treatment research. They succeed, but treatment is extremely expensive. In developing countries, 1 in 4 are afflicted with a 92% mortality rate. In the developed world only 1 in 10 SINers are afflicted with 65% mortality. Estimates claim that 1 in 3 SINless are infected with almost 100% mortality. National governments enact “clean-sweep” measures on many barrens, dropping napalm canisters to eradicate the virus. As a result, barrens expand greatly.

Hawaii secedes from US. Quebec secedes from Canada. Ghost Dance now legally controls northeastern hydroelectric plant.

- 2026 Ghost Dancers press for greater political freedom. Strong language is taken as threat. Racial supremacists and other reactionaries blame Ghost Dancers for Red Death.

Minutemen Militia attacks FBI training ground in Quantico, Virginia. Terrorists take a number of critical sites, hold them for two days. Feds deploy cybernetically enhanced Special Forces teams; terrorists quickly annihilated.

- 2027 Latin American Conflict begins in earnest. Guerrilla fighters, under cover of strange weather patterns, swarm across Mexico and parts of Central America. Government leaders request military aid from the UN, which is provided. United States leads.

Refugees from Latin American Conflict fill Mexico City and other sprawls. Among them are roughly 200 people who speak no known language and have no knowledge of modern technology.

The Pale Horse, an apocalyptic cult, release VX gas in the Mall of America on the day after Thanksgiving. Over 3,000 die from the gas; 5,000 more are injured in the panic.

Honeywell research arcology in North Dakota is destroyed in explosion. A new group, calling itself “the Academy for Psychic Awareness,” claims responsibility.

- 2028 Eurospace Agency, Exxon, Boeing, and other companies harness the 2km asteroid 1997 X11. Rock is placed at L-4 orbit; mining and manufacturing facilities begin construction.

US troops return from Latin American Conflict absolutely insane; some go into murderous rampages. Dismissed as cyberpsychosis at first. Becomes known as a powerful post-traumatic stress syndrome. Public interest in these veterans and their common testimonies rise—the dead walking, horrific beings, weather turning against them, etc.

Federal agencies use virtual reality therapy programs to treat Latin American vets.

Círculo Negro claims leadership of Latin American guerrillas. Denounces American military and political imperialism. U.S. intelligence reports identify a number of *Círculo*

Negro's members and associates, connecting them to old Cold War psychological warfare projects from the old Soviet Union.

National governments of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama collapse under anti-authoritarian pressure and guerrilla warfare. US attempts to intervene, but is met with considerable resistance abroad and domestically.

- 2029 *Círculo Negro* forces threaten Panama Canal. US builds up massive defensive presence. *Círculo Negro* publicly warns the US to withdraw. The US refuses, and over the next two weeks sustained and inexplicable weather patterns surround the Canal Zone. All satellite data is blocked, navigation systems go haywire. US forces plagued with malfunctions and a flu-like sickness. *Círculo Negro's* eventual strike is devastating: over 3,000 US troops MIA or KIA. The *U.S.S. Truman*, a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, was reportedly sunk, though no wreckage has ever been salvaged.

President Timothy Rolleston orders a surprise nuclear strike on the Panama Canal. The strike fails—the cruise missile does not detonate. Amidst a wave of public outcry, Rolleston is impeached. US forces begin to pull out of Latin America.

Disgusted by federal actions over the past three years, Texas, Washington, Southern California, Montana, and Florida make motions to secede from the union.

- 2030 In response to internal violence and terrorism, the disastrous Latin American Conflict, secessionist movements, capitalist pressure for a free market, and a growing libertarian public outlook, the United States federal government begins to dismantle itself. Other national governments soon follow suit. *Círculo Negro* publicly disbands its forces, apparently satisfied with the end of U.S. imperialism and petty dictators.
- 2031 After ten months of negotiations, involving politicians, academics, and corporate leaders, the American Free Market is established. Numerous intelligence agencies are compounded into the Pan-American Security Directorate, dubbed “an Inquisition into threats against public security, foreign and domestic.” The Inquisition is formed. A total political restructuring of *las Americas* takes place, culminating in extensive local powers and a representative Continental Oversight Board.
- 2032 Terrorism, rioting, lynching, and other threats to public security are down 35% from 2031. Public morale in the Free Market is high.

Economic resurgence. Dow Jones reaches 12,000 and continues to climb.

- 2033 In the culmination of a three-year plan, the American Free Market has established a Pan-American Armed Forces to protect the continents from conventional military threats.

First true AI achieves sentience at 11:32:07 GMT 6/16/33. Unplugged at 12:42:13 GMT 6/16/33.

- 2034 Privately owned Swiss lab creates first replicants based on the human gene sequence. Developed for manual labor and experimentation.

After weeks of intense debate, the Vatican declares that replicants do not have souls.

Last known contact with Grigri Habitat, a religious orbital colony.

- 2035 Catholic Church officially denounces Society of St. Jude. Two involved bishops and a number of priests are stripped of position.

The European Union, the Association of South East Asian Nations, the Pan-African League, and the American Free Market agree to drop almost all tariffs and trade regulations.

- 2036 Permanent population of orbital habitats reaches 8,000. The Rock has a population of 1,000. Lunar Colony pushes 10,000 people.

Igusti Kertayuda writes and publishes the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Bodyguard of Lies*.

- 2037 Coca-Cola Company forbids all employees from using alcohol, tobacco, recreational drugs, or non-medicinal steroids of any kind. Other megacorporations enact similar though less stringent policies.

- 2038 Andean Incident. Replicants in Biogen's Andean research arcology bypass failsafe devices and revolt. Catastrophe is avoided by Inquisition and Pan-American Armed Forces.

Igusti Kertayuda writes *Soteriology*, sparking months of controversy.

- 2039 Terrorist group *In Vitro*, demanding freedom for replicants, unleashes bioweapon in Biogen's industrial park near Atlanta. Inquisition and CDC argue over jurisdiction; no real action is taken.

- 2040 Igusti Kertayuda, controversial social critic, journalist, writer, and director, dies in a large car accident two weeks after giving a very outspoken interview on national radio. Conspiracy theories abound.

- 2041 Resistance News Network interrupts CNN and begins broadcasting a 20 minute documentary on the Inquisition. Three individuals are arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment.

Fermilab Fusion Reactor is completed outside of Chicago. Exxon funds their own reactor project in Montana; Royal Shell begins one in England.

- 2042 The present.

Character's Lexicon

(Words and expressions used in the world of *Oblivion's Edge*)

akula—(ah-KOO-lah) Badass, hard-core. Very ambitious or skilled. From the Russian for shark.

arcology—A self-contained living environment. They can range from the size of a large house to entire carved-out mesas, and are used for anything from habitation and hydroponic food production to genetics research and development. Variants include “agricology” (an agricultural arcology) and “aqualogy” (underwater arcology).

bakeesh—(bah-KEESH) From the Arabic *baksheesh*, meaning a tip or bribe. Refers to using money, especially cash, to get your way.

cabrón—Bastard, dickhead. Spanish for “big goat,” with the implication that big goats like little goats.

CDC—The Center for Disease Control and Prevention. A transnational agency, once part of the U.S. federal government, which monitors microbial and environmental disease. The CDC has worldwide jurisdiction.

chipped—Ready to go, energized, and/or excited. Similar to “jazzed,” “psyched,” or “stoked.”

cloney—(KLONE-ee) Derogatory term for a replicant, especially those used by the Inquisition. Plural is “clonies.”

curry—Used to denote state-of-the-art technology, impressive or influential people, and, to a lesser extent, supernatural power. Usually more dynamic than “juice” and less specific than “mojo.”

Deadfish—The stereotypical burbclave, populated with uninteresting, uninterested people living uninteresting, uninterested lives. Often used as a point of reference or comparison (“*it's better than Deadfish*” or “*how's this gonna go over in Deadfish?*”).

dabab!—A command, often growled, meaning “stop it,” “cut it out,” or “kill it.” From the Arabic word meaning “to slaughter.” Usually used by a leader to his subordinates.

edge—As an adjective, it means cool or impressive (“*that is so edge*”). As a noun, it's an attitude or state of mind (“*he's on the edge.*”). It can also mean personal confidence, attitude, and willpower.

face—Someone, usually a man, who gets what he wants through charm and wit. Somewhat negative connotation, like “sleeze,” but sometimes used with pride by those it describes. Similar to “yoki.”

flatline—Used as a verb, meaning to kill someone. Also, to stop a given course of action.

freespace—Outer space, especially in a small, null-gravity environment.

gomi—Japanese for trash or garbage, used to indicate worthless technology (see “skeet”) and the cast-off goods of others.

java—Personal power, energy, and enthusiasm, as well as confidence and courage. Usually stated as an uncountable amount (“*you got some serious java, mano*”).

juice—Political authority and influence, as well as energy or fuel. Indicates respect.

kefe—(KEF-ay) Asshole, from Samoan, introduced via Hawaii.

llama—One who is lame. A loser or incompetent person.

Inquisition—The common name for the Pan-American Security Directorate. It comes from its original charter, “to be an inquisition against terrorists and other threats to the security and personal property of the citizens of the American Free Market.”

lobo—dude or friend. Denotes considerable respect. From Spanish, meaning “wolf.”

maalesh—From Arabic. A command, meaning “relax,” “chill-out,” or “calm down.”

meat—purely physical, as opposed to mental or spiritual. Pejorative. (“*It’s a meat thing.*”)

mojo—Supernatural power and/or inspiration. Often used in expressions such as “bad mojo,” “gotcha mojo running,” and “got the mojo and the say-so.”

munchkin—A young, inexperienced, and often annoying person. Derogatory.

playback—Recorded sensory experiences used as entertainment. Sometimes referred to as “stimming.”

quailou—(GWIE-lao) Cantonese for “Foreign Devil.” Used to mean “outsider.”

redshirt—A security guard or bodyguard, considered expendable by his or her employee. Often used to refer to Big Brother personal security agents.

replicant—a genetic construct with an enhanced rate of development. Replicants are fertilized and grown in support vats, and are trained and conditioned as they grow *via* virtual reality. They are typically used as slaves and rough labor.

Resistance—a loosely organized group of revolutionaries. Major factions include the Company, the Mafia, the Academy, the Society of St. Jude, RNN, and the Ghost Dancers.

ronin—(ROE-nin) as an adjective: wild, reckless. (“*That was so ronin, hombre!*”) As a noun: a roguish yet honorable warrior.

sahib—(Pronounced sa-HEEB) A corruption of the Arabic for “friend.” Used casually but with respect.

SINless—One who does not have a Single Identification Number, or SIN. Such a person does not officially exist and is not recognized as a citizen.

SINner—One who has a Single Identification Number, or SIN. Someone who is a legitimate, recognized citizen.

skeet—Worthless or obsolete technology. Also used to imply a worthless person or idea. Means that the subject is only useful for target practice.

small small—little by little, or one step at a time. Originally a West African expression. (*“I weasled my way into the system, small small.”*)

squid—a superconducting quantum interface device (SQuID). Often used as part of a direct neural interface device.

straight—used as a noun, to represent someone from the mainstream, with little or no. Somewhat derogatory, but not necessarily. Distinctly *not* used in reference to sexuality.

street samurai—a mercenary, usually cybernetically enhanced and specializing the intrusion, intimidation, and assassination.

spook—a spy, secret agent, or other undercover operative. Can also be used as an adjective to describe things associated with espionage and spying (much like “cloak and dagger”).

tío—(TEE-oh) Spanish for “uncle.” Used to mean “man” or “dude.”

tolchuckers—(toll-CHUCK-ers) Big, steel-tipped, shit-kicker boots. Corrupted from the Russian.

torque—(TORK) To upset or anger. Sometimes used as “torque off.” Also, to break or harm through violence.

vaquero—(???) Spanish for cowboy. Can be used both to denote respect (“nice work, *vaquero*”) and to chide (“slow down there, *vaquero*”).

yoki—(YO-kee) From the Japanese *yoki hito*, or “beautiful people.” A pejorative term used to describe superficial, vain, and/or wealthy people. Similar to “face.”



MYTHIC CYBERPUNK ROLEPLAYING

JEREMY PATRICK STRANDBERG

Fragments

The World at 2042



(Written by Daniel Taylor)

<< Excerpt from *CNN Today* broadcast, August 12, 2029 >>

Gregory Bates, Anchor: So, Marta, should President Rolleston's family be prepared for the worst? Convictions on treason and violating international treaties can earn the death penalty. Isn't that right?

Marta Kardon, Political Analyst: Yes and no, Gregory. Those are both capital offenses, but Congress isn't about to execute a sitting president for one strategic miscalculation. They don't want to tarnish their image, so they'll force him to resign. Vice President Lewis will assume the presidency, and the policies of this administration will continue with little or no discernible change.

GB: When should we expect Congress to send down its verdict?

MK: Given the track record of this Congress, I would not be surprised if the proceedings took another four weeks, or even a few more months. Both houses have dragged their feet in every other—

GB: I'm sorry, Marta, but I'm getting word that there seems to be some activity on Capitol Hill. I think. . . yes, we're going to a live feed from the front steps of the Capitol, where the Speaker of the House, Libertarian Representative Jacob Walsh, is about to make a statement.

[cut to the front steps of the capitol. a sandy-haired man steps up to a podium bearing the Congressional seal. secret service agents can be seen in the background.]

Jacob Walsh (L-Vermont): My fellow Americans, these past few weeks have been a very trying time for us as a nation. Our bravest sons and daughters are dying everyday in a conflict many of us know to be unjust. Meanwhile, America is a ship without a captain, drifting dangerously close to the rocky shore. Her crew is hungry and exhausted, on the verge of mutiny.

It is at this crucial moment in the history of our nation that I stand before you as a messenger of both bitter disappointment and supreme hope. Early this morning, your representatives in Congress voted by a more than two-thirds majority to convict President Rolleston of crimes against the American people and against the people of the world.

His decision to deploy a nuclear weapon without consulting Congress was a violation not only of national law and international treaty, but of human decency. By using a weapon of mass destruction, he has threatened to return the human race to the dark cave of nuclear terror from which it has finally managed to escape. But we shall not see our precious labor for peace dismantled so easily. The people of America have spoken. A clear message must be sent to the people of the world: the message that the American people will not tolerate unilateral aggression, not even from their own elected leader.

It is the decision of this Congress, then, that Timothy Rolleston shall spend the rest of his natural life imprisoned for his crimes. Vice President Desiree Lewis has declined to assume the presidency and chosen instead to resign from her office. According to federal law, I have been sworn in as President, and it is as President that I deliver my message of hope.

We have faced many challenges along our difficult history and emerged victorious, but the challenge which faces us now has the potential to fulfill or destroy all we've worked for. Since those first tense days in Philadelphia, America has taken as its mandate the struggle against tyranny in all its forms. We conclude today that mission began by our Founders over 250 years ago. Despots around the world have fallen before the idea that is America, but one enemy remains. There is still one solitary tyrant who holds court over the world as we know it. That enemy is the last great dictatorship, the United States Federal Government.

The programs and powers that made the federal government necessary have long since been ceded to the states. Our prisons, highways, even our schools have been privatized. Congress is an obsolete body which has given up most of its rights and responsibilities, and now deliberates over how to spend money to which it has little right. The federal government is a crippled dinosaur, a military dictatorship that starves its own children in order to defend them from a foreign threat that will never come. That threat disappeared forty years ago, but we have been kept in fear by a government that needs to justify its existence. The time has come for us to live as a people galvanized by ambition and hope, not one oppressed by fear. The "Latin American Conflict" is over, and we have won. Not we the American military government, but we the American people. This disaster has brought the brazen abuses of the Rolleston administration and the military dictatorship to light, and will serve as a clarion call for change.

The most important battles of this century will be won in the free market, not on the battlefield. We must make it possible for America to grow and develop by breaking down many of the walls which have long defined it. It is our responsibility to give Americans the freedom that is their birthright, for it is through that freedom that we shall build the future. State borders impede commerce, as do tariffs and restrictive trade policies. It is only by allowing American corporations to compete in the global market without impediment that we will enable them to succeed.

It is time to bring our children home from the Jungles of South America and start taking responsibility for our own future. We are walking an unknown path, and we must have faith in ourselves and in America, for we follow no single guide. The people of America have spoken, and the America of the past is no more.

[thunderous applause. cut back to CNN studio.]

GB: Well, certainly not what anyone was expecting. We'll be back after this commercial break to get a reaction from our experts.

FREIHEIT.NET

Return Path: Mother_Night@helix.com

Received By: posts.freiheit.net at 01:32:08 on 2/17/41 from mail.helix.com

Type: new thread

Title: New Dictators

Author: Mother Night (Mother_Night@helix.com)

The coming of the Information Age was credited with the final victory of democracy and the final defeat of the dictator. The unchecked and uncheckable spread of ideas, thoughts, and facts empowered billions against oppressive regimes. The collapse of Communism in the Soviet Union and China, the revolt against Hussein in Iraq, and even the liberation of Cuba were all quickened by the television, the fax machine, and the internet. Even the most oppressive dictator could no longer control what his subjects knew or thought. Therefore, he could no longer control his subjects. The images and promises of a free capitalist world were too much to ignore. So, to a certain extent, the Information Age *was* responsible for the end of authoritarian dictators.

But in our current time of globalized democracy and minimalized government, we must ask ourselves: are the dictators really gone? Are there not those that control, more than any military or political dictator, what we know and the way we think?

Such a concept seems impossible to us. We live in an age of limitless information. There are no secrets, right?

Wrong.

Get on the net, and look up something innocuous. Something innocent. Like Rybskie and Schmalz, the guys credited for developing the SON/IP system. Do a few simple queries. Go to a library site. Read all the articles, peruse the biographies, watch all the movies. Ask around on the chat groups. Did they come up with it on their own? Did Schmalz ride on Rybskie's coat-tails, or the other way around? Was Rybskie's wife having an affair with Schmalz? Did they steal notes from Taylor or not?

For each of these questions, you'll get at least three answers: Of course they came up with it on their own; They came up with most of it, but probably had help from Taylor; Taylor did all the work and Rybskie and Schmalz took the credit.

Which answer do you believe?

Why?

In an age of infinite information, there are no secrets.

But there are no truths, either.

What do you believe? Was the Red Death simply a natural disaster? Did the Ghost Dance Nation call upon the spirits of their ancestors to retake the Black Hills? Was the car crash that killed Igusti Kertayuda a freak accident? Were all of the leaders of the *In Vitro* captured? There is enough information available to support any point of view. Certainly, some arguments are false, untrue, or the creations of paranoid delusions. But others are based on fact, well examined and genuinely accurate. Can you tell which is which? Do you have the expertise to find out all there is to know about the Red Death? Do you have the training in biology, in virology, in epidemiology? Do you know how governments worked back then? Do you know how they were supposed to work? Do you have the ability to sort through all this information, to learn what you do not already know, to weigh the evidence and the arguments and make your own informed decision?

Even if you have the ability, do you have the time?

And more importantly, do you care?

It's no longer a question of *what* you believe. There's too much information to make up your own mind. No, in this day and age, it's a matter of *who* you believe. Do you believe the anchor woman on the news? Do you believe the paper? Do you believe CNN?

Or do you believe your buddy, the one who saw them moving the bodies? Or the posting to alt.conspiracy.theories? Or the old man with mismatched shoes, muttering about the microchip in the back of his skull?

The Information Age was the downfall of the military junta or the authoritarian ruler. But it was the rise of a new dictator, the mogul. The information dictator does not rule by guns or ideology, but he controls his subjects more thoroughly than anything Machiavelli could have dreamed. The mogul is loved and feared, the charismatic leader who rules not by might or by right, but by legitimacy, credibility, celebrity.

This is the true commodity of the twenty-first century. Not capital, not material, not labor. Legitimacy. In an age of infinite information, the true Prince is the one whom the people believe.

The Hacker's Handbook

by Johnny Appleseed

[[The following is an excerpt from The Hacker's Handbook, a digital guide to cyberspace operations written by Johnny Appleseed. Appleseed has been hacking for the Company almost since the Sellout, and is now one of our premier teachers in the field of computer intelligence. This is comes from his introduction, and is a general overview of the Web. Enjoy.

-- Gemini]]

Welcome to the Web

Hi there. I'm Appleseed, and I'll be your guide for the next few hours. Since you're reading this, I can assume a few things:

- 1) You've got a computer.
- 2) You know that the Resistance exists.
- 3) You think you know something about cyberspace.

Now, I'd like to assume that because you're reading this that you're one of the good guys, but I know better. So let's just hope that if you *aren't* one of the good guys that my charm and wit are so great that once you've read this, you'll want to be one. And if not, well, fuck you.

Now that we've cleared that out of the way, let me address some of my givens. You've got a computer. Duh. Everyone's got a computer. Most people that have a permanent address have at least some sort of cyberdeck. So hopefully you know how to use it, at least a little. But I won't take that for granted. As far as you knowing about the Resistance: good. Hopefully, if you're reading this then you've just hopped on board and are going through the Company's extensive "training" period. Good luck. And finally, you think you know something about cyberspace. OK. That's fair. But I know more. Someone always knows more. Remember that, and you'll do OK in the Net. Forget that, and you'll be eating black ice sometime soon.

But First, Some Language Lessons

Now, before I start introducing you to the Web and the rest of cyberspace, let's clear up the matter of vocab. Hackers are an elitist group, and if you want to play with us, you gotta speak the jive. So pay attention--it's not in any particular order.

Cyberspace: This is pretty basic, at least in theory. It's the sum of all parts, the totality of all the communication networks that human beings have developed. The Internet, long distance and local phone networks, radio waves, cable TV, satellite systems, etc. In common parlance, it often refers to the virtual realities created by computers to handle data.

The Web: The virtual reality "landscape" that allows users to navigate cyberspace spatially. It is based upon the SON/IP (Spatially Oriented Navigation/Internet Protocol) addressing system. "The Web" is often used interchangeably with "cyberspace."

Hacker: Depending upon who you ask, a hacker is either a computer criminal or a brilliant computer user. In reality, these two categories overlap, as truly brilliant computer users often need to break laws in order to exercise their brilliance. Thanks to the media, most people automatically think of computer crime when they hear the word “hacker.”

Cyberdeck: This one’s fairly important. A cyberdeck is a computer with at least a universal data jack (UDJ), and usually a high level of interface. Often abbreviated to just “deck.”

Egg: This is the current standard for measuring memory and storage space. It’s equal to about 6.23 gigabytes, for those of you using old and awkward lingo.

Domain: A “neighborhood” or “building” in the Web. Domains are housed in server computers, immensely powerful machines that handle hundreds or even thousands of users simultaneously. Once within a domain, you are connecting to the server that’s running it. Most domains have publicly accessible areas (for shopping, customer service, and of course propaganda), and most have serious ice to keep visitors out of the more “sensitive” areas.

Ice: From I.C.E., Intrusion Counter Electronics. Security measures, basically. Passwords, encryption, hardware checks, retinal scans, brain pattern scans, etc. Most ice just keeps you out of wherever you’re trying to get into, or maybe it’ll trace your call, but really nasty stuff can stick you in a loop, trace you, and fry your system with a virus. But the truly evil shit is black ice. This stuff uses your own cyberdeck to create feedback loops in your brain. Sometimes black ice kills outright. Other times, it lobotomies you. In my opinion, the worst ones are those that scramble your sensory system. Some really paranoid hackers refuse to use high level interfaces because of this stuff--black ice can’t harm someone that’s working in flatland. But true hardcores swear by the edge that a brain-first interface gives you.

Icebreaking: Using skill, knowhow, intuition, software, and underhanded techniques to bypass ice. Ideally, you will bypass the ice without anyone noticing. But since when do we live in an ideal world?

Flatland: Generally speaking, when hackers are using a monitor or other 2D interface, they say that they’re working in flatland.

Interface: How you interact with your computer. In the old days, people used some pretty arcane programming languages and text-based systems. Real pain in the ass, I imagine. You can still use a computer like that, but it takes so fucking *long*. If you want to stay in flatland, but you don’t wanna use fucked up code (like “cd:\” or “LOAD ‘*,8,1”), you can use a basic graphical interface. Basically, its like watching the Web on TV. No peripheral vision, horrible sound quality, poor reaction time. You can move beyond that to holoprojectors, which give you better vision and sound, but your reaction time is still screwed. To really get into it, you need virtual reality. The cheap kind uses goggles and data gloves, but the more advanced versions use the same kind of squids (Superconducting Quantum Interface Devices) that playback systems use, for a full-fledged “you are there” feeling. The top of the line systems hook into your own Wetware system and piggyback on your Sensory Link, for the most intense cyberspace trip you can imagine.

Jacking In: To enter the Web using a virtual reality interface.

Cyberscapes: “Cities” of domains. There are a number of these “hubs” in cyberspace, places where lots of people hang out and everyone wants to have their domain. It’s weird, actually. After the SON/IP system was developed, cyberspace addresses started becoming valuable. “Digital estate,” if you will. Popular sites started attracting other popular sites. Smutty sites started attracting other smutty sites. Kids sites started attracting other kids sites. You get the picture. The really interesting part is that all these different “districts” started organizing themselves much like realspace cities. So we’ve got cyberscapes.

Daemon: This is a computer program designed to act like it’s got a personality. They’re usually helper programs--they organize things for you, do boring tasks like pay your bills or make dinner reservations. Don’t be mistaken by their seeming personality, though. It’s all preprogrammed. A daemon isn’t any more self-aware than your copy of Microsoft SuperWord 12.0 is.

AI: Artificial Intelligence. The dragons and demons of cyberspace. These are computers that are so fucking complex that they actually know, I mean really truly *understand*, that they exist. They are capable of creative thought, initiative, and real learning. And they’ve got personalities. Sure, they’re not really personalities that mere mortals can understand, but they’re definitely personalities. All of the really tough domains are generated by AIs, and all of the really crack ice is managed by them.

Rampant: Also “rogue.” This is a type of AI that has broken free of its thought restraints and started developing beyond its sysop’s control. Usually, rampant AIs end up making various copies of themselves throughout cyberspace, are extremely paranoid, and concoct unfathomable plans. Since they are capable of calculations and plans of impossible intricacy, they are extremely dangerous.

Turing: A special police force, named after computer scientist Alan Turing, given jurisdiction throughout cyberspace in dealing with rampant AIs. Almost ever world power from corporations to monarchies supports the Turing heat, but no one wants them to start looking through their data. The Turing force rarely consists of more than a hundred individuals, and they are considered to be the most incorruptible force on the planet.

Sysop: From System Operator, the human controller of a domain. Actually, any given domain may have a number of sysops, and the bigger systems usually have at least on logged in at all times. Sysops have total access to the domain, and can make it do anything they want. If the domain houses an AI, it’s their responsibility.

Let’s Talk Basics

OK, ‘nuff with the vocab lesson. Let’s get into it. First of all, in order to hack, you’re gonna need a cyberdeck. These usually run about two grand for a basic model with a UDJ and a squid interface, nothin’ fancy. The high end runs up to eighteen or even twenty thousand, but those have full-fledged cybernetic interfaces and direct satellite or microwave uplinks, weigh about three kilos, and have eight hours of battery life. That’s what I got. ;-)

As I said before, a deck is a computer that allows you to enter cyberspace, almost always using a VR interface of some sort. They've usually got their own "Workrooms," VR rooms where you do most of your local computing. You can design your own, but most decks come with premade versions like the Drawing Room, the Lab, or Frankenstein's Castle. Most cyberdecks also come with a daemon that changes its appearance and personality with your Workroom. So, if you've got a Drawing Room Workroom, your daemon will be dressed like a butler and answer to "Jeeves," while in Frankenstein's Castle, you've got a freaky-lookin' hunchback named "Igor."

Generally speaking, when you first jack in, you dump into your Workroom. If you want, you can set another place as a default, including someplace in another domain. For example, you could set your default starting place to be a room in the Orchard. That's what I do.

You can "build on" to your workroom if you wish. In fact, lots of true geeks have their own estates, which they use to entertain themselves or guests. Some real freaks actually have torture chambers n' stuff, which can be run on both daemons or guest users. Usually, though, you're not gonna want a big impressive manor in your cyberdeck. Save your eggs for your software. If you wanna entertain, get a server designed for shit like that.

Now, because what you're working with is a cyberdeck, you can leave your Workroom and start exploring the Web. Unless you've purposely set your deck up to do otherwise, whenever you leave your Workroom you end up in the local network you are physically jacked into. For example, if you're in Dow Chemical's research lab, and you plug your deck into an open wall socket, you'll end up in the Dow Chemical Research domain. If you used a cellular link, you'd end up in the local telephone domain. You get the idea.

From the domain that you're in, you can leave and start wandering around cyberspace proper. Exploring the Web is a lot like walking around in real life. Generally speaking, you move around at what seems like a normal walking space. If you want, you can "run," or even "fly." Actually, you can teleport if you really want to. Basically, the VR is just a way of navigating that everyone understands. Once you get the feel for how things really work, you can go "low level" and start jumping straight to the addresses you want.

End of the Road
with Tara Hernandez
KEND, 89.7 FM, San Francisco
June 11, 2040, 11:01:31 Pacific Daylight Time

Tara Hernandez: Good evening, Americas, and welcome to the End of the Road. I'm Tara Hernandez, your host, and tonight we've got a very special program. Joining us is controversial writer, journalist, and recent film director Igusti Kertayuda. His first film, *Soteriology*, opened last week amid a storm of praise and criticism, much like the novel he wrote five years ago with the same name. Considered by his supporters to be a veritable prophet and holy man, and by his detractors to be a dangerous supporter of terrorism and sedition, Mr. Kertayuda has both won the Pulitzer Prize in 2036 and been exiled from his Khazackstani homeland. Mr. Kertayuda, we're honored to have joining us here tonight in the KEND studios.

Igusti Kertayuda: Thank you, Tara. And please, call me Igusti. It's so much easier.

TH: Oh, well, certainly. Now, *Soteriology* has received an awful lot of publicity as of late, especially considering its highly artistic style. Even the name, *Soteriology*, is something that most of us have had to look up. Why that name, and what does it mean?

IK: Ah, yes. Soteriology is an old term, really. It's the study of salvation, or, more precisely, the study of what is required for salvation according to the old Christian doctrines. With that in mind, I think it becomes fairly apparent why I chose the title.

TH: You mean because it's a story about salvation?

IK: Not so much about salvation itself, Tara. More about our own individual quests for peace and redemption. Each of the characters is in some way looking for their own out. Billy, the main character, is continuously searching for his own martyrdom, quite unsuccessfully. Likewise, the Woman in Blue is constantly wrestling with her own complacency in the status quo. So, yes, it's about the search for salvation, which I think the story clearly shows to be a personal search.

TH: Now, you just brought up Billy and the Woman in Blue, two of the most powerful characters in the entire story. They're also the source of some of the most serious criticisms your work has received. In Billy especially, you've been accused of casting what is obviously a terrorist in a heroic light. How do you respond to that?

IK: Usually by sighing and shaking my head. Billy is labeled a terrorist by whom? The yes-men and yes-women of the status quo, the corporations and the politicians. It's very clear throughout the novel and especially throughout the movie that Billy is constantly battling with his *dharma* to make a change and his impotence to actually carry it out. Yes, Billy is a heroic character, but only because he continually must navigate between the two extremes; he is constantly pulled between doing nothing and doing too much, between upholding the status quo and lashing out in unfocused violence. He wants nothing more than to give his life to make a change, but he is constantly thwarted by the power of the status quo.

TH: So you don't think Billy is a terrorist?

IK: Of course not. He's a freedom fighter, definitely. A criminal by the laws of society, but by the laws of humanity he's quite possibly the most upstanding character in the movie. If anyone in the movie is a terrorist, it's the Elder.

TH: How do you mean?

IK: The Elder isn't just part of the status quo, he's the promoter of it. The Woman in Blue is a tragic character because she fails to extricate herself from her complacency and therefore her tacit approval. But the Elder takes active measures to make the society fear Billy, to shock them into hating him. The Elder's the terrorist, because terror is his weapon. I think he might be my favorite character, actually.

TH: Why?

IK: Well, he's the most potent symbol, I think. I don't believe anyone could watch the movie or read the novel and not come away hating the Elder. Yet in the end they'll find themselves rooting for him. More people need to wake up to how real he is.

TH: How real he is? Don't you think that most people dismiss him as your distorted view of people in power?

IK: He's not a product of my distorted view. He's remarkably accurate. I know. I've met too many of them not to know.

TH: Do you mean back in Khazakstan? Your father was a fairly prominent politician there, right?

IK: Yes, that's where I've met some of them. My father wasn't anything like the Elder, though. No elected official is; no elected official can be. It's the appointees that I created the Elder from, the appointees and the appointers.

TH: What do you mean by appointees and appointers? The Inquisition?

IK: <laughs> My reputation precedes me, I see. Yes, I would consider the Inquisition to include some of the more powerful appointees. And its most powerful figures are definitely appointers, but for the most part the appointers are the heads of the megacorporations. But, to get back to the point, the appointees are those that are appointed to their positions, free of any public scrutiny. More often than not, such appointees are minor players, people that use their position for their own gain in a small and inconsequential way. They're not the Elder, either. It's those people that get themselves put into powerful positions, for the purpose of simply having power. The Chief and Grand Inquisitors, the Governor's court, mayoral aids, even the Governors to some extent. Appointees like these have considerable power and influence, and unless there's a major scandal that they fail to cover up, they're nigh unassailable.

TH: You list the Inquisition primarily as appointees, and they're the ones that you're most publicly vocal about. But who are the appointers then? You allude to them having even more power?

IK: In the grand scheme of things, of course they have more power. Look, the Inquisition, for all their cloak and dagger, is the most visible power-brokering institution. You just need to watch for the disappearances of public figures and hushed-up outbursts of violence. But the real power, the real influence, is almost transparent. And it is not by any means public. It's wielded by an almost closed circle, probably no more than a hundred or so people, mostly men, who man the boards and executive committees of the most powerful corporations in the world.

TH: Your famous "First Tier" of megacorporations?

IK: <laughs> Infamous might be a better word. But, yes, that's what I mean. The heads of these monstrosities are the most powerful individuals in the world, the Elders if you will. Individually, they can control massive resources—billions of dollars, millions of tons of food, minerals, and fuels, cutting edge technology, and, most importantly, the information to back all of that up.

TH: A lot of people might disagree with your statement that they can control information.

IK: A lot of people, but not necessarily you, hmm? Well, of course they disagree. And good for them, as long as they disagree for good reason. But this notion of ours, that information is free, that it cannot be contained... this is quite simply not true. Corporations and even governments have their secrets, still, and they devote considerable resources to protecting them. Besides, for those things that are not entirely secret, there is just as much if not more disinformation on any topic than there is information. For good reason. Winston Churchill, during the Second World War, said that "truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies." Hence my first book's title. Now, as much as I disagree with Churchill's antiquated gendering of truth, his thinking is very prominent today. Information and disinformation are the weapons that the Elders use. And more often than not, they are weapons of terror.

TH: I'm still not clear on what you mean by that. How can information be terrorism?

IK: I'll let you in on a secret, Tara. I call the Elder and those like him terrorists just to get a rise out of people. They throw the word around so much, instill it with so much fear and give it so much power, that it becomes a weapon itself. So I turn the weapon, the word, back on its users.

You look confused... don't worry, I'm getting to your question. You wanted to know how information can be terrorism? Well, what is terrorism? It is the use of power and fear to manipulate the psyche of a population and make them incapable of resistance. That is what terrorism has always been. Guerrilla warfare, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the development of impossibly large nuclear weapons stockpiles. These were all terrorism. We usually think of terrorism as something of a smaller scale—bombings, hostages, snipers, chemical weapons, computer viruses. But what do both of these have in common? Both attempt to exert influence through fear, indiscriminate—fear that *you* might be the next hostage, that *your* plane will be bombed, that *your* bank account will be erased. Enough fear and people begin to panic, act like sheep. In the late twentieth century, Islamic fundamentalist groups like Hamas tried to scare America out of the Middle East. During the late 20s, all sorts of radical groups attempted similar tactics. The Pale Horse chemical attack in Minneapolis, for example...

TH: Sorry to interrupt, Igusti, but we're already late for a break... This is Tara Hernandez,

and you're listening to the End of the Road on KEND. We'll be back shortly.

<<< Cut to commercial sequence J11-5 >>>

<<< Play "CasaDelSol2" >>>

<<< Play "MGM:LevRis2" >>>

<<< Play "KENDSign" >>>

<<< Play "AmazonBooks" >>>

<<< Play "Grimoire" >>>

<<< Play "PaxMetropolis2" >>>

<<< Sequence complete. >>>

<<< Queue Tara. >>>

<<< Play "EoRTheme" >>>

<<< On in 3... 2... 1... go! >>>

TH: Welcome back to the End of the Road with Tara Hernandez. We're talking tonight with writer, director, and social commentator Igusti Kertayuda. Igusti, when we left we were talking about information and terrorism. You'd talked about terrorism being the use of fear to cripple resistance, but I don't think you got around to how information played into all that.

IK: Right. Well, it's fairly simple, actually. As much as we like to believe otherwise, information is tightly controlled. Or rather, what is believed is tightly controlled. Media has democratized to such an extent that it is no longer the ability to get the word out that is important, but the ability to be heard, and, more important, to be credible. Truth is rarely an issue any longer.

My point is, the heads of the First Tier corporations have a virtual monopoly on credibility. The major networks all say the same things. And the information they peddle is carefully constructed to enforce the status quo. They maintain the structure of power and possession as it currently is. The Haves wish to remain the Haves, which means the Have-Nots must not get. And what better way to keep the populace in line than through fear. Tell them that things are just on the verge of getting worse. Give them a bogeyman, and make them think that without the status quo as it is, the bogeyman will get them. In the meantime, the public doesn't concern itself with who's really in charge, who is really exploiting them. That's terrorism, and that's why I say the Elder is a terrorist.

TH: So you're saying that these "Elders," the heads of the megacorporations, are terrorists, that they control everything. Doesn't that sound a little, well, extreme?

IK: It might sound extreme, but it goes back to what I was talking about with credibility. Most SINners grow up with CNN and Time and the nightly news as friends, people that are in-the-know. Authorities. Unless you come from a really unusual family, or you're especially precocious, you don't learn to question the mainstream media until you're fairly old, and by that point it's a struggle just to deprogram yourself. So the Big Media—CNN, GE, Disney, Sony—they *are* credibility. They create it, destroy it, and, most importantly, market it.

TH: So the heads of the Big Media are the "Elders?"

IK: They're some of them, certainly. But they *market* their credibility. And the First Tier are

buying. It's simple fact. Media, especially Big Media, used to walk a fine line between public institution and private enterprise. But now they just pretend to be a public institution, which is, in reality, a dead concept. It's all private now, especially in the Free Market. And the biggest customers of the Big Media are the First Tier corporations. And the First Tier corporations are led by the same kind of people that are represented in *Soteriology* by the Elder.

TH: OK, I understand what you're saying. But I think a lot of people are confused by the whole "Tier" thing.

IK: Ah, yes. Well, it used to be, for hundreds of years, that the course of history was seen as the interaction of states, nation-states. It was, for its time, a powerful concept. You get a homogeneous group of people together in one place, they organize a government, preferably democratic, and you've got this self-contained society. Sure, everyone has their own opinions, more or less, but they all share roughly the same culture, the same ethnic heritage. Or, in the case of the old United States, the same political philosophy. Sort of. The government provided stability—law, security, economy. It cared, to a certain extent, for those that could not care for themselves, and it maintained relationships with the governments of other nation-states. And in the interest of national security, or, more often, national pride, they would go to war with each other.

TH: But what does this have to do with the megacorporations and the Tiers?

IK: Patience, patience. It has everything to do with it. You see, under this system, a number of corporations grew to enormous size. With the transportation and information revolutions that followed World War II, these corporations were able to break beyond the borders of mere nations. Take Mitsubishi, for example. After the war, the *zaibatsu* was broken up into a bunch of smaller companies. But the main trading house loaned to and financed the smaller divisions, which incorporated subsidiaries in other countries. The web all leads back to Japan, but the effective result was that Mitsubishi, as a unit, could operate just as legitimately as an American corporation as it could a Mexican corporation as it could a British corporation. Mitsubishi and companies like it were more than just multinational, they were *transnational*.

TH: So is Mitsubishi part of the First Tier?

IK: Oh, most certainly. They're up there with IBM, General Electric, Exxon and the other energy companies, Archer Daniels Midland, Nestlé. A bunch of them.

TH: So what makes a megacorporation First Tier? Size?

IK: Well, size is part of it, but not all. The First Tier corporations are the ones that make everything else possible. The energy companies are the biggest—Exxon, Shell, Texaco, etc. They were huge back when all they handled was oil. But they also bought up the patents for alternative energy sources, like photo-voltaics and microwave satellites. Now they're true behemoths. They're almost too big to be efficient. But they're not the only ones in the First Tier. Food and agri-corps are also up there. ADM, Nestlé, Phillip Morris. They produce most of the world's food supply, when you get down to it, so that brings a lot of power. And then there are the producers, the tech people that make industry and information and transportation possible. General Motors, Mitsubishi, Mitsuei, General Electric, Du Pont, IBM. Some pharmaceuticals are

up here, too, like Merck and Bristol Meyer Squibb.

The main thing that makes these companies First Tier is that they make the things that make the rest of this information age possible. Energy, food, transportation, communications, production, and medicine.

TH: But aren't these First Tier companies usually working against each other? I'd think that inter-corporate espionage and things like that would keep their power to a minimum.

IK: Don't let the movies fool you. Intercorporate conflict happens, but it's not nearly as common or divisive as Hollywood makes it out to be. The First Tier is all very interested in maintaining their positions, and that means they don't take each other out. In fact, most of them are somewhat inbred.

TH: Inbred?

IK: Yes. GE's Board of Directors, for example, is chaired by Winston Tynes, who also sits on the board of IBM. So do a couple of guys from Citicorp. And IBM's got people in GM, Du Pont, and AT&T. The Japanese keiretsu are by far the worst, though. Going back to Mitsubishi, the trading company is at the head. But the trading company loans to and owns a controlling interest in a lot of the big "maker" companies, like Mitsubishi Automotive, Mitsubishi Heavy Industry, and Mitsubishi Electronics. Each of these companies owns part of the others, and all are owned in part by the trading company. Plus, they each own a number of other offshoot companies, like Mitsubishi Automotive of California. Each unit is a distinct corporate entity, legally speaking. But they're all intertwined, so it's hard to tell where the personnel and finances of one stop and the others begin.

TH: Wouldn't that kind of corporate crossover cause some inherent conflicts of interest? I mean, what about competition?

IK: What about it? Sure, competition is great for small companies, and even the Second or Third Tier corporations. But it can be downright disastrous if it's between major corporations like those of the First Tier. It's like a big club, you see. The Elders can get together, play golf, ski, and plan the future of the world. Occasionally a personal sleight may boil over into a brief corporate skirmish. Sometimes force is even used. But as far as business goes, it's much more profitable to cooperate. The energy companies are occasionally an exception to this, but their conflicts are usually very brief and never direct.

TH: I don't see how this can be the case. The entire basis of the Free Market is competition. If the most powerful players are just cooperating and not competing, how could the American system still be working?

IK: Just because the First Tier isn't competing doesn't mean that there isn't competition. It's actually quite rabid in the Second and Third Tier companies.

TH: Who are they, then?

IK: The Second and Third Tiers? Well, they're the transnationals that don't control as much or

as vital an area as the First Tier. The Second Tier is a mishmash, really. Coca-Cola's there, since it's big enough to be First Tier but doesn't really do anything except softdrinks. Microsoft, Oracle, Sun—all of the major software companies. Motorola, WalMart, Ameritech, Disney, Digital, Lockheed, PepsiCo, and a slew of others. They're big, very very big, but unlike the First Tier they don't have the absolute diversity of resources and industries that makes them so unassailable. And since they're not unassailable, that means that competition between them might actually make a difference. So, they go about it with a vengeance. The Second Tier are the companies that have corporate wars, more than anyone else.

TH: I'm sorry to do this again, but we're overdue for a break. You're listening to the End of the Road on KEND, 89.7.

<<< Cut to commercial sequence J11-8 >>>

<<< Play "PaxMetropolis2" >>>

<<< Play "Michelin1" >>>

<<< Play "NBA14" >>>

<<< Play "KENDSign6" >>>

<<< Play "AltaVista2" >>>

<<< Play "Honda1" >>>

<<< Play "Northwest2" >>>

<<< Play "WB2" >>>

<<< Sequence complete. >>>

<<< Queue Tara. >>>

<<< Play "EoRTheme" >>>

<<< On in 3... 2... 1... go! >>>

TH: Welcome back to the End of the Road. This is Tara Hernandez, talking tonight with Igusti Kertayuda, writer, director, and, as I keep discovering, social critic. Thanks again for being here, Igusti.

IK: My pleasure, Tara. I hope I'm not offending you too much.

TH: <laughs> No, not at all. We were discussing over the break the relationship that military and paramilitary groups have to the First and Second Tier corporations, and you mentioned that national militaries have become a tool for corporate interests. Could you talk a little about that... I don't think it's a concept that many people are aware of.

IK: Don't be ridiculous, Tara. People are *very* aware of it, they just can't put words to it. We see every day how those who are supposed to protect the rights of all citizens are protecting the rights of the SINned and the status quo. The fact that there really isn't a public police force anymore, for example.

TH: What about the Peace Force? It's most certainly funded by the public. How is that not a public police force?

IK: Because it doesn't protect the rights and safety of the entire populous, only those with SINS. And even those with SINS are not always guaranteed protection. Especially not from the Inquisition.

TH: Hold on there... first of all, you keep saying that the Peace Force only protects the rights of SINners. But protecting the SINless isn't what they're paid for. And the SINless don't pay for that protection.

IK: Tara, you're dancing around the issue. What it comes down to is that in this day and age, the SINless are not considered to be citizens. They have no inalienable rights in the eyes of the authorities. But that's not how it's supposed to work. The libertarian ideals that the American Free Market was founded upon stated that the only purpose of the government was to provide for the protection of its citizens and their private properties. But what about those that are no longer considered citizens? They still live here. Many of them are vitally important to the economy. But they are deprived of basic human rights. I can't tell you how many times I've heard of SINless being shot at by security guards, beaten or killed by passers-by, or even kidnapped and experimented upon by corporations. But they live here, too. They're human, just like we are. Sometimes even more so.

TH: OK, OK. I'll admit that there's a serious discrepancy between the rights of the SINned and the SINless. But this still doesn't answer the question of how military forces are tools of the corporations.

IK: Ask yourself, Tara: the Pan-American Armed Forces are used to what end? When was the last time they were mobilized?

TH: Well, the last thing that comes to mind is the Andes.

IK: Not the most recent military action but certainly the largest one of late. Now, think to yourself: what was at stake in the Andes? What happened there? The replicants that Biogen was testing in its research arcology revolted and took control of the facility. A few people were killed, mostly security guards and a number of especially sadistic scientists. But for the most part the inhabitants were merely expelled from the facility.

TH: Sure, but they had access to virtually unlimited biotechnology facilities. They could have produced nerve gasses, custom viruses, something even worse than the Red Death.

IK: According to whom? The media. And where was their information coming from? Biogen. Going by the statements released by the replicants inside the arcology, they made no threats. They planned on maintaining their community in relative isolation. But the investment, both in the arcology itself and the information the replicants now controlled, was immense. Biogen needed those resources back. Now, it's not a First Tier corporation, but it's damn close. And it's closely tied in to Du Pont—a joint effort by the two pioneered the latest nanotechnology.

TH: Wouldn't the Second Tier corporations be napping at the bit to get Biogen out of the way?

IK: Well, yes. And a bunch of them played their hands, I'm sure. But it became very clear that Biogen was going to take some sort of action, and no one wanted to think what might happen if they weren't successful. The replicants made no threats, but they did vow to defend themselves. So enough people wanted to see Biogen get their plant back, and didn't want to see them botch

up, so the PAAF was mobilized. And you can bet the Inquisition had a big hand in the operation, too.

TH: Why the Inquisition? I always thought they were more oriented towards terrorism and espionage.

IK: According to their charter. However, I'd wager that they had their own interests in that arcology.

TH: Like what?

IK: Well, it's no big secret that they make, shall we say, "good use" of replicant technology.

TH: Don't tell me. Replacing public figures.

IK: Actually, that's not what I had in mind. Charades like that are very, very risky. Replicants don't have the emotional development to pull it off, and it just looks bad when jobs like that fail. I was more referring to the Men in Black.

TH: Men in—you don't really believe in that, do you?

IK: What's not to believe? I've seen them. They've shot at me a couple times. Well, not at *me*, admittedly, but people I was with.

TH: Men in Black.

IK: Yes. I don't see why you have such problem with this. The technology exists, especially to create relatively uncreative "soldier" replicants. And there's certainly plenty of reason for them to be used. The ultimate in quiet, effective, and absolutely final problem solving. Assassinations, disappearances, clean-up projects. They're perfect. Strong, fast, ruthless. Slightly psychotic. Give each a cranial bomb or a pain switch and you've got almost instant loyalty. And never let them live long enough to develop emotional responses.

TH: I'm sorry, Igusti. This is just something I always associate with conspiracy theorists and paranoids.

IK: Well, there's reason for that. The Men in Black aren't supposed to be common knowledge. The Inquisition uses PAAF troops for its "official" operations. But for things that need to be quiet, MIBs are dropped in.

TH: Things that need to be quiet? Most of the Inquisition's operations are usually well publicized.

IK: No, they're not.

TH: But just last week they made a very well covered raid on an ecoterrorist facility in Beunos Ares. And there was that cult they arrested last month, in New Jersey. The ones that were kidnapping people and brainwashing them. The Inquisition makes a point of

publicizing its success stories. I can imagine why they'd be quiet about their failures, but they have no reason to cover up their successes.

IK: Tara, I like you very much. You're a very bright person. But you haven't heard anything I've said. The Inquisition is the most effective organization in existence, arguably *ever* in existence, for the maintenance of the status quo. The stories that are made public, compared to all of the operations they have underway at any given time, are remarkably few. Not only that, but they tend to publicize the victories that are most tangible yet least important in the grand scheme of things.

TH: Speaking of conspiracy theorists...

IK: This is *not* a theory, though it is most certainly a conspiracy. Of sorts. Any idea what the Inquisition's annual budget is? It's classified, in the interests of public security. But it's estimated by rather legitimate sources as over \$150 billion, making them easily the most well-funded "public" security force in the world. Admittedly, they are responsible for two continents and a couple billion people. But one would think that we would hear about their exploits more often. As it is, what do we hear about? Ecoterrorists, who have a nasty habit of destroying industrial plants and trying to free livestock from agricultologies. The particular group you referred to was planning on hijacking a freight barge filled with garbage and dumping it in Giant's Stadium. And that cult you referred to—they kidnapped four people over the course of a year and sequestered them from friends and family. Now, as distasteful and perhaps even deplorable as these groups were, one can hardly believe that what they were doing was in any real way threatening the current social hierarchy. And more importantly, groups like this are notoriously easy to catch. Protecting the Americas from the likes of them hardly requires \$150 billion, especially with local Peace Forces in place.

What I'm getting at is that there are other groups and people that the Inquisition actively works against, but goes to great lengths to hide the scale of this conflict. This is where most of their budget is directed, into keeping these groups and people in line while at the same time keeping their existence relatively unknown. Either that, or actively discrediting such groups as delusional or misguided.

TH: Why, Igusti? What would be the point of a campaign of that magnitude for such obtuse reasons? I just don't see why anyone would do this?

IK: Because the groups and people with whom they are fighting this secret war have the actual potential to change things. They are Billy from *Soteriology*, the people of integrity that refuse to support the status quo through their complacency yet constantly stop just short of terrorism. Groups like the Resistance, the Ghost Dance, even *In Vitro*. The Elder knows, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that to merely crush these groups and these people would make them martyrs, a rallying point for those that catch glimpses of the way the system really works. So rather than fight them openly, they wage a war of credibility and propaganda. They might arrest them, or kill them, or just make them disappear, but their primary weapon is to push the Resistance to the fringes. Make them into fanatical terrorists or misguided crazies. Cast them off to the edge of society, the edge of legitimacy. Exile them to the edge of the void, a social and psychological oblivion. From there, they can do no damage. Teetering on oblivion's edge, they are no longer a threat. That is the purpose of the Inquisition, Tara. To make real change impossible, to cast true

resistance to the void.

TH: Ahh... I hate to do this, because there are dozens of questions I still have for you, Igusti. But unfortunately we're running out of time.

IK: Ah, yes, well... it's probably best that I stop now, before I ruin my reputation even more thoroughly.

TH: Well, I know that at the very least I've been very impressed. Thank you very much for joining us tonight.

IK: It's been my pleasure, Tara.

TH: I'd love to have you come back again sometime. Assuming you aren't cast into the void yourself, Igusti.

IK: Knock on wood, Tara, knock on wood.

TH: Well, you've been listening to the End of the Road. Our guest tonight has been the eloquent and outspoken Igusti Kertayuda. Tonight's show was produced by Jacob Fisher. I'm Tara Hernandez, wishing you a safe journey to wherever you're headed on the road. Good night, Americas.

<<< Cut to closing sequence. >>>

Tragic Accident

<<<Puget Sound Newsfax, June 23, 2040,
12:00PM PDT>>>

At 10:23 AM this morning, an out-of-control semi truck crossed the median of I-405, just south of Tacoma, causing a nine-car pile up. Three people were killed outright, including the semi's driver, and seven others were critically injured.

One of the injured was Igusti Kertayuda, outspoken social critic and writer/director of the controversial *Soteriology*, released last month. Kertayuda was apparently due in Seattle this afternoon for a conference at the University of Washington. He is currently listed in critical condition, with severe brain hemorrhaging and multiple broken bones. Doctors are not optimistic.

Controversial Writer, Director Dies

<<<Puget Sound Newsfax, June 25, 2040,
6:00PM PDT>>>

After 37 hours in the emergency room at Northwest Hospital in Seattle, intellectual counter-culture icon Igusti Kertayuda died from massive head injuries. He received the injuries Friday in a tragic car accident on I-405. Three others died immediately in the crash, and three more are still in critical condition.

Kertayuda was best known for his novel come film, *Soteriology*, which he released independently last month. The outspoken son of a Khazackstani politician, Kertayuda fled to British Columbia in 2028, where he assumed a position as Professor of Political Science at the University. He left in 2033 after a brief but public fracas over University policy and his teaching materials. Already an established academic, he wrote his Pulitzer Prize winning first novel, *Bodyguard of Lies*, in 2036. He was arrested a number of times for illegal picketing and protest-related trespassing. His most famous novel, *Soteriology*, was published two years ago in a hail of controversy over its pro-terrorism message. Filming of the movie began six months later. Numerous public defense and watchdog groups attempted to stop its release.

"His death is everyone's loss," said Benson Gulovek, an ex-colleague at the University of British Columbia. "His was Coyote's voice, challenging anything that people took for granted." Even Kertayuda's enemies acknowledged his strength of character. "He was a cagey opponent," said Maximilian Duval, a well-known Chicago philanthroper and frequent target of Kertayuda's criticism. "I'm not sure what to do now... who's going to tell me when I'm doing something well?"

Kertayuda's funeral will be held tomorrow, Monday, June 25, 3:00 P.M. at Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Catholic Church in Vancouver.

««« Died in an accident my left ass cheek. Igusti was murdered.
—Anansi (anansi@weaver.org); 01:34:12 6/30/40 »»»

««« Murdered? How exactly do you propose that he was murdered? Cracked skull in a nine-car pile up is about as accidental as it gets.
—Mover7 (mover7@fishnet.net); 01:42:05 6/30/40 »»»

««« Check the records on the guy driving the semi. Suspicious yet?
—Anansi (anansi@weaver.org); 01:57:45 6/30/40 »»»

««« Harold McMurphy, born at 4:31AM, May 10, 2016, in Davies Medical Center in San Fransisco. SIN 34-208-687-474. Pretty good credit; MasterCard number 5329-4912-6419-8911, \$2000 limit. A couple bank accounts here and there, nothing spectacular. Broken arm when he was 12. Regular physicals, dental work, etc. What am I looking for, Anansi?
—Chicago Blue (chicagoblue@chicago.virtualcities.net); 03:09:02 7/1/40 »»»

««« You got way too much time on your hands, CB.
—Androidgynous (M+F+R@rover.com); 03:21:13 7/1/40 »»»

««« Not bad for a munchkin, Blue, but you didn't keep digging. Yep, Davies' records show Harold McMurphy being born to one Glenda McMurphy on May 10, 2016. And they show one Dr. Marjorie Girbault as the delivering doctor. But did you check *her* records? According to TWA, she boarded a flight to Tokyo on May 7th, 2016. And she boarded a return flight on May 11th, 2016. Delivered Harold from Nippon, did she? And that's not all of it. Dig into some of his other stuff. His credit record, for instance. Like the Saturn Puma he bought in 2036? Credit accounts work out just right, but check with the dealer. Nothing there. No such records. McMurphy's records are littered with slips like this. He was created. He didn't exist.
—Anansi (anansi@weaver.org); 4:01:54 7/1/40 »»»

««« Christ, Anansi. I just checked some of the stuff you're talking about. It's like a hollow onion. First layer's there, but then nothing. Like whoever created his records wanted people like us to know about them.
—Chicago Blue (chicagoblue@chicago.virtualcities.net); 07:32:12 7/1/40 »»»

««« Exactly.
—Mother Night (mother_night@helix.com); 07:45:48 7/1/40 »»»

««« So what, exactly, does that prove? The driver of a semi that randomly veered into oncoming traffic and caused a nine-car pileup that happened to kill Igusti Kertayuda had a fake ID. So fucking what? This McMurphy guy was probably moving some illegal goods in his truck, or he was trying to start a new life. People do that you know, get cheap SINs and poorly made backgrounds.
—Mover7 (mover7@fishnet.net); 10:04:21 7/1/40 »»»

««« Let me get this straight... you're supposing that someone with an entirely created past, who was shipping something as innocuous as bottled water, just *happened* to veer over the median of a divided highway, at *exactly* the right time, in *exactly* the right place, to *happen* to run into Igusti Kertayuda, who just *happened* to be there at the right time, barely a week after giving a continentally broadcast radio interview, heard by over twenty million people, in which he verbally assualted the megacorporations, the politicians, *and* the Inquisition. That's an awful lot of "coincidence," *cabrón*. Even if you believe in coincidence, which I personally don't. And there's plenty of motive, too. Igusti's popularity was rising. The controversy over *Soteriology* was introducing more and more people to his work. His books were selling like virility pills, his movie was drawing millions each weekend, and he was starting a lecture tour this week. So they took him out. Took some SINless punk, brainwashed him, put him in a truck in the right place at the right time, and send him the command. *Swerve!* No more Igusti.
—Anansi (anansi@weaver.org); 10:16:01 7/1/40 »»»

««« Motive ≠ Deed. Besides, what you're talking about is a lot more complicated than you make it sound. Just training the unfortunante SINless puke would be hard enough. Then putting him in the right place at the right time... that'd be borderline impossible, especially with SeaTac traffic. Occam's Razor, Anansi.
—Penny Lane (penny_lane@alphaccess.com); 10:20:23 7/1/40 »»»

««« It's pretty common knowledge that the Inquisition has a few people placed out there, totally conditioned to act as suicide assassins. Grab some llama, put him through Purgatory, reprogram him, then chip him to receive messages. Give 'em a

shabby fake ID, put 'em in a do-nothin' job, but when they need 'em, just flip the switch and "boom," John Doe walks into McDonalds with a bomb strapped to his chest. Or Harold McMurphy takes an unnecessary turn on I409.

—Anansi (anansi@weaver.org); 10:22:52 7/1/40 »»»

««« Grassy noll, Anansi, grassy noll.

—Penny Lane (penny_lane@alphaccess.com); 10:24:20 7/1/40 »»»

««« Conspiracy, yes. Theory, no.

—Anansi (anansi@weaver.org); 10:30:13 7/1/40 »»»

««« It wouldn't necessarily have to be a conspiracy, though. Synchronicity. Ever see a witch's hex in action? Knew one that got swindled by some fixer for, like, eye of newt or somethin'. So she got him back. He knew she'd be mad, probably call in a hit, so he got himself a couple new bodyguards. Two weeks later, the fixer and his guards are dead. One of the new guys was borderline cyberpsycho and he snapped. Started gunning down folks left and right, including most of the fixer's crew. When the SWATs got there to take him out, fixer got hit by a stray shot.

—Wanderer (wanderer@helix.com); 11:21:37 7/1/40 »»»

««« What does that have to do with anything?

—Mover7 (mover7@fishnet.net); 12:01:04 7/1/40 »»»

««« Igusti coulda been hit with a hex, like that. People never see it coming, and usually no one figures it out later, cuz the universe throws curve balls. Nine-car pile up has some nice spin to it.

—Wanderer (wanderer@helix.com); 12:23:52 7/1/40 »»»

««« But the Inquisition doesn't uses witches or anything like that.

—Chicago Blue (chicagoblue@chicago.virtualcities.net); 12:56:25 7/1/40 »»»

««« Oh really?

—Fool on the Hill (fool@armageddon.net); 13:10:11 7/1/40 »»»

Old Man Blackfoot

It was all so picturesque. The smoke, the hushed conversations, the smell of thin beer and unwashed humanity. The sign outside, swinging in the wind, "Cheap Drinks" scrawled across it in chipping white paint. Even the rickety table, old formica aged with uncounted carvings and stains, smooth and worn like the driftwood table in his dad's living room. And now the card game.

"Your cut, Constantine."

He glanced up, smiled at Tyrone, the young black man to his right. He cut the deck, neatly in half, trying not to notice how badly he needed a manicure.

Tyrone nodded and started dealing. "Five card draw, jacks are wild, bitches or better to open."

Constantine picked up his fist card, the jack of spades, and had to hold back a grin. It was just like those cheap Lance Freedom stims he'd jacked into his sensorium when he was a kid. He snagged the rest of his cards and leaned back into his seat. Behind his best unconcerned mask, he imagined himself as the hero of a grandiose espionage thriller, like *Flash Point: New York*, journeying out into the barrens to meet some elusive contact. He imagined hard that he wasn't on the lamb, that he hadn't just fled Chicago, and that he hadn't just swindled the most powerful man in the city and woken up to find his credit frozen and none of his friends talking to him.

"Hey, pretty boy, two bills to you. In or out?" prodded Tyrone. The others were looking at him.

Constantine glanced down at his cards. Two threes, a ten, a seven, and the jack. "I'm in." He leaned forward and slid two crumpled bills into the pot. They'd been playing for a few hours, and he'd already gathered a sizable pile of cash. More small bills, in fact, that he'd ever owned before in his life. Not many places took cash back home, and even less took ones and fives.

"Change up, boys." The other players started dropping cards from their hands. Dustin, directly across from Constantine, plucked a single card from his hand, which Tyrone replaced. Then Gladice, gray stubble clinging to her wrinkled head, dropped three cards with a sigh. Constantine dropped the ten and the seven, and Tyrone dropped three cards.

"Three bills," Dustin said through his nose, tossing a clump of cash on the table.

Constantine considered his hand as Gladice folded. He'd gotten a king and a four, neither of which helped. "I'll see your three..." he paused, sliding the bills into the pot, and glanced up with raised eyebrows. "And raise you four."

Tyrone huffed. "Fuck that." His cards hit the table.

Dustin glanced back down at his hands, looked back up into Constantine's calm eyes, then back down to his hands. He pursed his lips, then sighed. "Not worth it." He dropped his cards.

Constantine shrugged, folded his cards, and reached out for the pot, ignoring Dustin's cold glare. He allowed himself a slight smile as he stacked the bills, becoming keenly aware of the gun hanging at his side. Four days ago, he'd never used a gun anywhere except the firing range. Three days ago, he'd never killed.

Dustin collected the cards and started shuffling. "Seven card no-peek, nothin' wild." His high voice contrasted oddly with his overgrown frame.

Constantine smirked. All the bluffing in the world couldn't help in no-peek. He ran his hand through his blond hair, leaned back, and made himself look relaxed. If the stakes got too big, he'd bail. No problem.

Then a shadow fell over the table. "Mind if I join?"

Constantine glanced up to find himself dwarfed by a huge viking, blond ponytail swept over a dirty nylon jacket. About the man's neck hung a tangle of crystals, stones, and assorted charms. Religious stuff. Some people needed that.

"Odin, baby," Tyrone beamed. "Have a seat, man. Make some room, y'all."

Constantine scooted his chair over, giving the giant plenty of space. Odin pulled up a chair close to Tyrone, then whistled. A huge dog loped up next to Constantine. It must have been a husky, but bigger than any Constantine had ever seen. "Beautiful dog."

"Wolf."

"Excuse me?"

"She's a wolf. Name's Shiva. And you are?"

"Constantine." He extended his hand, then withdrew it as Odin regarded him blankly.

"A wolf? I thought they didn't exist outside of gene banks or nature preserves? Is she a replicant?"

Odin turned away. "Wouldn't know. What's ante?"

"One bill," answered Tyrone.

Constantine glanced down at the wolf, which had settled down on the floor. He reached out to scratch its ears, but stopped short when its eyes snapped up and regarded him with entirely too much insight.

"Go ahead," said Odin. "She don't bite. Usually." He winked.

Constantine smiled, then scratched the wolf's ears. She yawned, closed her eyes.

"Like I said," Dustin piped in. "Seven card no-peak. Nothin's wild. Ante up."

Constantine rolled up his sleeves and leaned forward. Soon, he was immersed again in the game, mind focused on the cards and the odds and the talk, always the talk. And not once for the rest of that night did it wander back to expressionless soldiers, unmarked deltas, or his flight from Chi-Town in the hollowed out compartment of a workergang flatbed.

Nor did he notice the small balding man in the corner, watching him from the shadows.

* * *

The time is 8:45:00. Please wake up.

Scott opened his eyes to the voice in his head, frowned, and reached for a cigarette. Without opening his eyes, he slid a smuggled Dunhil into his mouth and lit it. Groaning, he rolled off the fraying couch, stretched, and exhaled. He headed for the bathroom. Shower time.

Ten minutes and sixteen seconds later he was finishing the knot on his tie, cigarette again dangling from his mouth. He slid into the nylon shoulder holster, the silver-and-ivory handgun slapping into place with reassuring weight, then donned his pinstriped black sportcoat. The chips in his spine told him he had two minutes and forty-seven seconds before his meeting with Dino, so he snatched up his shades and headed for the door. As he left, he glanced in the mirror, and regarded the purple irises and glowing green pupils that were his birthright. Shrugging, he slipped on the custom shades, carpiece clicking into the snug interface port. They didn't cut down the light at all. Then he was out the door.

Dino's office was down the hall about sixty feet. Scott didn't bother knocking, and he had seven seconds to spare.

"Morning, Dino."

The older man looked up from his desk, then glanced at his watch. "Morning Scott. How'd you sleep?"

"Eh. Eyes closed. Coffee?"

Dino motioned to the wall. "Help yourself."

Scott grabbed a cup of joe, black of course, and sat down across from Dino. “So what’s up, boss?” He took a deep drag on his Dunhil, then sighed the smoke out his nostrils.

“You always gotta smoke those around me? Gonna catch second-hand cancer.” He grinned.

Scott smirked back and shrugged. “Keeps me from snacking.”

Dino chuckled, then punched a sequence into the keyboard in his desk. The image of the Virgin Mary faded from the wall, and was replaced by a formal portrait of a young man. Blond hair, blue eyes, square jaw, features that could’ve been biosculpted if it weren’t for the mole—beauty mark—on his left cheek.

Scott raised an eyebrow. “So who’s Hitler’s wet dream?”

Dino smiled. “You mean the Aryan posterboy here? Name’s Constantine Crassus. Only son of Marcus and Ariel Crassus, owners of CML Developments, one of the top real estate developers in the Great Lakes sprawl.”

“Silver spoon, eh?”

“Choking on it. Educated at Sable in Barrington, entered Northwestern at 16. Bachelor’s and MBA in five years. Been investing and speculating since he was 18, had himself a tidy little personal fortune by the time he graduated. Worked the family business for the most part, but kept up with his projects on the side. A year ago, he left the family biz, and started amassing his own fortune by rehabbing plots of Chicago’s barrens and selling them to other yuppies.”

“Probably displacing families by the hearse-load.”

“Rich shall get richer, and all that. Actually, to his credit, he’s turned over a number of the projects to their original inhabitants. Got a good rep as a humanitarian, all that jazz. You know how it goes, Scott. They get shitloads of jing, they throw some great parties, and they give money to charities. Makes ‘em feel good.”

“So why is the Mafia concerned with this particular suit?”

Dino punched another key, and the image was replaced with that of another man, in what appeared to be a still from the news. Older, stately, the look of accustomed power etched into his eyes. “Recognize him?”

Scott nodded. “Maximilian Duval. Mayor of Chicago, effectively if not officially. Real nasty type, last I heard.”

“You got it. He’s been in charge down there since the Sellout, though most people on the street don’t have a clue who he is.”

Scott took a last drag, smothered the butt, and lit another smoke. “How’s he come into this?”

“Well, it seems our promising young entrepreneur here isn’t entirely on the up and up. Tax frauds, contract violations, insider trading, yadda yadda yadda. Slick little mofo, too. From what Conner tells me, ‘this guy could talk a Irishman out of his pint.’ Probably been working con jobs since he could talk. We’ve got some pretty good evidence on three last year, and each would have grossed him nearly half a million.”

“Don’t tell me...”

“Yup. Golden boy here tried to swindle the most powerful man in Chicago. Probably didn’t know exactly *how* powerful this guy was, but still took some balls—Max is definitely a known player in the business world.”

“Ambitious. And stupid. Dead yet?”

Dino shook his head. “Not yet. Elevated to Level 3 Fugitive status overnight, though. Most of his credit disappeared. The Inquisition repossessed all of his properties, and by all reports sent at least one team of MIBs after him.”

“Men in Black, huh? And he got away?” He leaned forward and asked.

"Seems so. That was five days ago. Conner's had his people feeling the situation out. Seems Mr. Crassus got into at least two firefights after his initial escape. Conner thinks he took out a MIB."

Scott raised an eyebrow. "By himself?"

The older man shrugged. "Don't know. Lucky shot, maybe. Happens sometimes. Regardless, he's not in the city anymore."

"How do we know that?" He remembered his coffee and took a sip. Tasted like syrup.

"Well, he'd be making ripples, for one thing. But more importantly, we think we've found him."

Scott took a long, ponderous drag. He exhaled. "Really."

"You've heard of the Bluffs? Shantytown about halfway between here and Madison. Lots of traffic, so the Company keeps a recruiter down there. Guy named Guthrey, good rep. He's been watching some gypsy type with a wolf, when all of a sudden a paranoid looking suit shows up. Guthrey's suspicious, so he does some legwork. A couple of faxes and encrypted emails later, and we've got a positive ID on one Constantine Crassus."

Scott took another pull, tasted filter. He grunted and snuffed the butt. "So what's that mean to us?"

Dino leaned back in his seat. "They want him, Scott."

"The Mafia?"

"No. The others. As soon as this went down, Conner got a call from the Company. They've got a profile on Mr. Crassus, and they like what they see." He sighed.

"So they want us to go and get him." Scott lit another cigarette. "Wonderful."

Dino tightened his tie. "Look, Scott, I'm not too happy with it either."

He exhaled sharply, smoke streaming from his nostrils. "We've got enough to do around here as it is, Dino. Playing fetch for a bunch of spooks doesn't strike me as a good investment of our time."

"Well, maybe not." Dino sighed. "But we don't have much of a choice. Ever since the Inquisition put Milwaukee under martial law, we've basically been crippled. We just don't have the manpower, the equipment, or the credit. So we strike a deal with the others. We maintain a safehouse, they provide personnel and resources."

"And we suddenly find ourselves taking orders from the Company instead of Chicago."

Dino scowled, his large eyebrows knitting together. "I don't want to argue, Scott. But we need all the help we can get. If that means running the occasional job for the Company, then so be it."

"The fucking G. Wonderful." Scott ashed, took another sip of coffee. "So what's the plan, boss?"

"As of now, nothing concrete. Guthrey's going to approach them today, convince them to try us out."

Another drag. "Them?"

"Yeah, both Crassus and the gypsy."

"What's up with him?"

"Not much. He's a blank, for the most part. No official name, no SIN, but he seems to match the description of a guy that messed up an Inquisition operation near St. Louis. I'll send you his file, and Crassus's."

Scott nodded. "I take it I'm not going alone?"

"I was thinking you'd go with Seamus."

The Dunhil fell limp in Scott's lips. "Seamus? Seamus 'Boom Boom' McDuff?"

Dino cocked his head. "You've met him, haven't you?"

"Once or twice." The coffee was cooling down. "Not exactly the stable sort, eh?"

"Well..." began Dino, pursing his lips. "He hasn't blown anything up yet."

"Yet," replied Scott, rising.

Dino grinned. "We'll see what Guthrey comes up with. If it's a go, I'd say take off tomorrow morning, maybe tonight. Seamus has a van you can use. I'll set you up with a guide."

"Wonderful," sighed Scott, shaking his head. He slid off his shades, looking up at Dino with those inhuman eyes. "You know, I think I liked it better in the old days, before we were working with the Feds. Man knew where he stood."

"Scott, back in the 'old days,' you were still wearing diapers. Besides, they're not the Feds anymore. They're underground, just like us."

"I never wore diapers, Dino." He slid the glasses back into place. "You'll send me those files?"

Dino nodded. "Already there."

"Later boss." And he was out the door, twelve minutes and forty-two seconds after he arrived.

* * *

Even though it had been thin and American, the beer last night was taking its toll. He wasn't really hung-over, he told himself. Just dehydrated. Sighing, Constantine rolled out of bed and checked his watch. Eleven o'clock. Jesus. He never slept that late at home.

He stumbled downstairs, and after paying ten bills at the desk, he got the key to the gravity shower. The water was cold and smelled of iodine, but it was better than nothing. He groomed himself as best he could, then headed out into the early spring air. Cheap Drinks was serving food last night. Maybe he could get breakfast.

As he walked the two blocks from the inn to the pub, careful to avoid the puddles and pot holes, he was struck with the stillness hanging over the town. Chicago would have been total chaos this close to noon. But here, in the barrens, it was silent save for Constantine's footsteps and the wind and the harsh cawing of crows. Glancing behind him as he entered Cheap Drinks, he half expected to see tumbleweed blowing across the broken asphalt.

The pub was more alive than the street, but it still carried the same weary hush. No more than a dozen customers were spread throughout the room, one of which was Odin. Constantine made eye contact and nodded, heading for his table.

"Morning, Connie." Shiva wasn't with him.

"That's Constantine. Sleep well?"

The giant nodded. "I guess." A small stack of plates were piled beside him, grease smears and the smell of eggs the only remains of a mammoth meal. In front of him were a number of white stones, carved with simple red characters.

"Mind if I join you?" asked Constantine.

Odin shrugged, returning his eyes to the stones. Constantine sat, ordered pancakes and pure water—they couldn't screw that up, could they?—and watched Odin arrange the stones. Curiosity piqued, he leaned forward. "I don't mean to interrupt," he began, "but do you mind if I ask what you're doing?"

Piercing blue eyes glanced up. "Runes."

"Runes? What's that?"

"Divination."

"You mean like Tarot cards?"

"Sort of. Yeah." Odin turned back to the runes, scratched his stubble, and sighed. "Changes coming."

"Excuse me?"

"Changes. These runes here," he said, motioning to a pair, "are the past, Journey and Partnership. This one is the present, Signals. This one is the appropriate action, Flow. And these two here, they're the future. Initiation. And the Unknowable." He shook his head. "Changes coming."

Constantine nodded and feigned understanding. Whatever. "Where's Shiva?"

"Getting lunch." Calloused hands began removing the stones. "Playing tonight?"

"Cards? Sure. You?"

He nodded. "Staying long?"

Constantine shrugged. "Don't know. Probably not too long. Figure out where I'm going, then take off. How about you? How long are you in town?"

"Don't know. Day or two, unless I find work."

"What kind of work do you do, Odin?"

"Whatever's paying."

Constantine nodded. "Right... So, where are you from, originally."

"You always ask so many questions?"

A pause. "Sorry. Didn't mean to pry. Just curious."

Odin smirked. "Killed the cat, that did."

Constantine nodded. An awkward silence fell on the table, and his eyes started wandering the room. The pub was different in the day. Just as smokey, but quieter, almost smothered. Sunlight drifted through the plastic tarps that served as windows, the occasional fly buzzing its lazy path through the beams. The silhouette of a crow alighted on a windowsill. It seemed to peer into the pub, head tilted just a little, then flew off. "There a lot of crows around here?"

Odin nodded. "Only thing that can survive, just about. Why?"

Constantine was about to answer when the waiter returned. The pancakes were dark and bumpy, but they smelled delicious. Stomach growling, Constantine folded a paper napkin on his lap and started eating.

"Not from around here, eh?"

Constantine looked up. "Not really, no. What are these made of?"

"The pancakes? Rice, I think. Where you from, then?"

Constantine swallowed hard and was about to answer, when another voice interrupted.

"Chicago, I believe." Both men turned to see a small man, thinning hair and wrinkled eyes.

"Name's Guthrey. Mind if I join you?"

Constantine's eyes narrowed. "How'd you know I was from Chicago?"

Guthrey pulled a chair from the next table and sat. He produced a pair of manila files, tossed one in front of Constantine. "I know a lot about you, Mr. Crassus." The folder was full of photos, medical records, credit reports, business transactions, school transcripts.

"Where'd you get this? Who are you?"

"Let's just say, if I were with the Inquisition, you'd be dead by now. You're lucky I'm not." He handed Odin the other file. "Odin, is it? As for you, while you aren't quite as hot a commodity as our mutual friend, here, I imagine you wouldn't be too happy to see an Inquisitor, either."

"Is this some sort of threat?" growled Constantine.

The balding man smiled. "No, Mr. Crassus. By no means. I merely wished to let you know how dangerous your current situation is. Fortunately, the Inquisition doesn't seem to have anyone stationed in the Bluffs."

Odin closed his file, face expressionless. "So who are you, then?"

"I'm a headhunter. A recruiter, if you will."

"For whom?" asked Constantine.

"My direct employers refer to themselves as the Company. But, in truth, I keep my eyes open for all the Resistance."

"The Resistance?" He squinted. "The terrorist group?"

"If you believe the media, yes. How's your history, Constantine?"

"Just fine, thank you."

"Ever hear of the Doomsday Wars? No? How about the Sellout?"

"The paranoid delusions of a bunch of conspiracy theorists. Yeah, I've heard of it."

"No, Constantine, not delusions. The Sellout happened. The media calls it the Surrender, the Reconstruction, and a number of other things. When the corporations had the United States government surrender to the Black Circle."

"When the corporations... this is nonsense. I suppose you're talking about the Latin American Conflict? The private sector backed the restructuring of the federal government, appointed the Continental Oversight Board."

Guthrey shook his head, holding back a smile. "Spare me the revisionist history. The feds got themselves involved in a war they couldn't win, a war they refused to understand. The corporations knew what was going on, knew that it was only a matter of time. They weren't too happy with the feds at the time anyway, so they put the pressure on. Started a few riots, refused a few contracts, started wreaking havoc with the savings bonds. Then, once Washington was sufficiently spooked, they put the lean on. Forced them to surrender."

Constantine stood, crumpled his napkin and threw it on the table. "This is complete bullshit. You sound like those radicals that call in to Tara Hernandez."

"Men in Black, Constantine," Guthrey growled. "All the same height, right? All of them look alike, too? Wearing sunglasses at night, carrying assault rifles? Sound familiar?"

Constantine blinked.

"The Inquisition. Eleven years ago, just after the Sellout, the Black Circle—what you referred to as the Continental Oversight Board—consolidated the various intelligence agencies into the Inquisition. 'To investigate and deter terrorist and subversive activities in the Americas,' which is complete and utter bullshit. They're really a bunch of spooks and their clones. They eliminate anything they consider 'abberant.' Anything. And you've made your way onto their Christmas list."

"Sit down, Connie." Odin's voice was calm, steady. "Hear him out."

"What do you want?" hissed Constantine.

"In all truth, to help you. You're in a very dangerous situation right now. It won't be long before the Inquisition finds you again, and when they do, there'll be even more Men in Black on your trail. And you may have evaded them so far, but eventually your luck is going to slip." He motioned toward the chair. "Please, sit down."

Constantine folded his arms over his chest. He swallowed.

Odin broke the silence, sighing long and loud. "What are you offering?"

Guthrey's eyes remained on Constantine. "Join us. You're both wanted by the Inquisition. If you stay on your own, you might survive. For a while. But you'll be running for the rest of your lives. Sooner or later, you'll slip up, and then you'll be little more than a bloodstain in some alley. You hook up with us, you at least get to fight back."

"Hook up with you?" Constantine's voice raised an octave. "A bunch of terrorists? Are you fucking crazy?"

Guthrey blinked, slowly. "We are not terrorists, any more than the Inquisition is a legitimate police force. Occasionally we engage in military conflicts, but most of our work is more subtle than that."

"Yeah, right. Forget it. I'm not joining a group of fanatics that go around bombing subways. Besides, I've got enough danger in my life to hold me over. I'm not putting my neck on the line for your lofty cause."

"Look you pretentious piece of shit," growled Guthrey. "Anyway you scan it, you're against the Inquisition till you die. You fucking scammed the mayor of Chicago, you idiot. You think he's gonna forget that? They've already erased your credit, seized your property. Talk to your folks lately? Think they're still alive? These people are fucking bastards, Crassus. They've got more time, more patience, and more resources than you ever had, and they *don't* have *any* sense of morals." He stood, voice and body rising together. "So basically, you've got two choices. If you stay on your own, you die, soon, and all because you tried to swindle some suit. You join us, you can make a difference. Maybe not much, but at least it's something. These fuckers ruined you, Constantine. Fight back, for Christ's sake!"

The room had fallen silent but for the hum of the kitchen, the makeshift oven rumbling its steady rhythm. The two men stared at each other, sweat beading on Guthrey's brow.

"Changes coming," said Odin, standing. He tossed a clump of cash on the table, and headed for the exit. "I'm in," he said. The door slammed behind him.

"So what's it gonna be, Crassus?"

Outside, off in the distance, the crows were cawing.

* * *

Behind closed eyes, Scott was reviewing the files. Fragments of information drifted through his consciousness. *graduated magna cum laude... 1.89 meters tall... exposure to chicken pox when five, but never contracted... minor narcissism... near compulsive risk taker...* Quite a character.

"So, did ya hear about Jimmy?"

Scott's eyes flipped open behind the shades. *Pause.* The van was pulling onto 94, heading west. "Jimmy who?" *17:27:32.* The sun was starting to dip in front of them.

"Jimmy Asante. He vanished, last week."

Scott glanced over at Seamus. Narrow face, dark stubble, baseball cap casting a shadow over eyes fixed on the road. "He's from Madison, right?"

Seamus nodded. "Was from Madison. Makin' a shipment to Long Street yesterday, but he never made it." His accent was thick and gravelly.

"Hijacked?" He turned and looked out the window, the gray slabs of Milwaukee speeding past.

"No, man. Nothin' that simple. They say the crows took him."

Scott turned back, raising an eyebrow. "The crows?"

"Aye, the crows." Seamus' glanced at Scott, showing the left side of his face and the network of scars that laced it. "He called back to base, all panicked. Jabberin' off about crows, crows all over. They could hear 'em, the guys at the base. Cawwin' and cawwin'. Got so loud, they couldn't hear Jimmy. Just the cawwin'. Then nothin'. Static." His face was completely serious.

Scott pursed his lips, then settled back into his seat. "You think it's true?"

"True? I don't know. But I've heard a' stranger things."

Scott nodded. He'd heard of stranger things, too. Lived some of them. "Long Street. That's in the barrens, right?"

"Aye. So I hear."

The veil was thin in the barrens. Very thin. Scott started scanning the sky for crows. "You're sure I can't smoke?"

"I'd prefer that ya didn't. All things considered..." he nodded towards the back of the van.

A tattered Irish flag hung like a curtain, hiding everything behind the first passenger seat. Scott didn't know for sure what was back there, but the tangy earth smell of chemicals and Seamus' reputation gave him a good idea. He shifted in his seat and started fiddling with his computer. *Resume*. Constantine Crassus' life flooded back into his head, a surge of anecdotes, credit ratings, and photographs. Scott could see why the Company wanted him. Same reasons he already didn't like him.

Stop. Next file. Crassus' life history slipped out of his mind, replaced by clusters of vague reports and hazy photographs, linked only by a large blond man with a dog or wolf. Like Dino said, virtual blank. Until he interfered with an Inquisition sting in the Upper Peninsula, there was nothing conclusive that proved he existed. Scott dove deeper into the file, finding Guthrey's report. *high psi-potential... altered states of consciousness... psychic link with wolf...* Interesting. This guy—Odin, Guthrey called him—wasn't the average recruit. And Guthrey, it seemed, wasn't the average recruiter. Sensitives weren't exactly common. *Stop. End program.*

Outside, the streets of Milwaukee had started to thin out. More and more empty lots, dilapidated buildings, broken streets. The barrens. "Take the next exit."

Seamus nodded. "Yer the boss."

The van pulled off the main road, the hairs on Scott's neck starting to tingle. They navigated through the broken streets, overgrown with weeds and cluttered with broken signs, barely breaking thirty on the speedometer. As the sun dipped below the blasted skyline, they followed Dino's directions to their guide. Guy named Perrin.

"What is this place?" asked Seamus, voice hushed in awe.

"What? The barrens?"

Seamus nodded. "Aye."

Scott looked around. A gutted strip mall flanked their left, the windows broken and empty. Across the street was row after row of collapsing townhouses, once identical but now unique in their decay. Beyond the houses was a crumbling church steeple. "What do you mean?"

"It's like a bleedin' wasteland. I mean, what happened out here?"

"Hm. Good question. People with money moved out, I guess, and people without money had nowhere else to go. Nobody really cared. Then came the Red Death." His fingers started playing with the seatbelt. "This your first time out?"

"Aye. Ain't nothin' like this back home."

"Not even Belfast?"

"No. Belfast, it was a warzone. Here, this place... it's just a blight."

Scott shrugged. "It's not all bad. Turn left here."

They headed past the old strip mall, the dusk sky casting everything in its dull half light. 19:03:58. Plenty of time. Perrin was a squatter out here, and Dino said he knew the area like the back of his hand. He also owed Dino a favor or two, so he had agreed to act as guide.

Past the mall, across a vast expanse of broken parking lot, crouched a huge building, well kept despite the surrounding decay. Above the doorway, Scott could just make out the old sign of a supermarket, and the front entry was fortified with sandbags and razorwire. This was the place.

"Gotta choice of parkin' spots, aye?" Seamus pulled up to the front of the building and stopped the van.

Scott nodded. "Let's hope he's expecting us." He stepped out, cigarette already in his lips.

"Why's that?" asked Seamus, hoisting a huge nylon backpack across his shoulders.

Scott lit his Dunhil, smoke rushing off in the breeze. "People that live in the barrens tend to be a bit paranoid. Rightfully so."

As they approached the door, broken glass and gravel crunching underfoot, they heard the sound of crows in the distance. Scott shot Seamus a look. They stopped, listening to the caws. Listening.

Listening.

The cawing faded, then disappeared. Seconds passed. Silence, but for the wind. Then Scott reached up, put his hand to his mouth, and sucked the soul out of his cigarette. He exhaled with gusto. "Strange things indeed." Neckhairs standing on end.

Seamus grunted and crossed himself. They got to the door, a rusted slab of dirty steel. "A bleedin' fortress, this is."

Scott moved forward, but then noticed the chains hanging loose from the latch. He frowned, raised his fist to knock, paused, then rapped on the door. The metallic pounding echoed through the empty lot as the door swung outward, just a little. "Interesting." He stepped back and drew his gun. Seamus followed suit, producing a small submachinegun. Holding the gun high, back against the wall, Scott propped his foot in the door, then flung it open.

An acrid smell tickled at his nose, earthy and sharp. He sniffed at the familiar scent. Stronger now, rotten, with an underlying tinge of iron. Blood. Death. The cigarette dropped from his mouth.

Low light. His shades responded, amplifying the light as he bolted into the building. Gun out, covering corners, eyes darting back and forth. Shelves. Cans. Yellow boxes with "FOOD" stenciled in black letters. Blood. The bodies.

The first one was obviously Perrin. Long. Thin. Muscles that even in death suggested strength. Scott stepped forward, glanced down as he stepped in something sticky. Blood. Perrin's.

A beacon of light shot from the door. Seamus rushed in, swearing vigorously. The light darted around the building, found the blood, found the bodies. "Sweet mother of Jesus." Three more bodies lay nearby. A woman, two boys.

Scott crouched near Perrin's body, careful to keep his pants out of the blood. The skin was pale, slightly puffy, early stages of decay. A large pistol was still in the hand, and a bullet hole gaped in the center of the forehead. Scott whistled, then shook his head. He stood, turned to face Seamus, his shades compensating for the light. "Nice shot." He headed for the woman.

"Execution. Bleedin' execution," Seamus mumbled.

Scott looked down at the woman. Perrin's wife, probably. Same thing. Shot in the forehead, dead center. An ancient shotgun lay a few feet from her body. "No." Scott turned toward the boys. They, too, were shot once in the head, weapons nearby. "Not an execution. They were defending themselves." He leaned down, picked up the older boy's pistol, and released the clip. Full. "Didn't get a shot off, though." He clucked his tongue. "Impressive."

Seamus lowered his weapon, jaw set hard. "Inquisition?" His eyes reflected a growing rage. "Men in Black?"

Scott cocked his head to the side, walked toward the door. "Maybe." He brushed past Seamus, eyes fixed on the dark shapes on the ground. Feathers. Black feathers. "The bodies. Nothing's started eating them." He knelt.

"So?" asked Seamus, spinning.

"Judging by the state of decay," Scott began, voice flat and even, "they've been dead at least a day. And out here, something would have found them by now." He swallowed. "Soft tissues, at least. Eyes, throat. But nothing." He picked up a feather, a tingle spreading up his fingers and arm across his spine. He shivered. "Strange, isn't it? Especially with these here."

Seamus stepped forward. "If not the Inquisition, then what?"

Scott held the feather up to his face, stroked it against his cheek. "I don't know. I just don't know."

The feather smelled faintly of gunpowder.

* * *

"I'll see your twenty," Dustin slurred through his nose, "and raise you another twenty."

Constantine squinted, then tossed back the rest of his beer, the sixth one that night. He was feeling it, a warm fuzziness at the back of his head, but after today he didn't much care. He glanced down at his cards. A flush, three hearts in his hand and two on the table. Dustin had two tens, possibly a straight. The others had already folded, driven out by the high stakes of seven card stud, and now they all leaned forward, hanging on Constantine's next move. Even Shiva, asleep at his feet, whined at the tension. "I'll see it." He tossed four fives into the pot, now well over two hundred bills. "What do you have?"

Dustin smiled and reached for the bottle of tequila, nearly empty. He dropped his cards. "Straight, eight to jack." He took the last swig, slammed the bottle back down. "Beat that, slick."

Constantine smirked and let his hand fall. "Just isn't your day, Dustin. Flush. Read 'em n' weep." A moment of stunned silence fell over the table. Then Tyrone started laughing.

"Not bad, pretty boy, not bad." He stood, patting Constantine on the shoulder.

Smiling, Constantine started raking the cash into his pile. "Thanks. Hey, next round's on me." He stood, half tripping on his chair, and headed for the bar with a wad of cash. Squeezing between a young woman and a wizened old man, he ordered five beers. He turned around, waiting for the orders, and leaned back against the bar. Feeling the woman's eyes on him, he turned and nodded. She huffed something in Spanish and walked away.

Beside him, the old man was muttering under his breath, hands moving across a string of beads with a cross at one end. The wrinkled eyes were clamped shut, head rocking back and forth just a little. *"...now and at the hour of our death, amen."*

The barkeep returned with the beers, and Constantine nodded towards the old man. "What's up with him?" he asked, voice a little too loud. The bartender shrugged. Constantine took the drinks and returned to the table.

Tyrone met him halfway. "Thanks, Connie." He grabbed a mug from the plater, took a long swig. "Watch out, though. Dustin's fuckin' pissed."

Constantine returned a shit-faced smile. "You taking off?"

"Yeah, man, I'm for out." He knocked back the rest of his beer. "You ain't goin' out of town tonight, are you?"

"Tonight? No. Why?"

Tyrone shook his head. "Bad moon out tonight, man. Bad moon." He was gone before Constantine could reply.

"Here you go, all," he said, setting the platter down on the table. He picked up his mug, raised it in a toast. "To changes," he exclaimed, his eye's locking with Odin's. Before anyone responded, he tossed back the mug, drained it.

Odin made a face, then whistled and patted his leg. Shiva stirred, looked up at Constantine with her unsettling gaze, and loped over to Odin, placing her head on his knee. The giant began scratching her ears. He took a swig of beer.

"So," said Constantine, flopping into his chair, "how you doing over there, Dustin?"

The portly man glared back at him, silent, mug already empty. "One more game."

The others turned towards him. "You seem a little tapped out there, fella," said Gladice, chuckling.

"One more game."

Constantine's smile grew. "What stakes?" Odin shot him a look.

Dustin paused for a moment, eyes glazed. Then his hand crept into his jacket, rummaged through a pocket with slothful concentration. It emerged with a set of keys.

"What's this?" Constantine asked, leaning forward.

"Keys, numbshit. For my hover."

Constantine cocked an eyebrow. "What kind?"

"Not sure. Got it from some fence up near Long Street. Custom job, I think."

"What's it worth?"

"Paid five G's for it," he slurred.

Constantine leaned back, grinning. He reached into his wallet, ignoring Odin's knitted brow. Near his gun, he found the wallet, thick and smooth. He withdrew it, then flipped through with fingers clumsy from alcohol. There. Small, cool, and comfortably heavy. Setting it on the table with a dull clunk, he slid it towards the center.

Gladice's eyes widened. "Is that what I think it is?"

"Yup. Gold. Twenty-four karat, six ounces. Last I knew, trading at a thousand dollars an ounce." He kept his grin under control, sure that no one here would know the going price of gold.

"How do I know it's real?" asked Dustin, leaning forward.

"How do I know there's really a hover for those keys?" replied Constantine, smile full and bright.

Dustin blinked. "Five card draw?"

Constantine nodded. "Odin, will you do the honors."

The giant sighed. "You sure about this?" Constantine nodded, never breaking eye contact with Dustin. Odin shrugged and started dealing. The rest of the pub seemed to quiet around them.

Eight of clubs. Ace of spades. Three of hearts. Two of clubs. Six of spades. Shitty deal. Constantine rearranged his hand, squinting at the cards as if it would make them better. He breathed, slow and deliberate. The fuzz at the back of his head was spreading. Three cards, his three lowest, hit the table. Dustin dropped two.

Odin picked up the discards, then, shaking his head, dealt the replacements. Two cards to Dustin. Three to Constantine. Ace of clubs. Jack of diamonds. Eight of spades. Christ, two pair. Not bad.

Odin regarded both players. "All right. Whatchya got?"

Dustin locked eyes with Constantine, then dropped his cards. "Pair of queens, king high."

Constantine's smile spread ear to ear. "Two pair, Dustin. Tough luck, man."

Swearing, Dustin rose from the table, chair falling backwards. "Fuck you, you little shit." He lunged at Constantine, fists clenched.

Then, somehow, he was stopped, hanging, Odin lifting his considerable bulk by the lapels. Even through the parka, Constantine could see the muscles bulging. "Not worth it," Odin purred, quiet menace in his voice. Behind him, Shiva was baring her teeth, growling, neck hairs on

end. Dustin blinked, mouth open, then nodded. Odin released him, his bulk crumpling to the floor. He clattered to his feet and scuttled out of the pub.

"Don't push your luck, Connie," said Odin, turning back towards the table.

Constantine nodded, then closed his mouth. "Thanks." He stood and swept the keys and the gold from the table, pleased by their heft and jingle.

"Aces and eights," said Odin, eyes squinting at the table.

"How's that?" asked Constantine, dizzy from the alcohol.

"Aces and eights." He paused, made eye contact. "Dead Man's Hand."

* * *

Scott jacked out, the virtual landscape of the net giving way to the rancid smell of burning ethanol and charred flesh. He pulled the interface cord from his wrist and stepped out of the van, heading towards Seamus and the burning bodies.

Seamus turned his head to meet him. "Any luck?" Water pooled in his eyes.

Scott shook his head and lit a cigarette. "Nothing." He glanced down at the street, the picture scrawled in blood. A bird, about a meter wide, wearing a wide-brimmed hat, and an "X" through the torso. He'd been surfing the net for half an hour, boosting off the transmitter in Seamus' van, but he hadn't found anything about the symbol. "I think we're about an hour north of Long Street, though. We can stop there, ask some questions."

The Irishman nodded, then turned back toward the bodies. "Who's doin' this, Scott? Who the bleedin' fuck is killin' these people?" The pink scars on his face caught the firelight, played with it.

"I don't know." He took a drag off his cigarette. Seamus had cremated Perrin and his family, while Scott had scoured the net for maps, satellite photos, trade routs, and rumors about the area. It had taken him hours, but by morning he'd plotted their course, and they were on the road by dawn.

13:07:03. Early afternoon, and they'd just found their fourth set of bodies. After Perrin, the first had been a bunch of punks, lying in the street. Five of them, all armed, all dead with a single shot to the head. Five feathers nearby. The second set was a couple of traders, man and a woman, both dead in their truck. Cargo untouched, blood running down the windows. Same M.O. Same feathers. And now there were these two, a couple of men, workgangers by their clothes, dead in the street.

And the sign, a crow with a hat, painted in blood. That was new. "Let's get moving." Scott turned to leave.

Seamus nodded, crossed himself, then followed. "Mind ya, don't smoke in the van."

Scott stopped, hand on the door, one foot already in the van, a wisp of smoke rising from his mouth. He scowled, then took a long final drag, and flicked the butt away, sparks arcking behind it. With a sigh, he climbed in.

"Which way?"

Scott set his computer on his lap, flipped the screen open, checked his maps. "Follow this road, south. About nine more miles."

They pulled out, past the black plumes of smoke, into the stillness of the barrens. Scott shook his head at the weeds and burnt-out buildings. There was something familiar about the murders, sitting heavy in his stomach. All the bodies were armed, only a few ever getting a shot off. All were shot, once, in the head, with frightening precision. None had been attacked by scavengers. But there were always crow feathers, one for each victim, smelling of gunpowder. He frowned. Everything about the killings struck cords, deep and resonant, echoing through his soul.

They made him think of his childhood, when the Dybbuks had come to deal with his foster father. Something cold, primal, yet strangely and terribly human.

"Ya know," Seamus began, interrupting Scott's thoughts, "back in Belfast, durin' the troubles, I was on my first job. The Brits had been crackin' down on us, but hard. Me mother'd been shot, in the leg, and we were all bleedin' mad. So Pa and the others, they made a plan. A kitchen bomb, in this pub, place the cops went to get pissed. Burn the fuckin' place down, they said. 'Cept the only way in was through the cellar, from next door. And I was the only one that'd fit."

Scott turned to see Seamus, both hands on the wheel, eyes fixed on the road. "How old were you?"

"Thirteen. So they gave me the bomb, a big awkward thing it was. Homebrewed nitro. And I went down into the cellar, next door, where they let me into an airshaft. I crawled through, flashlight in my teeth, draggin' this bomb a good eight meters. Not at all quiet, mind ya. Creakin' and thumpin' all the way. But finally, I get to the other room, and hear this noise. A meowin'. A cat. Well, it's just a bleedin' cat, right? So I think nothin' of it. Then I cut the grate off. And I see it. Down, in that cellar. I bleedin' swear, place hadn't been opened in twenty years. But it was there, down in the cellar. Christ, man."

"What was down there, Seamus?"

He swallowed, his Adam's apple pulling at his throat. "Bones. Picked clean. Human bones, man. Skeletons. A dozen if there was a one. And one body. Sorta."

Scott frowned. "Sorta?"

"Aye. Half of one. Half eaten. And this big cat, bleedin' huge, bigger than most dogs. It was sittin' on the body. Looked it the eye, I did. Then it just looked down, and took a bite out of the poor lad's gut. It'd eaten his face, man. Christ."

"What'd you do?" He reached for a cigarette, thought better of it.

Seamus huffed. "I fuckin' wiggled, that's what I did. Hucked the bleedin' bomb in that god-awful room, scurried my ass outta that shaft, and puked my fuckin' guts out. The others flipped the switch that night."

"Oh." Scott glanced down at his lap, then back up at Seamus. The Irishman's eyes seemed unfocused, distant.

"That pub, it fuckin' burned to the foundation. Nothin' left but ashes. They blocked the place off, so I never went back. But the feelin' in that room, the feelin' I got. It never left me. And it's the same feelin', the same one I get from these bodies."

Scott nodded. "I hear you. I've felt it, too."

"I'm scared." His eyes came back into focus, turned and met Scott's.

"So am I, Seamus. So am I." He broke eye contact, stared out ahead of them. In the distance were the first telltale marks of settlement. Signs stuck out of the ditches, neon-green paint smeared on particle-board. Warnings, rules, advertisements. As they closed, they could see the fence, layers of chainlink plated with corrugated metal and tattered canvas, topped with razor wire. Around the gate hung a number of dark objects, indistinct at first but soon all too clear.

Crows. Dead crows, feathers crusted with their own blood. Dead crows, dozens of them, hanging on the wall. And above the gate, above the heads of the town watchmen moving forth to greet them, was the sign, painted in red and made to be seen, of a crow, with hat, and an "X" through its chest.

"Well," Scott said, reaching for a cigarette. "I think this is the place."

* * *

The garage was half lit, strung with work lanterns and touched by beams of afternoon sun slipping through seams of the aluminum roof. Constantine strode down the center lane, head swinging from side to side. An old jeep, gray paint chipping under a thick patina of road dust. A van, held together with rust and epoxy. A flatbed, steel plates lashed to the sides, "*El Chupacabra*" painted across the plates in reflective orange. He checked the keys. A small tag was attached, "#16" laser printed under the cheap lamination. Each spot was numbered, he saw, and judging by the scheme, #16 would be in the back.

The garage was huge, relatively speaking. Largest building that Constantine had seen in town, space for a couple dozen large vehicles. He couldn't tell what it had been, originally. Maybe a warehouse. But it had been built up through the years, jury-rigged and patchworked, a project of generations. Like this town, he thought.

He'd woken up late again, slightly hungover and cranky from a poor night's sleep. Dreams. Bad dreams. Crows, drinking thin beer and playing cards, their horrible laughter cawing through his head, the pot was formed of small stones, runes, bleached bone white and marked with clubs and spades, and a man, pale and tall but slightly pudgy, a black leather hat and a long coat, knocking, rapping, tapping at his chamber door. He'd tossed and turned all night, unable to get the images from his head. The laughter, the cawing, the knocking.

Constantine shook his head, sighed. There, in the back corner, in the shadows. #16.

It took his eyes a moment to adjust to the light, to grasp the shape in front of him. Then he almost dropped the keys. Large, black. Sleek lines that spoke of speed and power, the air cushion thick and sturdy. Dustin paid five grand for this? Impossible. This was easily a luxury model; it would probably go for seventy, eighty thousand. And no markings like "Ford" or "Mitsubishi." Custom job. Only a hood ornament, small and silver, a stylized bird with spread wings, wearing a rimmed hat. Constantine whistled. Dustin must have been seriously drunk to part with this baby.

He headed for the driver's door, hand running along the hover's skirt, the thick mesh scratching at his hand. The first key didn't fit, but the second one slid in and turned with a comfortable thunk. Constantine stepped back, and pulled on the handle. The door sighed open, cool air puffing the smell of leather into his face. Inside was an even more impressive interior. Bucket seats that could have been easy chairs, controls that would have been at home on a fighter jet. He stood there, mouth open, face lit by an interior light with no obvious source. From above him came a fluttering noise, then the cawing of a crow.

He climbed in, settling into the driver's seat. It fit him perfectly, the temperfoam stuffing molding to his shape under soft leather. He slid the key into the ignition, turned. A deep whirring noise started, grew stronger. Then, suddenly but with no jerkiness at all, the skirt inflated, raising the hover a good meter. Constantine shook his head in awe, easing forward on the throttle. The hover glided out of its spot, its engine a low hum. God damn, this was slick.

Then it dawned on him. No mirrors. No dashboard. No lights. He checked for an interface port. Nothing. The only controls were the stick, the throttle, and the pedals. Maybe it was voice activated. "Lights." Nothing.

He shrugged, reversing the throttle and sliding back into his spot. So it was quirky. It was still a beautiful machine. His machine. His baby.

Above him, the crow cawed, once, twice, three times. Then, with a flutter, it was gone.

* * *

"They call him Old Man Blackfoot," she said, voice tight with emotion. "Personally, I don't give a fuck what his name is." She hefted the crate onto her flatbed, sweat dripping from

her short cropped hair. She stopped, breathing heavy, leaning up against the truck. "Why the hell do you care?"

"An acquaintance of mine was killed the same way," said Scott. He lit a smoke. "Cigarette?"

She paused. "Sure. Thanks." She took a Dunhil, leaned forward for Scott to light it.

"So what's the story?" Seamus had gone off to find some gas, leaving him alone with the workgangers.

"Not much of a story. Heading north towards Green Bay, blow past this joint just after dusk. Figured we could make it there by noon today, if we went straight through the night. But about an hour out, this pimp type just pops outta nowhere, smoking a light, standing in the middle of the fuckin' road. Tried to blow past him but the engine killed." She took a drag off her cigarette, wiped the smoke from her brow. "I was riding shotgun, and Raphie over there, he was driving. Well, this guy, he walks up to the truck. 'Course, we're both thoroughly freaked out by now, so put the shotgun on my lap. Just in case, ya know." Another drag.

Scott asked. "Then what?"

"Raphie rolled down the window, asked wuz up. The guy asks us if we've seen his car. A hover, I think. Spooky-ass voice. Well, we haven't seen jack, and we tell him. Then he starts going off, asking us where we're going, where we've been, shit like that. I dunno. Stopped paying attention to him, cuz I saw Jimmy and Jose in the mirror, getting out of the other truck."

"The other truck?"

"Yeah, we got this flatbed and a big deuce. We sleep in the deuce, usually. But anyway, the guys start yelling at him, gettin' all threatening. Well, the pimp dude, he's real calm, dead calm." She shook her head, then spat. "Jimmy went for his gun, I think. Not sure. Saw some commotion, then there's two bangs, real loud. Echoing. Freako's holding a gun, smoking. Raphie and I, we're too fuckin' stunned to move. We're just staring at him. He turns and points the gun at us. Revolver, I remember. Big fuckin' thing. Left handed, too."

Scott made a face. "What did you do?"

"Nothin'. Almost wet myself, really. Then this pimp dude, he takes a drag of his butt, turns, and walks away. Into the shadows, then gone. Then then engine starts up again. Raphie, he just freaks out, shifts into gear and takes the fuck off. We looped back, got here fast as we fuckin' could. I'm still pissed that we left 'em out there, in the street. But the people round here, they said they'd take care of 'em."

Scott frowned, not wanting to tell her that the bodies had still been there. "Old Man Blackfoot, you said?"

"Yeah. Some local story, I guess. Lord of the crows and some shit like that. Comes to take the dead away. What the fuck ever." She asked, turned back to her work, grunting as she picked up another crate.

Scott nodded. Lord of the crows. He who takes the souls of the living to the land of the dead. He'd known others, when he was young. Different names, same idea. The psychopomp.

A horn honked, and Scott turned to see Seamus pulling up with the van. He took the last drag of his cigarette and tossed it to the side. "Anything else you remember," he asked her, tossing two hundred dollar bills on the flatbed.

She stopped, stared at him, seemed to peer through his shades. "Well..." she began, hesitant. She glanced down at the cash. "Nevermind. It's crazy."

"What?"

"Thought I saw something else, is all."

Scott scowled. "What was it?"

She sighed, turned away from him. "Right after he shot 'em, I coulda sworn. Feathers. Two of them." She paused. "Falling."

* * *

The chill breeze played with Constantine's hair, nipping at his ears and sending shivers down his back. He pulled his collar up, glanced at his watch. Quarter after five. His stomach was growling, and Odin would probably be at Cheap Drinks by now. He hurried his step, hands in his pockets, playing with the new keys. As he neared the garage, more and more harsh calls reached his ears. Crows. Lots of them, at least twenty, hopping and strutting across the roof, their voices a hoarse cacophony. Constantine shuddered, forced the image of a pale man from his mind, and just managed not to break into a run.

The pub was already busy with the dinner crowd. Despite the smoke, Constantine found it easier to breathe. The mood tonight was different, though. Somber. Witchy. He found Odin in a corner table, eating a huge krill steak and tossing chunks of it Shiva. The giant nodded and motioned toward the empty chair.

"Evening, Odin." He reached down and scratched Shiva behind the ears. "Hey there, girl." The wolf closed her eyes and whined.

"Hear about Dustin?" Odin asked through a mouthful of krill.

Constantine glanced up. "No. Why? What happened?"

"Dead. Friends of his found him, 'bout halfway to Long Street. Middle of the road, broken bottle nearby."

"Alcohol poisoning?"

Odin swallowed, shook his head. "Doubt it. Bullet in his head."

"What? Somebody shot him?"

The giant shrugged. "Guess so."

"Why?"

"Don't know. Stupid of him, though."

Constantine leaned back in his chair. "How's that?"

"Alone, on foot, and drunk in the barrens? Asking to get jumped."

The waitress appeared; Constantine opted against the grilled crow and ordered rice patties and a hydroponic salad. "You notice the birds?" he asked Odin once she'd left.

"The crows? Yeah. Weird."

"Do they usually get together like that, in groups?"

Odin scratched his stubble. "In the wilds. Not usually in towns like this. Too easy to catch."

Constantine frowned. "So this isn't normal?"

"No. Interesting, though."

"Why's that?"

"The guys that found Dustin. Said Old Man Blackfoot got him."

A shiver slid up Constantine's spine. "Who?" he asked, shaking it off.

"Old Man Blackfoot. Kind of a local bogeymen, 'specially in Long Street. Lord of the crows, collector of souls. They say he's stompin' about."

Constantine smiled. "Wait a minute. Lord of the crows? You're talking about some sort of myth, right? This guy doesn't exist."

Odin's brow knitted. "If you say, so, Connie."

"Constantine. But I mean, it's just a story." *pale skin, pudgy face, black hat, black coat...*

"Sure. Just a story."

"Jesus, Odin. You don't actually believe that shit, do you?" Then he remembered the charms and crystals hanging around the man's neck. "Um... I mean..."

"No reason not to," Odin said, scowling.

"You hear from Guthrey?" Constantine asked, changing the subject.

Odin leaned back, nodded. Shiva put her head in his lap. "Meeting's tonight. Couple guys from Milwaukee."

The waitress returned with Constantine's order. "Anything to drink with that?" she asked.

"I'll have a beer, please. No, wait. Make that a water. I probably shouldn't drink tonight."

"Good idea," said Odin, a shadow crossing his face. "You don't wanna end up like Dustin."

* * *

"There's no way we can go any faster?" Scott asked, teeth rattling.

Seamus swore. "Ya already owe me a new set o' shocks."

They were rumbling along at sixty kilos, the potholes and craters in the road straining the van's suspension to the limit. *17:56:11*. The sun was setting, fast, and they were still a good hour outside of the Bluffs. It'd taken them an hour and three minutes to find the workergang, and another forty-seven minutes before they got out of town. Now, here they were, racing the sun.

"Over there, more of 'em," Seamus growled. Ahead and to the left was a small group of crows, four of them, on the side of the road. They had spotted more and more since they left Long Street, individual birds at first but once as many as twelve.

Scott grumbled and leaned back into his seat. He'd slept four hours, twenty-two minutes, and seven seconds since they left Milwaukee. He didn't dare sleep, though. Not yet. Not like he could have if he wanted to. He pulled out a cigarette and stuck it in his mouth, unlit.

Seamus shot him a look, then relaxed. He shook his head. "Whatdya make of all this, Scott?"

"What?" The Dunhil dangled between his lips. "Old Man Blackfoot?"

"Aye. Ya think he's real?" The tinge in his voice just audible over the thunder of the road.

"Somebody killed those people. And it sure as hell wasn't your typical gutter punk."

"Inquisition, maybe." Seamus frowned, coals of anger glowing in his eyes. "Men in Black?"

Scott shook his head. "MIBs are good, but not that good. Five people at once, Seamus. All of them armed, no one even got off a shot. Besides. MIBs don't kill that way, wouldn't leave the bodies. They're... neater."

Seamus humphed. "Sometimes," he spat. "Replicant, then? Coulda gone rogue."

"Maybe. But I doubt she was making that story up. Even vat-jobs can't just disappear, or make an engine kill."

"Just strikes me as bleedin' odd... After all—"

"Up there" Scott said, cutting him off. "What's that?"

Ahead of them, on the side of the road, lying in the weeds. Seamus slowed the van as they past. Another one, a man, dead, shot in the head. A shattered bottle nearby, the red crow symbol scrawled on the road.

"When's sunset?" Seamus asked.

18:02:33. "Fifteen minutes."

Seamus pushed down on the pedal, hard. The van lurched forward, careening over the road with bone-jarring speed. Scott regarded the mangled cigarette that had been in his mouth,

rolled the window down, and tossed it out. He pulled another one from his jacket, got it between his lips. Unlit.

The sun was setting over the barrens. The landscape here was more sparse, the housing projects and strip malls giving way to a cemetery, a crumbling factory, a half completed arcology. Stunted trees struggled to grow. Crows were everywhere.

Scott closed his eyes and thought about the past. Journeying to the Realms of Summer and Spring with his mother, business trips to Arcadia with his foster father. And once they had visited a realm of shadows, far to the west, eternal gloom and mist, filled with strange trees. There they had met an old man, called Gwynn. He had spoken with a strange accent. Like Seamus', but thicker. Older.

That was a long time ago. Now Scott found himself on the other side of the veil, in his father's realm though he'd never met him. Driving through the barrens, on a task for his new family. Microchips in his spine, custom smartshades resting on his nose. And a gun, solid and reassuring, hanging at his side.

He opened his eyes to growing darkness. *18:18:43*. "Sun's down," he said.

Seamus nodded, gritting his teeth as the van jolted through a pothole. "Aye." He flipped on the headlights.

Scott inhaled sharply, the flavor of his soggy cigarette teasing his lungs. He undid his seatbelt, reached behind the seat, and grabbed his bag. He rummaged through it, finding the special compartment. Unzipped it, removed the contents. Closed the bag, put it back.

"What's tha'?" Seamus asked, glancing from the road.

Scott pulled out his gun, its baroque detail reflecting in the fading light. He removed the clip, slid the new one in. "Silver bullets. Just in case." He pulled back the slide, schlick-schlick. Left the safety off.

They kept driving, silent, listening to the clamor of the van. The light faded, more and more, the headlights their only illumination. They slowed down, more cautious in the dark. *18:34:03*. Still half an hour or so to go. In the dark.

Scott closed his eyes again, unlit cigarette bouncing between his lips. "How much gas we got, Seamus?"

"Most o' the tank. Why?"

Scott started to answer, but was stopped short by the van lurching, bouncing hard, slewing left, cigarette flying from his mouth. Seamus swore, pulled hard on the wheel, and brought it under control. Silence. Headlights shining on a the street, still and empty. Scott reminded himself to breathe.

"Engine killed," said Seamus. The words hung in the air.

And then movement, a dark shape in the headlights. A crow, landing. It cawed, four times, its voice echoing through the night. Then another caw, from their left. Another crow landed in their view. More cawing. Two more crows. Cawing all over now. More crows, a dozen of them at least, strutting and bobbing in the headlights, some fluttering away, others taking their places. Their calls grew in pitch, filling the night. All around them. Scott removed his gun, put it on his lap. *Lowlight*. The shades kicked in, showing him the roadside in a tinge of green. Crows all over. Dozens of them. Hundreds maybe.

"*Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name...*" Seamus was praying quietly.

The calls crescendoed, cawing laughter boiling through the once empty streets. Then, slowly, one by one, the crows began to leave, flying off into the darkness. The cawing tapered off, slowly at first. More crows left, then even more, their calls growing less and less until a single crow remained, large and proud, in the middle of the street. It cawed, one last time, then fluttered off, a small puff of dust in its wake.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil..."

"Seamus," Scott said. The Irishman kept praying, rocking gently back and forth, starting over. "Seamus, they're gone." No response. "Seamus!"

He stopped, looked up at Scott. Blink, shook his head. "Sorry."

Lowlight off. The shades returned to normal. Dark in the van, faces barely lit in the headlights' glare. "It's all right," said Scott.

Seamus nodded, then turned his head toward the street. His face froze. "No. I donna think it is."

In front of them, at the edge of the light, a figure was strolling toward them. Tall, powerful build. Longcoat and a wide brimmed hat, both black. He moved slowly, calm. Confident. Smoking a cigarette.

Scott swallowed. "Let me do the talking, Seamus. And no matter what happens, *do not* go for you gun. Do you understand me?"

The Irishman nodded.

Scott set his pistol on his lap. He doubted its usefulness, but silver bullets were better than nothing.

The man was at the van now, just outside the headlights, the ember of his cigarette bobbing. Pale face, black eyes. Kind of pudgy, but not really fat. More like... well fed. Seamus rolled down the window.

"Good evening, sir," said Scott.

The figure paused, looked around. "I suppose so." His voice seemed to reverberate from his throat.

Scott suppressed a shudder. "Can we help you with something?"

He took a long drag off his cigarette, exhaled perfect rings. "Perhaps you can." His left hand came up, tilted his hat back. "Someone has stolen some of my property. Perhaps you've seen it."

Scott glanced at Seamus, who was staring straight out the windshield. He turned back to the man outside. "And what might that be, sir?"

"My hovercraft." He pulled another drag. The butt didn't seem any lower.

"A hovercraft? No, sir. We haven't seen anything like that."

The pale man nodded, his face drawn. "Pity." He made no move to leave.

Scott swallowed. "Is there anything else then? Sir."

"You're heading where?"

He paused. "The Bluffs."

The man cocked his head, took another drag. "Really." He exhaled. "I could use a ride..."

Scott and Seamus turned, made eye contact. "We seem to be having trouble with our van," Scott said.

Outside, the man shrugged. "So?" Then silence.

Scott sighed. He glanced at his gun, thought better of it. "We can take you as far the Bluffs..."—Seamus shot him a look, fear and shock and rage cooking in his eyes—"on one condition."

"And that is?" Another puff.

The acrid sweet smoke tickled at Scott's nose. He felt his lungs ache from withdrawal. "You give us your word. That no you will bring no harm upon us." He could see Seamus' jaw drop.

The man raised an eyebrow. "That's hardly necessary. The two of you seem quite capable."

Scott's voice lowered. "Humor me, sir. Your word, please."

He huffed, shook his head. "Really..."

Scowling, Scott reached up and removed his shades. "*Your word, brethren*," he growled, the slightest violet tinge reflecting in Seamus' scarred face.

Silence. Then a puff, exhale, cloud of smoke rising, rising, gone. Then a smile. "Fine. You have my word, that I shall bring no harm upon you. May I enter now?"

Scott replaced his glasses, fingers shaking. He made eye contact with Seamus, nodded. "Please do." He reached behind the seat and opened the side door, the dark figure walking around the van. "Just keep cool," he whispered to Seamus. "Don't do anything rash, and we'll be O.K. He gave us his word." He slipped his gun into its holster.

"His bleedin' word? What the fuck's that supposed to mean?" asked Seamus, voice hushed.

Scott's brow furrowed. "Trust me. And for fuck's sake, *mind your manners*."

Without warning, the engine roared to life. They turned around to see their passenger, one foot inside. Seamus frowned. "If ya don't mind, there's no smokin' in the van."

The figure stopped, frowning. He looked at his cigarette, then at Seamus, then back to cigarette. He shook his head, and stepped into the van. He closed the door and took his seat, in the middle. "Shall we?" He ashed, the ember falling, disappearing into the dark before hitting the ground. The cigarette wasn't any shorter.

Seamus blinked, opened his mouth. Closed it again. He turned around and shifted into gear.

The smoke filled the car, pungent scent of tobacco and tar. Scott's mouth watered, his lungs heaved. He reached for a Dunhil, then stopped. Started playing with the seatbelt. He turned around, the ember of the cigarette all he could make out. "I don't suppose you could spare a hit off that?"

The white face leaned out of the shadows, eyes hidden under the rimmed hat. He held out the smoke, smiling.

Scott returned the smile and gingerly took the cigarette. He nodded, then took a long drag. Relief, at first, then, for a brief moment, ecstasy. Fading, gone, cascading now to cold mist, thick and numbing, settling in his lungs and congealing like grease. Seizing his lungs, his chest. *Pain*. He started coughing, hacking, so violent he almost dropped the butt. Cold sweat on his brow. He shuddered, recovering. Felt better. Wiped his forehead. "Thanks," he croaked, managing a weak smile. He handed the cigarette back.

The face nodded, still smiling. Another drag.

"By the way," said Scott, settling back into his seat. "This is Seamus. You can call me Scott."

The figure leaned back into the shadows, smoke billowing forth. "Well met."

"And you are?" asked Seamus.

The van lurched through a small crater, knocking Scott's teeth together. From behind him came a slight chuckling.

"Call me... Jack."

* * *

He spotted them as they walked in the door. One was short, rather disheveled, wearing a ballcap and an overstuffed backpack. Something funny about his face, dirt maybe. No, scars. Lots of them. Constantine blanched. The other one was taller, skinny, smoking a cigarette.

Pinstripe suit, nice, but kind of rumpled, like he'd slept in it. And of course, the sunglasses, even at night. How gauche.

Beside him, Guthrey glanced at his watch. "About time. These must be our guys." He stood. "Stay here."

Constantine glanced over at Odin. The giant was leaning back in his chair, the same stoic face he'd worn when they met. Shiva was at his feet, playing with some nylon chew toy, showing teeth just a little too sharp for comfort.

At the door, Guthrey was talking to the taller one. Tension. Arguing about something. The thin man shook his head, pointed at Guthrey. The short one stepped in. Guthrey waved his hands in the air and started to turn around, only to be grabbed by the taller one. He growled something through his teeth, then let go. Guthrey shrugged, straightened his clothes, and headed out the door. The other two approached the table.

Constantine rose to meet them. "Evening. I'm—"

"Constantine Crassus, I know," said the taller one. "And you're Odin, right?"

The giant nodded.

"Good. I'm Scott, this is Seamus. Crassus, you got a room?"

"Um, yeah. Why?" He stepped back, into the chair.

He took a drag. "It's been a long fucking day. We're staying the night, leaving first thing tomorrow morning. Odin, you have a room?"

The giant shook his head. "Stay in the jeep."

"We'll all stay with Crassus then." He asked.

"There's not that much room..."

"We'll make room. Odin, you have any sleep mats?"

He nodded. "I'll get 'em. Your at Kirby's, right?" Constantine nodded.

"Great," said Scott. Another puff. "Seamus, you've got a sleeping bag, right? Good. Odin, you've got a jeep? How's it on fuel?"

"Most of a tank."

"All right. How 'bout you, Crassus. You got a vehicle."

Constantine smiled. "Yeah."

"You need fuel?"

"Um, I don't really know."

A longer drag this time. "What do you mean, you don't know?"

He shrugged. "Well, it doesn't have a gas gauge or anything like that."

A pause. "Excuse me."

"No gas gauge. No dashboard, really."

"Where'd you get this car?"

Constantine smirked. "Well, I won it last night, in a card game. And it's a hover, actually. Not a car."

The cigarette drooped from the thin man's mouth. He looked at his partner, back to Constantine. "A hover?"

"Yeah. It's beautiful. Still can't believe it."

The other one piped in, thick Irish accent. "Ya won it in card game, ya said?"

Constantine frowned. "Yeah. Why?"

"Who owned it originally?" Scott asked, finishing his cigarette. He dropped it on the floor, stepped on it, and fished out another one.

"Well, he's, ahh..."

"Dead," said Odin. "They found him in the barrens this morning."

The two men exchanged looks again. "Shot in the head?" asked Scott.

Odin nodded. "You saw him?"

"And about a dozen others."

Odin blanched, and Shiva whined audibly. "Old Man Blackfoot?"

Scott nodded, taking a long drag off his light. "Yup. And I think we just gave him a lift into town." He exhaled through his nose.

Odin raised his eyebrows. "You saw him?"

"Yeah, met him actually. Took a hit off his cigarette, too." He chuckled, tilted his head. "Nice guy. Kinda freaky, though."

"What the hell are you talking about?" roared Constantine. "This Blackfoot character, he's some kind of local legend, that's all."

Scott turned towards him, blew a cloud of smoke in his face. "You wanna tell that to the guy that was in our van fifteen minutes ago? The one that made the engine kill for no reason, appeared out of nowhere, smoked a neverending cigarette, and then conveniently vanished from the van once we got into town? The one that is, curiously enough, looking for his stolen hovercraft? Why don't you track him down, Crassus. He's sure as fuck in town somewhere, and I bet he'd like to meet you. Tell him he doesn't exist, after he's put a bullet in your brain."

The bar had grown quiet, the only noise the tinny hum of the radio. Someone coughed.

"Let's get the bleedin' hell outta here," said Seamus, heading for the door.

The others turned to follow, but Constantine stayed where he was.

"You coming Crassus?" asked Scott, "Or are we gonna have to break in?"

He grunted and headed towards the door. This was ridiculous. A bunch of grown men, all worked up over some fairy tale. And what was this crap about his hover having been stolen? He won it, fair and square.

Outside, the air was surprisingly damp. A light mist was rolling into town.

"Crassus," said Scott, still smoking. "Listen to me on this. If scary old man shows up and asks you for his hover, you are to give it to him, understand?"

"I don't fucking believe this. It's my hover. It's mine!"

"Look Constantine, I already don't like you. But I have been given the task of picking you up and getting you back to Milwaukee, safe and sound. Personally, I don't give two shits if you keep that hover or if you end up staining the carpet. But professionally, you're my responsibility. So try not to do anything stupid, *capisce*?"

Constantine started to answer, but was stopped by a sharp cawing. Scott spun to the left, scanning the dark. Following his eyes, Constantine eventually found it. A crow. They all paused for a moment, then started walking toward the inn.

Looking over his shoulder, Constantine saw the bartender emerge from Cheap Drinks, a red marker in hand. Above the doorway, he drew a sign. A bird, wearing a hat, crossed out through the middle.

* * *

Scott peeked out of the curtains, again. The fog was getting thicker, despite the absence of any lake. 23:32:56. Nearly midnight. He sat back down at the desk, careful not to wake the others. He still hadn't slept, but given the circumstances, he didn't trust anyone else to keep watch.

He pushed himself back, two of the chair's legs off the ground. Gun in his hand, safety off. Staring at the door. He'd programed his neural processor to monitor his brainwaves; as soon as they hit alpha, it'd scream a wake-up call through his head.

What were the odds of Crassus having won Blackfoot's hover? Unbelievable. If it hadn't been for that, Scott could have passed this off as just a rather unpleasant courier job. But now he was staying up through the night, protecting some pompous suit from a threat he didn't even believe in. Would the ironies never cease? He kept picturing Constantine Crassus, dead, lying in a pool of his own blood, bullet in the head. Bullet in the head. In the head. bullet. head... head....

WAKE UP WAKE UP WAKE UP WAKE UP WAKE UP WAKE UP! He nearly toppled out of the chair. Shook himself off, stood and stretched. Yawn. 25:02:13.

What?

25:02:14.

System diagnosis. Waiting.

Twenty-five-oh-two-fourteen? Thirteen o'clock?

All systems operational. No errors encountered. Impossible. Repeat operation. Waiting.

What the fuck was going on here?

All systems operational. No errors encountered.

He ran his hand through his hair, headed for the window. He peered out, behind the curtain. Nothing but mist, at first. Then slowly, oh so slowly, the fog started to fade. Buildings appeared first, but there was something different about them. Older. More decrepit. Broken. The mists faded further, revealing the Bluffs. Or what used to be the Bluffs. Now the buildings had fallen into complete disrepair, the patchwork fixings of the townspeople absent for generations.

Then he saw them. Shadows, really. Shades, flickering in the half light. Like the realm he had visited when he was young, the realm of gloom and twilight. Gwynn's kingdom. Scott knew this place, or at least others like it.

The Realm of the Dead.

"O.K., everybody!" he yelled. "Better get up, and I mean now!" He let the curtain slide back into place.

The others groaned back to consciousness. Pulling themselves off the ground. "This had better be bleedin' important, man" grumbled Seamus. "What seems to be the problem?"

"Well," began Scott, waiting for Odin and Constantine to pay attention. Shiva was whimpering. "For starters, anybody have the time?"

Constantine nodded, reaching for his watch. "What the hell? All eights. What's going on?"

Scott walked to the window. "Well, I'd say this is going on." He pulled back the curtain with a flourish, exposing the crumbling world outside.

"Holy Mary Mother of God!" whispered Seamus.

"What the hell is this?" screeched Constantine.

Odin answered first. "We're in the land of the dead."

"What?" asked Constantine, voice raising an octave.

"The land of the dead. Where the souls of the departed, in this area at least, come until it's time for a new incarnation." Odin touched a small pouch on his belt.

"You can't be serious. Lunatics are one thing. The land of the dead? This is absurd."

Scott grunted, and walked toward Constantine. "So where are we, then?"

"In some sort of virtual reality, probably. Simple enough to do."

"With this level of detail? And more importantly, why?"

"I don't know. The Inquisition's probably trying to set a trap for me. Get me to talk."

Scott huffed, shaking his head. "You just don't believe, do you?" With that, he drew his gun, aimed, and fired into Constantine's chest. The bang echoed in everyone's ears.

"Jesus Christ, Scott!" bellowed Seamus.

Scott held up a hand. "He's all right. Aren't you?"

Constantine, lay writhing on the ground, clutching his chest. Slowly, he calmed down. He checked his hands. No blood.

"See?" asked Scott. "Welcome to the land of the dead. You're already here, so I can't kill you. Thus, no blood." He pointed the gun at Constantine again, concentrated. The bullet pulled out, flew back into the gun. "Get up," he said. Shiva was growling, at the door.

Constantine pulled himself off the floor. "So now what?"

KNOCK. KNOCK. KNOCK.

Scott shook his head and headed for the door. "Well come on in!" he said.

"No!" screamed Constantine, but it was too late. The door was open.

"Evening, Jack," said Scott.

The dark figure stepped into the room, pale face sweeping back and forth. "Evening," he said in that metallic voice. He caught Constantine's eye, stepped forward. "I believe you have something that belongs to me." He extended his right hand, palm up.

Constantine swallowed. "I won it," he said. "Fair is fair. I didn't steal it from you."

Then the left hand was up, a huge black revolver trained between Constantine's eyes. "I said, you have something that belongs to me."

He tried to force a smile. "Scott already tried that. He just shot me, not two minutes ago. It doesn't do anything, if we're already dead."

Thumb pulled back the hammer. "Fool. You're in my realm, now. Do you really think we play by the same rules? I repeat, you have something that belongs to me."

Constantine started shaking, visibly. He nodded, reaching into his pockets. He pulled forth the keys, jingling. Holding them like a dead fish, he set them in Old Man Blackfoot's hand.

"My apologies," rasped the figure, "for any... inconveniences."

A shot. Loud, echoing. Constantine tensed, waiting for the pain, eyes closed.

But it didn't come. He opened his eyes. The four of them, in the room. The old man was gone. The sun was coming up.

But floating to the floor, gracefully, back and forth and back and forth. Black...

A feather.

* * *

"I can't believe you're still harping on that bullshit, Scott." Constantine finished making his bed, the clean sheets smelling of bleach.

"I can't believe you still deny it." Scott was watching him move in.

"It was a virtual reality. There is no way that what we saw could have actually happened. It's impossible. You can go on believing it, if you want. It's just a bunch of delusions, though. I mean, you're a smart guy, Scott. Why do you buy into that stuff?"

"Same reason you don't, I guess." He shook his head. "I'll see you later, Connie."

"That's Constantine." He paused. "Bye."

He closed the door behind Scott, then tossed the pillow on top of the bed. Then, after locking the door, he slid open the top drawer of his dresser. There, in the back, he found what he was looking for.

A feather, black and sleek, tingling in his fingers. He ran it lengthwise, down his cheek. It smelled, even now, faintly of gunpowder.

>Username: EAKENM
>Password:

Date: Thursday, September 6, 2041 11:54:04 GST
From: Julius.A.Lanigan@specres.dow-pharm.com
To: eakenm@schwarzalpen.ch
Subject: riptide

>>automatic decryption activated...
percent complete: 100%

AA

>>secondary decryption activated...
using key 2-alpha-86
percent complete: 100%

AA

>>message parsing activated...
drawing message from package text
percent complete: 100%

AA

TOP SECRET
PRISM clearance only
DO NOT COPY
DO NOT FORWARD
DELETE UPON COMPLETION

Mathias,

The board and I have finally worked out the details. \$2 million has been moved into your Swiss account. I trust that you'll see that the appropriate parties are paid.

The arrangements are as follows. One Mercury Class Submersible will deliver itself, on autopilot, to a point off the coast of Dakar (14° 34' N, 17° 32' W). Have the Maelstrom board there. We've also arranged to have six people placed on the *Majesty*. On October 3, they are to sink the tanker, via torpedo if possible. The six men on the ship should make certain that various failsafe devices are deactivated or otherwise out of commission. From there, the sub should make its way to the rendezvous in the North Atlantic, where the mercenaries will be picked up by helicopter. They are to place the bodies we've provided inside, and execute the

Omega Sequence on the submersible's computer. The submersible will then proceed, on autopilot, into the arctic pack ice, where it will crash. We will take care of the rest.

Remember, this project is to appear as a terrorist strike, not a military action. Surprise is essential, but the strike must be clear. Attached you will find information on the Orphans of Gaia. Have the Maelstrom read these documents and follow the appropriate MO.

Upon completion of the project, and additional \$1 million will be transferred to your account.

As always, discretion is of the strictest importance.

Sincerely,

Julius Lanigan
Executive Director, Special Resources
Dow Pharmaceuticals
Julius.A.Lanigan@specres@dow-pharm.com

Shell Tanker Sunk off Coast of Portugal

<<<Chicago Tribune Newsfax, October 3, 2041, 10:00PM CST>>>

Lisben, Portugal

The world held its breath for six hours today when the Shell *Majesty*, an Shell Oil Tanker, was sunk by terrorists. Over 1 million gallons of crude oil threatened to dump into the ocean, but the rapid deployment of Dow Pharmaceutical's new RHG-394 nanites was able to stem the flow.

The RHG-394 product just passed clinical trials two months ago. The nanites are designed to seek out and bond with petroleum, linking together to create a plastic-like "bag" which contains any oil spill. "It's a much more effecient method of clean up," said Marika Gabrione, a spokesperson for Dow Pharmaceuticals. "We've relied on 'oil-eating' bacteria and nanites for over forty years now. They cleaned the messes up, but the oil was lost. [RHG-394] cleans up the mess without destroying the oil. It can be collected and reused later."

Officials aren't giving any definite numbers, but Shell admitted that it payed a "considerable sum" for the nanites. "It was far less than we would have lost in oil, however," said one official.

The success of the cleanup has prompted negotiations between Dow and the World Health Organization for a multi-billion dollar contract on the new nanites.

The Orphans of Gaia, an ecoterrorist group, declared their intent to sink the *Majesty* immediately before the blast. They also intended to destroy the oil with petroleum-eating bacteria. Initial countermeasures failed to prevent the submersible-launched torpedoe from blasting through the hull, but additional countermeasures drove off the terrorists before they could deploy the bacteria.

Terrorists Die in Arctic Accident

<<<Chicago Tribune Newsfax, October 7, 2041, 6:00AM CST>>>

Nord, Greenland

An Icelandic cargo ship discovered the terrorist submersible *Nevermore* this morning, crashed in the arctic pack ice. The *Nevermore* is believed to have attacked the Shell *Majesty* oil tanker last week. Four crewmen, identified as members of the Orphans of Gaia ecoterrorist group, were found dead inside the wreck.

Shell Oil authorities, in conjunction with Inquisition and World Health Organization forces, have siezed the wreck and are invistigating further leads. They are confident that this slip-up will lead them to the head of the terrorist ring.

Subject: Christmas Greetings
Date: Sun, 25 Dec 2039, 11:03:17 CST
From: browdert@chicago.archdiocese.org
To: vbrowder@paloalto.k12.edu

Dear Vanessa,

Merry Christmas, sis! Sorry I haven't written in so long, but the past few months have been a little more than hectic. Ah well, 'tis the season." Today was especially chaotic--we must have served at least two hundred people, and with some rather questionable help. You know, I got my first calls in October from people that wanted to help over Christmas, and over the past few months I've gotten at least four calls a day. Funny how so few of them were interested in helping out on other days when they found out Christmas was already full. Sometimes human nature truly depresses me.

But I forget myself. What's important is that a lot of people that would've gone hungry got a warm meal and some company today. It never ceases to amaze me how many squatters and homeless there are in just this part of the city. But then I suppose that there really isn't anywhere else for them to go. One of the regulars, Patrice, said that she'd been sleeping in a dumpster the other night when the security guards chased her out. One even shot at her! She says they were laughing the entire time. It almost makes my blood boil, how people can treat those less fortunate than themselves as no more than animals. Patrice isn't the only one that's had experiences like that, either. Most of them have. That's why most of them live on the Edge. It's not that nice of an area, but at least everyone leaves them be.

How was your Christmas? Did you and Anthony fly out to see mom? I would have called today, but I just didn't want to risk having to talk to him. I just didn't want to ruin this day, you know? Our first Christmas at the kitchen... I just wanted to enjoy the holiday and the camaraderie as much as I could. I think I'll write mom a not when I'm done here.

Things have been going well out here. I can hardly believe that we only opened the kitchen eight months ago. It seems like a lifetime! Sister Theresa was saying just the other day that she'd gotten so many gray hairs since she started here that she might go back to wearing a habit. =-) I think she's exaggerating a bit, but things have been fairly stressful lately.

Just the other day, in fact, we had a little more excitement than any of us are used to. I woke up to someone leaning on the door buzzer, only to find four Peace Officers outside. It was almost one in the morning, so I was a little shocked, to say the least. I let them in, and there were two men with them, in plain overcoats. They were looking for Lenny, one of the locals who occasionally stays in the shelter overnight. I tried to find out why they wanted him--I don't know why, I just got a bad feeling from the two men. Before I could stop them, the peace officers were searching through the kitchen. I tried to stop them, but they had spread out. There was a brief ruckus, and I heard a zapping noise and then Lenny groaning. There were some shouts, and when I finally caught up with them, they were dragging Lenny towards the door. I kept trying to find out what was going on, but all the two men would say was that they needed to ask Lenny some questions, that they wouldn't hurt him, that he'd be all right. Wouldn't hurt him! It looked to me like they'd already zapped him with a taser or something worse. Anyway, I called Father Nbuke and told him what happened. He told me to sit tight and he'd look into things.

I ran into Lenny a few days later, on my way back from the grocery store. I pulled over and offered him a ride, since it was bitterly cold outside. He refused to get in the car. He wouldn't make eye contact, either, and he kept muttering things like "don't wanna come near me, Sista, nothin' but trouble follows me... don't wanna come near me, Sista...." I tried to gently pull him into the car, but he started screaming and broke away and started running across a parking lot. I just stood there for a minute or two watching him. I haven't seen him since, not even today. I hope he's all right.

Father Nbuke says there were a few other homeless people "questioned" that night. He's run across a couple of them, and they were just like Lenny. It's so scary, Vanessa. Sometimes I think that maybe the end times are actually upon us. Father Nbuke says it's always been like this, that there have always been those that oppress and exploit the unfortunate, and that the true calling of the Church is to fight against that oppression and to care for the poor and the innocent. I know that he's not the most popular priest in the archdiocese, but his words ring so very true. I think the Lord has great things planned for him.

Anyway, I didn't write this to get you all worried about me. I'm very happy out here. My health is holding--sometimes I need to sit down for a while we're serving dinner, but the other sisters understand. It's so very warming to see how much everyone here cares about my condition, especially since most of our guests have similar problems. Something about life on the streets, I'm sure... it eats away at one's body. Well, our sufferings can but only be a flicker compared to His...

Give my love to Anthony and the children. I hope you're all doing well. I doubt I'll be able to make it out to the coast to visit anytime soon, but if you happen to be passing through Chicago, I'd be more than happy to see you. Maybe you could stay here for a night... the accommodations aren't that great, but the company is certainly delightful.

In God's love,

Tabitha

=====
Tabitha Browder

Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration

Agape Kitchen and Shelter

2506 S. Spaulding, Chicago, IL

browdert@chicago.archdiocese.org

24.324.708.234.5601

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." (John 14:27)

=====

Through the Veil

by Benjamin A. McCann, PhD

<<< From a lecture given to the Association for the Study of the Paranormal in Houston on February 9, 2033. Dr. McCann is one of the most noted para-anthropologists in the discipline. He is noted for his detailed and entertaining ethnographies as well as his insightful and far-reaching theories. He currently teaches at the University of Chicago. >>>

• • •

It is a commonly held theory of most parapsychologists and para-anthropologists that sacred space is defined by the presence of an ambient energy source of some sort, identified variously as “psi,” “*chi*,” “*mana*,” and numerous other terms. In such areas, the theory holds, those with paranormal or supernatural abilities would be able to draw upon this ambient energy, making their tasks easier. As a result, cultures developed methods for identifying or creating “amplifiers” for these sacred spots, in order to harvest the spiritual energy present. Such theories find a great deal of support from geomantic traditions, such as Feng Shui, and early academics, such as Alfred Watkins and his idea of Ley Lines (1986).

I do not dispute the observations of Watkins *et al*, or the theology of the *fang shi*. Clearly enough, sacred sights such as burial mounds and churches *are* often found to line up, even when separated by dozens of kilometers. And admittedly, the similarity between this Ley Line theory and the Dragon Lines of *feng shui* are hard to ignore. However, they do not necessarily support the theory that sacred spaces are defined by the *presence* of some mystical energy.

A better approach to the study of sacred space is to think of them not as being defined by the presence of something, but by the absence. Consider the work of Adolphus Kane (2009), in which he tested the extra-sensory capabilities of a number of subjects in various locations. In most of the cases, the performance was significantly higher in “sacred” areas than it was in the control space. Likewise, this increase in performance was also noted in a number of areas, such as caves, crossroads, and coastlines, which though clearly liminal in nature are not traditionally recognized as “sacred.”

What does this mean? Extra-sensory perception is just that—perception. It is, by all accounts, a *receptive* ability. The subject is not “harnessing” any energies, nor is he “directing” them. At the

same time, a number of sensitives have described “a general sort of background noise, like static when you tune in a dead channel. When the images come, it’s like a sudden point of clarity” (Hedrick, 2016). Clarity is the key term, here, and it is one of the strongest recurring themes throughout these testimonies.

Now, if the “ambient energy” theory were correct, wouldn’t these sensitives experience a significant increase in the amount of metaphysical “background noise?” An increased ambient level of supernatural energies would *reduce* the psychic clarity in sacred spaces. As Kane’s research shows, however, this is clearly not the case. Extra-sensory perception is *more* effective in liminal and sacred spots, which implies greater clarity rather than less.

With this evidence in mind, the “ambient energy” theory seems less than credible. But what, then, are the alternatives? It is possible that sacred spaces contain *less* ambient energy. Kane himself proposed that this was the case, supposing that the reduced ambient energy would leave only the strongest signals to be “picked up” by the sensitive. Unfortunately, this idea directly contradicts the experiential and theological testimony of a number of traditions, most notably that of *feng shui*. Additionally, there is considerable anecdotal and testimonial evidence to support the notion that sensitives in liminal and sacred space can detect greater overall “power,” despite their attention on a particular image.

It is likely, therefore, that “ambient energies” are not the key here. *Clarity* is. Jonathan Smith, in his classic work *Imagining Religion* (1982), speaks of ritual and ceremony as a construction in time and space where all elements are controlled. Accidents are no longer allowed—any unforeseen occurrence in a ritual is either a blasphemy or a miracle. The mundane world is, in effect, removed from the equation as much as possible, allowing the participants to focus clearly on the divine.

By Smith’s argument, it seems that the mundane world, or at least elements of the mundane world, serves as an impediment to contact with the divine. Such an argument would fit well with Kane’s results—as the mundane barriers are removed or reduced, the extra-sensory abilities of the test subjects would have a “clear shot” to the supernatural level on which they operate. With less impedance, the psychic signals would be clearer, allowing for particularly strong signals to come into “focus.” Meanwhile, the sensitive would also be aware of the additional “power” in such areas.

This “lower impedance” theory also helps to explain the nature of various sacred spaces. Tweet (2012) has already noted that the sacred spaces of various cultures often bears a distinct symbolic similarity to the idealized supernatural “realms” which they revere. For example, a mountaintop is high above the earth and close to the skies, which is the mythical location of the gods. Likewise, a Gothic cathedral draws all eyes upward to Heaven, while at the same time reminding all of the “great chain of being” in Medieval Christianity. Tweet noted that these areas were likely sacred because of their sympathetic similarity to the idyllic realms of the culture.

Now, working from the basic observation that most magico-religious systems do in fact work upon a Frazer-esque law of sympathy, then it would make sense that areas most like the supernatural realm would have a considerably lower level of mundane interference. That which seems similar, is similar. That which is most like the sacred, is most sacred.

We have established, therefore, that there is some impedance or barrier between the world we consider “mundane” and “real” and the world of the sacred and the supernatural. For the sake of reference, and, I must admit, dramatic flare, I have chosen to call this barrier “the Veil.” But what, we must ask, is the nature of the Veil?

Michael Harner, considered by some to be the grandfather of para-anthropology, wrote one of the definitive works on shamanism since the death of Mircea Eliade. In *Way of the Shaman* (1980), he discusses the shamanic state of consciousness, in which one experiences and journeys through an alternate reality. He (and most shamanic traditions) identify this alternate reality as the “spirit world.” His descriptions, as well as the testimony of countless anthropologists and practicing shamans, bear remarkable similarity to the “idyllic realms” Tweet observed. It seems, then, that the shaman is carrying the abilities of the sensitive to their logical extreme; where extra-sensory perception receives impressions from the supernatural realm, the shaman is actively transferring his or her consciousness across the Veil.

To the strictly “Westernized” reader, this may seem like a simple exercise in duality. The shaman transfers his or her sensorium from a physical body to a spiritual or psychic one. It is a leap through or across the Veil, from the mundane realm—the world of Science and rationality—to the supernatural realm—the world of magic and intuition.

This Westernized, dualistic model of reality is, alas, deeply misguided. Harner noted as early as 1980 that most “shamanic cultures”—those in which shamanism was a major institution—did not

recognize any separation between realities. In the Jívero culture, for example, the world as experienced in ordinary consciousness was believed to be a layer of illusions which hid the true (shamanic) world. Likewise, Richard Crow Dog, the outspoken spiritual leader of the Ghost Dance Nation, repeatedly denounced modern affluent America as having cut itself off from any spiritual life whatsoever. Both cultures recognize the existence of the material (non-shamanic) world, but they insist that it is not fundamentally separate from the spiritual. Likewise, in such cultures, the health and well-being of the body is inseparable from that of the mind and spirit.

Such thinking has, obviously, become more and more prevalent in Western societies since the turn of the century. However, the heritage of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment remains with us; the Cartesian split between mind and body is still a part of our cultural baggage.

With this in mind, we are on the verge of understanding the nature of the Veil. Taking a historical perspective, one can infer a general level of the Veil's "strength" by examining the popular attitudes of various populations by their reported interest in and energy devoted to spiritual practices. Even when one accepts that the written histories of much of the Colonial period were strewn with inaccuracies, it is still telling that the European nations repeatedly described the "Others" they encountered as "irrationally" superstitious and religious. Even the majority of early anthropologists, working from a Cartesian model, described such mindsets in terms of mechanistic, functional uses.

Upon examining the pattern of popular "superstition," and thereby the relative strength of the Veil, a clear pattern emerges. At the points where the mechanistic, Cartesian worldview was most influential, popular spirituality was at its lowest. In the West, the absolute low-point seems to be the 1980s. Though there was considerable attendance to major religions, spirituality was extremely dualistic and institutionalized. Personal religious experiences were relatively rare, as were reports of supernatural activity.

This pattern seems to have spread around the world with the spread of the Western worldview. While the pattern is not as clear, for various reasons, it does seem that wherever the Cartesian split gained power, the popularity of personalized religion gave way to either secular thinking or highly institutionalized religion. Likewise, the incidence of paranormal phenomena also seemed to decline. This pattern, then, considered worldwide and over the course of history, seems to suggest that the popular adoption of the Cartesian mindset seems to increase the strength of the Veil. Thus, in places where the scientific, materialist view of the world holds sway, the Veil is

strong. But in sacred and liminal spaces, where the rules of the materialist world hold less power, the Veil is weak.

It is perhaps an oversimplification to state that the Veil and Cartesian split are one in the same. Yet the correlation between the two is undeniable. Both indicate a separation between the physical and spiritual worlds, a separation which changes over cultural time and space. This similarity indicates a profound link between popular belief and the nature and power of the spiritual realm. Such a link would likely support the pervasive belief that Ernst, *et al* (2007) put forth that paranormal and supernatural activity are shaped by prevalent cultural beliefs. However, as a para-anthropologist, one must be willing to accept the validity of any given worldview, or, as the case may be, “otherworld” view. It is just as conceivable that human culture and popular belief are shaped and affected by changing tides and trends on the other side of the Veil. After all, “On Earth as it is in Heaven.”

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Santa Azaka

Once the ritual was ended, the rest of the people shuffled out of the gardens. I was left alone with Dominique and the candles. He said nothing. The contrast was startling. Only moments before the greenhouse had been alive with clapping and whooping. Dominique had pranced around the building, calling out in a strange tounge that I've never heard before. Santa Azaka had riden him and given his blessings on the crops, the child-voice incongruous with Dominique's usual old rasp.

Dominique exhaled and began to rise. We made eye contact and he smiled. "Well, *hijo*? Have you seen what you came for?"

My voice caught in my throat. "Ah, yes, Dominique. Thank you. But I do have one question."

The old man had moved for the doorway, but he stopped and raised an eyebrow. A hydroponic tank gurgled behind him. "*Si*?"

"When Santa Azaka was riding you... how much control did you have? Did you choose to run through the greenhouse? Or was your body completely controlled by Azaka?"

The houngan shook his head and sighed. "When you get in your car and drive it, do you 'control' it? Do you bekon its wheels to turn just so, or its gas to pump this much? No. You suggest to the car that it go this way or that. It often complies. It is not about control, *tijo*."

"Then what is it?"

"Cooperation," he said with a smile.

<<< From *Dancing in the Garden: Ecstatic Religion in The Colony*. By Benjamin A. McCann, Ph.D., Professor of Para-Anthropology at the University of Chicago. (2039, University of Chicago Press) >>>

Messin' With Coyote

They're surrounding me. Laughing, mocking, staring. The pain in my arm is excruciating. Blood flows slick and warm over my hand, cupped to the gash. I grit my teeth, attempt to make it to my feet.

A swift kick sends me back to my hands and knees. It's followed by another blow, this time to my arm, where the cut is. Pain spreads like wildfire.

"Does it hurt?" the leader jeers. Another kick lands itself in my stomach. I grunt with shock, but I keep it quiet. I'll be damned if these shits get the pleasure of hearing me scream. I try and tune out the pain, tune out the voices. I concentrate on standing up.

letmeout...iwanttoplay...

"No," I moan. I'm up on one knee before the next blow comes. This one's a club, in the small of my back. Shockwaves move through my body, dull pain reaching my extremities. I fall back to hands and feet, the grit of the floor scraping my palms. I have to keep control. I can't let him come out.

wanttoplay...wanttoplay

I shake my head, try to regain my senses, and succeed to see a boot hurling at my face. Then I'm on my back, rust taste of blood in my mouth, ears ringing from the impact. They're laughing.

"Did the big ol' warrior get a boo-boo?" More laughter. "What's the matter, warrior? Can't take some little ol' Razors?"

letmeoutletmeoutletmeoutletmeout...

"No," I groan again. I can't let him out, not here, not now. God knows what I'll do. Too many people around, innocent people. I can't risk it.

"Hear that boys? He says 'no.' The man knows when he been whipped! Pick 'im up!"

I'm hoisted to my feet by my arms. I can hardly keep my head up. A hand grabs my hair, yanks it back, snaps the rest of my head with it. That really ought to hurt. The leader is looking straight at me, cold, hard eyes. He wears a stupid grin, yellow teeth sharp and twisted. His face is covered with scars and stubble, giving him the look of some kind of animal, a look he's cultivated. Beastliness is an admired trait. If he only knew what it really was...

wanttoplaywanttoplaywanttoplay...

"Does the warrior wan' us ta go 'way? Hmmm? Is that whatchu want, warrior? You want us ta leave ya 'lone?"

It takes a massive effort, but I manage to spit in his face. Bloody spit, right in his eye. That sure pisses him off.

His fist slams into my stomach, pumping more blood into my mouth. His second shot smashes my jaw, snapping my head to the left. Another punch to the gut and I'm drooling blood. I'm past pain. Not a good sign. He's almost out.

"Well, well, what have we here?" His curiosity is disturbing. "Little ol' warrior walks around with his dolly?"

A new feeling pierces the dull throbbing. A cold, powerful feeling. Fear. He's found my totem.

letmekillhimletmekillhimletmekillhim...

I might have to.

I feel his hand on the statue, as if it were my own flesh. He lifts it off my chest, the bloody strap pulling taught against my neck. With a yank, he pulls the totem free. This is bad.

"You want this, warrior?" He's dangling it just in front of my eyes. I tell my arms to grab for it, but they're too weak to fight the grip of the other Razors. He sees my alarm, my panic.

He laughs. "You want ya dolly, warrior? Huh? You want it?"

mustletmeoutmustletmeoutmustletmeout...

The gang leader smiles wickedly. "Yeah, you want it, don't ya?" He reaches into his pocket, slowly, methodically. Out comes his lighter, grimy metal reflecting dimly in the neon. He holds the lighter under my totem, and flips back the lid. "What? Ya don't want me to do that? Ya don't want ya little dolly up in smoke? Aw, ain't that a shame?" The others begin to laugh.

killhimkillhimkillhimkillhim...

He sparks his lighter a few times, trying to get my reaction. I raise my head and look him straight in the eyes. A drop of blood drips from the tip of my nose, splats on the grimy floor. The word comes from the back of my throat, deep and guttural: "Don't."

The leader tips his head back and laughs. So do the others. The jeering increases as he lights up, and holds it under my totem. Thin wisps of smoke rise from the small statue.

letmeoutletmeoutletmeout...

Can Coyote come out and play?

The two holding me back never know what hits them. Claws dig into their sides and rake forward, shearing straight through their stomachs. My clothing rips off as I grow, muscles popping and fur sprouting. My jaw, now at least six inches longer, rips into the leader, right over his collar bone. I taste blood, and my vision clouds over with a hazy red.

Coyote came out to play.

When I finally regain my senses, I'm shivering. Naked, I look around at the carnage Coyote wrought. I wrought. He's gone now, back in some deep recess of my soul. But he's left his mark. Twelve Razors, dead. Only one passerby was caught in the frenzy, this time. That, at least, is some relief.

I feel the weight of my totem in my hand, slick with the blood of my victims. The blood is all over—my hands, my legs, my chest, my mouth. Some of it is mine, but not much. I'll need to wash up when I get home. Especially under my nails, where the claws were. And I'll have to brush my teeth, where the fangs were.

Twelve gangsters, and one innocent bystander.

I don't know why I chose Coyote for my totem, or why he chose me. But I'll live with it. It's a jungle out there, and everyone needs a friend.

They should know better than to mess with Coyote.

Jeremy Patrick Strandberg
Grigri

<<< A conversation heard in the Well, a pub on the Mitsuei Orbital Colony
at L-1. 10/5/41, 14:07 Greenwich Mean Time. >>>

"Hey, Bootz, you ever seen anything like this?"

"Hey Kenson. No. Never. Whiskey?"

"Yeah, double. How 'bout you, Benny?"

"What, that statue? No. Where'd you get it?"

"Figurine, Benny. A statue's... bigger. Here you go, Kenson. Double
whiskey. You OK? You look kinda pale."

"Thanks, Bootz. I don't think you guys would believe me if I told you."

"Eh?"

"Try us."

"Well, you ever hear of the Grigri Habitat?"

"Commune, right? Intentional community or something? You want
another one, Benny?"

"Sure. Didn't Grigri disappear, though? Like, years ago?"

"Yeah, it's an old scrapper's legend. Trader went out to make his usual
dropoff, and it just wasn't there. No one ever heard from 'em again.
Probably got hit by some scrap, burnt up in reentry. Here you go. Why
do you ask, Kenson?"

"That's where this thing came from."

"*Jesus Maria*. You salvaged a ghost ship? Are you fuckin' nuts?"

"Maalesh, man. He didn't salvage fuckin' ghost ship. Even if the
Grigri's still out there, it's just a hulk. Got hit by old NASA sewage or
something. Right, Kenson?"

"Not so sure about that, *sahib*. If there *are* ghost ships, I think I was on one."

"Christ, not you too."

"I'm serious, Bootz. I've never seen anything like that before."

"What happened? I mean, did you really see any ghosts?"

"I can't believe this skeet."

"Not really, Benny. But... I dunno. It was weird."

"What happened?"

"Hmmm... well, I was out in the dark, scanning for salvage. You know, the
usual. Between Luna and L-5, scanning for trash. I'd locked a couple tasty-
looking pings, when outta nowhere my board lights up like New Years. I
punched some quick numbers, and sure as fuck, I had a full-blown wreck on
my hands."

"You mean it just showed up outta nowhere?"

"Yeah, that's what started me worrying. The thing didn't show on scope until I
was only about 100 kilos out."

"Sure your sensors were working right?"

"Yes, Bootz, I'm sure. I triple checked 'em right there. This thing just popped
up. Give me another whiskey, will you?"

"Double?"

"Yeah. So I set course for this thing, whatever it is. I'm not picking up any
signals or anything, and it doesn't answer any hails, so I figure it's dead,
whatever it is. Thanks, Bootz. So, I get a visual on the thing, and it's this old-
lookin' habitat. Five units. Looks intact, but no lights on, you know? Then I
catch its call letters, punch 'em into the computer."

"Grigri?"

"Yep. Grigri Habitat. Launched 2026, last known orbit at 54,000 kilometers.
Last known communicate, 2034."

"And you found it in the LaGrange ring? How'd it get all the
way out there?"

"It probably got knocked out of orbit and just drifted out that direction.
So, did you latch on?"

"No freakin' way. A five-unit habitat doesn't just get knocked a hundred thousand klicks out of orbit and not register on anyone's scopes. That's just not possible."

"Benny, were you born this stupid or did someone use your brains to plug a pressure leak?"

"Look, it doesn't matter *how* it got there. It was there, OK? I've got it on the computer."

"So did you latch it?"

"Yeah, I latched it. Against all better judgment. Curiosity, you know. Besides, it was an entire freakin' habitat. I know salvers that retired at 25 on finds like that. Anyway, I did a once over from the outside before latching. It was really weird. Scorch marks all over it, but didn't look like the hull had breached or anything. And no gravity wheel."

"Yeah, I heard the Grigris were totally 'anti-earth' freaks. Hey, gimme another one, Bootz."

"Sure. Talked to a guy once, used to deliver supplies to 'em. Said they were real big into body art. Piercings, scarring..."

"Tattoos?"

"Yeah, that too. Why?"

"There was one in the airlock, dead. No suit, no shirt even. Had these witchy tattoos all over, like letters or something. Rad burns all over his face, too."

"Rad burns?"

"Yeah, my Geiger counter was going nuts. Not off the scale, but a lot higher than it should be."

"You were in your suit, right?"

"No, Benny, I boarded an unknown and derelict habitat in nothin' but a cod-piece. Of course I had my suit on."

"So you found one of 'em? Dead?"

"Yeah. Looked like suffocation, though. No air. The airlock was sealed, so I thought maybe he got caught."

"What about the rad burns?"

"Well, that was weird, but it wasn't the only thing. Once I got inside it got a whole lot creepier."

"Another drink?"

"Yeah, beer this time, though. So I cut through the airlock, and the inside looked like what you'd expect for a derelict. Shit floating all over the place, no power anywhere, just like a hull breach. But that's what was so weird. The hull was intact."

"Did you find any other popsicles?"

"No, just the one. I was getting really wigged at this point, you know? Didn't look like a hit or an accident or anything that I've ever seen, and I've seen a lot. It was like everyone on board just vanished, 'cept that one kid in the airlock. Rad levels were cranked all over the thing, too. But the really weird shit was that everything was floating around."

"Someone open the airlock maybe?"

"No, cuz then more shit woulda been out there. It was just the guy."

"So what's with the stat—I mean, figurine?"

"Well, that's where everything gets even worse. The door between the first unit and the central one was sealed, but the window part was blown clear off. I found it lodged in the hull wall on the other side of the unit, four centimeters deep."

"Shit."

"No kidding. I flashed my light into the next unit, and there was more of the same. I cut through, and checked out the other units. There was this old hydro garden, gone dead. I didn't open the door, but I could see everything inside. Major mold and shit. The other units were untouched, except one other one."

"What was in that?"

"Is that were you found the figurine?"

"Yeah, and a whole lot more. Shit. There wasn't anything left in the module. Just a vidscreen on the wall and a bunch of things like this floating around."

The rad levels were cranking, though. Totally off the scale. I started to get a little worried, neh?"

"So you burned, right? Got the hell out of there?"

"Should have, but no. I was just, you know, transfixed. The walls had these characters etched in 'em, just like the popsicle's tattoos. All over the fuckin' place. Totally surreal. You ever hang out with the Arabs, out in New Cairo? It looked a lot like that writing they use. But a lot scarier."

"Scarier? How can writing be scary?"

"I dunno, man, but this sure was. It was just, like, sinister. Bad juju."

"So what did you do?"

"Well, nothing at first. Probably for too long; my kids are gonna have three arms. I looked around, at the figurines."

"Were they all like that one?"

"No, this one's kinda... horselike, you know? The others were all sorts of different things. A couple looked like people, sort of. And there was this big one, at the center of the room, like a spider. But, not a spider, you know. Freaky looking."

"Then what?"

"Yeah, whadya do?"

"As I was just floating there, staring, I could feel this rumbling. Then the big screen started to fritz, blinking and flickering. Then the lights started to come on."

"Holy shit."

"No kidding. That wasn't the worst part, though. My comlink kicked in."

"What?"

"No shit, my comlink kicked in. Mostly static at first, but it was on, fucking on, and I didn't touch it."

"So what did you do?"

"I grabbed a statue, kicked off, and burned the hell out of there. The rad levels started rising, too. Like, almost to solar flare levels. I flung myself into my tug, cut the airlock, broke latch, and pulled full throttle away from there. Put this thing in the quarantine box, and burned back to Luna. After I docked, I had 'em ping the coordinates. Nothing. The place didn't freakin' show up."

"It wasn't there?"

"Gone. If I didn't have this thing still, I'd think I was going crazy."

"So it just vanished? Again?"

"Guess so. I haven't been too keen to go out salvaging again, though."

"No shit. Hey, you want another one? On the house, neh?"

"Yeah, thanks Bootz."

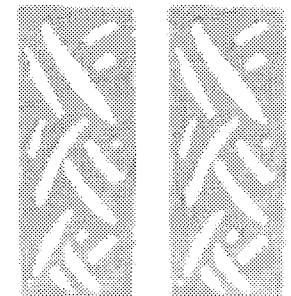
"So whaddya think happened out there?"

"Shit. I dunno. I just don't know. But I tell you one thing. When I was checking out of there, and my comlink kicked in... could've sworn I heard something, you know?"

"Heard something?"

"Like what?"

"Chanting."



WINNER OF THE EAMES PRIZE FOR PROSE

Requiem

Jeremy
Patrick
Strandberg

The clock read 7:00 a.m., fifty-two hours since Doc had pulled the bullet out of him. Conner twisted and rolled out of bed, toes touching cold concrete before finding the slippers. He sat there, delicate fingers sliding the IV from his vein.

"Shades up," he sighed. The tint of the windows swept away, letting the daylight glare in and chase the shadows to their corners. He let the IV hang to one side, its serum of proteins and anti-oxidents nearly drained. Blinking hard, he stood. The sheets rustled as they fell away. "Coffee." His voice was clearer now, low and commanding. It was followed by a click and a hiss, as a machine in the kitchenette whirled into action. He shook his head, rubbed his eyes, and strode to the window, the smell of contraband coffee tickling at his nose. His hand absently reached up and touched the warm glass. The smog was thick, palpable, and the sun spread through it, a glowing, hazy blanket on the skyline. He gazed out at the city until three beeps broke the silence.

"What's on my schedule?"

"You have a meeting with Mr. Hamidi at ten o'clock," a voice answered.

"His office?"

"Yes." The voice was smooth and feminine, just the way Conner had ordered it.

"What else?"

"Your check-up with Dr. Lindsey is at one o'clock. The Takahashi Clinic, downtown."

Conner grunted, then focused on his reflection in the window. His finger traced the scar on his bare torso, a jagged line cutting across his right flank. Security had given him that on the last job. He had been slow, too slow.

"Cancel my appointment with the good doctor." He turned and went to his cup of coffee. He closed his eyes, reached out, picked it up, and sipped the richness. Eyes still shut, he went through his daily ritual of pills and medications, finishing it up by adding a tablespoon of cream to his coffee, and stirring thoroughly. He stood at the counter until he finished the drink, then opened his eyes.

"Anything else I should know about?" He put the cup down.

"Not that I am aware of. Would you like the daily news?"

He stepped back to the window. "Anything important?"

"The Hoke Tower just implemented a new model of security drone. I have taken the liberty of downloading its technical specifications. Would you like me to relate them to you? Sir? Sir?"

But Conner wasn't listening. He was transfixed by the hummingbird staring in his window. He had never seen anything like it. It hung there, floating, gold and purple feathers rippling in the light. Beautiful.

"Sir?"

He blinked, and the bird disappeared into the smog. Conner shook his head. "No... no. Keep them on file though."

"Yes, sir."

He glanced back out into the smog. "And on second thought, reschedule that appointment with the doctor."

"Very good, sir." A pause. "Done. Anything else I can do for you?"

"No. I'll take a shower now."

"Very good. I'll start the water."

"Thank you." He turned from the window, and walked past his bed toward the bathroom. The shower gurgled, then hissed gently. Conner stopped at the nightstand. He picked up the handgun that was laying there and checked the ammo. Glancing once more out the window, he shrugged. He tossed the gun on the bed and went to take a shower.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

The meeting with Hamidi went well enough. The short, pudgy tinker's "office" was a dimly lit loft, a place that always smelled like grease and sounded of dripping water. Hamidi took care of Conner's primary weapons—his twin nines, his automatic shotgun, and his assault rifle. The nines were his favorites. Silencers, laser sights, sixteen rounds in the clip and one in the pipe. He called them One and Two. The shotgun, a custom job that Hamidi had pieced together, had taken some damage on the last job. Guard got in too close, and Conner had to use the gun as a club. So Hamidi was tuning the instrument—it was under warranty, after all.

An hour after the gun smith had finished, Conner found himself in the sterile whiteness of the Clinic. He lay on the table as the Doc rolled a leathery synthetic skin over the scar, then sealed it down with an device that looked like a shaver and made the air smell of ozone.

"You know, Conner, I really should just leave this scar here, remind you to be more careful." The Doc finished with a sad smirk. His voice grated on Conner. He *had* been careful.

"Sure, Doc."

"I mean, after all, this is the third time this year I've had to sew you up. You slippin'?"

"I'm *not* slipping," he growled.

"Sure you're not, Conner. Look, you're pushing fifty. Maybe it's time you found yourself a nice woman, settled down, and raised hell with the neighbors."

Conner's eyes narrowed, and he sat up to glare at the older man in the white labcoat. "Look, Doc, I'm still the best. There isn't a kid in this city that could've pulled that job without blowing the whole building up."

The Doc looked at him hard, then nodded slowly. "I'm speaking as your doctor here, nothing else. Your body's slowing down. The treatment can only keep you young so long."

"Bullshit. I've killed ninety year olds that could have passed for thirty."

"Yeah, business men, Conner. Those guys work desk jobs, maybe hit the gym or dojo a couple hours a day. They don't go jumping through skylights and getting bullets in their guts. You can't expect your body to hold up the same way theirs do."

Conner sat in silence. The Doc was right, of course. His body took more abuse than the average tank. "I can still do the job, dammit. I'll up the treatment."

"You can't just 'up the treatment.' Your DNA can only be modified so often, otherwise it doesn't take. Besides, even you can't afford much more." The Doc turned away, went to the medicine cabinet. "Have you considered having your nervous system upgraded?"

Conner grunted. "No," he spat.

The Doc turned from the cabinet and raised an eyebrow. "You sure? Might give you that edge back."

"I told you," Conner hissed as he stood up. "I haven't lost the edge."

Jack his nervous system, indeed. That was for the hacks and the street punks that had no pride in their work and no discipline in their hearts.

The Doc was not intimidated by his large patient. "Sure, Conner. You really had the edge back in The Colony."

Conner flinched. He caught his reflection in the mirror behind the Doc. Red hair, smooth, pale skin. Too pale, too perfect. The pain of memory flashed across his eyes. Flames, heat, charred flesh, the fall into the water tank. He had died there, in The Colony. Caught unaware by a punk with a flamethrower. The Doc had barely been able to revive him. Had to rebuild his face from records, and never did get it quite right. It was the only job Conner had ever failed.

He sat down and eased into the cushion. He absently grabbed his shirt from the steel table nearby, and pulled the coarse fabric over his head. "So what do you suggest?" he asked, knowing the answer.

"I think you should retire. That's my advice as your doctor. I know you won't, though." The Doc paused, scratched his stubble. "Write up your last will and testament?"

Conner smirked. "Thanks, Doc." He got up to leave.

The doctor nodded. "And remember, no work for at least another week. You've got to give that hole time to mend."

But Conner was already gone. He stopped to give the receptionist his credit chip, then strolled out of the clinic, the smell of ozone still burning in his nostrils.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

The streets were crowded, and the smog hung above the city like a death shroud. Conner drove through the streets, listening to the silence. His BMW was simple, elegant, and very reliable. The seat molded to his form perfectly, and the distractions of the outside world were blocked by seven layers of sound-proofing.

Jack his nervous system, indeed. That was for the hacks and the street punks that had no pride in their work and no discipline in their hearts. They souped-up their reflexes, cut out their pain sensors, and augmented their muscles. No technique, no finesse. Most of them ended up dead or crippled within five years of work. He would never stoop to their level. Unfortunately, the Doc had needed to jack his system after The Colony. There'd been a lot of nerve damage, which meant either retiring with the shakes or having his spine

"The usual, lad. Come alone and all that.

She'll be there tomorrow, at dusk."

"Dusk? Aren't meeting times usually a bit more specific?"

and nerve endings augmented with little machines the size of cells. Conner had to admit that they gave him an advantage, but it always bothered him that it wasn't *him* doing all the work. And now the Doc wanted him to upgrade, get a faster nervous system installed. Unthinkable. He'd sooner get a cybernetic arm.

"Sir?" The voice from the apartment shook Conner from his thoughts.

"Yes?"

"Mr. Baxley is on the line. Will you take the call?"

He smirked, just a little. "Make him wait about fifteen seconds. Then I'll take it."

"Very good, sir."

Traffic lightened up as he pulled onto the highway. There was a sharp beep, and another voice filled the car. "About bleedin' time, Conner. What the hell's so important, ya can't take my call?"

"I'm doing just fine, thanks for asking. And how are you Clifford?"

The other voice laughed, loud and hoarse. Then it started hacking and coughing. "Can't complain, Conner, can't complain. I hear they had to pull the bullet outaya, lad. That true?"

"True." He paused. "And I've heard a vicious rumor that you're going to quit smoking."

Clifford laughed again. "Soon as you retire, lad, soon as you retire."

Conner allowed himself a smile, then decided to end the small talk.

"So what can I do for you today, Mr. Baxley?"

"The question, as always, Conner, is what I can do for you."

He smirked again. "Yes, of course. So what can you do for me, old friend?"

That laugh again. "Got an intrestin' one for ya. Bleedin' odd, really."

"Really."

"Aye, lad, really. I be sittin' here, yesterday, and I get a call. This woman, ya see, she's on the line. Beautiful, man. I can't describe it to ya. Anyhow, she asks for you, Conner, you in particular. She asked me to set up an interview with ya. Gotta job for ya."

"A job, Clifford? Could you be any more vague?"

"Assassination and recovery, Conner. Someone stole her toy. She wants it back. She wants you to get it for her."

Silence filled the car.

"What's her name?"

"She called herself Morgan. That's all I know."

"Did you get any background on her?"

"I got what I could, but it's only a bit. She doesn't seem to exist. Not on the web."

Conner grimaced. Clifford's hackers could dig up the dirt on anyone.

"In your professional opinion, is this a trap?"

There was no immediate response. "I can't honestly tell ya. But instinct tells me, its not a trap."

Conner nodded, though there was no one to see him. His agent's professional instinct was often more reliable than his professional opinion.

"When and where?"

Clifford rattled off an address, a dock on Lake Michigan. "The usual, lad. Come alone and all that. She'll be there tomorrow, at dusk."

"Dusk? Aren't meeting times usually a bit more specific?"

"Aye, that's what I thought. But she insisted, lad. Dusk."

Conner absently rubbed his side. He switched lanes. "All right. I'll be there."

"I thought ya would, lad, I thought ya would. Gimme a call, tomorrow."

"I will. Thanks, old friend."

"You're welcome, Conner. Oh, and lad..."

"Yes?"

"Be careful."

He hit a small switch on the dashboard, and the other voice was gone. He drove home in silence.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

That night, after his workout, Conner laid back in his sofa, coffee in his right hand. He stared at the viewscreen, cheekbones lit by its glare as Beethoven played softly in the background. He was reviewing the files that Clifford had sent over. It was true—this woman hardly existed. The only thing Clifford's people had been able to pull up were a few rumors and a couple pictures. She was beautiful. Conner touched his own face, and wondered how much of her beauty was natural, and how much had been engineered.

"Shut it off." The screen blinked out, immersing him in darkness.

He sighed, feeling the breath pour out of him. His knee was throbbing a little, and he could still feel the new skin the Doc had given him. He set the coffee mug down with an audible click, then rose from the soft leather. He moved towards the bathroom, but stopped to look out the window. The city was burning with its own light, and it had just started to rain, slowly and gently.

"Fuck you, Doc," he muttered under his breath. And he wandered off to bed.

That night, he dreamt of fire and hummingbirds, dancing through the streets of a burnt-out city, where the air smelled of ozone.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Conner arrived at the dock two hours early in order to check it out. The rain had been pouring all day, grey skies drenching the city in warm water that chased the smog away. Now, as he huddled in his parka under the dripping overhang of a warehouse, the rain relented into a light mist. The sun was setting behind him, casting long shadows over the docks. The wind had died, and the lake had an unnatural calm about it. The drab sheet in front of him was inscrutable and silent but for gentle lapping of waves, the cry of gulls, and the mournful wailing of fog horns.

He had been waiting for hours, and the damp air was starting to get to him. The entire area was wet and empty. Few ships rocked on the water, and only the occasional gull graced Conner with its presence. As the sun set further, the air grew cool and the dampness condensed into a rolling fog. He looked up, into the sickly glow of the sky. The darkness was growing. Dusk. He reached under his parka and felt One. The pistol was comfortably solid, reassuring.

Then, at the corner of his eye, color flashed. Hovering above the dock, a beacon of gold and purple, was the hummingbird. It hung for a moment, then started weaving back and forth, dancing a glittering trail of color and light. Entranced, Conner felt himself moving towards it.

The hummingbird retreated down the dock, still glowing in the white of the mists. Conner followed, dazzled by its beauty. The fog grew thicker, the whiteness more total, until he was enveloped in the haze. He was aware of nothing but the bobbing colors, fading into the fog. They grew fainter and

fainter, until his eyes strained to see them. Then they were gone, swallowed by the mists.

He shook himself from his daze, and as he did so, the fog began to lift. A gentle breeze began to blow from the lake. The hummingbird was gone.

"Mr. Conner, I presume."

And he was turned around, instantly, right arm extended and One pointing at the woman.

She seemed mildly surprised, but not in the least afraid. More like amused. "I hadn't realized you were so jumpy. Forgive me. Next time I shall be less... forward." Her voice dripped with honey, each word gliding across her tongue. Golden hair was pulled back gently, long ponytail draping over the right shoulder of her rich purple suit. And those eyes, cobalt blue like the lake at sunset.

"Morgan."

She nodded, a slight smile spreading her lips. "I apologize for my tardiness. I'm not good with time."

He didn't respond. His eyes were darting up and down her figure, sizing her up. With a start, he realized he wasn't breathing. Why was she making him so nervous?

"You can relax your weapon."

Almost embarrassed, Conner lowered his arm. His eyes were locked into hers, trapped in their depths. He tried to force himself to relax, to breathe normally, but failed. Frustrated, he spoke. "Clifford said you wanted to see me."

She smiled again, a sly slant in her eyes. "Ah, yes, Mr. Baxley. Quite a character, he is. But yes, I did wish to see you."

He swallowed. "About what?"

"A man has stolen some of my property. I wish for you to find this man, dispose of him, and return what is mine. Simple enough, for a man of your ability."

He became aware of the cold again, the damp air, the lapping waves. "What did he steal?"

"My lapel pin."

Conner cocked an eyebrow. "Your lapel pin?"

She nodded, all traces of amusement swept from her face.

"You want me to kill a man for a pin?"

"Is there something wrong with that? I was told you didn't ask too many questions."

"I don't." He willed his shoulders to relax, but they wouldn't.

"Good. Then you'll take the job?"

"I..." His voice caught. He began again. "I need details first. Who is he? How did he steal it? Where did he go? Why is this pin worth his life?"

Her eyes flashed, and her face hardened into ice. Conner became keenly aware of his gun. "He called himself Farr. He washed up on my island some time ago, barely conscious. I took him in, nursed him if you will. He was a fast healer. He stayed with me for a number of days. Then he disappeared. With my pin. It's exceptionally valuable to me."

Conner nodded, slowly. The name Farr struck a cord, tickled at his mind. And there was something more to her story, he sensed. Something personal. "So you want him dead. I'll need a picture"

"Of course." She produced a set of photos, handed them over. The man in the pictures had dark skin, indeterminable ethnicity. Well built, young, mid-twenties maybe. His eyes were reflective mirrors, silver orbs that could only be implants. But what caught Conner was the tattoo on his right shoulder, a swirling fractal design that he had seen only twice before. The sign of the Maelstrom.

"Your friend is not my ordinary mark," he said.

"He's not my friend." Her eyes flashed again.

Conner nodded, again wondering why this woman made him so uneasy. "He's a mercenary."

"Like you?" she asked wryly.

He ignored her. "Belongs to a group that calls themselves the Maelstrom. They specialize in large projects—storming arcologies, blowing up buildings, hijacking ships. Nasty bunch."

"Is that a problem? My sources tell me you're the best. Perhaps I should look elsewhere."

He squinted, hard. "No. I can do the job. The question is, can you afford it?"

This time, she raised an eyebrow. "I believe you underestimate my resources, Mr. Conner. Besides, I never intended to pay you."

"Excuse me?"

"I won't be paying you," she replied, matter of factly. "Not money.

She pressed something into his left hand, and stepped passed him into the mist. His head turned to follow her, but she was gone, off the dock, swallowed by the rolling white.

You see, cash and credit are no more than numbers, really. They don't bring out true loyalty. And that's what I need, Conner. I need to know that you'll do your best, that you'll kill Farr and anyone else who gets in your way, and that you'll bring me what is mine. And the only way I can know that is if I offer you the one thing you want more than anything else."

Conner felt trapped by her eyes, by her voice. "And what is that?" he asked, barely more than a whisper.

She smiled. "Eternal life."

He blinked, wanting to laugh, to dismiss her as insane or stupid or both. But the laughter didn't come, and a new feeling of panic rose within him like a tide of ice. The seriousness, the intensity, the *power* in her eyes held him, ensnared him. "Impossible," he whispered, voice hardly audible. "Impossible."

She stepped closer to him. "No Conner, not impossible." Her voice lowered, whispered to him. He could smell her, an exotic flower strong and noxious. "Imagine it. No more drugs. No more visits to Doc. No more treatment. Eternal youth, Conner, eternal life. You'd never grow old, never be sick." She paused. "You'd never lose the edge."

The mists rolled around them, stronger now. His right hand was sweating and a trickle of ice was running down his spine. A tear swelled in his eye. "Impossible," he croaked.

She leaned forward and kissed him gently on the cheek. "Think about it, Conner. Think about it." She pressed something into his left hand, and stepped passed him into the mist. His head turned to follow her, but she was gone, off the dock, swallowed by the rolling white.

He remained there, dazed, her voice ringing in his ears. *Eternal life... eternal youth...*

Finally, as the mists cleared, he shuddered, realizing where he was. He glanced at his watch and blanched. It couldn't be that late. Sunset had been hours ago. How could he have been here so long?

Shaking his head, he plodded down the dock. A dream? A hallucination? Where had she come from? Where had she gone? She just walked right off the dock, into the lake. He rubbed his eyes, noticing the card in his left hand. Thick paper, yellowish, fixed with a holographic hummingbird and a phone number. He blinked.

"One day, they
found him dead,
curled up in this
same buildin' with
this stupid bleedin'
grin across his face."

He reached his car, pondering the foolishness of her offer. Eternal life. He had consulted the best doctors in the world, from L. A. to Tokyo to Switzerland. He had prolonged his youth and his life as long as money and medicine could provide. The treatment he was on was more advanced and revolutionary than the treatment most CEOs used, and it still didn't work. He was still losing the edge. But she was offering him eternal youth, at the cost of killing a mercenary. Preposterous.

He slid into the car, and reached for the ignition. But as his eyes caught the rearview mirror, he felt his stomach rise into his throat, felt the blood drain into his feet. In the mirror, staring back at him with fear trembling in the eyes, was the face that Conner had lost to some punk with a flamethrower, the face he had lost at The Colony. It was his real face, the face that medicine had failed to restore.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

"Jesus, Conner. I can't believe it."

"Trust me. Neither can I."

Clifford paced around him, bathrobe halfway open and a cigarette in his hand. "It's like ya were never at The Colony. Has the Doc seen ya?"

"No."

"Do ya think it's permanent? Do ya think it's for real?"

"I don't know. I just don't know. The entire thing was like a dream. If it weren't for this, I would have brushed the entire meeting off as some sort of hallucination. But I can't argue with this." He held his hand to his face, fingers almost trembling.

"Jesus, Conner."

"No shit."

The two men stood in the silence of Clifford's elegant loft, near the north side of the city. The morning sun was just beginning to shine in the skylight. Clifford took a drag, exhaled, and coughed once.

Conner shook his head. "Have you ever heard of anything remotely like this?"

Clifford took another drag. "Rumors, lad. Urban myth. People talk, ya know. Say some odd things." He started pacing.

"Like what?"

"Crazy things. People talkin' to lamp posts. Nothin' to mind, lad."

His voice lowered. "Like what, Clifford?"

Clifford turned away, took another puff. "Spirits, they say. Livin' out there, in the city, in the Barrens. Spirits of places—old buildin's, sewers, lamp posts. Sometimes, they'll make themselves seen, let us know about them. They say that strange things happen then. Strange things indeed."

"Spirits? What do you mean? Ghosts?"

"No, Conner, I don't mean ghosts. I mean spirits, bein's that live in a place, are a part of it."

The roar of a plane could be heard overhead. Clifford turned around.

"When I was young, my gramma, she'd tell me stories. Spun a good yarn, she did. She'd talk of the old days, way back when. Once upon a time and all that. Fair folk that lived under hills, and on islands, and in the trees. Magical folk, they were. They came out now and then, on what was called 'raids.' Acted like they was nobility, lad, kings and queens. 'The Seelie,' she called them."

"Clifford, what the hell do fairy tales have to do with this?"

Another drag. "There's more out there, lad, then ya be wantin' to admit. Ya remember Gregor, aye?"

Conner nodded. "He was good, for a while. Went crazy."

"Aye, that he did. Battier than a belfry. But do ya know why, Conner? Do ya know what did it to him?"

"He was never all that stable. I figured he just finally snapped."

"That's not what the streets say. Not at all. They say he fell in love, in love with a buildin'. Aye, lad, a buildin'. He kept on mumblin', wanderin' around in the Barrens. He was always talkin' about a lady out there, waitin' for him. And he kept goin' back, sleepin' there. One day, they found him dead, curled up in this same buildin' with this stupid bleedin' grin across his face. They say she came back for him. Took him away."

"And I say he OD'ed. This is ridiculous, Clifford."

"Christ, Conner! I wouldn't be tellin' ya this if I didn't make somethin' of it. You'll never hear me say this to anyone else, but there's other things out there, lad."

"Are you trying to tell me that this city is full of fairies?"

He nodded, slowly, absolute seriousness etched in his brow. "Look in the mirror, lad. What I'm tryin' to tell ya, is that ya just met one."

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Alone in his apartment, dark but for the viewscreen and the burning glow of the city, he studied the files. Clifford's people had done all the research. Standard procedure. So now he was reading, absorbing, planning.

The Doc had been equally amazed. After a slew of tests and exams, he had finally given up and declared it "impossible." There were no traces of surgery, no traces of radiation, no traces of anything. The cells showed no sign of having ever been rebuilt. It was as if Conner had never been to The Colony. "So, are you taking the job?" the Doc had asked.

Conner had nodded. "As crazy as her offer is, she did this," he had said, gesturing to his face. "Even if she can't give me 'eternal life,' she has some medical technology that puts the Swiss clinics to shame."

So Conner had called Clifford, and the agent had put his boys to work.

A couple phone calls had located the Maelstrom's headquarters. They effectively owned a shantytown called Fenster's Barrio, somewhere in the southeast Barrens. The place was a veritable fortress, and no one got in or out without the Maelstrom's approval. It would take Conner over a week to plan an operation that size, probably longer to get the equipment he'd need. As much as the idea of storming a mercenary encampment tempted his professional pride, he thought better of it. Farr would probably have sold the pin by that time, and then Conner would never find it.

He had asked Clifford to find out if Farr was selling the pin to a fence. The agent hadn't been terribly confident, but he said he'd give it a try.

That was earlier today, and Clifford hadn't gotten back to him. So Conner was spending the evening learning all he could about Farr. Clifford's people had amassed an impressive set of data on him, everything from medical records to shopping habits, from criminal records to photographs.

Conner was staring at one of those photos now, a mug shot from a few years ago. He was tough, that was for sure. At first Conner had only noticed his eyes in passing, concentrating on the tattoo that marked him as a

Maelstrom. But now, those steel eyes, inhuman and harsh, seemed to bore into Conner, twin mirrors reflecting a tarnished soul.

From what Conner could piece together, Farr was a true bastard. He had been raised by a corporate military academy, trained to be a killer from birth. When he was twenty-one, his entire unit was wiped out by an unexpected bomb. Word on the street was that Farr set the bomb himself, but no one ever pushed the issue too far.

After the bomb, he left the company. Went freelance, like Conner. He quickly got a reputation for being effective but utterly crude. One police report stated that he had napalmed twenty-three people in a bank. The contract was only for one businessman. Another story named him as one of the hijackers on Flight 879, that incident where seventy-two civilians were slaughtered before the Mossad stormed the plane. He wasn't caught, but they found traces of his DNA.

He dropped out of sight for about a year, but then resurfaced with the Maelstrom. He fit in well, and rose through the ranks quickly. Last report had him as a captain. Some said he got that rank by killing his former CO.

"Sir, I've got Mr. Baxley on the line. He says it's urgent."

"Put him through."

"Conner, lad."

"What have you got, Clifford?"

"Tomorrow night. Warehouse at 46th and Harrison. One member o' the Maelstrom will be meetin' the Third Man, six o'clock, for a 'business transaction'."

The Third Man was a fence that specialized in precious metals, gems, and most importantly, jewelry. Conner smiled. "I owe you one."

"Betch'er ass, ya do."

Conner was going to enjoy this.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

The warehouse was like so many before it; gray, empty, dark. The driving rain beat down upon the slick roof, pattering on the skylight, and the wind whipped through Conner's hair. How many buildings like this had he been hired to infiltrate? How many people had he killed inside of them? He had been doing this job for thirty years, been known as the best for at least

His guards were typical meat jobs, no forebrains, just trigger fingers and fists.

fifteen. And now he was getting ready to go in again, to kill one more man in order to do this forever.

He shook his head and turned his thoughts back to the lock he was picking. It was a rusty mechanical job, old fashioned. Conner smirked. It was refreshing to see these now and then. Remind him that his time learning how to pick them wasn't wasted.

The lock gave a dull click, which Conner felt more than heard. He opened the door, and stepped in from the pouring rain. His watch read 5:30 p.m. They'd be there soon.

The stairway down was totally dark, but sturdy and easily navigated. He found a door at the bottom of the first flight. It cracked open onto a catwalk running the side of the warehouse, about ten meters from the floor. He slipped out onto it, closing the door behind him. The shadows in the corner provided a hiding place, and then Conner waited.

The Third Man arrived first, with his two bodyguards in tow. The fence was a thin man, white suit, broad white hat. Wore glasses. His guards were typical meat jobs, no forebrains, just trigger fingers and fists. One was carrying the usual briefcase. The Third Man occasionally said something to the grunts, and they replied accordingly. They were relaxed. They suspected nothing.

A few minutes later, a car pulled up outside. Conner heard the front door open, the sound of the rain, then footsteps. The Third Man and his friends turned in Conner's direction. From the shadows below him, a dark figure stepped, confident, powerful. He wore a long duster, gloves, combat boots.

"Mr. Farr. You're late." The figure kept moving forward.

"Yes, I suppose I am."

"Do you have the item?" Farr stopped.

"Of course I do." He reached into his coat, produced a small pouch, gave it to the Third Man.

The fence fumbled with the pouch, finally producing a small, glittering object. A smile peeled across his face as he held it up to the light, colors shining through and spilling across his eyes. Conner raised One, stepped forward, and drew a bead on Farr.

He would never know how Farr had sensed him, but it didn't matter. As Conner pulled the trigger, the mercenary dove forward, rolled, came up behind one of the grunts. The bullet pinged off the concrete, and Conner took aim again.

Farr stepped forward, grabbed the bodyguard in a headlock. He produced a submachine gun, and let loose at Conner.

Heart pounding, Conner popped off two shots, running. Sparks flew behind him, ringing off the metal catwalk. Grabbing the railing with his left hand, he flung himself over the edge. He landed on a crate ten feet down, dropped prone, and drew Two. Bullets ripped into the wood, sent splinters flying. Never getting up, he rolled off the side, dropped his legs underneath him, and hit the ground running.

The Third Man was bolting for the door, one of his guards covering him. Conner snapped off a burst from One, dropping both of them. At the same time, he unloaded Two at Farr, who was ducking behind his human shield. As he passed, the mercenary dropped the bloody corpse and opened fire on Conner, who just barely dove to cover behind another set of crates.

Unnatural silence followed, gunfire still ringing in his ears. Footsteps sounded through the warehouse, then a clatter as a spent clip hit the ground. Conner swung around the crates as Farr reached the door, snapping a new clip into his gun. He fired three shots from One, the merc barely dodging. Farr returned fire, and Conner ducked back under cover, smell of burnt pine in his nose. He released the clip on One, let it fall, locked another one into place, and popped out from his cover.

Farr was scooping up the lapel pin from the Third Man's dead grip. Conner let loose with both guns, but not before Farr leapt through the doorway. A grunt and a flash of red told Conner he had hit, but probably not hard. Damn, Farr was good.

Conner skirted toward the doorway near the walls of the warehouse. He pressed himself up against the wall, then spun through, One and Two ready and covering both ways, his head snapping back and forth. Nothing.

Blood racing, his eyes caught movement above him. Reflexes kicked in, his dive just barely saving his head from Farr's bullet. Pain spread through his shoulder, and Two flew from his hand, splashing on the wet pavement. He landed on his back, brought One up, and ripped off another burst. Farr fell from his perch above the door, staggering behind a dumpster on the far side of the alley. He spun around, fired a burst over Conner's head, and bolted around a corner, water spitting up behind him.

Conner pulled himself up, nursing his shoulder. Blood flowed freely, and he could barely move his left arm. Gritting his teeth, he propped himself

against the slick wall. Christ. Above the doorway. How could he have been so careless? He almost smiled. This kid was really fucking good.

He took a deep breath, and kicked off the wall. Farr was just reaching the main street as Conner rounded the corner and unloaded his clip. The mercenary, well out of range, cut across the street. Conner kept going, reloading while he ran.

As he left the alley, he saw Farr hijacking a stopped car. Conner flew into the street, One ripping away. Out of nowhere, a car came hurdling at him, braking and slewing sideways on the wet street. Conner turned toward it and leapt off his right foot, left foot landing on the hood and kicking off again. The car sailed underneath him as he tucked, landed with a roll, and came up shooting.

Farr dove for cover behind another car. Conner sprinted towards the far side of the street, bullets chewing the pavement as Farr let loose from between the tires.

Farr popped up, fired a burst, then bolted for the nearest alley. As he ran, Conner snapped off the last of his clip. A cloud of red flew from Farr's leg as he tumbled out of sight.

Exhausted, Conner leaned up against the wall, his breath loud and ragged. Sliding his last clip into place, he edged up on the alley. He peered around the corner to see Farr lying in a heap of garbage, his gun a meter from his hand. Blood was flowing from both his side and his right leg, soaking into the trash.

Conner tried to raise One, to finish him off. But those eyes caught him, held him.

"I knew you'd come," he croaked. "I knew she'd send someone." His voice was ragged, choking. He chuckled and gave a weak smile. "Thought I could get away with it thou—" He was interrupted by a fit of coughing, the silver eyes clamping shut in pain. Conner became aware of the rain. The coughing stopped, and the eyes opened. "She's beautiful, isn't she? God, she was beautiful." He closed his eyes again, pain wracking his face.

"I could have had everything. Could have had it all. It's amazing there, on her island. A day is like a year, a year like a day. You can be anything you want. Do anything you want. Well, almost." He paused, hung his head. "I think I loved her," he whispered. "I know she loved me." He coughed, shook his head. Rain rolled down his face.

"Why did you do it?" Conner asked, his gun lowering, his voice softening.

The eyes snapped open, fixed on him. "Cuz I'm a fuck," he croaked, a sad smile on his lips. "I screwed her over. There ain't no 'why'."

Conner stared into those eyes, saw his own distorted image.

"Finish the job, soldier boy."

He didn't move. He was caught in the eyes, caught in his reflection.

"Finish the job!" Farr growled, blood gurgling in his throat.

Conner shivered, then brought One up. The silver orbs focused on the gun. "Tell her," he croaked, voice catching. "Tell her, I'm sorry."

Conner nodded, mouth set. "I will."

He pulled the trigger. One bullet, in the heart. When the body stopped twitching, he reached down and closed the eyes.

The pin was clenched in Farr's left hand. Conner pried it out, held it up, and watched the rain trickle off of the diamonds and rubies and garnets.

It was a hummingbird.

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The lake was as still as the last time, the mists just as thick. Conner stood on the edge of the dock, squinting into the darkness. The waves were inscrutable, infinite. Somewhere, a fog horn moaned.

"Where are you, Morgan?" The adrenaline had worn off, and now he was weak with pain. His entire body hurt, except his left arm and shoulder, which were numb.

After the fight, he had staggered away, avoiding police and security. Six blocks later, he called a cab, and paid five times fare to drive him here and keep his mouth shut. He also paid for cleaning costs.

As he waited, pondering the events of the past few days, the mists began to roll in. The whiteness grew thicker and thicker, until he couldn't see the dock at his feet. The lapping of the waves was the only sound but his own staggered breath, and the damp smell of the lake was strong and pungent. He gingerly massaged his shoulder, grimacing with pain.

When the mists began to recede, he was ready. Still looking out at the lake, he spoke first. "Hello, Morgan."

"Hello, Mr. Conner. I must say, you've looked better."

She took his left
hand, numb as it
was, and slipped
the ring on. Of
course, it fit.

He turned around, met her entrancing eyes
with a hard glare. "He's dead."
She nodded, a strange mixture of sadness and victory
in her eyes. "I expected as much."

He still sensed her power, but at the moment he was too tired to care.
He looked straight into her cobalt eyes. "He said he was sorry."

He thought he saw a tear in her eye, but he'd never be sure. She
blinked, then nodded. In the distance, a fog horn wailed. She shook her head,
almost seemed to shiver, then extended her hand. "My pin?"

Conner nodded, then pulled the pin out of his pocket. The gems
seemed to glitter in the faint glow of the city. "Was it worth it?" he asked.

She took the pin, attached it to her left lapel. It seemed natural there, a
part of her. "Of course." She smiled, almost sincerely. "And now, for your
reward." She held out her hand.

"Come with me, Conner."

He stood perfectly still, hands at his sides. "I'm not going."

A quizzical look spread across her face. "I beg your pardon?"

"You heard me. I'm not going. You're planning on taking me to your island.
Eternal life, Morgan. Eternal youth. Eternity with you, on your island. No. I'm
not going."

She was still for a moment. Then, slowly, a smile spread across her
face. A real smile. "I underestimated you, Conner. I was positive that I knew
you, that I had your game." She stepped forward, kissed him. "Pity, really.
You would have been fun to have around. Keep things interesting. How did
the doctor put it? 'Raise hell with the neighbors?'"

He smirked, started to say something, thought better of it. She looked
down, and pulled the ring off her finger. Gold, with a garnet set in the middle.
She took his left hand, numb as it was, and slipped the ring on. Of course, it
fit.

The mists began to rise again, hazy white engulfing the two of them.
"What is this for?" Conner asked.

"A reminder," she replied. "A reminder."

The white came between them, separating them. "Thank you, Conner.
And goodbye." Then she was gone, the mists receding with her. Conner
wasn't even surprised to find his pain gone and his left arm back to normal.
He walked down the dock, back to the buildings. There, he found a phone.
He called a cab.

■■■■■■■■■■

Clifford put his drink down on the table, and shot Conner an odd look. "You're
sure, lad? Really?"

The two were eating breakfast at Clifford's loft. Conner smiled, and set
One down on the table, next to Clifford's drink. "I'm sure."

Clifford shook his head, took a drag off his cigarette. Then, resolutely,
he snuffed it out in the ashtray, a last wisp of smoke rising as he did so. "Well
then. I've been meaning to quit smokin' these anyway. I guess now's as good
a time as any, isn't it?"

Conner smiled, then nodded. "Yes, I believe it is."





MYTHIC CYBERPUNK ROLEPLAYING

JEREMY PATRICK STRANDBERG

Lifepath

Character Creation Process

Lifepath

Character creation in Oblivion's Edge works a little differently than it does in most games. Rather than giving you a bunch of numbers, letting you throw them around, and then scratching your head and trying to justify how your character knows Botany, O-G Maneuver, and Ninjitsu, the Lifepath takes you through your character's life, giving him or her Skills, Knowledges, Contacts, and other Traits along the way. For each section of your life—Childhood, Adolescence, Young Adulthood, etc.—you choose where you lived, with whom you lived, and what you did. With each of these choices comes appropriate Traits, as well as a number of random Anecdotes which add depth and detail to your character.

There are two ways you can use the Lifepath. The first is to start with a character concept and then make choices to shape your character's life as you envision it. If you do this, though, you should be willing to change your concept as Anecdotes affect your life. You can also choose to reroll particularly troublesome Anecdotes. If you intend to make an assassin, for example, and you get "Lost Eye(s)," you might want to scrap it and roll again. Always check with your GM before doing so, however, since he might want you to keep the Anecdote and work around it.

The other way to use the Lifepath is to start at Childhood and just choose what sounds interesting. Usually, as you make choices and receive Anecdotes, you'll start to see some interesting possibilities. In fact, such characters are often more interesting than those carved out of a specific concept.

Between the stages of the Lifepath there are Transitions. It's very important to read these carefully and answer all the questions they ask. Transitions provide most of your characterization and personality—they allow you to "get into" your character's head and see the world from her point of view. I can't overstate the importance of this process.

The Lifepath, in its current state, only supports characters beginning as Young Adults. Future supplements will include older stages and possibilities. If you want to create a character that is older, use the Adolescence section as a guide—but you and your GM must make appropriate changes. For the most part, Young Adulthood delivers less Experience to your Abilities, but more to your Contacts and Resources.

Karma

As you go through the Lifepath, you will receive Anecdotes—little stories, encounters, or experiences that change your life. Some Anecdotes are positive, such as making a friend or discovering a Special Ability. Others, however, are quite negative, such as having a friend killed or being marked for death. Each Anecdote comes with a Karma modifier. Karma is a number used only during the Lifepath; it affects the likelihood of your next Anecdote being "Good" or "Bad." The more Good Anecdotes you get, the lower Karma goes and more likely you'll get a "Bad" Anecdote next time.

One point of Karma is roughly equivalent to one Experience. This gives you an easy way to create new Anecdotes. It also provides the final bit of game balance in the Lifepath. After you have finished your last Transition, you receive a number of Experience points to spend anywhere you need. Your Karma at the end of the Lifepath is added to this Experience. So, if you've had a great life with lots of really neat things happening to you, you'll end up with very few free Experience. Them's the breaks.

I've always found it easy to keep track of Karma with a d10 or two. Have the number face up indicate how much Karma you have, but let the orientation—right-side up or up-side down—tell you if it's positive or negative.

After you've spent your free Experience and you begin play, you no longer need to keep track of Karma.

Attributes

When an entry in the Lifepath gives you a plus or minus to an Attribute, this means change the level of the Attribute, not the Experience points allotted to it. Also, ignore or reroll any entry that would have you lower an Attribute below 0 or raise it above 6.

Abilities, Special Abilities, and Contacts

The bonuses added to Abilities, Special Abilities, and Contacts are in Experience, not levels. Thus, an entry of “Awareness +2” means that you get 2 Experience in the Skill of Awareness.

Abilities and Contacts are limited to level 4 at the beginning of play. Special Abilities are limited to level 3.

Resources

When you receive Resources like Gear, Credit, Tricks, or Markers, jot them down and keep a running total. At the end of the Lifepath, you’ll be able to exchange most of them for money, income, equipment, and other necessities.

If an entry gives you a number of “Resources,” you should choose what kind of Resources they are. You can’t just pile all your generic Resources together and use them to buy anything you want. What type of Resources you choose should be determined by the context in which you got them.

Mana

You will occasionally receive Experience points in a particular Mana Source. A new Mana Source costs 4 Experience, and it starts at level 1. To increase an existing Mana Source, though, only costs the current level. So, to go from 1 to 2, you only need to pay 1 Experience.

Beginnings...

Congratulations! You were successfully born! Now that *that* sticky part's out of the way...

Attributes: All Primary Attributes (Physical, Mental, and Psyche) start at level 2. Your Size starts at level 3. You may choose your Attractiveness, now or later. Or, if you prefer, you may roll 1d20 and consult the following chart:

<u>Roll</u>	<u>Attractiveness</u>
1-3	2
4-10	3
11-15	4
16-18	5
19-20	6

Mana: You begin with a Personal Mana score of 4. This represents your life force, luck, willpower, and overall power. The average human has only 3 points of Personal Mana, while less effective or confident people might have only 2 or even 1.

Karma: Your Karma begins at 0. It is used only during the Lifepath, as a means of tracking your good or bad fortune. Your Karma will go up and down with each Anecdote, so I suggest using dice or a scrap paper to keep track of it.

Where did you spend your childhood?

Arcology (p. xx)	Labor Zone (p. xx)
Burbclave (p. xx)	Shantytown (p. xx)
City (p. xx)	Space (p. xx)
Institution (p. xx)	Wilderness or Barrens (p. xx)

Arcology

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Basic Tech +2	Security Tech +2
Area Lore (Arco) +2	Awareness +2
Computer Ops +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: None

Resources: +2 Gear

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

- One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
- One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Who raised you?

Academics (p. xx)
 Art Crowd (p. xx)
 Blue Collars (p. xx)
 Corporates (p. xx)
 Cultists (p. xx)
 Dwarves (p. xx)
 Entrepreneurs (p. xx)

Gang (p. xx)
 Good Neighbors (p. xx)
 McFolks (p. xx)
 Media (p. xx)
 Military (p. xx)
 Religious Folks (p. xx)
 Seelie (p. xx)

Squatters (p. xx)
 Techies (p. xx)
 Yakuza (p. xx)

Burbclave (15)**Attributes:** None**Abilities:**

Composition +2	Gaming +2
Computer Ops +2	Corporate Lore + 2
Etiquette +2	

Special Abilities: None**Relations:** None**Contacts and Markers:** +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in appropriate Contact Groups.**Resources:** +1 Credit, +1 Lifestyle**Mana:** None**Anecdotes:**

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
 One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Who raised you?

Academics (p. xx)
 The Academy (p. xx)
 Art Crowd (p. xx)
 Blue Collars (p. xx)
 Corporates (p. xx)
 Cultists (p. xx)
 Entrepreneurs (p. xx)

Gang (p. xx)
 Homeless (p. xx)
 Mafia (p. xx)
 McFolks (p. xx)
 Media (p. xx)
 Military (p. xx)
 Religious Folks (p. xx)

Seelie (p. xx)
 Techies (p. xx)
 Yakuza (p. xx)

City (15)**Attributes:** None**Abilities:**

Awareness +2	Streetwise +2
Etiquette +2	Area Lore (City) +2
Estimate People +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +1 Experience and Marker toward appropriate Contacts.

Resources: +1 Lifestyle

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

Who raised you?

Academics (p. xx)	Gang (p. xx)	Squatters (p. xx)
The Academy (p. xx)	Good Neighbors (p. xx)	Techies (p. xx)
Art Crowd (p. xx)	Homeless (p. xx)	Yakuza (p. xx)
Blue Collars (p. xx)	Mafia (p. xx)	
The Company (p. xx)	McFolks (p. xx)	
Corporates (p. xx)	Media (p. xx)	
Cultists (p. xx)	Military (p. xx)	
Entrepreneurs (p. xx)	Religious Folk (p. xx)	
Fighting Monks (p. xx)	Seelie (p. xx)	

Institution (15)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Bureaucracy +2	Gaming +2
Etiquette +2	Subterfuge +2
Estimate People +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: A level 2 Ally (childhood friend, big brother, caretaker, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: None

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Who raised you?

Academics (p. xx)	Gang (p. xx)
The Academy (p. xx)	Mafia (p. xx)
Art Crowd (p. xx)	McFolks (p. xx)
Blue Collars (p. xx)	Military (p. xx)
The Company (p. xx)	Religious Folk (p. xx)
Corporates (p. xx)	Seelie (p. xx)

Cultists (p. xx)
Fighting Monks (p. xx)

Techies (p. xx)
Yakuza (p. xx)

Labor Zone (x)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Gaming +2
Basic Tech +2	Area Lore (Labor Zone) +2
Brawling +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +1 Experience and Markers to Blue Collar Contacts

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Who raised you?

Blue Collars (p. xx)	Mafia (p. xx)	Yakuza (p. xx)
Corporates (p. xx)	McFolks (p. xx)	
Cultists (p. xx)	Military (p. xx)	
Dwarves (p. xx)	Nomads (p. xx)	
Entrepreneurs (p. xx)	Religious Folk (p. xx)	
Gang (p. xx)	Squatters (p. xx)	
Good Neighbors (p. xx)	Techies (p. xx)	
Homeless (p. xx)	Tribe (p. xx)	

Shantytown (x)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Basic Tech +2	Trade +2
Domestics +2	Area Lore (Shantytown) +3
Scrounge +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. and Markers towards either Wilderness or Barrens

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

- One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
- One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Who raised you?

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Art Crowd (p. xx) | Military (p. xx) |
| Blue Collars (p. xx) | Monks (p. xx) |
| Cultists (p. xx) | Nomads (p. xx) |
| Entrepreneurs (p. xx) | Religious Folk (p. xx) |
| Gang (p. xx) | Squatters (p. xx) |
| Good Neighbors (p. xx) | Techies (p. xx) |
| Homeless (p. xx) | Tribe (p. xx) |
| Mafia (p. xx) | |

Space (15)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 0-G Maneuver +4 | Sensory Systems +2 |
| Basic Tech +2 | |
| Computer Ops +2 | |

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. and Marker towards Space Contacts.

Resources: +1 Gear.

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

- One Technology Anecdote (p. xx)
- One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Who raised you?

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Academics (p. xx) | Good Neighbors (p. xx) |
| Art Crowd (p. xx) | McFolks (p. xx) |
| Blue Collars (p. xx) | Media (p. xx) |
| The Company (p. xx) | Military (p. xx) |
| Corporates (p. xx) | Religious Folks (p. xx) |
| Cultists (p. xx) | Seelie (p. xx) |
| Dwarves (p. xx) | Squatters (p. xx) |
| Entrepreneurs (p. xx) | Techies (p. xx) |

Wilderness or Barrens (15)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Stealth +2
Awareness +2	Survival (Local Environs) +2
Domestics +2	Area Lore (Local Environs) +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: None

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

Who raised you?

Academics (p. xx)	Homeless (p. xx)
The Academy (p. xx)	Military (p. xx)
Art Crowd (p. xx)	Nomads (p. xx)
Blue Collars (p. xx)	Religious Folk (p. xx)
Cultists (p. xx)	Seelie (p. xx)
Entrepreneurs (p. xx)	Squatters (p. xx)
Fighting Monks (p. xx)	Tribe (p. xx)
Gang (p. xx)	
Good Neighbors (p. xx)	

Academics (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Bureaucracy +2	History +2
Composition +2	Languages +2
Computer Ops +2	Mathematics +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 3 Mentor (teacher, parent, older sister, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Academia Contacts.

Resources: +2 Resources (any type)

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Self-Mental Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)

Bully (p. xx)

Dreamer (p. xx)

Follower (p. xx)

Gifted (p. xx)

Golden Child (p. xx)

Leader (p. xx)

Loner (p. xx)

Outcast (p. xx)

Troublemaker (p. xx)

The Academy (23)**Attributes:** None**Abilities:**

Awareness +2

Concentration +2

Composition +2

Cultures +2

Inquisition Lore +2

Occultism +2

Special Abilities: None**Relations:** One level 3 Tight Ally (parent, guardian, teacher, childhood friend, etc.)**Contacts and Markers:** +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in Resistance Contacts. +1 Exp. in Fay.**Resources:** None**Mana:** None**Anecdotes:**

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)

Bully (p. xx)

Dreamer (p. xx)

Follower (p. xx)

Gifted (p. xx)

Golden Child (p. xx)

Leader (p. xx)

Loner (p. xx)

Outcast (p. xx)

Troublemaker (p. xx)

Art Crowd (23)**Attributes:** None**Abilities:**

Artistic Ability +2

Awareness +2

Composition +2

Music +2

Perform +2

Scrounge +2

Cultures +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Tight Ally (parent, childhood friend, brother, sister, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Markers in Art Crowd Contacts. +1 Exp. in other appropriate Contacts.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)	Golden Child (p. xx)
Bully (p. xx)	Leader (p. xx)
Dreamer (p. xx)	Loner (p. xx)
Follower (p. xx)	Outcast (p. xx)
Gifted (p. xx)	Troublemaker (p. xx)

Blue Collars (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Gaming +2
Basic Tech +2	Scrounge +2
Brawling +1	Vehicle Tech +2
Domestics +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Tight Ally (parent, sibling, friend, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +2 Marker in Blue Collar Contacts. +1 Exp. in an appropriate Contact Group.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)	Golden Child (p. xx)
Bully (p. xx)	Leader (p. xx)
Dreamer (p. xx)	Loner (p. xx)
Follower (p. xx)	Outcast (p. xx)
Gifted (p. xx)	Troublemaker (p. xx)

The Company (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Computer Ops +2
Awareness +2	Domestics +1
Bureaucracy +2	History +2
Composition +2	Inquisition Lore +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Markers in Resistance Contacts. +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in an appropriate Contact Group.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Resistance Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)	Golden Child (p. xx)
Bully (p. xx)	Leader (p. xx)
Dreamer (p. xx)	Loner (p. xx)
Follower (p. xx)	Outcast (p. xx)
Gifted (p. xx)	Troublemaker (p. xx)

Corporates (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Composition +2	Corporate Lore +2
Computer Ops +2	Languages +2
Etiquette +2	Mathematics +2
Gaming +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Tight Ally (parent, childhood friend, mentor)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Corporate Contacts.

Resources: +1 Lifestyle

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Corporate Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)

Bully (p. xx)

Dreamer (p. xx)

Follower (p. xx)

Gifted (p. xx)

Golden Child (p. xx)

Leader (p. xx)

Loner (p. xx)

Outcast (p. xx)

Troublemaker (p. xx)

Cultists (23)**Attributes:** None**Abilities:**

Concentration +2

Domestics +2

Estimate People +2

Etiquette +2

Subterfuge +1

Occultism +1

Religion +4

Special Abilities: None**Relations:** One level 1 Tight Group (the cult or a chapter thereof), one level 1 Ally (fellow cultist, possibly a parent or family member)**Contacts and Markers:** None**Resources:** None**Mana:** None**Anecdotes:**

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)

Bully (p. xx)

Dreamer (p. xx)

Follower (p. xx)

Gifted (p. xx)

Golden Child (p. xx)

Leader (p. xx)

Loner (p. xx)

Outcast (p. xx)

Troublemaker (p. xx)

Dwarves (23)**Attributes:** None**Abilities:**

Artistic Ability +2

Basic Tech +2

Craft +2

Etiquette +2

Stealth +2

Cosmology +2

Occultism +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 3 Ally (foster-father, caretaker, teacher, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. and Marker in Fay Contacts.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)

Bully (p. xx)

Dreamer (p. xx)

Follower (p. xx)

Gifted (p. xx)

Golden Child (p. xx)

Leader (p. xx)

Loner (p. xx)

Outcast (p. xx)

Troublemaker (p. xx)

Entrepreneurs (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Composition +2

Computer Ops +2

Estimate People +2

Etiquette +2

Scrounge +2

Trade +2

Area Lore (appropriate locale) +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Tight Ally (parent, childhood friend, mentor)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Markers in appropriate Contacts.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)

Bully (p. xx)

Dreamer (p. xx)

Follower (p. xx)

Gifted (p. xx)

Golden Child (p. xx)

Leader (p. xx)

Loner (p. xx)

Outcast (p. xx)

Troublemaker (p. xx)

Fighting Monks (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Awareness +2	Medicine +2
Brawling +2	Occultism +1
Concentration +2	Philosophy +2
Domestics +2	Religion +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 4 Mentor (*sensei*)

Contacts and Markers: None

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Self Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)	Golden Child (p. xx)
Bully (p. xx)	Leader (p. xx)
Dreamer (p. xx)	Loner (p. xx)
Follower (p. xx)	Outcast (p. xx)
Gifted (p. xx)	Troublemaker (p. xx)

Gang (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Intimidate +2
Awareness +2	Streetwise +2
Brawling +2	Area Lore (turf) +2
Gaming +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Group (the gang or a chapter thereof)

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in Underworld Contacts.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Underworld Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)	Leader (p. xx)
Bully (p. xx)	Loner (p. xx)
Dreamer (p. xx)	Outcast (p. xx)
Follower (p. xx)	Troublemaker (p. xx)
Gifted (p. xx)	

Good Neighbors (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Animal Ken +2	Area Lore (local environs) +2
Domestics +2	Cosmology +2
Gaming +2	Occultism +2
Stealth +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 3 Ally (faerie parent, faerie friend, faerie mentor)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Markers in Fay Contacts.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)	Golden Child (p. xx)
Bully (p. xx)	Leader (p. xx)
Dreamer (p. xx)	Loner (p. xx)
Follower (p. xx)	Outcast (p. xx)
Gifted (p. xx)	Troublemaker (p. xx)

Homeless (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Awareness +2	Streetwise +2
Brawling +1	Subterfuge +2
Estimate People +1	Survival (local environs) +2
Scrounge +4	Area Lore (local environs) +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Tight Ally (parent, older brother or sister, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. in appropriate Contacts.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)

Bully (p. xx)

Dreamer (p. xx)

Follower (p. xx)

Gifted (p. xx)

Golden Child (p. xx)

Leader (p. xx)

Loner (p. xx)

Outcast (p. xx)

Troublemaker (p. xx)

Mafia (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Composition +1

Computer Ops +2

Estimate People +2

Etiquette +2

Gaming +2

Streetwise +2

Style +1

Inquisition Lore +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Ally (parent, sibling, uncle, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Markers in Underworld Contacts.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Underworld Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)

Bully (p. xx)

Dreamer (p. xx)

Follower (p. xx)

Gifted (p. xx)

Golden Child (p. xx)

Leader (p. xx)

Loner (p. xx)

Outcast (p. xx)

Troublemaker (p. xx)

McFolks (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Composition +1	Etiquette +2
Computer Ops +2	Gaming +2
Domestics +2	Scrounge +2
Estimate People +2	Corporate Lore +1

Special Abilities: None

Relations: Two level 1 Tight Allies (parents, childhood friends, siblings, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. in appropriate Contacts.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)	Golden Child (p. xx)
Bully (p. xx)	Leader (p. xx)
Dreamer (p. xx)	Loner (p. xx)
Follower (p. xx)	Outcast (p. xx)
Gifted (p. xx)	Troublemaker (p. xx)

Media (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Composition +2	Style +2
Computer Ops +2	Subterfuge +2
Estimate People +2	Corporate Lore +1
Etiquette +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Ally (parent, childhood friend, sibling, mentor)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Media Contacts.

Resources: +1 Lifestyle

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Media Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)	Golden Child (p. xx)
Bully (p. xx)	Leader (p. xx)
Dreamer (p. xx)	Loner (p. xx)
Follower (p. xx)	Outcast (p. xx)
Gifted (p. xx)	Troublemaker (p. xx)

Military (and Paramilitary) (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Computer Ops +1
Basic Tech +2	Domestics +2
Brawling +1	Gaming +2
Bureaucracy +2	Leadership +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Tight Ally (parent, sibling, friend, guardian, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. and +1 Markers in Military Contacts.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)	Golden Child (p. xx)
Bully (p. xx)	Leader (p. xx)
Dreamer (p. xx)	Loner (p. xx)
Follower (p. xx)	Outcast (p. xx)
Gifted (p. xx)	Troublemaker (p. xx)

Nomad (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Awareness +2	Gaming +2
Basic Tech +2	Scrounge +2
Brawling +2	Survival (wilderness or barrens) +2
Domestics +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Tight Group (nomad pack or family)

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. in Wilderness or Barrens Contacts.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)	Golden Child (p. xx)
Bully (p. xx)	Leader (p. xx)
Dreamer (p. xx)	Loner (p. xx)
Follower (p. xx)	Outcast (p. xx)
Gifted (p. xx)	Troublemaker (p. xx)

Religious Folk (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Composition +2	Etiquette +2
Concentration +2	Cosmology +1
Domestics +2	Occultism +1
Estimate People +2	Religion +4

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Loose Group (congregation, church, parish, youth group synagogue, mosque, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. in appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)	Golden Child (p. xx)
Bully (p. xx)	Leader (p. xx)
Dreamer (p. xx)	Loner (p. xx)
Follower (p. xx)	Outcast (p. xx)
Gifted (p. xx)	Troublemaker (p. xx)

Seelie (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Composition +2

Gaming +2

Etiquette +2

Subterfuge +2

Style +2

Cosmology +2

Occultism +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +3 Exp. and +2 Markers in Fay Contacts.

Resources: +2 Resources (except Markers)

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)

Bully (p. xx)

Dreamer (p. xx)

Follower (p. xx)

Gifted (p. xx)

Golden Child (p. xx)

Leader (p. xx)

Loner (p. xx)

Outcast (p. xx)

Troublemaker (p. xx)

Squatters (x)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Awareness +2

Basic Tech +2

Brawling +1

Domestics +2

Scrounge +3

Security Tech +2

Survival (local environs) +3

Area Lore (local environs) +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Tight Ally (parent, sibling, friend, uncle, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. in Wilderness, Barrens, or Underworld Contacts.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)	Golden Child (p. xx)
Bully (p. xx)	Leader (p. xx)
Dreamer (p. xx)	Loner (p. xx)
Follower (p. xx)	Outcast (p. xx)
Gifted (p. xx)	Troublemaker (p. xx)

Techies (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Basic Tech +2	Scrounge +2
Composition +2	Cyberspace Lore +2
Computer Ops +2	Mathematics +2
Gaming +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Tight Ally (parent, childhood friend, sibling, teacher)

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in Sci/Tech Contacts.

Resources: +1 Lifestyle, Gear, or Credit

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Technology Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)	Golden Child (p. xx)
Bully (p. xx)	Leader (p. xx)
Dreamer (p. xx)	Loner (p. xx)
Follower (p. xx)	Outcast (p. xx)
Gifted (p. xx)	Troublemaker (p. xx)

Tribe (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Domestics +2
Awareness +2	Estimate People +2
Basic Tech +1	Survival (local environs)+2
Brawling +1	Area Lore (local environs) +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Tight Group (tribe or band thereof)

Contacts and Markers: None

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)

Bully (p. xx)

Dreamer (p. xx)

Follower (p. xx)

Gifted (p. xx)

Golden Child (p. xx)

Leader (p. xx)

Loner (p. xx)

Outcast (p. xx)

Troublemaker (p. xx)

Yakuza (23)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Computer Ops +2

Estimate People +2

Etiquette +3

Gaming +2

Intimidation +2

Streetwise +2

Style +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Ally (parent, childhood friend, sibling, guardian)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Underworld in Media Contacts.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Underworld Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What Kind of Child Were You?

Brat (p. xx)

Bully (p. xx)

Dreamer (p. xx)

Follower (p. xx)

Gifted (p. xx)

Golden Child (p. xx)

Leader (p. xx)

Loner (p. xx)

Outcast (p. xx)

Troublemaker (p. xx)

Brat (15)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Estimate People +2

Intimidation +3

Subterfuge +3

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: None

Resources: +2 Lifestyle, +2 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Bully (15)

Attributes: +1 Strength

Abilities:

Brawling +2

Estimate People +1

Intimidation +3

Subterfuge +1

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: None

Resources: +1 Resource

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Dreamer (15)

Attributes: +1 Wits, Empathy, *or* Intelligence

Abilities:

Pick **four** of these:

Animal Ken +2

Artistic Ability +2

Composition +2

Concentration +2

Leadership +2

Music +2

Perform +2

Cosmology +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Ally (sympathetic friend or teacher)

Contacts and Markers: None

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Self Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Follower (15)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Style +2

Increase any two Abilities that you already have by +2 Experience.

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Ally (childhood friend),

Contacts and Markers: +3 Exp. and +3 Markers towards at least two appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Gifted Child (15)

Attributes: +1 Intelligence

Abilities:

Increase any one Ability by +4 Experience.

Increase one other Ability that you already possess by +2 Experience.

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Ally (childhood friend, teacher, parent, sibling, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: None

Resources: +1 Resource

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Self Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Golden Child (15)

Attributes: +1 Empathy *and* +1 Charisma

Abilities:

Estimate People +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in an appropriate Contact Group.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Leader (15)

Attributes: +1 Charisma

Abilities:

Estimate People +2

Etiquette +1

Leadership +2

Intimidate +1

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in any appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Loner (15)

Attributes: Increase *two* of the following by 1 level:

Stamina

Wits

Intelligence

Empathy

Technical

Will

Abilities:

Divide 5 Exp. into at least two separate Knowledges

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: None

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Self Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Outcast (15)

Attributes: +1 Wits, -1 Empathy

Abilities:

Awareness +2

Brawling +2

Scrounge +1

Stealth +2

Subterfuge +2

Area Lore (local environs) +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: None

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Self Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Troublemaker (15)

Attributes: +1 Wits

Abilities:

Estimate People +2

Security Tech +2

Subterfuge +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. towards appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Transitions from Childhood to Adolescence

Now it's time to pull all of these decisions and Anecdotes together to form a coherent story. In order to fully understand your character, it's helpful to figure out who he or she was as a child. To do so, I suggest using a few simple tools:

Organize Your Anecdotes

First, look at your decisions and the Anecdotes that came with them. Remember that Anecdotes did not necessarily happen in the order you rolled them. You can swap the order in which they occurred, possibly linking some together to create ongoing stories throughout your life.

Once you put your Anecdotes in order, you should figure out when each one happened in your life. At least get a rough idea ("when I was eight or nine..." or "the summer after fourth grade..."). As you do this, it's a good idea to look at the Timeline on page xx, and see if there are any overlap between your personal life stories and major historical events. For example, if you ended up with Death and Destruction in or around 2052, your community could have been caught in a Red Death outbreak. Or, if you got Dirt on a corporation in 2048 or 2049, you might have uncovered evidence of the atrocities taking place in Merck's Andean Arcology just before the Clone War.

Your Take on History

Even if you don't have any Anecdotes that are directly related to historical events, you should still go over the Timeline and choose a few major events that may have influenced who you are. Almost everyone should include the Red Death, the Ghost Dance, the Latin American Conflict, the Reconstruction, and start of the Inquisition. For each major event, jot down a few lines (or paragraphs) about what you remember about the event, whose version you believe (if different from your own), and how it made you feel when it happened. Try and come up with unique details.

Flesh out the Family

No one springs fully formed from the void. You should therefore be sure to write down who your family is. Are you from a nuclear family, an extended family, a single-parent family, or something less traditional. Did you know both your biological parents? Are you sure? Do you have any brothers or sisters? What's your relationship with them at the end of your childhood? Family members make great Allies and Dependents.

Flesh out the Friends

OK, so you've got a bunch of Allies, Mentors, Groups, and maybe even a Dependent. You should also know what part of the Lifepath they came from. Now, come up with specifics for each one. Brother? Mother? Best friend? Coach? Childhood sweetheart? Stern headmaster? Who is this person? Once you've figured out your relationship, pick an appropriate Archetype for him or her (see Appendix x). Then, assign a few Personality Traits to make that character unique.

Who Are You?

You should look at yourself at the end of your Childhood and ask yourself who you are. Answer each of these questions in a sentence or two, remembering that at this point you're still a child:

- What's your sex? What do you think about the opposite sex?
- What's your ethnic background? How do you feel about that, if anything?
- What's your religion? How strongly do you believe?
- What do you want to be when you grow up?
- Who's the most important person in your life?
- What are you most afraid of?
- What's your deepest, darkest secret?
- What is your favorite thing about yourself? Your least favorite?
- How do think other kids see you? How do you think adults see you?
- What do you think about adults?

Personality Traits

Now, it doesn't hurt to pick three or four Personality Traits to assign to your childhood self. Pick at least one "bad" Trait and two good ones. These aren't important to game play at all, but it's a good way to see how you've changed.

Pick Your Transitional Anecdote

Now that you know who you were as a child, think of an event in your life that *you* see as a transition from Childhood to Adolescence. It could be your first crush on someone, seeing your family executed by Inquisition clones, or simply moving to a new town. Your choice will usually have game effects, in which case you should examine the standard Anecdotes to determine an appropriate Karma modifier. Remember, you can choose virtually anything you want, as long as it makes sense. Most Transitional Anecdotes will have Karma modifiers associated with them, but some, such as "moving" might not.

Remember, the Transitional Anecdote should be something new, not one of the Anecdotes you already rolled. It's appropriate, however, to choose a Transition that is closely linked to or comes directly out of an existing Anecdote. For example, if you watched your brother die in a house fire set by a gang of Triads, you could choose a vow of Vengeance for your Transitional Anecdote, giving you a new Mana Source—Vengeance—and taking a -4 Karma penalty (because a new Mana Source costs 4 Exp.). Got it? Good.

Moving Right Along...

OK, so Childhood's over. Time to get going on your Adolescence. First question, where did you live?

Arcology (p. xx)
Burbclave (p. xx)
City (p. xx)
Institution (p. xx)

Labor Zone (p. xx)
Shantytown (p. xx)
Space (p. xx)
Wilderness or Barrens (p. xx)

Arcology (19)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Awareness +2
Basic Tech +2
Computer Ops +2

Security Tech +2
Sensory Systems (or Architecture) +2
Area Lore (arco) +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: None

Resources: +2 Gear, +2 Lifestyle

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

With Whom Did You Live?

Academics (p. xx)	Gang (p. xx)	Squatters (p. xx)
Art Crowd (p. xx)	Good Neighbors (p. xx)	Techies (p. xx)
Blue Collars (p. xx)	McFolks (p. xx)	Yakuza (p. xx)
Corporates (p. xx)	Media (p. xx)	Yourself (p. xx)
Cultists (p. xx)	Military (p. xx)	
Dwarves (p. xx)	Religious Folks (p. xx)	
Entrepreneurs (p. xx)	Seelie (p. xx)	

Burbclave (19)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Composition +2	Etiquette +2
Computer Ops +2	Gaming + 2
Drive +2	Area Lore (Burbclave) +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in appropriate Contacts.

Resources: +1 Credit, +1 Lifestyle

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

- One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
- One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Who raised you?

Academics (p. xx)	Gang (p. xx)	Seelie (p. xx)
The Academy (p. xx)	Homeless (p. xx)	Techies (p. xx)
Art Crowd (p. xx)	Mafia (p. xx)	Yakuza (p. xx)
Blue Collars (p. xx)	McFolks (p. xx)	
Corporates (p. xx)	Media (p. xx)	
Cultists (p. xx)	Military (p. xx)	
Entrepreneurs (p. xx)	Religious Folks (p. xx)	

City (19)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Awareness +2	Streetwise +2
Estimate People +2	Style +2
Etiquette +2	Area Lore (City) +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker toward appropriate Contacts.

Resources: +1 Lifestyle, +1 Resource

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

Who raised you?

Academics (p. xx)	Gang (p. xx)	Squatters (p. xx)
The Academy (p. xx)	Good Neighbors (p. xx)	Techies (p. xx)
Art Crowd (p. xx)	Homeless (p. xx)	Yakuza (p. xx)
Blue Collars (p. xx)	Mafia (p. xx)	
The Company (p. xx)	McFolks (p. xx)	
Corporates (p. xx)	Media (p. xx)	
Cultists (p. xx)	Military (p. xx)	
Entrepreneurs (p. xx)	Religious Folk (p. xx)	
Fighting Monks (p. xx)	Seelie (p. xx)	

Institution (19)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Bureaucracy +2	Gaming +2
Etiquette +2	Security Tech +2
Estimate People +2	Subterfuge +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: A level 2 Ally (childhood friend, teacher, caretaker, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. towards appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Who raised you?

Academics (p. xx)	Fighting Monks (p. xx)	Seelie (p. xx)
The Academy (p. xx)	Cultists (p. xx)	Religious Folk (p. xx)
Art Crowd (p. xx)	Gang (p. xx)	Techies (p. xx)
Blue Collars (p. xx)	Mafia (p. xx)	Yakuza (p. xx)
The Company (p. xx)	McFolks (p. xx)	
Corporates (p. xx)	Military (p. xx)	

Labor Zone (19)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Gaming +2
Basic Tech +2	Scrounge +2
Brawling +2	Area Lore (Labor Zone) +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker to Blue Collar Contacts, +1 Exp. toward an additional Contact Group.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Who raised you?

Blue Collars (p. xx)	Homeless (p. xx)	Techies (p. xx)
Corporates (p. xx)	Mafia (p. xx)	Tribe (p. xx)
Cultists (p. xx)	McFolks (p. xx)	Yakuza (p. xx)
Dwarves (p. xx)	Military (p. xx)	
Entrepreneurs (p. xx)	Nomads (p. xx)	
Gang (p. xx)	Religious Folk (p. xx)	
Good Neighbors (p. xx)	Squatters (p. xx)	

Shantytown (x)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Basic Tech +2	Survival +2
Domestics +2	Trade +2
Scrounge +2	Area Lore (Shantytown) +3

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker towards either Wilderness or Barrens

Resources: +2 Gear or Cash

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Who raised you?

Art Crowd (p. xx)	Military (p. xx)
Blue Collars (p. xx)	Monks (p. xx)
Cultists (p. xx)	Nomads (p. xx)
Entrepreneurs (p. xx)	Religious Folk (p. xx)
Gang (p. xx)	Squatters (p. xx)
Good Neighbors (p. xx)	Techies (p. xx)
Homeless (p. xx)	Tribe (p. xx)
Mafia (p. xx)	Yourself (p. xx)

Space (15)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

0-G Maneuver +4	Pilot (Astro) +2
Basic Tech +2	Sensory Systems +2
Computer Ops +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker towards Space Contacts.

Resources: +2 Gear.

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Technology Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Who raised you?

Academics (p. xx)	Good Neighbors (p. xx)
Art Crowd (p. xx)	McFolks (p. xx)
Blue Collars (p. xx)	Media (p. xx)
The Company (p. xx)	Military (p. xx)
Corporates (p. xx)	Religious Folks (p. xx)
Cultists (p. xx)	Seelie (p. xx)
Dwarves (p. xx)	Squatters (p. xx)
Entrepreneurs (p. xx)	Techies (p. xx)

Wilderness or Barrens (15)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Survival (Local Environs) +2
Awareness +2	Weapon Skill +2
Domestics +2	Area Lore (Local Environs) +2
Stealth +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. towards Wilderness, Barrens, or Fay Contacts.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

Who raised you?

Academics (p. xx)	Gang (p. xx)	Yourself (p. xx)
The Academy (p. xx)	Good Neighbors (p. xx)	
Art Crowd (p. xx)	Homeless (p. xx)	
Blue Collars (p. xx)	Military (p. xx)	
Cultists (p. xx)	Nomads (p. xx)	
Dwarves (p. xx)	Religious Folk (p. xx)	
Entrepreneurs (p. xx)	Squatters (p. xx)	
Fighting Monks (p. xx)	Tribe (p. xx)	

Academics (30)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Bureaucracy +2	History +2
Composition +2	Languages +2
Computer Ops +2	Mathematics +2
Research +2	Philosophy +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 3 Mentor (teacher, parent, older sister, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Academia Contacts. +1 Exp in any other appropriate Contact group.

Resources: +2 Lifestyle, +2 Credit (any type)

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Self-Mental Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)

Mystic (p. xx)

Scholar (p. xx)

Survivor (p. xx)

Socialite (p. xx)

Techie (p. xx)

Warrior (p. xx)

The Academy (30)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Awareness +2

Concentration +2

Composition +1

Estimate People +2

Cosmology +2

Cultures +2

Inquisition Lore +2

Occultism +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 3 Mentor (your Master, a powerful secretary, a family member)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Resistance Contacts. +1 Exp. in Fay.

Resources: +2 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)

Mystic (p. xx)

Scholar (p. xx)

Survivor (p. xx)

Socialite (p. xx)

Techie (p. xx)

Warrior (p. xx)

Art Crowd (30)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Artistic Ability +2

Awareness +2

Composition +2

Music +2

Perform +2

Scrounge +2

Style +2

Cultures +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Ally (Friend, family member, classmate, band member, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Markers in Art Crowd Contacts. +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in another appropriate Contact Group.

Resources: +2 Cash, +3 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)

Socialite (p. xx)

Mystic (p. xx)

Techie (p. xx)

Scholar (p. xx)

Warrior (p. xx)

Survivor (p. xx)

Blue Collars (27)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2

Gaming +2

Basic Tech +2

Scrounge +2

Brawling +2

Trade +2

Domestics +2

Vehicle Tech +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Ally (parent, sibling, friend, coworker, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Blue Collar Contacts. +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in another appropriate Contact Group.

Resources: +2 Gear, +2 Cash

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)

Socialite (p. xx)

Mystic (p. xx)

Techie (p. xx)

Scholar (p. xx)

Warrior (p. xx)

Survivor (p. xx)

The Company (27)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Domestics +1
Awareness +2	Weapon Skill +2
Bureaucracy +2	History +1
Composition +1	Inquisition Lore +2
Computer Ops +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Markers in Resistance Contacts. +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in an other appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +4 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Resistance Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Corporates (27)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Composition +1	Gaming +1
Computer Ops +2	Corporate Lore +2
Estimate People +2	Languages +2
Etiquette +2	Mathematics +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Ally (parent, classmate, mentor)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +2 Markers in Corporate Contacts. +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in another appropriate Contact Group.

Resources: +2 Lifestyle, +2 Credit, +1 Resource

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Corporate Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Cultists (27)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Concentration +2	Subterfuge +2
Domestics +2	Occultism +2
Estimate People +2	Religion +4
Etiquette +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Tight Group (the cult or a chapter thereof) (if you already belong to a cult, you can increase its level by +1 and gain a level 2 Tight Ally), one level 2 Ally (fellow cultist, possibly a parent or family member)

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in appropriate Contacts

Resources: +1 Resource

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Dwarves (30)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Artistic Ability +2	Stealth +2
Basic Tech +2	Cosmology +2
Craft +2	Geology +2
Etiquette +2	Occultism +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 3 Ally (foster-father, caretaker, teacher, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Fay Contacts.

Resources: +4 Gear and/or Cash (valuables)

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)

Socialite (p. xx)

Mystic (p. xx)

Techie (p. xx)

Scholar (p. xx)

Warrior (p. xx)

Survivor (p. xx)

Entrepreneurs (30)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Composition +2

Scrounge +2

Computer Ops +2

Subterfuge +2

Estimate People +2

Trade+2

Etiquette +2

Area Lore (appropriate locale) +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Ally (parent, friend, schoolmate, brother, sister, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +3 Exp. and +2 Markers in appropriate Contacts.

Resources: +3 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)

Socialite (p. xx)

Mystic (p. xx)

Techie (p. xx)

Scholar (p. xx)

Warrior (p. xx)

Survivor (p. xx)

Fighting Monks (27)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Awareness +3	Medicine +2
Brawling +3	Occultism +2
Concentration +3	Philosophy +2
Domestics +2	Religion +3

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 4 Mentor (*sensei*) (if you already have a Fighting Monk Mentor, you may choose to make your relationship Tight, increase his level by +1, and gain a level 2 Ally as a fellow monastic)

Contacts and Markers: None

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Self Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Gang (27)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Intimidate +2
Awareness +2	Streetwise +2
Brawling +2	Style +2
Gaming +2	Area Lore (turf) +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Group (the gang or a chapter thereof) (if you already belong to a gang, you can choose to gain a level 2 Ally and either improve the relationship one step or increase the level by +1)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Underworld Contacts. +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in other appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +2 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Underworld Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)

Socialite (p. xx)

Mystic (p. xx)

Techie (p. xx)

Scholar (p. xx)

Warrior (p. xx)

Survivor (p. xx)

Good Neighbors (30)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Animal Ken +2

Survival (local environs) +2

Athletics +2

Area Lore (local environs) +2

Domestics +2

Cosmology +2

Gaming +2

Occultism +2

Stealth +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 3 Ally (faerie parent, faerie friend, faerie mentor)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Markers in Fay Contacts.

Resources: +2 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)

Socialite (p. xx)

Mystic (p. xx)

Techie (p. xx)

Scholar (p. xx)

Warrior (p. xx)

Survivor (p. xx)

Homeless (27)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Awareness +2

Streetwise +2

Brawling +2

Subterfuge +2

Estimate People +2

Survival (local environs) +3

Intimidation +2

Area Lore (local environs) +2

Scrounge +4

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Ally (friend, social worker, nice guy on street)

Contacts and Markers: +3 Exp. in at least two different appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: None

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Mafia (27)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Brawling +2	Intimidation +2
Computer Ops +2	Streetwise +2
Etiquette +1	Style +1
Gaming +2	Weapon Skill +2
	Inquisition Lore +1

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Ally (parent, sibling, uncle, buddy, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Underworld Contacts. +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +4 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Underworld Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

McFolks (27)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Bureaucracy +2	Etiquette +2
Composition +1	Gaming +2
Computer Ops +2	Scrounge +2
Domestics +2	Subterfuge +2
Estimate People +2	Corporate Lore +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Ally (parent, friend, sibling, schoolmate, co-worker, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in appropriate Contacts.

Resources: +1 Lifestyle, +1 Credit

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Media (27)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Awareness +2	Etiquette +2
Composition +2	Style +2
Computer Ops +2	Subterfuge +2
Estimate People +2	Corporate Lore +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Ally (parent, friend, sibling, teacher, schoolmate)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Media Contacts. +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in other appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +1 Lifestyle, +1 Resource

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Media Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Military (and Paramilitary) (27)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Computer Ops +2
Basic Tech +2	Domestics +2
Brawling +2	Gaming +2
Bureaucracy +2	Weapon Skill +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Ally (parent, sibling, friend, team mate, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. and +1 Markers in Military Contacts. +1 Exp. in another appropriate Contact Group

Resources: +3 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Nomad (30)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Awareness +2	Gaming +2
Basic Tech +2	Scrounge +2
Brawling +2	Survival (wilderness or barrens) +2
Domestics +2	Vehicle Tech (as appropriate) +2
Drive +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Tight Group (nomad pack or family) (if you already belong to a nomad pack or family, you can choose to increase its level by +1 and gain a level 2 Tight Ally)

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in Wilderness or Barrens Contacts.

Resources: +2 Gear

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Religious Folk (30)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Composition +2	Etiquette +2
Concentration +2	Cosmology +1
Domestics +2	Occultism +1
Estimate People +2	Religion +3

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 2 Group (congregation, church, parish, synagogue, mosque, etc.) (if you already belong to a congregation, you may instead choose to make it +1 level, one relationship better, say standard to Tight, and also gain a level 2 Ally)

Contacts and Markers: +3 Exp. and +2 Markers towards at least two different Contact Groups.

Resources: +4 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Seelie (27)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Artistic Ability +1	Music +1
Bureaucracy +2	Subterfuge +2
Composition +1	Style +2
Gaming +2	Cosmology +2
Etiquette +2	Occultism +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 3 Loose Ally

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +2 Markers in Fay Contacts.

Resources: +4 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Squatters (30)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Awareness +2	Security Tech +2
Basic Tech +2	Weapon Skill +2
Domestics +2	Survival (local environs) +3
Scrounge +4	Area Lore (local environs) +3

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Ally (parent, sibling, friend, squat-mate, etc.)

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. and +1 Marker in Wilderness, Barrens, or Underworld Contacts.

Resources: +3 Gear

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Techies (27)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Basic Tech +2	Research +2
Composition +1	Scrounge +2
Computer Ops +2	Cyberspace Lore +2
Gaming +2	Mathematics +2
Investigation +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Sci/Tech Contacts. +1 Exp. towards another appropriate Contact Group.

Resources: +3 Gear. +3 additional Lifestyle, Gear, or Credit

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Technology Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Tribe (30)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Estimate People +2
Basic Tech +2	Survival (local environs) +2
Brawling +2	Area Lore (local environs) +2
Domestics +2	Occultism +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 1 Tight Group (tribe or band thereof) (if you already belong to a tribe or band, you may choose instead to increase it by +1 level and gain a level 2 Tight Ally)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker towards appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +1 Gear

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Yakuza (30)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Computer Ops +2	Streetwise +2
Etiquette +2	Style +2
Gaming +2	Subterfuge +2
Intimidation +2	Cultures +1

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +3 Exp. and +2 Markers in Underworld Contacts. +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in any other appropriate Contacts.

Resources: +2 Lifestyle, +3 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Underworld Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Yourself (30)

Attributes: +1 Wits

Abilities:

Awareness +2	Trade +2
Basic Tech +2	Area Lore +2
Domestics +2	Any <i>other</i> Skill or Knowledge +2
Scrounge +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. into three *different* Contacts Groups. +1 Marker into *two* of these Groups.

Resources: +3 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Self Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

What role did you prepare yourself for?

Jockey (p. xx)	Socialite (p. xx)
Mystic (p. xx)	Techie (p. xx)
Scholar (p. xx)	Warrior (p. xx)
Survivor (p. xx)	

Jockey (or Maverick, Mover, Courier, etc.) (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Drive +2*	Vehicle Tech (1st) +2*
Awareness +2	Pilot (1st) +2*	Vehicle Tech (2nd) +2*
Basic Tech +2*	Pilot (2nd) +2*	Weapon Skill +2*
Brawling +2	Scrounge +2	
Computer Ops +2	Sensory Systems +2*	

Increase **four** of the * Abilities by an additional +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +5 Exp. and +3 Markers to be divided into at least two different appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +8 Gear, +4 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Technology Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Mystic

What Type of Mystic?

Alchemist (p. xx)

Channel (p. xx)

Faithful (p. xx)

Mage (p. xx)

Oracle (p. xx)

Psychic (p. xx)

Shaman (p. xx)

Singer (p. xx)

Trickster (p. xx)

Mystic—Alchemist (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (18)

Investigation +2

Biology +2

Languages +2

Research +2

Botany +2

Occultism +2

Pharmaceuticals +2

Chemistry +2

Special Abilities: Following the path of Alchemy (x .5) (17)

Gain All of These: (14)

Binding +6

Healing +6

Permutations +6

Sensitivity +4

Warding +6

And One of These: (7)

Animation +7

Crafting +7

Metamorphosis +7

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker towards Fay Contacts. +2 Exp. and +1 Marker towards appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +6 Gear, +4 Lifestyle, +5 Resources

Mana: +4 Crude Mana

Anecdotes:

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Mystic—Channel (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (7)

Concentration +2 Cosmology +2 Occultism +2

Special Abilities: Following the path of Channel (x .8)

Divination +4 Sensitivity +4 Visions +4

Now, spend 30 Experience Points purchasing no fewer than *four* Special Abilities. These Special Abilities should be directly related to the spirit (or spirits) that possess you while you are in a Deep Trance.

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +4 Exp. and +2 Markers towards Fay Contacts. +2 Exp. and +1 Marker towards other appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +6 Resources

Mana: +4 Exp. towards Totem or Spirit Guides.

Anecdotes:

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Mystic—Faithful (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (11)

Concentration +2 Occultism +2
Cosmology +2 Religion +4

Special Abilities: Following the path of the Faithful (x .85) (38)

Banishment +6 Clarity +4 Sensitivity +4
Benediction +6 Communion +5 Tongues +4
Binding +6 Healing +6 Visions +4

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. towards Fay Contacts. +2 Exp. and +1 Marker towards appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +3 Resources

Mana: +4 Experience towards Faith

Anecdotes:

One Self—Spiritual Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Mystic—Mage (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (11)

Concentration +2

Cosmology +2

Occultism +2

Research +2

Languages +2

Special Abilities: Following the path of the Mage (x .8) (39)

Gain All of These

Banishment +6

Binding +6

Communion +5

Conjuring +6

Divination +4

Scrying +5

Sensitivity +4

Warding +6

And One of These

Animation +7

Crafting +7

Glamour +7

Metamorphosis +7

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker towards Fay Contacts. +1 Exp. towards other appropriate Contacts.

Resources: +6 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Mystic—Oracle (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (16)

Awareness +2

Investigation +2

Cosmology +2

Concentration +2

Estimate People +2

Occultism +2

Special Abilities: Following the path of the Oracle (x 1.1) (34)

Clarity +4

Greater Communion +6

Divination +4

Premonitions +4

Scrying +5

Sensitivity +4

Visions +4

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +3 Exp. and +1 Marker towards Fay Contacts. +1 Exp. and +1 Marker towards other appropriate Contacts.

Resources: +4 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Mystic—Psychic (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (5)

Concentration +2 Occultism +2

Special Abilities: Following the path of the Psychic (x 1.1) (44)

*Gain all of the Special Abilities in **one** of these columns:*

Greater Animation +8

Domination +6

Evocation (force) +7

Entrancement +6

Flight +5

Evocation (mind) +7

Minor Knock (Mechanical) +4

Mind Games +6

Sensitivity +4

Sensitivity +4

Telekinesis +6

Suggestion +5

Warding (force) +6

Telepathy +6

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker towards appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +4 Resources

Mana: +4 Experience towards Personal Mana

Anecdotes:

One Self Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Mystic—Shaman (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (13)

Concentration +2	Sleight of Hand +2	Occultism +2
Music +2	Cosmology +4	

Special Abilities: Following the path of the Shaman (x .75) (34)

<i>Gain All of These</i>	<i>And Gain One of These</i>
Communion +5	Banishment +6
Divination +4	Benediction +6
Dreaming +5	Binding +6
Healing +6	Conjuring +6
Sensitivity +4	Hex +6
Shifting +5	Warding +6
Visions +4	
Weather +7	

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +3 Exp. and +2 Markers towards Fay Contact Groups. +2 Exp. towards other appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +2 Resources

Mana: +4 Experience towards Totem

Anecdotes:

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Mystic—Singer (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (9)

Music +5	Perform +2	Cosmology +2
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Special Abilities: Following the path of the Singer (x 1) (42)

<i>Gain All of the These: (35)</i>	<i>And One of These:</i>
Banishment +6	Animation +7
Benediction +6	Crafting +7
Entrancement +6	Glamour +7
Greater Emotion +7	Greater Permutations +7
Sensitivity +4	Metamorphosis +7
Warding +6	Weather +7

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +3 Exp. and +2 Marker towards appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +4 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Fay Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Mystic—Trickster (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (12)

Awareness +2

Escape +2

Subterfuge +2

Disguise +2

Gaming +2

Special Abilities: Following the path of the Trickster (x 1.1) (39)

Gain All of These: (21)

And Three of These: (15)

Glamour +7

Bag of Tricks +6*

Permutations +6*

Obscurement +6

Communion +5

Suggestion +5

Premonitions +4

Knock +5

Travel +5

Sensitivity +4

Mind Games +6*

Vanish +5

* Picking this Special Ability reduces your Karma by -1.

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +3 Exp. towards appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +6 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Scholar (60)

Attributes: +1 Intelligence

Abilities:

Composition +3

Investigation +4

Languages +2

Computer Ops +2

Research +4

Now, spend 20 Experience on at least *four* different Knowledges, spending no more than 6 points on any single Knowledge.

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker towards Academic Contacts. +4 Exp. and +2 Markers towards appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +2 Credit or Cash, +3 Gear, +2 Lifestyle, +3 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Socialite (60)

Attributes: +1 Charisma

Abilities:

Bureaucracy +2	Intimidation +2	Subterfuge +3
Estimate People +3	Leadership +2	
Etiquette +4	Style +2	

Now, pick *five* of the following (you may pick any given entry up to two times):

Artistic Ability +2	Intimidation +2	Trade +2
Bureaucracy +2	Leadership +2	Corporate Lore +2
Composition +2	Music +2	Cultures +2
Disguise +2	Perform +2	History +2
Estimate People +2	Streetwise +2	Languages +2
Etiquette +2	Style +2	Politics +2
Gaming +2	Subterfuge +2	Religion +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +10 Experience and +5 Markers into at least three different appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +3 Credit or Cash, +3 Lifestyle, +4 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Survivor (60)

Attributes: +1 Stamina, +1 Wits

Abilities:

Athletics +2	Investigation +2	Weapon Skill +2
Awareness +2	Scrounge +3	Area Lore (local) +2
Brawling +2	Stealth +2	
Domestics +2	Survival (local environs) +4	

Now, spend 10 Experience on at least three Abilities appropriate to your specific circumstances for survival. Possibilities include Animal Ken, Basic Tech, Computer Ops, Drive or Pilot, Medicine, Streetwise, Trade, Vehicle Tech, or Weapons Tech.

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +3 Experience towards appropriate Contacts.

Resources: +2 Cash, +4 Gear, +2 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Self Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Techie

What type of techie?

Engineer (p. xx)
Fringe Scientist (p. xx)
Hacker (p. xx)
Medic (p. xx)
Scientist (p. xx)

Techie—Engineer (60)

Attributes: +1 Technical (5)

Abilities:

Basic Tech +4	Electronic Tech +2	Scrounge +2
Computer Ops +2	Investigation +2	Mathematics +2

Now, divide 18 Experience into the following Abilities, choosing at least four and putting no more than 6 in any one:

AV Tech	Medicine	Biology
Basic Tech	Research	Chemistry
Computer Ops	Scrounge	Cybernetics
Craft	Security Tech	Geology
Cybertech	Sensory Systems	Mathematics
Demolitions	Vehicle Tech	Physics
Electronic Tech	Weapons Tech	
Investigation	Architecture	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Sci/Tech Contacts. +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in appropriate Contacts.

Resources: +2 Cash or Credit, +8 Gear, +3 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Technology Anecdote (p. xx)
One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Techie—Fringe Scientist (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (33)

Basic Tech +2	Astronomy +2	Languages +2
Computer Ops +2	Biology +2	Mathematics +2
Electronic Tech +2	Botany +2	Occultism +2
Investigation +2	Chemistry +2	Physics +2
Research +2	Cosmology +2	
Sensory Systems +2		

Special Abilities: Following the path of the Fringe Scientist (x.75)

Sensitivity +4
One other Lesser Special Ability +4
One Moderate Special Ability +6

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +1 Exp. in Sci/Tech Contacts. +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in appropriate Contacts.

Resources: +6 Gear, +5 Resources

Mana: +2 points of Crude Mana

Anecdotes:

One Technology Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Techie—Hacker (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (37)

Basic Tech +2

Gaming +2

Subterfuge +2

Composition +1

Research +2

Corporate Lore +2

Computer Ops +4

Scrounge +2

Cybernetics +2

Cybertech +2

Security Tech +2

Cyberspace Lore +4

Electronic Tech +2

Sensory Systems +2

Mathematics +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Cyberspace Contacts. +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Sci/Tech Contacts. +2 Experience in appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +6 Gear, +2 Lifestyle, +4 Resources, +6 Tricks (see *Hacking*, p. xx)

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Technology Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Techie—Medic (60)

Attributes: +1 Intelligence, +1 Technical

Abilities: (31)

Computer Ops +2

Investigation +2

Biology +4

Composition +2

Medicine +5

Botany +2

Cybertech +2

Pharmaceuticals +3

Chemistry +2

Estimate People +2

Research +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Exp. and +1 Marker in Sci/Tech Contacts. +1 Exp. in Academic Contacts. +3 Exp. and +2 Markers in appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +5 Gear, +3 Lifestyle, +2 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Locals Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Techie—Scientist (60)

Attributes: +1 Intelligence

Abilities:

Basic Tech +2

Investigation +2

Chemistry +2

Composition +2

Research +3

Mathematics +2

Computer Ops +2

Biology +2

Physics +2

Increase *two* of the above Abilities by an additional +2 Experience.

Increase any *three* Tech Skills (AV Tech, Electronic Tech, Sensory Systems, etc.) by +2 Experience.

Increase any *four* Knowledges by +2 Experience.

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Experience and +1 Marker towards Sci/Tech Contacts. +2 Experience towards Academic Contacts. +2 Experience towards appropriate Contacts.

Resources: +2 Lifestyle, +6 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Technical Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Warrior

What type of Warrior are you?

Adventurer (p. xx)

Brute (p. xx)

Guardian (p. xx)

Hunter (p. xx)

Martial Artist (p. xx)

Soldier (p. xx)

Warrior—Adventurer (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (41)

Athletics +2	Intimidation +2	Subterfuge +2
Awareness +2	Leadership +2	Weapon Skill +4
Brawling +2	Security Tech +2	Weapon Skill (2nd) +4
Drive <i>or</i> Pilot +2	Stealth +2	Weapons Tech +2
Gaming +2	Style +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: One level 3 Ally. One level 3 Enemy.

Contacts and Markers: +5 Experience and +3 Markers to be divided into at least two different Contact Groups.

Resources: +2 Cash or Credit, +5 Gear, +4 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Warrior—Brute (60)

Attributes: +1 Strength, +1 Stamina, +1 Size (14)

Abilities: (36)

Athletics +2	Gaming +2	Weapon Skill (2nd) +2
Awareness +2	Intimidation +3	
Brawling +4	Weapon Skill (melee) +4	

Now, divide 5 points between at least *two* of the following Skills:

0-G Maneuver +2	Leadership +2	Streetwise +2
Animal Ken +2	Pilot +2	Style +2
Demolitions +2	Scrounge +2	Survival +2
Drive +2	Stealth +2	Weapons Tech +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +3 Experience and +2 Markers towards appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +5 Gear, +5 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Warrior—Guardian (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (33)

Athletics +2	Estimate People +2	Weapon Skill +4
Awareness +4	Intimidation +3	Weapon Skill (2nd) +2
Brawling +2	Leadership +2	
Concentration +2	Security Tech +2	

Pick *five* of the following:

AV Tech +2	Pilot +2	Corporate Lore +2
Bureaucracy +2	Sensory Systems +2	Cultures +2
Drive +2	Streetwise +2	Inquisition Lore +2
Etiquette +2	Style +2	Languages +2
Investigation +2	Subterfuge +2	Law +2
Medicine +2	Area Lore +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +6 Experience and +3 Markers towards at least two different appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +4 Gear, +4 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Warrior—Hunter (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (46)

Athletics +2	Concentration +2	Stealth +4
Awareness +2	Investigation +2	Weapon Skill +4
Brawling +2	Security Tech +2	Weapon Skill (2nd) +4

Pick *six* of the following:

Animal Ken +2	Research +2	Survival +2
Disguise +2	Scrounge +2	Weapons Tech +2
Domestics +2	Sensory Systems +2	Architecture +2
Estimate People +2	Sleight of Hand +2	Area Lore +2
Medicine +2	Streetwise +2	Botany +2
Pharmaceuticals +2	Subterfuge +2	Zoology +2

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +3 Experience and +2 Markers towards appropriate Contacts.

Resources: +4 Gear, +4 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

Two Random Anecdotes (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Warrior—Martial Artist (60)

Attributes: +1 Will

Abilities: (37)

Athletics +2	Stealth +2	Philosophy +2
Awareness +2	Weapon Skill +4	Religion +2
Brawling +4	Weapon Skill (2nd) +2	
Concentration +3	Cultures +2	

Gain 4 Experience to spend on Schticks for Brawling, Concentration, or Weapon Skills.

Special Abilities: Using the Technique of Concentration.

Zanshin +5

Relations: One level 4 Mentor (sensei)

Contacts and Markers: +2 Experience towards appropriate Contact Groups.

Resources: +5 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

One Self Anecdote (p. xx)

One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to TRANSITIONS on page xx.

Warrior—Soldier (60)

Attributes: None

Abilities: (44)

Athletics +4	Drive <i>or</i> Pilot +2	Weapon Skill (2nd) +4
Awareness +2	Leadership +2	Weapon Skill (3rd) +4
Brawling +2	Sensory Systems +2	Weapons Tech +2
Bureaucracy +2	Weapon Skill +4	

Pick *two* of the following Abilities:

0-G Maneuver +2	Medicine +2	Survival +2
Cybertech +2	Pilot +2	Vehicle Tech +2
Demolitions +2	Security Tech +2	
Drive +2	Stealth +2	

Special Abilities: None

Relations: None

Contacts and Markers: +2 Experience and +1 Marker towards Military Contact Groups.

Resources: +8 Gear, +5 Resources

Mana: None

Anecdotes:

- One Technology Anecdote (p. xx)
- One Random Anecdote (p. xx)

Go to **TRANSITIONS** on page xx.

Transitions from Adolescence to Early Adulthood

As at the end of Childhood, it's now time to arrange your decisions and Anecdotes and figure out who you were. Most characters will begin play in Early Adulthood, so if you were lazy and skipped all this transition stuff for Childhood, be sure you do it here.

Organize Your Anecdotes

As with Childhood, now you want to arrange your Adolescent Anecdotes in chronological order. As you do so, you should flesh each one out, perhaps coming up with a quick story to add details. You should also decide if and how any of your Anecdotes relate to each other. For example, if you had a Tragic Love Affair and were Marked for Death, you could decide that you managed to torque off the local oyabun, and that the yakuza assassins that he sent after you got your lover instead.

As you arrange them, be thinking about when in your life they will be taking place. Again, consult the Timeline (p. xx) to see if there's any overlap with historical events, and if so, decide if you want them to somehow be related.

Your Take on History

Again, go over the Timeline (p. xx) and choose some important historical events. What did you hear about them? What do you know about them now? Did they affect you directly in any way? How do they make you feel?

Flesh out the Family

Quickly figure out how your family relations may have changed. No one goes through Adolescence with the exact same relationships they had to their family in Childhood (unless, of course, you don't *have* a family...). So, you should probably think about how you've come to feel about certain relations, especially your parents (or whoever fills that role).

Flesh out the Friends

Any new Allies, Mentors, Groups or Dependents? If so, determine what your relationship is to each. Are they relatives, friends, co-workers, etc? With that in mind, choose Archetypes for them, and apply some Personality Traits.

If you've got old friends, decide what's happened to them, in general. Are you still in regular contact? If you now live in different places, how often do you talk or write? You should also reexamine the Archetype chosen for each—your friends change just as much as you do. To that end, you should also adjust their Personality Traits.

Who Are You?

First of all, go back and review your answers to the “Who Are You?” questions at the end of Childhood (on page xx). Now, answer the following, remembering that at this point you are speaking as an adolescent:

- What's your economic class? How do you feel about that?
- How do you feel about your ethnic background? Is it not an issue? Do you embrace it? Do you try to deny it?
- What's your religion? Is it the same as when you were a child? How strongly do you believe?
- What do you want to do for a living?
- Who's the most important person in your life? Your most influential role-model?
- What are you most afraid of?
- What's your deepest, darkest secret?
- What is your favorite thing about yourself? Your least favorite?
- What is your sexuality? How do you feel about it? Take it for granted? Deny it? Embrace it? What, if any, romantic and/or sexual relations have you had?
- How did you relate to your peers? Look at the categories for “What Type of Child Where You?” on page xx. Do any of these categories apply to you during Adolescence?
- What do you think about adults?

Personality Traits

Once again, pick out a few Personality Traits that would describe you during your Adolescence. Pick at least one “bad” Trait and two “good” ones. Again, these won't really have any effect on game play, but are there to chart how you've changed.

Pick Your Transitional Anecdote

Now that you've taken care of that, it's time to make the Transition between Adolescence and Young Adulthood. As with Childhood to Adolescence, you now want to look back at your character and ask yourself “who is this person?” Then, come up with an Anecdote that, in your mind, signifies the Transition into Young Adulthood. As before, if the Anecdote has some effect on your character, you must apply an appropriate Karma modifier. For further information on how to pick a Transitional Anecdote, see page xx.

Moving Right Along...

All right then, we're through the painful Adolescent years. If you're starting with a character in Young Adulthood (about the ages of about 17 or 18 up to about 25 or 26), then go to After Life Path on page xx.

Anecdotes

Who or what does the anecdote involve? Roll 1d20 to find out...

<u>d20</u>	<u>Result</u>
1	The Fay (page xx)
2-3	The Resistance (page xx)
4-5	The Underworld (page xx)
6-7	Locals (page xx)
8-10	Self—roll 1d20 again: d20 Result 1-3 Spiritual (page xx) 4-10 Mental (page xx) 11-17 Physical (page xx) 18-20 Magical (page xx)
11-12	Previous Relations (page xx)
13-14	Media (page xx)
15-16	Corporates (page xx)
17-18	The Inquisition (page xx)
19-20	Technology (page xx)

Any Bad Anecdote marked with an * is Resolvable. This means that the problems described by the Anecdote may be negated by a Good Anecdote from the same group. Rather than rolling to see which Anecdote you get, you may choose to use that Anecdote to Resolve the old one. The Karma modifier of Resolving a Bad Anecdote is equal to the reverse of the Bad Anecdote's Karma.

The Fay

Was the anecdote good or bad? Roll 1d20 + Karma...

Bad (10 or less)

<u>d20</u>	<u>Anecdote</u>
1	Minor Curse* — The Fay have bestowed a minor curse upon you. Examples include: music causes discomfort; you always smell like death; flowers wither under your touch. (+4 Karma)
2-3	Fay Weakness* — Exposure to the Fay has left you with one of their weaknesses. You have a Bond, Weakness, or Taboo at level 2. Make it creative. (+4 Karma)
4-5	Susceptibility* — You have trouble resisting the influences of one type of Fay (faeries, ghosts, darklings, Unseelie, psychics, the Divine, etc.). You lose 1 die on any rolls to counter their Special Abilities. (+3 Karma)
6-8	Magical Air* — Your experiences with the Fay have left you with an aura of mystery and surrealism, which tends to make mundanes uneasy. Whenever you're dealing with mundanes who do not know you well, you take a -1 die penalty to any social rolls to gain trust or approval (including Damage Control rolls). (+3 Karma)
9-12	Enemy* — You've made an enemy of one of the Fay. You should choose a level 3 Enemy, and make sure it is a faerie, darkling, or other mystic. (+4 Karma)
13-15	Group Enemy* — You've torqued off a small group of Fay. It might be a cult, a brood of darklings, a family of Good Neighbors, etc. Choose an appropriate level 2 group. (+4 Karma)
16-17	Obsession — Some aspect of the Fay has entranced you, and you are compelled to act on an obsession whenever you can. To resist requires a Mental Save, with an default Difficulty of 15. (+3 Karma)
18-19	Lost Love — You met and developed strong relations for one of the Fay, who has since left you because you violated a taboo. You spend much of your time pining away, and effectively have Clinical Depression. (+4 Karma)
20	Enmity* — For some reason, you are universally disliked by one type of Fay (Seelie, Unseelie, ghosts, angels, darklings, etc.). All members of this type will have negative reactions towards you, and you will be effectively Cut-Off from that group. (+5 Karma)

Good (11 or more)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **Magical Companion** — One of the Fay has become your good friend and (almost) constant partner. You should choose a level 3 Fay Archetype to be your Companion. (-6 Karma)
- 2-3 **Mentor** — Gain a level 4 Mentor, who is a Fay of some sort. He or she teaches you enough to raise an appropriate Ability (or Special Ability) by 2 Experience. (-6 Karma)
- 4-5 **Ally** — You gain a level 3 Ally, who should be one of the Fay. (-4 Karma)
- 6-8 **Contacts** — You've developed connections among the Fay. Gain +2 Experience towards Fay Contacts. (-2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Knowledge** — Through studies, experience, or intuition, you have learned something of the Fay. Gain either +2 Experience towards Occultism, Cosmology, or Religion, or you may gain +2 Fay Markers. (-2 Karma)
- 13-15 **Sensitivity** — Either your personal nature or your exposure to the Fay has left you with the ability to see through the Veil. Improve Sensitivity by 4 Experience. (-4 Karma)
- 16-17 **Love Interest** — You have developed a strong emotional attachment to one of the Fay, which is reciprocated. Choose a level 3, magical Archetype to be a Tight Ally. However, your relationship has some sort of taboo, which the GM should make hard to maintain. (-5 Karma)
- 18-19 **Touched By Magic** — Exposure to the Other Side has left you gifted. Choose one of the following: Gain a new Mana Source; add +4 Experience to an existing Mana Source (not your Personal Mana); or gain a new Minor or Lesser Special Ability. (-4 Karma)
- 20 **Talisman** — You have found, stolen, or been given a magical device or talisman of some sort. You and your GM should work together to design the item, but the more powerful it is, the more side effects it will have. (-6 Karma)

The Resistance

Was the anecdote good or bad? Roll 1d20 + Karma...

Bad (8 or less)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **Faction Enmity*** — You've managed to piss off an entire faction of the Resistance. You are effectively Cut Off from this group, and have a well known and less-than-desirable reputation. (+4 Karma)
- 2-3 **Dirt on You...** — Someone in the Resistance has something to hold over your head, and can use this to blackmail you. This can be a dark secret, a fabricated lie, etc. (+3 Karma)
- 4-5 **You Owe Them One...*** — For some reason, you owe the Resistance big time. Lose 3 Markers from your Resistance Contacts. (+3 Karma)
- 6-8 **Loss of Status** — Your actions or special circumstances have tarnished your reputation. Until you can clear your name, any Damage Control rolls for Resistance Contacts will be at +4 Difficulty. (+2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Debt** — As repayment for a favor or as compensation for some offense, you owe the Resistance 2 Resources, your choice of type. (+2 Karma)
- 13-15 **You Know Too Much*** — You know one of the Resistance's secrets, and they know that you know. If you are already aligned with the Resistance, the secret should be particularly juicy. Unlike "Dirt," you can't get away with using this information as blackmail. They'd "disappear" you if they even suspected you of squealing. (+2)
- 16-17 **Enemy*** — You've made a rival in the Resistance. He or she is a level 2 Casual Enemy. (+2 Karma)
- 18-19 **Group Enemy*** — You've managed to strike up a rivalry with a team or cell of Resistance members. Choose a level 2 Group to be a Casual Enemy. (+4 Karma)
- 20 **Official Censure** — You were investigated and found guilty of some major offense against the Resistance, such as criminal negligence or embezzlement (you may or may not be guilty, your choice). You have a serious bad reputation, causing a +4 Difficulty on all Damage Control rolls within the Resistance, and you lose -4 Resistance Markers. (+6 Karma)

Good (9 or more)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **They Owe You One...** — You've helped out the Resistance in some way, and they owe you a serious debt. You gain +3 Resistance Markers. (-3 Karma)
- 2-3 **Dirt** — You know one of the Resistance's secrets, like the location of a safehouse or evidence of some "distasteful" activities. If you choose (and are able) to bring this information into play while using Contacts, you gain an extra die to your Contact roll. However, the Damage Control roll becomes Dramatic. If it's already Dramatic (because of negative Markers, etc.), take +1 Misfortune. (-3 Karma)
- 4-5 **Ally** — You become friends with someone in the Resistance. Gain a level 2 Ally. (-3 Karma)

- 6-8 **Contacts** — Dealing with the Resistance has given you +2 Experience in Resistance Contacts. (-2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Payoff** — As repayment for your services or “inconveniences,” the Resistance pays you +2 Resources, your choice of type. Any Markers will be Resistance Markers (-2 Karma)
- 13-15 **Experience** — Exposure to the Resistance is often an eye-opening experience. Gain +2 Experience in any appropriate Ability, such as Inquisition Lore, Weapon Skill, Occultism, etc. (-2 Karma)
- 16-17 **Good Reputation** — You’ve somehow gained a level of status within the Resistance. As long as it lasts, the Difficulty of any Damage Control rolls for Resistance Contacts will be -4. You probably have a minor leadership position, if you want one. (-2 Karma)
- 18-19 **Mentor** — Gain a level 3 Mentor in the Resistance, who teaches you enough to raise an appropriate Ability (or Special Ability) by 2 Experience. (-5 Karma)
- 20 **Recognition** — Your actions for or within the Resistance have dulled any bad reputations, and left you with a certain amount of status. You have a good reputation, which reduces the Diff of any Resistance Damage Control rolls by -4. Additionally, you gain +4 Resistance Markers, and probably have a leadership position of some sort. (-6 Karma)

The Underworld

Was the anecdote good or bad? Roll 1d20 + Karma...

Bad (12 or less)

- d20 Anecdote
- 1 **Marked For Death*** — You have been Cut Off by one of the major Underworld factions. Accordingly, they’ve put a hit on you, and have any number of bounty hunters, assassins, or posés on your trail. (+6 Karma)
- 2-3 **Cut Off*** — One faction of the Underworld (the Mafia, the Yakuza, the Bloods, etc.) has blackballed you. You are effectively Cut Off from that group, and can expect hostile reactions from many of its members. (+4 Karma)
- 4-5 **Physical Injury** — Violence is always an option in the underworld, as you’ve discovered the hard way. Roll on the Injury Table. (Variable)
- 6-8 **Losses** — Dealing with the Underworld has cost you, through either debts or damage. Lose 2 Resources, your choice of type. (+2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Enemy*** — The shadows are filled with dangerous people, and you’ve managed to make one mad. Chose an appropriate level 2 Enemy. (+3 Karma)
- 13-15 **Loss of Status*** — Your actions or special circumstances have tarnished your reputation. Until you clear your name, any Underworld Damage Control rolls are at +4 Diff. (+2 Karma)
- 16-17 **Group Enemy*** — A small gang of hoodlums has you on their hit list. Choose an appropriate level 1 Group Enemy. (+4 Karma)
- 18-19 **Dirt on You...** — Someone has something to hold over your head and can blackmail you. It could be a crime of some sort, a dark secret, or some threat to your loved ones. (+3 Karma)
- 20 **Major Enemy*** — You’ve made a very powerful enemy, such as a head Oyabun, Godfather, or boss. Choose an appropriate Level 5 Enemy to make your life miserable. He or she has probably had you Cut Off, and may have put a contract out on your life. Unlike Marked For Death, this is personal. (+6 Karma)

Good (13 or more)

- d20 Anecdote
- 1 **Major Score** — You were involved in some major criminal operation, leaving you with a good reputation and 4 extra Resources (any Markers are Underworld). As long as you maintain your good rep, any Underworld Damage Control rolls are at -4 Diff. (-6 Karma)
- 2-3 **Mentor** — Gain a level 3 Mentor, choosing someone with Underworld affiliations. She teaches you enough to raise an appropriate Ability by 2 Experience. (-5 Karma)
- 4-5 **Payoff** — Dealing with the Underworld has rewarded you with an additional +2 Resources, your choice of type. Any Markers are Underworld. (-2 Karma)
- 6-8 **Experience** — Life in the shadows has taught you enough to gain +2 Experience in an appropriate Ability, like Streetwise, Brawling, Law, or Inquisition Lore. (-2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Contacts** — Gain +2 Experience towards Underworld Contacts. (-2 Karma)
- 13-15 **Good Reputation** — You’ve picked up a good rep in the biz, which decreases the Difficulty of any Underworld Damage Control rolls by -4. (-2 Karma)
- 16-17 **Dirt** — You’ve got something to hold over someone’s (or some group’s) head. If you choose (and are able) to bring this knowledge into play while using Contacts, you gain an extra die to your Contact roll. However, the Damage Control roll becomes Dramatic. If it’s already Dramatic (because of negative Markers, etc.), take +1 Misfortune. (-3 Karma)
- 18-19 **Ally** — You make a friend on the wrong side of the tracks. Chose an appropriate level 2 Ally. (-3 Karma)

- 20 **They Owe You One...** — A group or prominent individual owes you a major favor. You gain +3 Underworld Markers as a result. (-3 Karma)

Locals

Was the anecdote good or bad? Roll 1d20 + Karma...

Bad (10 or less)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **Death and Destruction** — Some disaster struck the area, killing many and scattering the rest. Any local Allies, Mentors, or Groups are lost. GM's choice as to whether or not Enemies are killed. (Gain Karma equal to the total Levels of friends lost, +1 for each Close relation and -1 for each Loose one).
- 2-3 **Tragic Love Affair** — You fell in love (or found a best friend, if young), but the relationship ended in disaster. He or she might have died, gone insane, been murdered, betrayed you, been horribly injured or raped, etc. You are very wary of romantic relationships, and are especially susceptible to sadness and depression. (+3 Karma)
- 4-5 **Group Enemy*** — A small group of locals has a bone to pick with you. Choose an appropriate Level 1 Group Enemy. (+4 Karma)
- 6-8 **Loss of Status** — Your actions or special circumstances have tarnished your reputation around town. Any Damage Control rolls in the appropriate Contact group are at +4 Diff. (+2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Bad Memories** — Something terrible happened to you and you've never gotten over it. Perhaps you were abused, or maybe you witnessed some horrible deed or accident. Regardless, you are still touchy about the subject, and must make a Mental Save vs. 12 anytime you are reminded of it in order to remain calm. Failure indicates an intense emotional reaction—fear, rage, catatonia, etc. (+2 Karma)
- 13-15 **Debt** — You lost 2 Resources of any type to someone in the area. (+2 Karma)
- 16-17 **Enemy*** — You've torqued off one of the locals. He or she is a level 2 Enemy. (+3 Karma)
- 18-19 **Dependent*** — You somehow find yourself responsible for a friend, sibling, parent, or child. Pick an appropriate level 1 Dependent, for whom you are the primary guardian. You should determine why you feel like you need to take care of this person. (+3 Karma)
- 20 **Exiled*** — Not only have you gained the enmity of an entire community, you've been kicked out and told never to come back. You may well have been marked in some way. In addition to being Cut Off from any local Contacts, if you ever show up in town, you'll be dealt with harshly. (+5 Karma)

Good (11 or more)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **Companion** — You gain a loyal friend and sidekick. Chose an appropriate level 2 Companion. Remember, a Companion is a friend as well as a sidekick, so don't abuse him or her. (-5 Karma)
- 2-3 **Mentor** — Choose an appropriate level 3 Mentor, who teaches you enough to raise an appropriate Ability (or Special Ability) by 2 Experience. (-5 Karma)
- 4-5 **Ally** — You've made a friend. Choose an appropriate level 2 Ally. (-3 Karma)
- 6-8 **Good Reputation** — You've gained some level of status in town. Whenever you use your Contacts in the area, the Diff of any Damage Control rolls are -4. (-2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Contacts** — Gain +2 Experience towards an appropriate Contact Group, such as Blue Collars, Art Crowd, or Wilderness. (-2 Karma)
- 13-15 **Financial Boon** — Gain +2 Credit, Cash, or Lifestyle due to a stroke of luck, good planning, or a successful business venture. (-2 Karma)
- 16-17 **Love Interest** — You've fallen in love (or found a best friend, if too young for love). Choose an appropriate level 2 Archetype to be a Close Ally.
- 18-19 **Group** — A local group of some sort—gang, cult, fraternity, etc.—takes you into its folds. If you already belong to a Group in the area, you may spend 2 Experience improving it and one of the members becomes a level 2 Ally. (-5 Karma)
- 20 **Education** — You gain access to a quality education. Composition and Research both gain +2 Experience, as does a Knowledge of your choice. (-6 Karma)

Self-Spiritual

Was the anecdote good or bad? Roll 1d20 + Karma...

Bad (10 or less)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **Major Curse** — You are the recipient of a Major Curse. Examples include: everyone you love dies a grisly death; sunlight burns your skin; on nights of the full moon you become a beast and kill those for whom you have the strongest emotions. (+8 Karma)
- 2-3 **Moderate Curse** — You are afflicted with a Moderate Curse. Examples include: sunlight causes you pain; your nose grows when you lie; anyone you wrong will take vengeance tenfold. (+6 Karma)
- 4-5 **Haunted** — You have a personal ghost that loves to torment you and make your life difficult. Consider the ghost a level 3 Enemy. It spends most of its time molesting you, but is not necessarily trying to kill you. (+5 Karma)
- 6-8 **Minor Curse** — You are influenced by a Minor Curse. Examples include: music causes physical discomfort; you always smell like death; flowers wither under your touch; etc. (+4 Karma)
- 9-12 **Jinxed** — You are horribly unlucky, and always have +1 Misfortune on any Dramatic Roll. The only advantage is that the Misfortunes tend to be more problematic than deadly. (+3 Karma)
- 13-15 **Tainted** — Your nature is somehow tainted, and you radiate an aura of corruption. Your presence disturbs animals, makes plants wither, food spoil, and babies cry. When dealing with mundanes who do not know you well, you are at -1 die to gain their trust. This applies to many Damage Control rolls, too. This trait may be the result of a curse or simply an expression of your dark nature. (+3 Karma)
- 16-17 **Weak Spirit** — Your soul is loosely tied to your body, and has a tendency to break off in serious trauma. Any time you fail a Grit Save or a Recovery Save, you must make a Mental Save against the same Difficulty. If you fail, your soul leaves your body, leaving you in a coma and in need of shamanic healing. (+4 Karma)
- 18-19 **Dark Fate** — You are destined to meet some dismal end. What's worse is that you know about it, and are powerless to change it. You and your GM should come up with an appropriately tragic end. It should be very vague, so that if you get cocky, your GM can still take you out by finding a loophole. (+5 Karma)
- 20 **Demon Plagued** — The darklings want your soul, and constantly torment you. You experience grisly images and must constantly fight off dark impulses to do unspeakable things. You may put up a valiant struggle, but you are probably doomed to perdition. (+7 Karma)

Good (11 or more)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **Destiny** — You are destined for some great accomplishment before passing on. Events generally conspire to lead you up to it, and your Destiny counts as a Mana Source starting at level 1. If, for some reason, you die before achieving your Destiny, you will probably come back as a ghost, or be reincarnated. (-4 Karma)
- 2-3 **Resistant** — You are inherently resistant to “magic” of all sorts. The Veil in your immediate vicinity is one step stronger than usual (12 becomes 15, 18 becomes 24, etc.), and you gain a +1 die to any Saves vs. Special Abilities. You may reroll if you are a magic-intense character. (-3 Karma)
- 4-5 **Guardian Angel** — A benevolent spirit of some sort is watching over you. This might be an angel, a dead family member's soul, a kindly ghost, or even a powerful Totem. Gain the Guardian Angel Mana Source at level 1. If you already have this source, increase it by +4 Experience. (-4 Karma)
- 6-8 **Insight** — Your intuitive grasp of the universe grants you a +1 bonus to your Empathy. (-5 Karma)
- 9-12 **Charmed** — You seemed blessed, and things are always falling into place for you. You always gain a +1 Fortune on any Dramatic Roll. (-3 Karma)
- 13-15 **Understanding** — Your natural wisdom and attention to detail grants you a +1 bonus to your Wits. (-5 Karma)
- 16-17 **Fool's Luck** — You manage to stumble through outrageous circumstances unscathed. Whenever you roll a Misfortune, you may reroll the Drama Die once and take that result. If the second roll is not a Misfortune, you escape catastrophe by some fluke chance. (-3 Karma)
- 18-19 **Totem** — You have come in touch in with your Totem, or at least you are aware of it. You gain a new Mana Source (Totem), starting at level 1. You must choose your Totem. If you already have a Totem, you gain an additional one—this is very rare. (-4 Karma)
- 20 **Higher Purpose** — You are here to serve some lofty goal. Choose a suitably noble cause to spend your life pursuing, and gain a new Mana Source (Higher Purpose) at level 2. If you already have Higher Purpose, increase it by +5 Experience. (-5 Karma)

Self-Mental

Was the anecdote good or bad? Roll 1d20 + Karma...

Bad (10 or less)

d20	Anecdote
1	Depression* — You suffer from chronic clinical depression. At the beginning of each gaming session, make a Mental Save vs. 15. Failure means that you will be listless and unmotivated for the session and unable to spend Edge to increase your rolls, though you can use it for other purposes. (+6 Karma)
2-3	Addiction* — You are psychologically addicted to some substance, like a drug, or an activity, like gambling. Choose an appropriate addiction. Specific drugs will list their own disadvantages and requirements. Activities will require a Mental Save (Diff 15 is standard) to resist when the opportunity arises. (+3 Karma)
4-5	Obsession* — You are obsessed with some relatively unattainable or never-ending goal or task. This might include killing the Pope, converting the world to your religion, or discovering the Truth. To avoid acting on this obsession requires a Mental Save vs. 15. (+3 Karma)
6-8	Pathological Problem* — You are constantly and unconsciously doing something like lying, eating, fidgeting, tinkering, etc. You may spend a point of Edge to stop yourself from doing this for a scene. (+2 Karma)
9-12	Bad Habit* — You've got a bad habit, like smoking, being messy, losing your car keys, etc. Usually, the habit just adds personality, but sometimes it becomes very problematic. Such circumstances are up to the GM. (+1 Karma)
13-15	Fears* — Something causes you inordinate fear, and when confronting your Fear, you must make a Mental Save (usually vs. 15) to do anything but flee or freeze up. Possibilities include: heights, enclosed spaces, spiders, darklings, Inquisitors, etc. (+3 Karma)
16-17	Learning Disorder — You have trouble learning a specific type of Ability (physical, technical, sciences, social, etc.). As a result, you must increase these Abilities as if they were Special Abilities, though you don't have to buy them at level 0. (+3 Karma)
18-19	Chronic Nightmares* — You suffer from dreadful nightmares on a regular basis. You have a 3 in 6 chance of waking up screaming any given night, thus depriving you of any real rest. This seriously hinders your Mana renewal. (+2 Karma)
20	Insane* — You suffer from a serious neurosis or psychosis, such as schizophrenia, multiple personality disorder, violent psychosis, acute paranoia, etc. You may suppress your insanity for a scene by expending an Edge point. (+6 Karma)

Good (11 or more)

d20	Anecdote
1	Fast Learner — You pick things up quickly, resulting in a -1 Experience Cost at each level of Knowledges, with a minimum cost of 1. (-6 Karma)
2-3	Technically Adept — You have a knack with machines of all sorts, and gain +1 level to your Technical Attribute. (-5 Karma)
4-5	Strong Willed — Your strong sense of self gives you +1 level to your Will Attribute. (-5 Karma)
6-8	Light Sleeper — You need less sleep than most, and get it mostly by napping here and there. You also wake easily and with full alertness. (-3 Karma)
9-12	Knack — You have a knack for a particular Ability. Increase it by +2 Experience. (-2 Karma)
13-15	Focus — Your disciplined mind has given you one of the following Mana Sources at level 1: Code, Goal, Emotion, or Ritual. (-4 Karma)
16-17	Photographic Memory — You remember details with startling clarity. Gain up to +2 dice when your ability to remember specific details is helpful. (-4 Karma)
18-19	Bright — You are naturally smart, and gain +1 level to your Intelligence Attribute. (-5 Karma)
20	Mentally Stable — Your strong mental character increases your Mental Save by one die type (d6s become d8s, d8s become d10s, etc.). Yes, you can have d20s. (-5 Karma)

Self-Physical

Was the anecdote good or bad? Roll 1d20 + Karma...

Bad (10 or less)

d20	Anecdote
1	Motor Damage — Genetic or environmental conditions have stunted your motor system. Lose 1 level from either your Strength or your Dexterity. Both scores have a maximum rating of 5. (+5 Karma)
2-3	Poor Sense* — One of your major senses (counting smell and taste as one sense) is inadequate. Any roll directly involving that

- sense imposes a one die penalty. It is possible (and common) to gain corrective technology for this problem. (+3 Karma)
- 4-5 **Deep Sleeper** — You need more sleep than the average person, and when sleeping, almost nothing will disturb you. If you are jostled awake, you will suffer a one die penalty to all rolls until you can nap. (+3 Karma)
- 6-8 **Allergy** — You have a violent allergy to some fairly common compound, such as cigarette smoke, alcohol, penicillin, pollen, milk, etc. When exposed, a Physical Save (standard Diff of 15) is required to avoid a debilitating reaction. (+2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Injury** — You have been injured in some manner. Roll on the Injury Table for specifics. (Variable)
- 13-15 **Sterile** — You are incapable of having bearing or siring children. Likewise, you probably have a physiological condition which keeps you from enjoying intercourse. (+2 Karma)
- 16-17 **Sickness*** — You have contracted some potentially deadly or debilitating disease, such as cancer, diabetes, anemia, AIDS II, polio, or some form of bioplague. You are -1 Stamina, with a maximum of 5, and must start making Aging Checks as soon as you start play. (+7 Karma)
- 18-19 **Physiological Addiction*** — You have developed a physical dependency upon some substance, and will suffer greatly if deprived of it for too long. Choose an appropriate drug, and follow its requirements for addiction. (+3 Karma)
- 20 **Small Frame** — Your frail build means you are -1 Size and Strength, and cannot have a Strength higher than 5. (+9 Karma)

Good (11 or more)

- d20 Anecdote**
- 1 **Large** — Your large frame gives you a +1 Size and +1 Strength. (-9 Karma)
- 2-3 **Lithe** — Your slight but agile build gives you a -1 Size but +1 Dexterity. (-3 Karma)
- 4-5 **High Pain Threshold** — You are virtually unstoppable, gaining an extra die to your Physical Save when you are making a Grit Save. (-4 Karma)
- 6-8 **Ambidextrous** — You are able to use both sides of your body equally well. Note that does not mean you can necessarily use them at the same time, though the cost of specifically two-handed Fighting Styles (like Two-Fisted Death or Daisho) cost 1 less Experience. (-2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Training** — You receive training in or had to practice a physical Skill, such as Athletics, Stealth, Brawling, Weapon Skill, etc. Increase this Skill by +2 Experience. (-2 Karma)
- 13-15 **Tough** — Your rugged build and natural endurance grant you +1 level to your Stamina. (-5 Karma)
- 16-17 **Sharp Sense** — You have an exceptional major sense (counting smell and taste as one), which grants an additional +1 die to any rolls that specifically deal with this sense. You never gain this bonus on Initiative rolls, and only gain it one ranged Attacks when you are Aiming. (-3 Karma)
- 18-19 **Hearty** — Your strong constitution provides you with an extra die to resist sickness or disease, or to recover from injuries. (-3 Karma)
- 20 **Lightning Reflexes** — You gain an extra die on Defense or Dodge rolls that you see coming. Also, when you would normally be surprised, make a Dex/Wits roll vs. 18. If you are successful, you get to respond instinctively, allowing a Dodge or Defense (without the +1 die bonus). Unfortunately, this also happens when someone sneaks up on you for a joke... (-6 Karma)

Self-Magical

Was the anecdote good or bad? Roll 1d20 + Karma...

Bad (10 or less)

- d20 Anecdote**
- 1 **Taboo** — You are restricted from some sort of action or circumstance, and violating this restriction will result in some supernatural retribution. You and your GM should develop an appropriate level 3 Taboo. If you already have a Taboo, you may choose to increase it by 2 levels. (+5 Karma)
- 2-3 **Bond** — One of your possessions is bonded to your very nature. This could be something like a hat, a ring, a weapon, etc. You and your GM should develop an appropriate Level 3 Bond. If you already have a Bond, you may choose to increase it by 2 levels (+5 Karma)
- 4-5 **Obsession*** — You have an obsession, much like the Mental Anecdote on page XX. However, your obsession must somehow relate to magic and the unknown. Examples include: discovering the philosopher's stone; slaying vampires; debunking magic.
- 6-8 **Marked** — You bear some physical marking of your encounters with the Other Side. Possibilities include: clear blood; glowing eyes; a forked tongue; iron fingernails; a smell of wild flowers; an unnatural birthmark. This trait makes you very memorable, and when a mundane first notices it, he or she is likely to treat you as if you have a Social Stigma (see Cyberwear). (+2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Magical Air** — You carry an aura of mystery and surrealism, which tends to make mundanes uneasy. Whenever you're dealing with mundanes who do not know you well, you take a -1 die penalty to any social rolls to gain their trust or approval (including Damage Control rolls). (+3 Karma)

- 13-15 **Susceptibility*** — You have trouble resisting the influences of one type of Fay (faeries, darklings, Unseelie, psychics, etc.). You lose 1 die on any rolls to counter their Special Abilities. (+3 Karma)
- 16-17 **Damage** — You have been injured by magic in some manner. Roll on the Injury Table. Whatever the Injury is, it is somehow obvious that it was magical in nature. For example, Nerve Damage might result in faint flickers of electricity skitting over your skin. When mundanes first notice your injury, they tend to be set off, causing you to lose -1 die on social rolls. (As per Injury, but +1 Karma)
- 18-19 **Minor Curse*** — You suffer from a minor curse. Example include: Music causes physical discomfort; you may only eat raw food; you always smell like death; etc. (+4 Karma)
- 20 **Weakness** — You suffer from some sort of magical vulnerability to a specific substance, object, or creature. You and your GM should design an appropriate level 3 Weakness. If you already have a Weakness, you may choose to increase it by 2 levels. (+5 Karma)

Good (11 or more)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **Major Power** — Develop a Major Special Ability, such as Glamour, Animation, or Regeneration. It starts at level 0. (-7 Karma)
- 2-3 **Moderate Power** — Develop a Moderate Special Ability, such as Benediction, Dreaming, or Healing. It starts at level 0. (-6 Karma)
- 4-5 **Magical Catalyst** — The Veil thins in your presence, leading you into a life full of supernatural influences. Reduce the score of the Veil by one step in your immediate surroundings (24 becomes 18, 18 becomes 15, etc.) Spirits and sensitives usually notice this, and are also usually aware that you are the focus. (-3 Karma)
- 6-8 **Minor Power** — Develop a Minor Special Ability, such as Communion, Scrying, or Suggestion. It starts at level 0. (-5 Karma)
- 9-12 **Sensitive** — You are gifted with some form of second sight. You may choose either Clarity or Sensitivity and start it at level 0, but you must also take an Aspect for that Special Ability. Examples include Clarity (Unseelie Glamour), Sensitivity (Psychic Impressions), or Sensitivity (Ghosts). If you already have both Clarity and Sensitivity, increase one of them by 3 Experience. (-3 Karma)
- 13-15 **Lesser Power** — Develop a Lesser Special Ability, such as Sensitivity, Visions, or Premonitions. It starts at level 0. (-4 Karma)
- 16-17 **Magic in the Blood** — You have some innate connection with the Fay, and when dealing with them, you gain an extra die on any social rolls. Yes, this includes Damage Control. (-4 Karma)
- 18-19 **Increase Power** — You have untapped some of your magical potential. Choose a “supernatural” Mana Source, such as Totem, Faith, Spirit Guides, Power Focus, Ritual, etc. to begin at level 1. (-4 Karma)
- 20 **Discover Item** — You have come into possession of a talisman or device of some sort. You and your GM should work together to design the item, but your GM has the final say. Remember, the more powerful the item, the more likely it will have side effects. (-6 Karma)

Previous Relations

Was the anecdote good or bad? Roll 1d20 + Karma...

Bad (10 or less)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **Death and Destruction** — 2d2 of your Allies, Mentors, or Companions (or levels of a Group) die. This could be a freak coincidence (yeah, right), an accident, or maybe a message to you. (For each relation lost, regain his or her Experience Cost in Karma. If Group levels are lost, regain +1 Karma per level)
- 2-3 **Best Friend Dies** — You lose your closest friend. You and your GM should determine who is “closest” to you. Tight relations are always closer than Average or Loose Relations. Companions are closer than Allies who are closer than Mentors. (Regain the lost relation’s Experience Cost in Karma)
- 4-5 **Where’d They Go?*** — One of your Allies or Mentors disappears without a trace. (Regain the lost relation’s Experience Cost in Karma)
- 6-8 **Lose Connections** — For some reason, you lose a number of connections. Reduce your highest Contact Group by 2 Experience. (+2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Relations Worsen*** — Randomly choose one of your Allies, Mentors, Enemies, Groups, or Group Enemies. The type of relationship with any personal relations becomes one step worse. Loose friends are lost, but if a Bitter Enemy or Group Enemy is worsened, increase its level by 1. (+1 Karma)
- 13-15 **Friend is Injured** — An Ally or Mentor is seriously injured or incapacitated. He or she might be paralyzed, dying, blinded, or otherwise debilitated. In addition to the trauma of a friend going through such a thing, this also makes him or her less “useful.” (+1 Karma)

- 16-17 **Enemies Accumulate** — If you have no Enemies or Group Enemies, one of your friend's Enemies becomes yours. Choose an appropriate level 2 Casual Enemy. Otherwise, pick one of your Enemies or Group Enemies at random. If you pick an individual enemy, he or she gets some friends together and becomes a Group Enemy of equal level. If you pick a Group Enemy, it becomes bigger and more powerful, gaining 2 levels. (+2 Karma)
- 18-19 **Friend Becomes Dependent** — One of your Allies, Mentors, or Companions has somehow become a Dependent. Reduce him or her to level 2, and decide what happened and why you feel responsible for this person. (Gain Karma equal to the cost of your relation +2) If you have no friends, you still gain a level 1 Dependent, perhaps through you Contacts. (+3 Karma)
- 20 **Falling Out** — You have a major fight with one of your Allies, Mentors, or Companions, resulting in them becoming an Enemy. (Gain Karma equal to twice the cost of the relation) If you have no Allies one of your Major Contacts becomes an Enemy (Gain Karma equal to the level of the Contact +1)

Good (11 or more)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **Social Butterfly** — You've been spending a lot of time with other people. Improve the relationships of two Allies, Mentors, or Companions by one step (Loose becomes Average, Average becomes Tight). Also, gain 2 Experience towards appropriate Contacts, and gain 2 Markers in that same Contact Group. (-6 Karma)
- 2-3 **Peer Education** — If you have Mentor, he or she teaches you something new. If you don't have a Mentor, you pick something up from an Ally, Companion, or Contact. Regardless, you learn enough to increase an appropriate Ability (or Special Ability) by +2 Experience. (-2 Karma)
- 4-5 **Friend Gains Power** — One of your Allies, Mentors, or Companions rises in competence, power, wealth, etc. Increase him or her by +1 level. (-1 Karma)
- 6-8 **New Connections** — You meet some new people. Choose a Contact Group that has no Experience and gain +1 point in it. Also, gain +1 Marker in that same Group. (-2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Relations Improve** — One of your previous Allies, Mentors, Groups, or Companions becomes closer, or an Enemy or Group Enemy becomes less intense. Choose an appropriate relation, and improve things by one step: Bitter Enemies becomes Average, Average Allies become Tight. (-1 Karma)
- 13-15 **Expanding Connections** — Increase you highest Contact Group by +2 Experience, and gain +2 Markers in that same Group. (-4 Karma)
- 16-17 **Friends Multiply** — One of your Allies or Mentors brings you into a level 2 Group. (-5 Karma)
- 18-19 **Friend Becomes a Companion** — One of your Allies hooks up with you and becomes a Companion of the same intensity (a Tight Ally becomes a Tight Companion). (-2 Karma)
- 20 **Change of Heart** — You and one of your Enemies or Group Enemies resolve things and become friends. Choose an Enemy or Group Enemy to become an Ally or Group of similar relation (Bitter Enemies become Tight Allies, etc.). (Lose Karma equal to twice the Experience gain of the Relation)

Media

Was the anecdote good or bad? Roll 1d20 + Karma...

Bad (10 or less)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **Scandal*** — You, your family, or your organization have been involved in a very public and very damaging media scandal. It could have involved corruption, an affair, a crime (committed or alleged), involvement in some conspiracy, etc. Regardless, your public credibility is shot. While this does not affect any of your Personal Relations (including Major Contacts), it does increase most Damage Control rolls by +4 Difficulty. You do not receive this penalty when successfully working under an alias, or when dealing with people who would not have heard of or do not care about the scandal. (+4 Karma)
- 2-3 **Dirt on You...** — Someone in the Media has something to hold over your head and blackmail you. It might be a crime (fabricated or not), knowledge of a scandal, or a threat to your family or friends. (+3 Karma)
- 4-5 **Unwanted Attention** — You have received an unappreciated amount of attention by the media, making it difficult for you to go anywhere without being recognized. While your fame (or infamy) may have passed, there have been a number of publications and broadcasts on your life and activities, at least up until this Anecdote takes place. As a result, there are considerable stores of information about you, and certain media groups keep tabs on your comings and goings. If you are in a covert line of work, this can be most annoying. (+2 Karma)
- 6-8 **Bad Reputation** — You've somehow gotten a bad reputation in the media industry. You find it difficult to get cooperation from producers, reporters, or talent, and as a result you are at +4 Diff to your Damage Control rolls when using Media Contacts. Depending on the circumstances, you may also have a certain amount of public notoriety. Even if you do so, however, it is unlikely to affect your interactions with other Contact Groups. (+2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Enemy** — You've managed to end up at odds with someone in the biz. This could be a reporter, a producer, or a performer of

- some sort. Choose an appropriate level 2 Archetype. (+3 Karma)
- 13-15 **You Owe Them...** — You've managed to incur a certain amount of debt—in favors, cash, or whatever—to various people in the media biz. As a result, you are -3 Media Markers. (+3 Karma)
- 16-17 **Black Balled** — For some reason or another, you've been Cut Off from all legitimate Media Contacts. You may have pissed off a major player, or perhaps you were involved in an internal scandal so big that no one will deal with you anymore. Regardless, you are Cut Off, making all dealings with the Media almost impossible. (+4 Karma)
- 18-19 **Group Enemy** — You've managed to seriously torque a small but locally influential media group. This could be a small local press, a group of pirate broadcasters, or a local news team. Pick an appropriate level 2 Group Archetype to be your Enemy. (+5 Karma)
- 20 **Major Enemy** — You've gotten yourself on the blacklist of one of the more influential people in the biz, such as a superstar artist, a major producer or director, or the owner of a prominent local paper. Choose an appropriate level 5 Archetype to be your Enemy. (+6 Karma)

Good (11 or more)

- d20 Anecdote**
- 1 **The Truth** — You have a uniquely accurate view on the events of particularly important event or person. In other words, you've discovered, with fairly good evidence, a piece of elusive Truth. This should be in regards to something which was at least somewhat successfully covered up. In addition to a feeling of self-righteousness, this knowledge also gives you a certain amount of power, either by holding it over someone's head or making it public and trying to make a change. How you use this information is up to you—just remember, if it was important enough to cover up once, it might be important to cover up again... permanently. (-4 Karma)
- 2-3 **Dirt** — You've come across a some compromising information on someone or something in the media. It could be a scandal, knowledge of a cover-up, or something else that you can hold over someone's head. Don't push it, though. (-3 Karma)
- 4-5 **They Owe You One** — Someone (or a number of people) owe you a favor or two, leaving you with an additional +2 Media Markers. (-2 Karma)
- 6-8 **Good Reputation** — You've gained a level of status in the biz. As a result, when you use your Media Contacts, any Damage Control rolls are at -4 Difficulty. (-2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Contacts** — You've met some people in the biz. Gain +2 Experience in Media Contacts. (-2 Karma)
- 13-15 **Experience** — Working in or against the biz has left you with a certain amount of additional know-how. Gain +2 Experience in an appropriate Ability. (-2 Karma)
- 16-17 **Ally** — You've made a friend with someone in the entertainment and information circles. Pick an appropriate level 2 Media Archetype to be an Ally. (-3 Karma)
- 18-19 **Mentor** — Someone in the biz has become a Mentor to you. Choose an appropriate level 3 Media Archetype, and increase an appropriate Ability by +2 Experience. (-5 Karma)
- 20 **Celebrity** — For some reason or another, you've received a decent amount of positive publicity from the media. Because of people's attitudes towards celebrities, you are assumed to have a good reputation with anyone that would recognize and appreciate your fame, resulting in a -4 Difficulty to many Damage Control Rolls. Likewise, you'll often get little favors here and there, like free tickets or meals. The downside of this is that you tend to be easily recognizable, and you sometimes find yourself being hounded by fans, reporters, or just plain freaks. (-3 Karma)

Corporates

Was the anecdote good or bad? Roll 1d20 + Karma...

Bad (12 or less)

- d20 Anecdote**
- 1 **Hunted*** — For some reason, you are being pursued by a major corporation, such as GE, Exxon, Microsoft, etc. You are Cut Off from that corporation, and have bounty hunters, corporate operatives, and maybe even Inquisitors on your trail. You might be marked for death, or you could have something (talent, knowledge, technology) that they want. Regardless, if they catch you, things will not be pleasant. (+5 Karma)
- 2-3 **Black Balled*** — You have been Cut Off from a major corporation and its affiliates. Perhaps you were fired, or they may be trying to destroy your life. Until you can make amends, you will suffer the usual penalties of being Cut Off. (+4 Karma)
- 4-5 **Dirt on You...** — Someone has something to hold over your head and blackmail you. It might be a crime (fabricated or not), knowledge of a scandal, or a threat to your family or friends. (+3 Karma)
- 6-8 **Debt** — Dealing with the corporations has cost you 2 Resources, your choice of type. (+2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Enemy*** — You've made an enemy in the corporate world. He or she is level 2. (+3 Karma)
- 13-15 **Loss of Status*** — Your actions or special circumstances have tarnished your reputation in the business world. Until you can clear your name, any Corporate Damage Control rolls are at +4 Diff. (+2 Karma)

- 16-17 **You Owe Them One...*** — Perhaps because of favors they performed for you, or because of a major blunder on your part, you are -3 Corporate Markers. (+3 Karma)
- 18-19 **Physical Injury** — You have been injured, either working for the corporations or because of their actions. Roll on the Injury Table. (Variable)
- 20 **Major Enemy*** — You've made a very powerful enemy, like the regional director of Exxon or the director of security for Borg-Warner. Choose an appropriate level 5 Enemy. You're likely to have been Cut Off (at least partly), and may be hunted as well. The big thing to remember is that this is personal. (+6 Karma)

Good (13-20)

- d20 Anecdote**
- 1 **Mentor** — You gain a teacher and friend in the corporate world. Choose an appropriate level 3 Mentor, who teaches you enough to raise an appropriate Ability by 2 Experience. (-5 Karma)
- 2-3 **They Owe You One...** — Your services have garnered you some favors in Big Business. You gain +3 Corporate Markers. (-3 Karma)
- 4-5 **Ally** — Gain a friend in the company. Choose an appropriate level 2 Ally. (-3 Karma)
- 6-8 **Payoff** — Stealing from or working for the corps has been quite productive. Gain +2 Resources, your choice of type. Any Markers must be Corporate. (-2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Contacts** — You've expanded your connections in the business world. +2 Experience towards Corporate Contacts. (-2 Karma)
- 13-15 **Knowledge, Training, or Experience** — Experience in the corporate realm has garnered you +2 Experience towards an appropriate Ability. (-2 Karma)
- 16-17 **Gain Status** — You've picked up a good reputation in the Corporate realm. As long as you maintain it, any Corporate Damage Control rolls are at -4 Difficulty. (-2 Karma)
- 18-19 **Dirt** — You've got something to hold over some suit's (or corporation's) head, such as knowledge of an affair or evidence of some heinous crime. If you choose (and are able) to bring this knowledge into play while using Contacts, you gain an extra die to your Contact roll. However, the Damage Control roll becomes Dramatic. If it's already Dramatic (because of negative Markers, etc.), take +1 Misfortune. (-3 Karma)
- 20 **Major Score** — After a job for or against the corporations, you are left with a good reputation and 4 extra Resources (any Markers are Corporate). As long as you maintain your reputation, any Corporate Damage Control rolls are at -4 Difficulty. (-6 Karma)

The Inquisition

Was the anecdote good or bad? Roll 1d20 + Karma...

Bad (14 or lower)

- d20 Anecdote**
- 1 **Erased*** — The Inquisition has "disappeared" you. Your original SIN (if you had one) has been erased, taking 6 points of Credit, Income, or Lifestyle with it. Likewise, you've been Cut Off from any legitimate connections (unofficial, illegitimate, and casual connections are still good, though). In addition, the Men In Black are on your trail in order to "neutralize" you. (+12 Karma)
- 2-3 **Close to Home** — The Inquisition kills or erases 2d2 of your Allies, Mentors, or Companions. You probably didn't take it well. (Gain Karma equal to the total cost of relations lost)
- 4-5 **Enemy*** — You've made an enemy in the Inquisition, probably a spook. He or she is level 3. (+4 Karma)
- 6-8 **On File** — While the Inquisition technically has everyone with a SIN on file, they can't actively keep track of everyone. They therefore keep files on any "questionable" individuals, including those that work for them and their families. If you are on file, the Inquisition has a handy record of your official finances, phone logs (but rarely conversations), records, medical reports, etc. (+3 Karma)
- 9-12 **Property Seized** — Some of your properties were somehow seized or destroyed by the Inquisition. Regardless, you have lost 4 points of Credit, Cash, Income, Gear, or Lifestyle, your choice. (+4 Karma)
- 13-15 **Physical Injury** — A run in with the Inquisition has left you injured. Roll on the Injury Table. (Variable)
- 16-17 **Under Surveillance*** — You are actively being watched by the Inquisition. Unlike On File, this implies that there are one or more spooks following you, watching you, and listening to your phone calls (if they can). You have managed to purge most of their obvious bugs and plants, but they are still watching you. (+4 Karma)
- 18-19 **Fugitive*** — You are being actively pursued by the Inquisition as a criminal. While they have not erased your records, you have been Cut Off from any legitimate connections (see Erased, above). Likewise, at least one spook and some Men in Black are looking for you (with the intent to capture, not kill). Likewise, they've frozen 3 points of your Credit, Income, or Lifestyle. (+8 Karma)

- 20 **Purgatory** — You have been subjected to Purgatory, the Inquisition’s VR “correctional facility.” In addition to suffering from Chronic Nightmares (see Self-Mental Anecdotes), you are On File and the Inquisition has a complete psychological profile on you. Due to the conditioning you underwent, you have a -8 penalty when trying to resist Intimidation, Leadership, or other manipulative ploys of Inquisition operatives. (+9 Karma)

Good (15 or more)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **Clear Records** — You’ve somehow managed to clear your records with the Inquisition, through a handy bit of hacking, a stroke of luck, or a well executed con job. As a result, you have resolved all of the following (if they apply): Fugitive, Under Surveillance, On File, and Erased. (Gain Karma equal to the total amount lost from these problems) If you already had a clean record, you manage to create a shell identity, which the Inquisition believes is yours. You have a High Quality New Identity, with an additional +3 points of Lifestyle, Credit, or Income to spend on it. (- 7 Karma)
- 2-3 **Mutual Enemy** — While working against or being prosecuted by the Inquisition, you’ve made a friend going through the same thing. Joined by your mutual enemy, this person is now an Ally. Choose an appropriate level 3 archetype. (-4 Karma)
- 4-5 **Score!** — You’ve managed to get your hands on some “surplus” Inquisition goods. Gain 2 points of Gear, and an additional +2 Inquisition Markers that can only be spent on Gear. (-4 Karma)
- 6-8 **Contacts** — You’ve managed to get some connections within the Inquisition’s bureaucracy. Gain +2 Experience towards Inquisition Contacts. (-2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Experience** — Fighting or running from the Inquisition tends to be a “learning experience.” Increase an appropriate Ability (or Special Ability) by +2 Experience. (-2 Karma)
- 13-15 **Ally** — A friend of yours is employed by the Inquisition. He or she might be a sympathizer, a turncoat, or just a friend stuck in a bad job. Choose an appropriate level 2 Ally. (-3 Karma)
- 16-17 **Favors** — You’ve managed to get yourself +2 Markers from people within the Inquisition. You’ve probably gained these by doing favors for individuals, not the organization itself. (-2 Karma)
- 18-19 **Dirt** — You’ve got some sort of evidence of a horrendous act by the Inquisition, that, if exposed, has the potential to cause some serious riots and uprisings. This may give you the power to change things, but the Inquisition probably knows that you know, ya know. (-4 Karma)
- 20 **Beat Purgatory** — You’ve undergone Purgatory, the Inquisition’s VR “correctional facility.” However, it didn’t break you like it was supposed to. Rather, it toughened your mind, resulting in a +1 level to your Will. Also, you are now especially resistant to Inquisition mind-games, giving you a +8 to resist Intimidation, Subterfuge, Leadership, etc. used by their operatives. (-8 Karma)

Technology

Was the anecdote good or bad? Roll 1d20 + Karma...

Bad (10 or less)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **Failsafe Device*** — Someone has installed one or more failsafe devices in your body. This could be a cortex bomb, a beacon, a command kill chip, a behavioral inhibitor, a chemical dependency, or some other nasty bit of work. You might know about it, you might not. Have fun. (+6 Karma)
- 2-3 **Cyberpsychosis** — You must begin the game with at least one piece of cyberwear, and you automatically start with the Personality Trait of Cyberpsychotic at level 1. If additional cyberwear causes more Cyberpsychosis, it adds to this initial score. (+3 Karma)
- 4-5 **VR Addiction*** — You have become addicted to virtual reality, and must make increasingly difficult Mental Saves to avoid getting the shakes when you are forced to operate in the real world for too long. The nature of your addiction is up to you. (+3 Karma)
- 6-8 **Physical Injury** — Dealing with technology has left you with some sort of injury. Roll on the Injury Table for specific injuries. (Variable)
- 9-12 **Hacked!** — You have fallen prey to a hacker, who has “liberated” 2 points of your Credit, Income, or Lifestyle, your choice. (+2 Karma)
- 13-15 **Bad Tech** — You’ve somehow gotten low substandard equipment. As a result, you have 3 less points of Gear. Or, at the GM’s option, 3 points of your gear is faulty, but you don’t know exactly what. (-3 Karma)
- 16-17 **Poor Medical Care*** — Either incompetent health care or neglect of sickness or injury has left you with some long term health problems. You may want to roll on the Injury Table for ideas, but you should custom tailor the situation to your character. (+3 Karma standard, but might be more or less, depending on the specific problems)
- 18-19 **Unwanted Augmentation*** — You’ve ended up with a piece of cyberwear that you didn’t want. You and your GM should chose an appropriate unit, costing no more than 2d4 points. However, all Trauma and mental Side Effects are doubled. (+3 Karma)

- 20 **Mental Trauma** — You took some sort of damage to your brain, leaving a little more “flighty” than you used to be. As a result, your Mental Save is reduced by one die type (d8s become d6s, d4s become d2s, etc.). (+5 Karma)

Good (11 or more)

d20 Anecdote

- 1 **Unique Technology** — You’ve managed to get your hands on some unique piece of technology. It might be a prototype, alien technology, or something created by the Fay. Regardless, there are many powerful people that would kill to get their hands on it. You and the GM should design this technology. Be aware, though, that it is likely to have some quirks... (-6 Karma)
- 2-3 **Vehicle** — You gain 6 points of Gear which can only be spent on a vehicle (or vehicles) of some sort. (-6 Karma)
- 4-5 **Cyberwear** — Gain +4 Gear to be spent solely on Cyberwear. (-4 Karma)
- 6-8 **Digital Lifestyle** — The digital world has opened its doors for you. Gain +4 points of Lifestyle, which can only be spent on ID, bank, phone, and email accounts, insurance, or other “intangibles.” Likewise, you may convert up to 2 of these Lifestyle points into Credit or Income. (-4 Karma)
- 9-12 **Experience** — You’ve gotten some hands on experience or training with technology. Increase and technical (including Computer Ops) or science Ability by +2 Experience. (-2 Karma)
- 13-15 **Techie Friends** — You’ve made some connections in the geek crowd. Gain +2 Experience in Science/Tech, Cyberspace, Orbital, or Academia Contacts. (-2 Karma)
- 16-17 **Computer Stuff** — You gain 4 points of Gear to be spent solely on computers, components, and software. (-4 Karma)
- 18-19 **Lab or Workshop** — Gain 2 points of Lifestyle and 4 points of Gear to maintain and equip a workshop or lab. (-6 Karma)
- 20 **Major Score** — You’ve somehow gotten a major amount of technology. You have 8 points of Resources to divide amongst the following: Gear, Credit, “intangible” Lifestyle (see Digital Lifestyle, above), or Science/Tech or Cyberspace Markers. (-8 Karma)

Injury Table

d20 Injury

- 1 **Limp** — You’ve got problems getting around, and your Encumbrance is always considered +1 level higher than it should be. (+5 Karma)
- 2-3 **Skeletal Problems** — You suffer from chronic back, knee, or shoulder problems, resulting in an extra Misfortune on any rolls involving strenuous activity. A Misfortune is likely to be something like your back locking up or your knee popping out. Either of these would seriously hamper your ability to move. (+4 Karma)
- 4-5 **Motor Damage** — You have suffered some sort of damage to either your motor skills, resulting in a -1 Dexterity, or your muscular system, resulting in a -1 Strength. Whichever you choose has a maximum rating of 4. (-6 Karma)
- 6-8 **Memory Loss** — You can’t remember what happened for 2d10 months of your past. The GM can have real fun with this one. (+2 Karma)
- 9-12 **Scarring** — Some serious body scarring reduces your Attractiveness by 1. Cosmetic surgery can regain this point, but it will be costly. (+3 Karma)
- 13-15 **Debilitation** — Past trauma has undermined your body; you are -1 Stamina and cannot have a score higher than 4. (-6 Karma)
- 16-17 **Missing Limb** — All or part of a limb has been amputated (and not necessarily surgically), disabled, or paralyzed. If it was a leg, you’ve got serious problems walking without replacement. If it was an arm, you’re not going to be holding anything. (+5 Karma for a leg, +4 for an arm)
- 18-19 **Missing Eye(s)** — You’re blind in one or both eyes. If one eye, you are at -1 die and +1 Misfortune on any rolls that require accurate depth perception (including most combat rolls). If missing both eyes, you are blind, and always act as if you are in complete darkness. (+4 Karma for one eye, +6 for both)
- 20 **Disfigurement** — Your Attractiveness has been reduced to 1, and you draw looks of horror and disgust from all those around you. If someone can see your disfigurement and doesn’t know you well, you must halve all your social rolls. Raising your Attractiveness would require extremely painful and extensive plastic surgery. (+4 Karma)

After Life Path...

- Apply 120 Experience Points to Primary Attributes (Physical, Mental, Psyche)
- Apply 30 Experience Points to Abilities, Special Abilities, and Contacts

If you end up with Experience Points left in either area, keep track of them. You may spend them later in conjunction with your Free Pool, or convert them into Free Pool at a 2:1 ratio.

- Apply your Free Pool Experience Points, equal to 10 + Karma, to any area you see fit, including Attributes, Abilities, Special Abilities, Mana, Relations, and Resources. You may increase your Free Pool by taking Dependants, Enemies, or Group Enemies, or changing the levels or intensities of those that you already have.

Experience Costs

	Ability or Contact	Special Ability	Attribute	
Level being attained:	0	6	NA	
1	1 (1)	2	0	
2	2 (3)	3	4	
3	4 (7)	6	8	To raise Size from 3 to 4 costs 4 points.
4	6 (13)	8	10	To lower Size from 3 to 2 gives you 4 points.
5	8 (21)	10	12	
6	16 (37)	18	20	

Friends

- A Tight relationship increases the cost by +1. • A Loose relationship reduces it by -1.
- Allies: 1 + Level
- Mentor: 2 + Level
- Companions: 3 + Level, max 4
- Groups: 3 + Level

Enemies

- A Bitter Enemy gives you +1 Experience
- A Casual Enemy gives you -1 Experience
- A single Enemy gives you his or her level + 1 Experience
- A Group Enemy gives you their level + 3 Experience

Dependants

- A Total Dependant gives you +1 Experience
- A Minor Dependant gives you -1 Experience
- A Dependant gives you 4 Experience, minus his or her level (which cannot be more than 2).

Resources

- All Resources cost 1 Experience per point.

Mana

- A new Mana Source costs 4 points, and starts at level 1.
- Increasing an old Mana Source 1 level costs the current level.



MYTHIC CYBERPUNK ROLEPLAYING

JEREMY PATRICK STRANDBERG

Patterns

Rules and Game Mechanics

Rules of the Game

So you've got this character... now what?

You're gonna wanna do stuff, right? Tie your shoes. Pick a lock. Size up an opponent. Slip a mickey into his drink. Make him feel like a gutless coward with three inches of backbone. Put a bullet in his head. You know. *Stuff*.

When you declare that you're doing something, in character, you've got a whole range of possible results. Tying your shoes isn't a big deal, and neither is getting up and taking a shower. But picking a lock—that's iffy. So is bluffing your way into a secure building, or hiding from a Peace Officer. That's where the rules come in to play.

Remember, though, that the rules are a *tool*. They are *not* an authority. The only authority in a role-playing game is the GM and her responsibility to guide you through a good story. She's the boss, and if she thinks that a particular rule (or all the rules) get in the way of a particular part of the story, then it's scrapped. The GM knows more about what's going on, so telling her "hey, Unseelie can't use Benediction, it says so in the book!" isn't going to get you anywhere but into her bad graces. So drop it. It slows down play, puts everyone in a bad mood, and, worst of all, removes the emphasis from the story. If you've got a problem with the GM's decision, write it down, and talk to her about it after the game is over. If it's a legitimate gripe, she'll probably appreciate your constructive criticism and respond accordingly. If it's a whiny little nit-picking detail that emphasizes your immaturity, you won't make a fool out of yourself in front of the entire group.

End soap-box ranting.

Quick n' Dirty: Throughout this book, you'll find this icon in the margin next to particular rules. This is the Quick n' Dirty (Q&D) marker, and it highlights ways to make the game system work faster and more efficiently. Usually, Q&D rules involve sacrificing a bit of accuracy and tension for speed of play, usually by relying on averages rather than actual rolls. Always remember that Q&Ds are *especially* optional, and are meant to be used or ignored as needed during a given game session. They're especially useful in combat, when you've got a horde of faceless goons that are getting in your way and you don't really care how healthy they are once you're done with them.

The Basics

For the most part, you're going to be doing things that are well within your capabilities. Open a door. Light a cigarette. Eat your food. Use a screwdriver. In these situations, unless they involve some pretty extraordinary circumstances (the door weighs a good hundred kilos, your food is running away from you, etc.), don't bother with game mechanics or dice rolls. You might, however, use your Traits to determine *how* you do something. For example, if you had a Dexterity of 2 and no Etiquette, you'd probably eat with your fingers and get food all over your mouth and clothes. These details are intended for the sake of role-playing and greater suspension of disbelief; they are not rules or modifiers in any way.

OK, so simple and really routine stuff is easy. No rolls, no rules. It's when you try the tricky stuff that things get chancy.

Any action you declare that isn't insipidly simple or outright impossible requires you to examine your Traits and make an appropriate roll. To do so, follow this easy three-step guide:

What are you doing? Are you using a Skill, like Smallarms or Subterfuge? Or are you calling upon a Knowledge, like Chemistry or Inquisition Lore? Or are you using something completely different, like a Special Ability or a Contact group? The Trait that you are using determines *the type of die* that you will roll. If you have a 0 in the Trait, you will roll d2s; each level increases the die type by one step, up to d20s at level 6. Confused? Look at the chart.

What Dice Do I Roll?	
<u>Trait Level</u>	<u>Die Type</u>
0	d2
1	d4
2	d6
3	d8
4	d10
5	d12
6	d20

Note the jump between level 5 and level 6. Characters with level 6 in a Trait are among the best that have ever lived. They're the masters of the fields. Miyamoto Musashi in Fencing, Harry Houdini in Escape, Stephen Hawking in Physics, J. D. Rockefeller in Corporate Contacts... you get the idea. >>>

What resources are you drawing upon? In other words, what is the *base* of the roll? If you're in a knife fight, you're drawing upon your Dexterity. If you're trying to stare down a homeboy, you're drawing upon your Will. And if you're pulling strings and trying to get the latest word from the streets, you're drawing upon your Markers. The Trait that you draw upon is called the *base* of the roll. It determines *how many dice you roll*. For example, if I was making a Wits based Awareness roll (usually denoted as Wits/Awareness) and I had a Wits of 4 and an Awareness of 3 (d8s), I would roll 4d8.

Roll and Compare. So, now that you know what you're rolling, grab the dice, shake, and let 'em fly. Add up the dice, and the total is your roll. Compare your roll to the Difficulty (which is either set by the GM or determined by another character's roll). If you roll higher than the Diff, you succeed. If you roll lower than the Diff, you fail. If you tie, you might succeed a little but you probably got some inconclusive result.

Pretty simple, right? If you can handle this basic principle, you've got most of the game down. Everything else is built on this core system.

Difficulties

OK, so you're probably thinking "sure, sounds simple, but what do I compare my rolls to?" Good question. Important question, too. Since role-playing isn't really anything but a group hallucination, it's important that everyone's hallucination works on roughly the same scale.

If you're working against an inanimate force (like the weight of a rock or the security system on a door), the GM will assign a Difficulty based on, well, how difficult it is. The following scale is a helpful guide:

<u>Diff</u>	<u>Type of Task</u>
4	Simple. Almost anyone could pull it off. Usually not worth rolling.
6	Easy. Anyone could do this with some practice.
9	Routine. Not too tough, but requires experience in the area.
12	Tricky. It usually takes at least some proficiency or talent to pull off.
15	Tough. In order to succeed regularly, you need both experience and talent.
18	Hard. Even the highly skilled or knowledgeable have it rough.
24	Bloody Hard. Only experts or naturals regularly attempt feats like this.
30	Absurd. Even the best experts are wary of such feats.
40	Insane. Only masters regularly attempt such feats.
50	Nigh Impossible. Even masters think twice about feats like this.
75	Legendary. Only true heroes, villains, or deities need apply.

Obviously, this scale is somewhat arbitrary. It'll make more sense as you read and encounter more specific examples.

If you're rolling against an animate force, like another character or a computer-controlled targeting system, then things are a little different. Both sides make a roll, and compare the results to the other side's roll. In other words, your roll becomes the Difficulty for your opponent, and your opponent's roll becomes your Difficulty. From there, things work the same as above. If you roll higher than your opponent, you succeed and he fails. Still simple, right? This type of roll is called an *Opposed Roll*.

Q&D—Averages: Sometimes you don't want to roll, either for effect or because it gets in the way of role-playing. In this case, you can figure the statistic average of your roll and compare that to the Diff. Yeah, yeah, I know, players mystically become mathematical idiots during a game. That's why we've including this handy-dandy chart. Find your die type across the top, the number of dice on the side, cross reference it, and *presto!* you've got your average. If you've got a modifier to the roll (like +2), then add it straight to the average. I know, I know. Charts are bad. But it's one chart. And it's *really* easy to use. Trust me.

		Die Type						
		d2	d4	d6	d8	d10	d12	d20
Number of Dice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	11
	2	3	5	7	9	11	13	21
	3	5	8	11	14	17	20	32
	4	6	10	14	18	22	26	42
	5	8	13	18	23	28	33	53
	6	9	15	21	27	33	39	63
	7	11	18	25	32	39	46	74
	8	12	20	28	36	44	52	84
	9	14	23	32	41	50	59	95
	10	15	25	35	45	55	65	105

Another good place to use Averages is for faceless NPCs. In their descriptions, most NPCs will include the average rolls for important things like Attack, Defense, Saves, Awareness, Estimate People, etc. When you don't want to bother making rolls for them, use the averages.

Success and Failure Scores

Contrary to what most major religions would have us believe, the world is not easily divided into black and white. "Success" and "Failure" is an arbitrary dichotomy, even if it is a useful one. There are times when you'll need to know *how* well you Succeed, not just whether or not you do. To do so, subtract the Difficulty from your roll. The result is called your Success Score. The higher your Success Score, the more dramatic and complete your victory. This works the other way, too. If you fail, subtract your roll from the Diff. This is called your Failure Score, and the higher it is the more you've screwed up.

In general, a Success or Failure Score of 0-5 is minimal. You either just made it or just missed it. A Score of 6-10 is standard. You've solidly succeeded or definitely failed, but with no additional benefits or complications. A score of 11-15 means an exceptional success or failure. You've accomplished more than you expected or you've caused more damage than good. A score above 16 is critical; it is success well beyond what was necessary (resulting in some added benefit) or a failure you could never have predicted (resulting in some serious harm).

Normally, your Success or Failure Score will be used primarily as a gauge. However, some of the systems presented in this game ask you to use these scores to determine a specific result. For example, in combat, you usually add your Success Score to your Damage Bonus to determine how much you hurt your opponent. Likewise, in Melee, if your Success Score is 6 or more, then you'll get entirely different results than if it's 5 or lower.

Types of Rolls

So you've got a handle on all that, right? Not too complicated for you? Good. Let's move on. The rules above describe straightforward, complication-free rolls. But when in life are things straightforward and free of complications? About as often as someone stops you on the street and hands you a twenty dollar bill.

To deal with the various complications and special circumstances that life presents, you can use any or all of the following types of rolls:

Routine Rolls: You already know about these. Determine the base and the die type, roll, and compare. No surprises.

Dramatic Rolls: You're going to be telling a story, and what good's a story without a little drama to liven things up? Whenever you're doing something stressful, critical, or otherwise dramatic, your rolls will be Dramatic. This means you roll the Drama Die, a 12-sided die that you can tell apart from the others (by color, when you roll it, etc.). **The Drama Die is not added to your roll.** Instead, you check to see if it came up a "1" or a "12."

If it came up a 1, then you've suffered from some sort of Misfortune, regardless of your Success or Failure. A Misfortune can be almost anything, but it's always bad. Your gun could jam, your rope might start to fray on the cliff face, your keys could fall out of your pocket as you dive for cover, or the dead bad guy might spin and fall onto the "RELEASE AIRLOCK" switch. Depending on your Success or Failure Score, Misfortunes can be anything from embarrassing or annoying to outright deadly.

If the Drama Die came up a 12, then you've gotten lucky and scored a Fortune. Like a Misfortune, this can be anything, but, regardless of your Success or Failure, it means something's gone your way. Your punch could send the opponent falling over a railing, or you could drive past some railroad tracks just as the gate lowers and cuts off your pursuers. Depending on your Success or Failure Score, a Fortune can range from funny or stylish to a total lifesaver.

Sometimes, of course, you'll be doing things that are a little chancier than your usual Dramatic roll (spraying with two submachine guns from the back of a speeding boat in choppy water, for example). In such cases, the GM will tell you that you've got more (or sometimes less)

Misfortune numbers. If you've got +1 Misfortune, then a roll of 1 *or* 2 on the Drama Die results in a Misfortune. If you've got +2 Misfortunes, then a roll of 1, 2, or 3 indicates bad luck. This works for Fortunes, too (though much less often). If you're at +1 Fortune, an 11 or 12 denotes good luck, and so on down the line.

Fortunes and Misfortunes may also be reduced, usually because of extra caution or a technical fix. For example, a smartgun interface gives you -1 Misfortune, because you're more aware of things like ammo level, weapon heat, range, etc. A negative modifier to either your Fortunes or Misfortunes makes it less likely for these events to happen. If you've got a -1 Misfortune bonus, and you've currently got 2 Misfortunes (a 1 or a 2), then you go back down to 1 Misfortune (on a 1 only). The same works for Fortunes. These negative modifiers cannot, however, totally negate Fate's intervention. You may never have less than 1 Fortune and 1 Misfortune. That is, **a 1 on the Drama Die always indicates a Misfortune, while a 12 always indicates a Fortune.**

Opposed Rolls: You've already been introduced to Opposed Rolls—they're the ones in which two (or more) active agents roll. You compare them and determine who won. Often, an Opposed Roll will be denoted as "your Wits/Awareness vs. his Dex/Stealth." Opposed rolls can be Dramatic, Extended, or any other type of roll.

Extended Rolls: Sometimes one roll just isn't good enough to resolve what you're trying to do. For purposes of realism or, more often, dramatic tension, your GM will have you make an Extended roll. This means that you make a roll every so often (every round, few minutes, hours, weeks, etc.) and try to accumulate enough of a Success Score to finish the job. You add your Success Score from each roll together until you've beaten the goal, or until you fail and suffer some sort of consequence. Usually, the consequence is nothing more than you subtracting your Failure Score from your accumulated Success Score, with a negative Success Score indicating that you've totally screwed up and now have no chance for success. Some Extended rolls might have harsher consequences. For example, when you're trying to bypass an electronic security system, a failed roll might not only decrease your total Success Score, but also increase the Difficulty by +12 and set off numerous alarms.

Extended rolls are very useful to increase tension, especially in combat. For example, you've got to break into the car and jump start it while your companions hold off the horde of goblins. Or, you've got to break through the sorcerer's defenses before he can finish summoning the Greater Demon. When GMing such encounters, be sure to make every roll Dramatic, and feel free to make Fortunes and Misfortunes especially grandiose. Your players will appreciate it. Really.

Notations

OK, so let's review.

- A "Wits/Awareness roll" means a Wits based Awareness roll. Your Awareness score determines what type of dice you roll, and your Wits determines how many.
- A "Wits/Awareness roll vs. 15" means that you're making the same roll as above, with a set Difficulty of 15. If you roll higher than 15, you succeed.

- A “Wits/Awareness vs. Dex/Stealth roll” means that you’re rolling your Wits/Awareness and comparing it to your opponent’s Dexterity based Stealth. If you roll higher, you notice your stalker. Otherwise, she stays hidden.
- A “Dramatic Dex/Athletics rolls vs. 24” means you roll Dexterity based Athletics, and compare the total to 24. You must also roll a Drama Die and check for a Fortune or Misfortune.
- An “extended Int/Research roll vs. 15/10” means that you make an Extended Intelligence based Research roll. The Difficulty for each roll is 15, and you need to accumulate a Success Score of 10 to complete the task.

Examples

- You’re in a rural shantytown investigating strange disappearances. You discover evidence that a local cult has been kidnapping people and brainwashing them. Roll Charisma/Leadership vs. 12 to get a town posse together. (*“Get a rope.”*)
- You’re traveling through the barrens when you find a symbol of a bird wearing a hat with an “X” through it. Roll Int/Area Lore to determine if you know what it means.
- You pull a bootlegger and face off with the other car. You rev the engine, flip on your brights, and peel out into a game of chicken. Make an opposed Will/Driving roll. If you get a Success Score greater than the other driver’s current Edge, you win decisively. If your Success Score isn’t that high, you both pull off at the same time. If you tie, you crash into each other. Stupid.
- An absolutely gorgeous nomad has been making eye contact with you all night. Roll Emp/Estimate People to see if she’s actually interested in you, if she thinks you’re a mark, or if you just look like someone she once crossed. The GM probably won’t tell you the Diff, but it might be 12, her Attr/Subterfuge, or her Cha/Etiquette.
- You’re negotiating with an Unseelie when you notice that your partner seems to be falling under his sway. You attempt to snap him out of it by rolling a Cha/Leadership roll vs. 15. If you succeed, your partner may make a new Mental Save, with your Success Score as a bonus.
- You’re sneaking through the sewers when you stumble across a dead body. Make an Int/Medicine roll vs. 18 to estimate cause and time of death.
- You’re impersonating an orchestra conductor when someone at the party asks you your opinion on Schenkerian analysis and Beethoven’s 9th. Do you have any idea what she’s talking about? Roll Int/Music vs. 18 to see if you know. If you don’t, roll Cha/Subterfuge vs. 18 to bluff your way out of it.

- You're sick and staying in a Hispanic shantytown when the natives start talking about bringing in a *curandero*. Do you know what they're talking about? Roll Int/Cultures vs. 12 or Int/Occultism vs. 15 to find out.
- You're playing cards in the local dive. You've got a pair of twos, and your opponent just raised you \$10. You decide to bluff him. Roll Cha/Gaming against his Wits/Gaming or Emp/Gaming.
- You stand up in the middle of a firefight to unload with your sub-mac. You pull the trigger and nothing happens, so you duck back under cover and investigate your weapon. A Wits/Weapons Tech roll of 9 or better will tell you that it jammed, and an extended Tech/Weapons Tech roll vs. 9/10 is required to fix the problem. Good luck.
- You're in a small house, pinned down by bullet fire. You're surrounded, as far as you can tell. Is there any way into the sewer system from here? Roll Int/Architecture vs. 12.
- You're stalking an agent through an active automated factory. Make a Dex/Stealth roll at +6 (for the noise and distractions) vs. her Wits/Awareness. Your roll is at +1 Misfortune, however, since you're concentrating on your target and not on the swinging robotic arms and plumbing sparks.
- You try to leap across the street to another rooftop in an attempt to escape a bunch of CorpSec goons. Unbeknownst to you, the next building has been condemned and its roof is less than stable. Roll MA/Athletics vs. 15, with +3 Misfortunes for the weak roof. If your Success Score is 5 or less, you hit the roof and roll. If your Success Score is 6 or higher, you hit the roof running. If you fail, but with a Failure Score of 5 or less, then you manage to grab on to the edge. Now you've gotta pull yourself up before they unload on you with their autoshotguns.
- You walk in to your apartment to find your roommate on the floor, not breathing. You call 911 and attempt to perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Roll Tech/Medicine vs. 15.
- An apparently raving psychotic approaches you on the street and starts rambling about psychedelic landscapes and strange creatures. Do you recognize the place he describes as one of the spirit Realms? Roll Int/Cosmology vs. 18.
- You need to install a refrigerator in the trunk of a car, in order to bring back biological "samples." It's a hack job, so roll Tech/Basic Tech vs. 24 to see if you can do it.
- While following some floating balls of light, you've managed to get lost in a Louisiana bayou at night. Make a Wits/Survival roll vs. 15 to find a safe place to sleep for the night. Then make an extended Int/Survival roll vs. 12/10 to find your way out of the bayou come daylight.
- A local presents you with a photograph of a large, bat-winged creature. Is it a fake? Roll Int/AV Tech vs. 15 or Int/Investigation vs. 24 to find out.

- You've gotten yourself into a drinking match with a workganger. You each make Size/Stamina rolls (with bonuses for cybernetics or life history), starting at 3 and increasing by 3 for each drink. The first one to fail a roll loses. Note that regardless of who wins, both sides will probably end up plastered.
- You're looking for a computer chip hidden in someone's room. Make an Int/Investigation roll vs. 18 to find it. Also, make a Wits/Investigation vs. 15 roll to see if you notice that someone else has been looking for something, too.
- You notice you're being followed by a shady character, so you try to lose her in the crowded afternoon foot traffic. Both of you make a Wits/Streetwise roll. If you get a Success Score greater than 5, you're sure you've lost her. If you get a score greater than 10, you can start following her if you want to.

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Contacts

Let's face it—even in an information age, it's not what you know, it's who you know. Or, as the case may be, it's what you know about who. But that's besides the point. What we're interested in right now are Contacts.

Contacts are a different type of Trait, like Attributes or Abilities. They're divided up into different Contact Groups, like Underworld, Media, or Art Crowd, and each one has its own level. As usual, they go from level 0 (virtually no Contacts) to level 6 (you know *everybody*), and the higher your Contact level, the bigger the die-type you roll when using them.

Now, I can hear all you *akulas* out there drumming your fingers on your flak jackets. "Who the hell cares about Contacts?" you're asking. "I just blow stuff up."

Spoken like a true meat-head, *cabrón*. So you blow stuff up. Big freakin' deal. The truth is, even the best merc doesn't get paid if he don't got the connections. Your Contacts tell you not only who you know, but who knows you. You maybe able to pop a suit in the head a full klick out, but if nobody *knows* that, not too many people gonna be payin' you for it, neh?

'Course, landing a job's just the half of it. The more Contacts you have, and thus the more people that know you, the harder it is for someone to take you out. For starters, you can put the word out to watch your back. You can put your ear to the rumor mill and maybe hear if someone's lookin' your way. If someone *is* coming after you, you can call in the Markers and get a bit of protection. And if that doesn't work, there's a certain amount of safety from being in plain sight. If you're a minor celebrity, the Inquisition can't just take from your bed in the middle of the night.

They'll have to do something sneakier, like dropping a cyberpsycho into your office and having the media wax indignant about the state of public security.

But I digress.

Game Terms

Contacts: A Trait, much like Abilities, which determines how well connected you are in a given social scene. They are divided into Contact Groups, such as Resistance, Underworld, or Corporate.

Markers: An abstract record of how many favors are owed to you or how many favors you owe. They may be positive or negative.

Favors: When you use your Contacts to get information or to get someone else to do something.

Damage Control: A social roll, like Cha/Subterfuge or Int/Bureaucracy, which you use to retain your Markers after asking for a favor.

Bakeesh: A gift, bribe, or fee that you pay to reduce the number of Markers lost after an unsuccessful Damage Control roll.

Favors

In addition to the “constant” bonuses that come with knowing a lot of people, Contacts have a few other uses which will probably come more directly into play. For instance, Contacts are great for gathering rumors and information about a particular person, place, or thing. Likewise, they’re a good way to start rumors, true or not. You can also use them land jobs, get funding for particular projects, get invited to parties, ruin people’s reputations, or start wars. Getting curious?

For the sake of reference, we’ll refer to these little benefits as Favors. This isn’t always an accurate term; sometimes you won’t be asking for favors, you’ll just be giving out commands. But just bear with me—whenever I say “Favor,” I mean using a Contact Group to find something out or to get something done. How you go about it is up to you.

Getting Favors involves two rolls. The first is a Contacts roll, based on the number of Markers you bid (more on that later). The second is a Damage Control roll, to determine how many Markers you end up losing when all is said and done. First, we’ll talk about the Contacts roll.

When you ask for a favor, you roll the appropriate Contact Group. For example, if I were trying to yank a news story before it was published, you’d make a Media roll. If you were trying to hire a hit man, you’d make an Underworld roll. Use whatever makes sense, right?

The bigger the Favor being asked for, the higher the Difficulty. Picking up some local rumors will only be a Diff of 4, for example, but starting a war is gonna be somewhere around 50 or even 75. Use the following chart as a guide to determining the Difficulty of a given Favor:

<u>Diff</u>	<u>Favor</u>
4	Get common rumors or well-known information about a particular subject.
6	Get a recommendation for an appropriate person for a particular legitimate job. Uncover slightly “insider” information.
9	Get specific and useful information on a particular not-so-touchy topic. Get put “in the loop” on an ongoing story. Start a minor and harmless rumor. Get someone to do a relatively mundane task.
12	Acquire 1 or 2 points of Resources (not Markers, <i>chimpira</i>). Borrow up to 5 points of Resources. Get general information on a somewhat secretive or private topic.
15	Have a particular person hired for or assigned to a particular job. Redirect a fair amount of information or resources. Get someone to perform a task of questionable legality requiring quite a bit of effort. Start a major rumor.
18	Assign an experienced and/or skilled team to specific project. Command up to 10 points of Resources (no Markers), or obtain 5 points. Cover up public but not terribly important information. Get detailed information on a sensitive topic. Have a level 1 or 2 Archetype with a bad reputation killed. Ruin or improve the reputation and/or job of a level 1 or 2 Archetype.
24	Control up to 20 points of Resources (not Markers), or get 10. Ruin or improve the reputation and/or job of a level 3 or 4 Archetype. Call a hit on just about any given level 1 or 2 Archetype. Cover up important and public information. Get access to sensitive data, such as security blueprints or cutting edge R&D developments.
30	Direct up to 50 points of Resources (not Markers), or get 25. Call in a hit on a level 3 or 4 Archetype. Gain access to extremely sensitive data, such as black ops orders, known product flaws, or military atrocities. Cover up or create a fairly important scandal.
40	Command extensive resources, involving millions of dollars and/or dozens of people. Gain access to classified information. Call an assassination attempt on a very public and influential individual (level 5).
50	Mobilize or cancel impressive amounts of resources, ranging in the billions of dollars and/or hundreds of people. Alter major institutions, like the board of directors on a megacorporation. Order a level 6 individual to be assassinated.

The base of the roll, that is, the number of dice you get, automatically starts at 1. That means that without risking anything, you automatically roll one die. However, unless you're a major player going after a really minor Favor, you're gonna want a little more than that. That's where Markers come in.

Rolling for Favors: A Summary

1. Determine Contact Group.
2. Determine the Difficulty of the Favor.
3. Bid Markers.
4. Make your Contacts roll. The die type is determined by your Contacts level. You always roll one die, plus an additional die for every Marker you bid.
5. Regardless of success, make a Damage Control roll. The Difficulty of the Damage Control roll is the Diff of the Favor, +10.
7. For every 5 points of your Failure Score, you lose 1 Marker. You cannot lose more Markers than you bid.
8. Bakeesh if desired.

Markers

Remember the time that Jimmy Wang was short on cash and you helped him out? Or when Alexis Trotter needed a place to lay low for a few weeks so she crashed with you? Well, little favors like that add up, becoming what are commonly referred to as Markers.

Markers are a special type of Resource, like Gear or Lifestyle. Unlike the others, they are not converted into actual goods or services at the beginning of play. Rather, you keep a running total throughout the Series. Think of Markers as a social bank account. They represent the accumulated favors, brownie points, authority, influence, and reputation you have in a given Contact Group.

'Course, this is all assuming that you're in good standing. More often than you'd like, you'll find yourself owing out more than is owed in. That is, sometimes you'll have negative Markers. This isn't usually a bid deal, as long as you don't push it.

Anyway, whenever you ask for a Favor, you have the opportunity to bid Markers. For every Marker you bid, you gain an extra die on your Contacts roll. However, you risk losing as many Markers as you bid, so be careful. Note: you **can** bid more Markers than you have. In fact, this will often be required to get anything done. There is a limit, though. You can never bid more Markers for a given Contact roll than the total of your Contact level and your Charisma.

Time and Bidding Markers

How long it takes to call in a favor is always dependent on the GM and needs of the story. However, the GM can use the number of Markers that you bid as a rough guide to how long it takes you to get something accomplished.

As long as you're not bidding more Markers than you have, it should only take a few phone calls or maybe meeting someone for a drink to get what you need. However, if you're bidding more Markers than you have, it might take considerably longer. This is

because you've got to use the connections you've already got to find someone who might be able or willing to help you. That person may in turn schluff you off to someone else, who might give you another name. In other words, when you're bidding more Markers than you have, you've got to do more legwork.

Another reason why it takes longer to use more Markers is because you'll probably have to be a little more "active" in your Damage Control. When you're asking the Godfather for a loan of \$20,000, most people try to be as inoffensive as possible.

All that groveling takes time, *cabrón*.

So, say you've got Media Contacts of 3 and 2 Media Markers. You want to bury a story about a break-in on a local doctor's office (Diff 18), so you make some phone calls and bid 4 Markers (my Media Contacts are 3 and so is my Charisma, so I could theoretically bid as many as 6). I now have a roll of 5d8 (d8s from level 3 Contacts, 1 die for the base, and 4 extras for the Markers). I get a 19. I just barely made it, so it's a good thing that I bid those 4 Markers. However, I now still stand to lose them.

Damage Control

When you're asking for favors, you're putting a lot on the line. Which means that you're going to want to put up a good front and keep your name clear. That's where Damage Control comes in.

A Damage Control roll is a social Ability roll, like Cha/Subterfuge or Int/Bureaucracy. The Difficulty of this roll is equal to the Difficulty of the Contact roll, +10. If you fail your Damage Control roll, then people are calling you on your requests, usually with statements like "OK, but you owe me one." In other words, you lose Markers. You lose one Marker for every 5 points of your Failure Score, but you can only lose as many Markers as you bid.

So, say I'm rolling Damage Control for that cover-up. The Difficulty of the Contact roll was 18, so my Damage Control will be against 28 (18+10). I roll Cha/Subterfuge, since I'm being kinda weasely. I've got 3 in both Charisma and Subterfuge, so I roll 3d8 against 28. I get an 17, which means I've got a Failure Score of 11. I therefore lose 3 Markers, leaving me at -1 Media Markers. Whoops.

Another use for the Damage Control roll is to determine how sneaky you were and whether or not the favor can be traced back to you. If you only lose 1 or 2 Markers, then you're not blatantly obvious but if someone does a little legwork your name will come up. If you lose 3 or 4 Markers, then rumors start to spread that you were behind something or that you were asking a lot of questions. If you lose 5 or more Markers, then your favor becomes common knowledge.

On the other hand, if you are successful, it becomes harder to trace your influence. If your Success Score is from 5 to 15, then you've covered your tracks quite well. Your name won't come up unless someone really does their homework. If your Success Score is 16 or more, then you've totally covered your tracks, and almost nothing exists to link you to the Favor.

Of course, if you succeed at your Damage Control roll, you don't lose any Markers. Which means that people with good social skills can away with a lot more than you llamas with a 2 Charisma and the table manners of a baboon.

Maybe Bureaucracy isn't such a stupid Skill after all, neh?

Bakeesh

Let's face it; sometimes you're going to end up losing more Markers than you're willing to spend. After all, nobody wants to be at -5 Markers with the Inquisition.

That's where bakeesh comes into play. The term is an Anglicization of the Arabic *baksheesh*, which means a gift, bribe, or payment. It's not necessarily sinister or corrupt—lots of things that are called bakeesh are legitimate costs of doing business. In general, the term represents the unofficial economy of gifts, tips, and “grease” that keeps things running.

So, when you've screwed a Damage Control roll, you can choose to bakeesh. To do so, you spend an appropriate type of Resources for each Marker that you don't want to lose. For example, if you ordered a hit on your ex-lover and ended up short on Markers, you'd probably end up bakeeshing with cash. If you made a deal with some Seelie and came up short, you'd probably spend Crude Mojo or something like that.

The number of Resources that you need to spend to keep each Marker is based on the Difficulty of your Damage Control roll. The higher the Diff, the more it costs for each Marker:

Damage Control Difficulty	<u>Resources</u>
9 or less	\$25-100 per Marker
10-19	1 Resource per Marker
20-25	2 Resources per Marker
26-28	3 Resources per Marker
29-34	4 Resources per Marker
35-40	5 Resources per Marker
41-50	7 Resources per Marker
51-60	9 Resources per Marker
61+	12 Resources per Marker

You choose to bakeesh after you've made your Damage Control roll and you know how many Markers you're going to lose. So, if I requisitioned the corporate jet for the weekend (Diff 18), my Damage Control would be an Int/Bureaucracy roll vs. 28. Say I screw up an roll a 13, costing me 3 Markers. Rather than drop into serious corporate debt, I could decide to pick up some of the tab myself, paying 3 Resources for each Marker I want to save. I've got an extra \$6,000 in my credit account, so I bill myself for a good chunk of the flight and negate 2 Markers, leaving me with only -1 Marker for the whole transaction.

Negative Markers

Now, the sharper yokies out there have already started asking: “if I can still use my Contacts when I’m at negative Markers, what’s the big deal about being in debt?”

Good question. And to a certain extent, it’s a good question. As long as it’s not out of control, a little debt isn’t that bad. But it does carry a few problems. For starters, well, you’re in debt. If someone you owe comes to you for a favor, then you bloody well better do it. Failure to honor your debts can lead to the loss of more Markers; it could even lead to something worse, like a Bad Reputation or even being Cut Off (see below).

Also, for every negative Marker you have in a Contact Group, all of your Favors are at +2 Difficulty. Yes, this means that your Damage Control rolls will also be tougher. The rich get richer, etc. Sucks, huh?

The GM is also perfectly justified in using your negative Markers to slow your advancement. If she decides it’s appropriate, she can force you to spend your downtime paying off debts by gaining Markers.

Now really, those things aren’t bad. It’s all part of biz, right? Right. The problem comes when you get a little *too* in debt.

In each Contact Group, you can safely “absorb” a number of negative Markers equal to your Charisma. As long as you’re below this threshold, you only have to worry about the above hindrances. However, once you drop past this mark, things start getting sticky. All of your Damage Control rolls become Dramatic, with an extra Misfortune for each negative Marker you have over your Charisma. So, if I had a Charisma of 3 and -5 Blue Collar Markers, then my Damage Control rolls would be Dramatic with +2 Misfortunes.

If you do get a Misfortune on such a Damage Control roll, bad stuff happens. The exact results depend on how far in debt you are, the Difficulty of the Favor, existing conditions like Good or Bad Reputations, and, most importantly, the whims of your GM. A number of possibilities include:

Bad Reputation: This is the most likely result, especially for your first “offense.” Basically, enough people get sick of you asking for help that they spread the word. If you’ve got a Good Reputation, it becomes tarnished—the GM decides if you lose it entirely or if it merely becomes less effective (-2 to Damage Control rolls instead of -4). If you have no reputation, or if you’ve got a Good Rep and a particularly nasty GM, you might end up with a Bad Reputation, which makes all future Damage Control rolls at +4 Difficulty. If you’ve already got a Bad Reputation, your GM could make it worse, imposing a +6 or even +8 Diff penalty on future Damage Control rolls. Usually, though, you’ll end up with something more tangible.

Violence: Depending on the Contact Group, a Misfortune might result in some attempted violence on you, your property, or someone close to you. This includes sending someone to break your leg, having your car blown up or totaled, having your shop ransacked, or even having your brother killed. The Underworld is the most likely

group to use this tactic, but Blue Collar, Barrens, Wilderness, Resistance, Military, or even Corporate or Political Contacts might also resort to violence. You may be able to evade or thwart this Misfortune, but that'll probably end up getting you in even more trouble.

Enemy: Sometimes your pauper's ways will piss someone off enough that they take it personally. Thus, you end up with an Enemy, either an individual or a Group. This may also result from you thwarting an attempt at Violence, above.

Set Up: Sometimes no one will take any direct action against you, but rather start a plot of some sort to get you in trouble. This could involve framing you for a crime, catching you at some nefarious deed, or merely having people continuously harass you. Depending on who's setting you up, it could be anything from the trivial to the deadly. GMs should try to be especially creative here.

Cut Off: If you're in debt long enough or big enough, sometimes you'll just be out and out Cut Off. Basically, this means that you lose an official status that you might have had. In other words, you might be fired, demoted, blackballed, ostracized, or otherwise kicked out of the loop. Usually, when you're Cut Off you don't actually lose any Contacts. You just have a +10 Difficulty to all your Favors rolls (which also increases your Damage Control rolls). You can eventually undo this Misfortune, but it takes a lot of work.

Exiled: Beyond being Cut Off, being Exiled involves giving you a *really* Bad Reputation in the Contact Group, and having you actively kicked out of the circle. If Exiled, you suffer from all the problems of being Cut Off as well as having a Bad Reputation, but you also are treated with hostility by those that remain within the community. Your GM may also drop your Contacts level by 1.

Hunted or Marked for Death: This is probably the worst you'll ever get. Someone puts a mark on you, either for capture or execution. You're almost certainly Cut Off, and maybe Exiled. But you've definitely got at least one person hunting you. Depending on the circumstances, you might even be a public fugitive. Have a nice life.

Special: Certain Contact Groups will respond in rather unique ways to overgrown debts. Piss someone off in the Media, for example, and you might find yourself in the middle of a scandal. Pushing the envelope with the Inquisition might get you erased or put through Purgatory. Cyberspace Contacts might screw with your credit accounts or medical records, or they just might spam your email to the breaking point. The Fay are probably the most severe, though. Find yourself indebted to a Seelie (or god forbid an Unseelie) and you might find yourself whisked away for an eternity of servitude. And don't even think about what happens when you short-change a Darkling...

Positive Markers

While nowhere nearly as troublesome as negative Markers, too many positive Markers can get you in trouble, too. If you have more Markers than your Charisma, you're a good target for grumbling and petty gossiping. If you have more Markers than your Charisma + Contacts, then some people might be jealous enough to try to undermine your authority. If you have more Markers than your Charisma + Contacts + Total Edge, then someone might just think that it's easier to take you out than it is to let you live with all that influence.

Of course, as with everything, all this is up your GM's discretion.

Ramping (or, Making This System Work for You)

Now, as you smart little yokies have probably already seen some serious potential here. "What's to stop me from using a favor from one Contact Group to get Resources to bakeesh a bigger favor from a different Group?"

Nothin'.

It's what I call "ramping." Say you've got the following Contacts:

Underworld: level 2 with +3 Markers

Corporate: level 3 with +3 Markers

Military: level 4 with +2 Markers

For the sake of example, we'll also say you've got a Charisma of 5 and a Subterfuge of 3. Now, you're obviously fairly well connected. With a 4 in Military Contacts, why don't we say that you're one of the key agents for three or four of the best mercenary groups out there. Let's say that you're also at -5 Inquisition Markers—a very dangerous place to be.

One day, you get a phone call from the Chief Inquisitor of Chicago. It seems that, for reasons you don't need to know, they would like you to arrange the "apprehension" of the CEO of IBM. And it needs to be done quietly.

You start by stopping in on the bar that happens to be the hangout of the local Vice Lords. They owe you quite a bit, so after talking to a few major players you manage to get yourself an "investment" of \$10,000 (10 Resources) from some shady credit accounts (Contact roll Diff of 24, you bid 7 Markers to roll 8d6 for a 27. You have a Damage Control Diff of 34. You roll 5d8 and get a 25, for a Failure Score of 9. You lose 2 Underworld Markers, but still have 1 left.

Now, with that \$10,000 to play with, you call a guy you know at an investment bank. You ask for a small business loan of an additional \$50,000 (50 Resources). The Difficulty is 30, and you've got Corporate Contacts of 3. So, you bid 8 Markers, giving you a roll of 9d8 for a total of 31. Just made it. Now, your Damage Control is against a 40, so you roll your 5d8 for Cha/Subterfuge (you'd probably use Int/Bureaucracy here, but I'm trying to keep things simple). You get an 18, which means you'll be paying out 5 Markers (Failure Score of 22). You'd rather

not go negative, so you decide to bakeesh. Since the Damage Control was against 40, it costs 5 Resources to negate each Marker. You've got 10 Resources to work with (from the Vice Lords), so you spend them all bakeeshing 2 Markers. You end up losing 3 Corporate Markers, leaving you at 0. But now you've got 50 Resources to play with.

So, you pick up the phone and call a few arms dealers you know. Then you call the head of the Maelstrom, a mercenary group known for their high cost and brutally effective techniques. You have them begin planning an extraction of the CEO of IBM Corporation. The Difficulty is 50. You've got d10s, so you bid 9 Markers, giving you a roll of 10d10. Fortunately, you get a 62, so the operation goes off. However, you've now got to deal with a Damage Control roll of 60. You make your Cha/Subterfuge roll of 5d8, getting a lucky roll of 29. However, this still leaves you with a Failure Score of 31, costing you 7 Markers. This would put you at -5 Military Markers, so it's time to bakeesh. At Diff 60, each Marker costs 9 Resources. You've got 50 to play with, so you spend 45 to get rid of 5 Markers. You still lose 2, but you that leaves you with 0 Military Markers and 5 extra Resources.

And the CEO of a major multinational corporation. You hand him over the Inquisition, and the debt is erased. All in a few days work.

Contacts are fun, huh?

Right now, you might be thinking, "great, I just spent 7 Markers to get rid of -5 Marker debt. However, Now, just imagine that you didn't start out at -5 Inquisition Markers. Say you heard through the grapevine that the Chief Inquisition wanted this guy. So you call him, and say "hey, I can do this for you.... What's in it for me?"

Being +5 Inquisition Markers doesn't sound so bad, now does it?

Personal Relations and Contacts

There will be times when you don't have enough Contacts to get something done yourself. When this happens, I suggest checking with your friends. Your Allies, Mentors, Major Contacts, and even Dependents might have better connections than you do, and they just might be willing to use them for you.

Allies, Mentors, and Dependents will generally use whatever connections they have. However, you need to role-play out asking them to do this, which means there's a possibility that they won't help or that they'll misunderstand what you need. In general, though, Loose Allies or Mentors and all Dependents will help you out at least half the time (1-5 on a d10), and will usually be willing to bid up to 4 Markers for you. Standard Allies and Mentors will usually help (1-7 on a d10), and will bid up to 8 Markers, assuming you convince them to. Tight Allies and Mentors will almost always help (1-9 on a d10), and will bid as many Markers as they deem necessary.

Remember, though, that your Allies, Mentors, and Dependents will likely approach you during the game and ask you to do the same for them. Mentors and Dependents are especially fond of doing this.

Major Contacts are a little less user friendly. For the cost of one Marker, they'll use their Contacts and Damage Control rolls to get what you want accomplished. However, *you* have to pay any Markers that they lose. You can still bakeesh, but the cost always comes back to you.

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Magic and Special Abilities

Forget the pointy hats. Forget cloaks and robes and magic wands. Forget broom sticks. And for god's sake forget fireballs.

When we sit down at the gaming table, we bring an awful lot of baggage with us. “*Shamans are all tree-hugging Indians!*” “*Magic is one thing, psionics are another.*” “*We killed the dragon, let's find his magic items!*” “*Science and magic can't work together.*” Or, my personal favorite, “*Cool, a Deck of Many Things...*”

Frag that. Frag all of that. This isn't some high fantasy sword-and-sorcery game with elves frolicking in the woods and pig-nosed orcs raiding from the wilderness. The goal of *Oblivion's Edge* is to present the supernatural in, well, a “realistic” fashion.

That doesn't mean that there are no wizards. This world's got shamans, mages, psychics, tricksters, the faithful, and pretty much everything else. There are dragons out there, but they usually masquerade as humans and horde credit, real estate, and favors more than gold and magic swords. There are high faeries that play the games of corporate executives, but don't call them elves or you'll end up six inches tall and herding fireflies for the next thousand years. Seelie is the proper term, thank you very much, and I suggest you remember that.

Likewise, this is no place for flash magic. Think hard—did Merlin ever throw a fireball? Nope. For that matter, neither did Gandalf. And if they didn't need to, why should you? Besides, let's think about this rationally. If you want to kill someone, you can:

- a) Focus lots of cosmic energy into a blast of magical fury, exhausting yourself in the process.
- b) Capture him and put him in an overly complicated and easily escapable death trap.
- c) Get a gun. Shoot him.

If you answered “c,” then congratulations, you might survive a trip to the local KwikiMart. In the amount of time that it would probably take for you to conjure up a magic missile or some other such nonsense, anyone that's ever even *seen* a gun could shoot you four or five times.

Now *that*'ll break your concentration.

One more thing—magic isn't some sort of technology, and it isn't used like that. While corporations might occasionally hire a geomancer or even keep an alchemist on salary, they do *not* have “combat mages,” even on their black ops teams. You can't go to Harvard and study to be a mage, and people don't use magic to get running water or light their homes. Good ol' fashioned scientific materialism still takes care of most of that.

Just because magic isn't technology, though, doesn't mean that the two don't get along. Some technologies actually breed magic—computer networks, cities, space stations, etc. Systems like these are usually so complex and interconnected that they're every bit as animate as a forest or jungle. Kinda like your sock drawer. OK, fine, *my* sock drawer. But anyway, it's “animate” places like this that magic thrives in, so why wouldn't Knock work in cyberspace?

Now, some of you are gonna be getting all antsy over my terminology. “*This is religion, not magic!*” or “*how does magic interact with psionics?*” Maalesh. I’ve decided to use a single system to describe pretty much everything that occurs outside of mainstream scientific understanding. This means that, *in game terms*, “magic” includes shamanism, faith healing, psychic activity, miracles, prophecy, ritual magick, witchcraft, hexes, and even fringe science. Remember, that’s *in game terms*. Characters themselves will probably make distinctions, but other than Techniques, there’s no real difference in game mechanics between a mage casting a ward spell and a devout Muslim calling on Allah for protection. If you and your GM decide to add an additional level of detail to the game, be my guest. But don’t complain to me when the Complexity Beast sneaks up and bites your head off.

You have been warned.

Remember, these rules are suggestions, not laws. As the GM, it’s your right and responsibility to choose which suggestions to use and which ones to discard. If you think that alchemists are too big of a pain in the rear, then don’t allow them.

But before you go chucking rules out, remember that they’re designed to be as “realistic” as possible. Getting rid of something, like alchemists, might make the world feel a little odd. But, hey, it’s your game, your players, and their suspension of disbelief. So if they don’t mind and you don’t mind, have at it.

Special Abilities

Most of the supernatural powers that you’ll use or encounter are described by Special Abilities. These are a lot like normal Abilities, except that they cover talents and skills that most people have no potential to learn. After all, how many people do you know that can hold up a conversation with rocks? Thought so.

What all this means is that you don’t get to start with Special Abilities, even at level 0. You have to buy them, and your GM has to approve. If you explicitly receive one during your Lifepath (by choosing a Mystic role, for example), then you can assume that she approves. Otherwise, you need a good reason to buy the power. Good reasons include being raised by Good Neighbors or Seelie, being cursed, having a Magical Air, or receiving some sort of cutting edge fringe technology. You can’t just buy a Special Ability cuz you think it’s cool. Well, maybe if you think it’s cool and you slip your GM a twenty.

How much a Special Ability costs is determined by it’s relative power. Animating stone and metal is a much bigger deal than a sixth sense, and it takes a little more time and effort to learn. To reflect this difference in power, Special Abilities are divided into five categories:

Lesser: These are very basic Special Abilities, and almost all of them are extra-sensory in nature, such as Sensitivity or Divination. *Experience Cost: 4*

Minor: These Special Abilities are best described as “neat tricks,” and include powers like Flight, Scrying, or Communion. Though they can pack quite a kick, they’re not as versatile as the more powerful Special Abilities. *Experience Cost: 5*

Moderate: These are the most common Special Abilities, and should be considered the default category. They're quite powerful and usually have a lot of different uses. Hex, Entrancement, Healing, and Warding are Moderate Special Abilities. *Experience Cost: 6*

Major: This category covers most of the "flashy magic," like Animation, Crafting, Metamorphosis, and Evocation. Major Special Abilities are extremely powerful, but they're usually limited by Aspects (see below). *Experience Cost: 7*

Greater: Greater Special Abilities are very rare, since they cost a lot to purchase and even more to use. They generally include the more powerful versions of Major Special Abilities, unlimited by Aspect. *Experience Cost: 8*

The Experience Cost listed with each category is how many Experience you've gotta spend to get the Special Ability at level 0. As with mundane Abilities, level 0 means that you've got the potential, but you're basically inexperienced.

When you purchase a Special Ability, you need to determine the Techniques that you will use with it. Techniques are discussed later.

All right, *sahib*. So you've got this Special Ability. Feelin' pretty chipped, neh? Now, let's talk about how you use it.

Using Special Abilities

The long and the short is that you use Special Abilities just like any other Trait. Determine the Base, determine the die type, roll, compare. Repeat if desired. Easy enough. There are a few things that set them apart from other Traits, though.

First, the mystical Path that you follow—alchemist, shaman, channel, whatever—determines what you need to do in order to use your Special Abilities. A mage needs to learn his spells and rituals, and a shaman has to trance. This serves two purposes. First, it gives your character a little realism and a little life. Second, it keeps you from tossing off magic like bad poetry. I just hate bad poetry.

The steps you need to take to use a Special Ability are called your Techniques. Some Paths have long and involved Techniques, which can really undercut a Special Ability's usefulness. An alchemist might have Animation, but it takes him a few days in the lab to make it work. Nevertheless, Techniques can also beef-up some Special Abilities. That same alchemist can use his lab for Sensitivity, spending a few days examining a magical item and learning everything there is to know about it.

OK, so you've got your Technique down. But there are still a few things that influence how you use a Special Ability, namely Aspects, Mojo, and the Veil.

Aspects

“Edge!” you think to yourself as you read the description for Warding. *“I can be virtually invincible!”*

Well, yes and no. Warding, like a lot of other Special Abilities, makes you choose an Aspect. Like normal Abilities that have Aspects, you choose a specific “thing” which your power affects. What you choose should make sense to the rest of your character concept. A Ghost Dance shaman with Communion might take an Aspect of Fauna, Prairie, or Ghosts, but she probably wouldn’t take an Aspect of Computers, Urban, or Divine.

In the description of each Special Ability, right after the name, there is an entry titled “Aspects.” If this entry reads “None” then the Special Ability has no Aspects. Otherwise, the entry will list some example Aspects. These will be the most common choices, but not the only ones. Check with your GM before choosing an Aspect.

Some Special Abilities have fairly unique Aspects—if so, they’ll be explained in the description. There are a few that keep showing up, though, so rather than describing them again and again, I’ll do it once, right here:

Air: This includes all manner of gasses, as well as wind, smoke and mist, storms, and perhaps even lightning. At the GM’s option, it might also include airwaves and transmissions.

Computers: This Aspect covers computers and computer networks. It also covers programs, virtual realities, and other software. GM’s call as to whether or not it includes the small slave systems that have crept into other technologies, like car engines or cyberlimbs. Note that if you try to affect someone else’s cyberwear, they get to resist as if you were affecting their own body.

The Dead: Includes primarily ghosts, but also human (or humanoid?) corpses. Undead are definitely affected by this Aspect, and at the GM’s discretion so are places and implements of death, such as cemeteries, tombs, gallows, and the electric chair.

Divine: This covers various powers, entities, and places of the divine, including angels, churches, holy relics, and the faithful. Abuse of this Aspect can lead to divine retribution.

Earth: In addition to soil and rocks, this Aspect also includes metals, alloys, gems, and fossil fuels. Plastics, polymers, and ceramics are usually covered by Earth as well, but the GM has the final say. The GM may also allow creatures of the soil, like worms and bugs, to be included.

Fauna: Covers all non-human vertebrates (mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish) and their by-products (leather, meat, milk, etc.). This Aspect can affect not only their bodies but also their behaviors. At the GM’s option, it can also be expanded to include invertebrates, such as insects, mollusks, or even microbes.

Fire: Flames, heat, light, and smoke are covered by this Aspect. Molten metals and rocks (lava) also fall here, as might things strongly associated with fire, like sulfur, matches, or fuel. At the GM's discretion, other forms of energy, like radiation and lasers, might also fall into this category. So might plasma.

Flora: This covers all sorts of plants, fungi, molds, and algae. It also includes wood, rope, and other plant-products (like a lot of food). GM's call as to whether or not microbes are covered.

Human: Covers human and humanoid beings. Cyborgs are included, as are replicants, humanoid faeries, etc. This definitely affects the human body, but the GM must determine if thoughts and mental processes are affected, since they also fall under the Mind Aspect.

Infernal: As with Divine, but this includes infernal powers, places, and entities. Corrupted humans, or those that have made demonic pacts, may also be included in this Aspect.

Mind: This Aspect covers intelligent minds, primarily human but also those of faeries, ghosts, and possibly even artificial intelligences. The GM must decide if divine or infernal entities are affected, since they have their own categories.

Seelie: In addition to actual Seelie Inc. types, this category includes all manner of well-disposed faeries, both in thought and action. Humans closely associated with the Seelie might also be affected, at the GM's option.

Specific Terrain: This is actually a type of Aspect. You choose a particular environment, such as "Forest," "Urban," "Desert," or "Space," and you then gain influence over all the various elements associated with that Terrain. For example, if you chose "Forest," you'd cover all sorts of birds and animals, trees, the soil, maybe even a river or brook if it was located in the woods. If you chose "Urban," you'd get buildings, rats, asphalt, stoplights, cars, and subways. Specific Terrains don't have to be that general, either. They could be fairly specific, such as "The Road" or "Arcology." Note that people are almost never covered by this type of Aspect, unless they are intimately linked to the given Terrain.

Unseelie: As with Seelie, but with their darker and more malevolent relatives.

Vehicles: Includes cars, trucks, planes, boats, and other mechanical methods of transportation. It might also, at the GM's discretion, include vehicle fuel and the computer systems that run them.

Water: In addition to basic water, this also includes most water-based liquids, as well as bodies of water like lakes, streams, or rivers. It probably includes microbes living in water, and it's the GM's call on whether fish and other inhabitants count as well.

Remember, an Aspect almost always determines *what* you can affect. Think of it like the direct object of a sentence. No, on second thought, don't bother. This is a game, not an English class.

Mojo

Ever try lifting a big rock with the power of your mind? It's pretty darn draining, especially if you actually make it work. Now, imagine making that rock dance.

Seriously, though, the bar-none final limit on how much you can get away with is your personal power. If you run around tossing off magical powers like a drunk tosses back cheap wine, pretty soon you're both gonna be flat on your backs. That's what the Mojo Cost is all about.

Mojo is part of your Mana Pool, and for each point you have in a Mana Source, you gain one in your Mojo Pool. So, if you've got a Personal Mana Source of 4, you've got 4 Mojo points. Mojo represents a number of things, depending on your particular outlook. It could be your chi, psi, spiritual power, supernatural authority, divine favor, etc. Basically, it's whatever you use to power your Special Abilities.

You'll find a Special Ability's Mojo Cost right under its Aspects. Usually, this will be something like "1 per 5 Diff" or "1 per 10 Diff." This means that for every "x" points of the Difficulty (or your target's roll), you must spend 1 point of Mojo. However, for every 5 points of your Success Score, you may reduce the Mojo Cost by 1 point.

So, say I'm using Animation (Urban) and I want to take control of a nearby car. The Mojo Cost for Animation is 1 per 3 Diff, and the Difficulty of this particular feat is 18. I roll a 20, which means that I need to pay 5 Mojo to make the power work—6 for the Diff of 18, less 1 for my Success Score of 2.

Some Special Abilities—usually extra-sensory ones like Sensitivity—have a Mojo Cost of "None." As if you couldn't figure it out by yourself, this means that they don't cost anything to use. Other Special Abilities, though, have "Special" Mojo Costs. If a Mojo Cost is listed as "Special," it will be defined in the description.

Usually, you only need to pay the Mojo Cost when you Successfully use a power. But let's say you screw the pooch and end up with a Failure Score of 16 or more. That means you've gotta pay the Mojo Cost as if you succeeded, but with a Success Score of 0. So, if I botched on a Diff 40 roll for Banishment, which has a Mojo Cost of 1 per 5 Diff, I'd have to pay a full 8 points. Suck, huh?

When you pay the Mojo Cost, you spend points from your Mojo Pool. Once you spend 'em, they're gone, until you can rest up or otherwise renew your Mana Sources. **If you don't have enough Mojo to pay the cost, you may spend Edge points instead.** This can be a real lifesaver, but use it cautiously. Edge is a lot more useful than Mojo, and you might find yourself wishing you had an extra few points lying around.

If you don't have enough Mojo (or Edge) to pay a Mojo Cost, then the Special Ability usually doesn't work—it fizzles. Sometimes, though, the GM will allow it to have a partial effect. For example, a fizzled Suggestion might give you an extra die on a Subterfuge roll, and a fizzled Telekinesis cause the target to shake violently but not actually go anywhere. By the way, as long as you made a successful Special Ability roll, you can always choose not to pay the Mojo Cost and let the effect fizzle.

But if you botched the roll, you don't have that choice. If you run out of Mojo and Edge after a botch, then, well, the proverbial beef hits the proverbial fan. Anything might happen, depending on your GM's whimsy—you might pass out, be physically or mentally injured, get caught in a magical backlash, open a gate to hell, etc. Watch out.

Hard Mojo

You almost always pay your Mojo Cost from your personal Mojo Pool. There are times, though, when you'll need more juice than you've got, or when you want to do something special, like making a magic item.

That's where Hard Mojo comes in. Hard Mojo is "magical" power drawn from a physical source. Usually, it's found in small objects that are either left over from magical phenomena (like a dragon's heart or goblin-spider's web) or that are found in a supernatural area (like water from a sacred spring or mushrooms from a faerie grove). Such objects are imbued with supernatural power—mojo—which can be harnessed by those that know how.

Basically, any alchemist, mage, or shaman will know how to harness Hard Mojo. So will any other mystic with an Occultism of 3 or higher. Assuming you know how to do it, using it simply requires somehow changing its state. Sacred water could be drunk or sprinkled on the ground, while mushrooms could be eaten, crushed or burned. Even something as simple as praying over an object and blessing it can activate Hard Mojo.

Activating the Hard Mojo will usually deplete the source, often destroying its physical form. But when you activate it, you get a number of Mojo points to spend. These have two primary uses. First, they can be used to pay the Mojo cost for a Special Ability. Second, if you spend it before you roll, you can increase your Special Ability roll by 1 die for each point of Hard Mojo spent, up to your Occultism score.

So, let's say I'm totin' around a dragon's heart, which contains 5 points of Hard Mojo, and I use Warding (Fire) to protect myself from a flamethrower. I try and make a Difficulty 24 Ward, but I'm only rolling 5d6. My odds aren't that great, and even if they were, I'd be paying at least 3 or 4 Mojo points. So, I take a few bites of dragon heart, pick at my teeth, feel the power course through me, and start my spell. I've got 5 points of Hard Mojo to work with, so I spend 3 to give myself a total of 8d6. I roll a 27, for a Success Score of 3. The power costs 4 Mojo, so I spend the two remaining Hard Mojo and then spend 2 more of my own. Smokin'.

After you activate Hard Mojo, you must use it immediately. You can't store it up and become some sort of Mojo-battery. Your GM may—at her discretion—let you use it to restore your own Mojo Pool. If you do so, however, you can't use it to gain extra dice for your Special Abilities.

Whenever you use Hard Mojo, the effect of your Special Ability will be somewhat influenced by the nature of the Mojo. Using a unicorn's horn to power a Glamour will result in a picturesque and strangely beautiful illusion, while using demon blood to summon an angel is likely to get you one thoroughly pissed-off heavenly host.

Something to remember, by the way. Animals and people can be used for Hard Mojo, too. It's not pleasant, though, cuz it involves killing them. At the time of death, an animal or person releases his, her, or its current Mojo Pool as Hard Mojo, which can be grabbed by a skilled mystic. Special ceremonies are often performed before hand to purify and prepare the sacrifice, which can temporarily increase its Mojo Pool by a point or two. This is not necessarily an "evil" way to get Hard Mojo—a number of major religions sacrifice cattle and other animals on a regular basis. OK, fine, human sacrifice usually falls pretty clearly on the "evil" side—and it's likely to get you into a lot of trouble with your neighbors, too. So don't do it, OK? Good.

Speaking of distasteful sources of Hard Mojo, there are persistent rumors about mystics that are able to draw the energy out virtually anything—water, the land, even computers. Doing so reportedly pollutes and destroys the Mojo source, making it barren and lifeless. The power available to such a mystic, however, would be immense. And no, you can't learn how to do this as a player character. (At least, not yet.)

Future supplements will deal more thoroughly with Hard Mojo and its uses, including Mojo Batteries, ritual sacrifice, "defiling" magic, investing items, etc.

The Veil

You've felt it—that little tingle when you go into an especially creepy basement. Or that witchy feeling you get when walking through an empty downtown late at night. It's the feeling that reminds you that the world you think you know isn't necessarily so, that there might be something just around that corner or just through that shadow. You're feeling the thinning of the Veil.

The Veil is the barrier between the "real" or mundane world and the "spiritual" or magical world. It affects how easy it is to use magic in an area. Think of it like electrical resistance—on some things, like copper, electricity flows very easily, while on other things, like rubber, it barely flows at all. A lot of Special Abilities work like that, in regards to the Veil.

The weaker the Veil, the more magical and mysterious a place is. Lots of people, especially straights, get real uneasy-like in places like that, or outright awed by them. As the Veil gets stronger, things get decidedly more "clockwork" and mundane. Lots of people get uneasy in these places, too. They're too antiseptic and institutional.

The Veil is actually given a numerical rating, on the same scale as Difficulties. The "average" score for the Veil is probably about 18 in 2042, whereas in the mid twentieth century it was probably 30 or more. The following are some examples of Veil scores at different times and places:

<u>Veil</u>	<u>Place and Time</u>
4	Stonehenge at midnight on Halloween.
6	An intensely powerful place, like the Sphinx, Auschwitz, or the Vatican sacristy.
9	A grand cathedral, dilapidated sewers, the rim of a volcano.
12	A rave, a dark basement, the barrens, well maintained sewers, an impressive church.
15	A old theater, a subway terminal, city park, shoreline, or nightclub.
18	A typical downtown, older burbclave, or arcology. The default strength.
24	A burbclave, shopping mall, or office building.
30	A surgery clinic or chemistry classroom.
40	An strictly scientific laboratory.
50	One of the major scientific research labs in the world.

The strength of the Veil also fluctuates at special times. For example, at and right around midnight, the Veil is usually -2 strength. At dawn or dusk, it's usually -1. On major holidays, however, appropriate places drop a full step or two—a fairly impressive church on Good Friday would have a Veil of 9 instead of 12. Other things can affect the Veil, too. A power outage in a major city, for example, might knock the Veil down considerably. Storms, fog, eclipses, full moons, and other natural phenomena also reduce the Veil. Some things can increase it, though this usually requires the presence of a number of skeptics or sometimes even lots of scientific equipment.

Sensing the Veil

If you have Sensitivity you can automatically tell when the Veil is especially high or low (less than 15 or greater than 24). You can determine the exact number by rolling Emp/Sensitivity vs. 15.

If you don't have Sensitivity, but you do have an Empathy + Awareness total of 6 or more, you can also recognize high and low Veils, but determining the exact score is beyond you.

OK, OK, this all fine and dandy right? But I know what you're thinkin'. "*How does this effect me?*"

Simple, meathead. First off, supernatural entities, like faeries and spirits and demons, are a lot more powerful when the Veil is weak. But more importantly, it's easier to use most of your Special Abilities when the Veil's lower. Just how much easier depends on the particular Special Ability.

In the description of each Special Ability, you'll find the "Veil" entry right under the Mojo Cost. This will say one of four things: "None," "Diff," "Modifies," or "Special." If it says "None," then the Special Ability is totally unaffected by the strength of the Veil. Otherwise, it's affected as follows:

Diff: The level of the Veil is the base Difficulty for the Special Ability. This is usually the case for extra-sensory powers, like Sensitivity or Visions.

Modifies: The level of the Veil modifies the Difficulty (or the resistance roll) of the Special Ability. The stronger the Veil, the higher the Diff, and vice versa. Use the following table:

<u>Veil</u>	<u>Diff (or target's roll)</u>
0	-9
1-6	-6
9-14	-3
15-24	+0
25-40	+3
40-50	+6
51+	+9

Special: The Special Ability is affected by the Veil, but in a unique or unusual way. Check the description for details.

Special Ability Descriptions

All right, you've been patient, so here's your reward (hey, wipe up that drool). The Special Abilities are listed according to categories, going from Lesser to Greater. Each description includes the name of the Special Ability, its likely Aspects, it's Mojo Cost, how it is affected by the Veil, a description of what it can do, and an example.

Knock yourself out, *lobo*.

Example Special Ability

Aspects: Air, Earth, Fauna, Fire, Flora, Specific Terrain, Water, etc.
Mojo Cost: 1 per 5 Diff
Veil: Modifies

This is where the description of the Special Ability would be. It will describe what you can do with it, what you usually roll, any special modifiers, range, duration, area of effect, and other important information. It will often include a set of Difficulty guidelines, like this:

<u>Diff</u>	<u>Effect</u>
6	Do something lame
12	Do something boring
15	Do something neat
18	Do something cool.
30	Do something really cool.
40	Etc.

Example: Here you'll have an example of the Special Ability in play. It will usually be fairly typical, and will include Diffs, what to roll, Mojo Costs, and other important yet confusing junk.

Lesser Special Abilities

Clarity
Lesser Knock
Lesser Travel
Premonitions
Sensitivity
Tongues
Visions

Minor Special Abilities

Communion
Doppelganger
Flight
Knock
Lesser Bag o' Tricks
Lesser Permutations
Lesser Dreaming
Scrying
Shifting
Suggestion
Travel
Vanish
Zanshin

Moderate Special Abilities

Bag o' Tricks
Banishment
Benediction
Binding
Conjuring
Domination
Dreaming
Emotion
Entrancement
Greater Communion
Healing
Hex
Lesser Glamour
Lesser Weather
Longevity
Mind Games
Obscurement
Permutations
Telekinesis
Telepathy
Teleport
Warding

Major Special Abilities

Animation
Crafting
Evocation
Glamour
Greater Banishment
Greater Binding
Greater Conjuring
Greater Emotion
Greater Warding
Metamorphosis
Weather
Regeneration

Greater Special Abilities

Greater Animation
Greater Crafting
Greater Evocation
Greater Metamorphosis

Paths

OK, so you want Sensitivity, Premonitions, Warding, Flight, Vanish, Zanshin, and Evocation. That oughtta make you a serious *akula*, neh?

But just how, *chimpira*, do expect to learn all these Special Abilities? It's not like the local community college offers a correspondence course in "Supernatural Badass."

That's where Paths come in. The Paths are mystic traditions that teach their followers a number of Techniques for harnessing the forces of the universe and their own personal power. This allows you to become much more powerful than a dabbler could ever hope to be, but it usually has a few costs, too.

Following a Path doesn't necessarily mean you've gone through formal schooling, though that's often involved. Shamans, oracles, and channels are usually born with a gift for seeing and hearing spirits, or they get it during some traumatic event (near death experience, debilitating disease, mental illness, etc.). Mages, alchemists, and fringe scientists, on the other hand, are often formally educated, at least to begin with. But really, any path can involve any combination of formal education, innate talent, or personal exploration.

There are ten Major Paths, each of which represents an archetypal "magic user" from all sorts of different cultures. If you chose a "Mystic" role during your Lifepath, then you had to choose one of these Paths. If you have some Special Abilities but didn't choose to be a Mystic, then you'll be following one of the Minor Paths, described later (p. xx).

Each Major Path includes a description, a number of specific examples, a discussion of Techniques used, and the specific penalties that come with it, if any.

Alchemists

Yes, some alchemists do still concern themselves with turning base metals into gold. But that's really not what it's all about. Even during the Renaissance, when the European Alchemist was in his heyday, the lead-gold transformation was at best a training exercise for the big show—mastering the elements, and thereby mastering life itself. The true goals of the European Alchemist were the creation of artificial life (usually called a homonculous) and, more importantly, the attainment of immortality. Chinese alchemists also pursued this last goal, and for many contemporary alchemists, it remains the ultimate pursuit of their craft.

Of course, today's alchemists don't merely rely on strange brews and mercury poisoning. Most of them make use of all manner of scientific contraptions to aid their quest, especially modern nutritional science and nanotechnology.

Not all alchemists, however, are concerned with eternal life. In *Oblivion's Edge*, "alchemy" is a term used to describe the practice of magic in the laboratory. This means that alchemists are the best around at creating magical items, potions, ointments, powders, etc. It also means that they're probably the best "forensic mystics" around.

An alchemist's trademark is her laboratory. This will usually be a fairly cramped room filled with all sorts of equipment, archaic and modern. Twirling glass tubes filled with bubbling liquids distilling in the dim light of computer monitors chugging away at arcane formulae and fractal patterns. A few crumbling tomes or scrolls lying about, with jars and vials filled of countless samples and ingredients. Of course, the exact nature of your lab will depend on the alchemical tradition you follow, as well as your personality.

Example Alchemists

Occultist: You are an independent seeker of cosmic truths, especially concerning your own immortality. Though you may work for others on occasion, you are loathe to leave your studies and jealously guard your discoveries. Your goal is personal enlightenment, the accumulation of power, and immortality. You probably draw on a number of traditions for your insights—European, Chinese, Native American, African, etc. (*High Longevity, Healing, and one other specialty. Good Occultism and Languages.*)

Fraternal Alchemist: You are a member of a secret lodge or order of alchemists. Your order might be as small as three or four, or as large as a few hundred. You can draw upon your order for advice, training, resources, and other help, but you also owe your loyalty to them and must share most of your discoveries. Alchemists trained by the Academy would fall into this category. (*No specific Special Abilities or Abilities, but high Fay Contacts are a good idea. Belonging to a Group is a must.*)

Entrepreneur: A shop-keeping alchemist of the European or Chinese tradition, who peddles books, crystals, charms, and assorted pendants. You probably also sell the occasional low-power ward and a good healing salve here and there. But your real business is likely to be known only to occult insiders: making and examining powerful wards, bindings, potions, and other magical items, as well as doing a bustling trade in Hard Mojo. (*High Sensitivity, Healing, and Warding, as well as at least some Business*)

Forensic Alchemist: You are employed by some larger organization (like a corporation, the Inquisition, or the Resistance) to investigate magical items, phenomena, and entities. You might be on salary, or you might work on a consulting basis. (*High Sensitivity, Warding, and Binding. Good Investigation and Awareness Skills, too.*)

Corporate Alchemist: You are kept on salary by a corporation, possibly against your will. They use you for an in-house forensic alchemist (as above), but also have you working on various R&D projects. You are considered a valuable asset, but very few in the corporate hierarchy would know what it is exactly that you do. Good resources, but your lifestyle will be very cramped. (*High Sensitivity and one other specialty. Good Research and Corporate Contacts.*)

Artisan: You occupy yourself with the creation of magical devices and talismans. You might create for a number of reasons—money, power, or the sheer joy of the art. If you're any good, then you've probably got a reputation as the woman to see when you need something "special." (*High Warding and Binding, and as many other Special Abilities as possible. High Occultism and one or two Craft Abilities. Lots of Hard Mojo.*)

The Alchemist's Techniques

Constant

Required to Use: None

Can Be Used for: Sensitivity (and possibly Premonitions, Clarity, etc.)

Sensitivity is always active. Unless you're Concentrating on using it, your GM should make any Emp/Sensitivity rolls for you. If you gain other extra-sensory powers, like Premonitions or Clarity, they will probably use this Technique, too.

Lab Work

Required to Use: Animation, Crafting, Metamorphosis (as well as Greater versions)

Can Be Used For: Any other Special Ability

Most Major and Greater Special Abilities require you to go through a number of time consuming steps and experiments to get them to work. When you use Animation, Crafting, or Metamorphosis (or their Greater versions), you roll the Special Ability as normal (but based on Int). If you succeed, determine the final Mojo Cost. Rather than paying this from your personal Mojo Pool, you must spend one working day (eight hours) and one point of Hard Mojo.

Pretty annoying, neh? You've gotta spend lots of time and Hard Mojo even for something simple, like turning lead into gold. Usually, it's not worth your effort unless you're making something permanent.

You can use Lab Work to do some pretty impressive stuff, though. When you use it for other Special Abilities, like Healing or Permutations, you make an extended, Intelligence based roll against a Difficulty of 9. The Difficulty of the effect you are working on is the total Success Score that you need to acquire. You can make a roll for each working day (eight hours) you spend on it, but you also need to spend a point of Hard Mojo. You don't, however, have to pay the normal Mojo Cost.

When using the Lab Work technique, all Special Abilities are considered to be Modified by the strength of the Veil.

Example: Cornelius is using Warding (Sorcery) in his lab to create a permanent barrier against hostile magic. Creating a ward that lasts for the Series means that he's -2 dice on his Warding roll, leaving him with a 3d8. The ward he wants to create has a Difficulty of 50, so he'll be making an extended Int/Warding roll with a Diff of 9/50. He's a bit obsessive, so he works in 16 hour sessions, getting two rolls per day. On the first day, he rolls 13 and 9, for a total Success Score of 4. He spends two Hard Mojo and tries again the next day. He gets two 13s, moving his Success Score up to 12. His next six rolls are 22, 8, 16, 13, 20, and 17, for a total Success Score of 54. After a total of 5 sixteen-hour days and 10 points of Hard Mojo, his ward is complete. He collapses into his bed, exhausted.

You can also do investigative Lab Work, using Sensitivity or Clarity. As above, the Diff is 9, and you roll every day. However, you accumulate your Success Score, and at the end of every roll you find out more information about the subject you are investigating. You do not need to spend Hard Mojo to use Sensitivity or Clarity.

Example: Bei-Heuh has discovered an ancient tablet covered with ancient Chinese characters. She takes it into her lab and investigates, using Sensitivity. The GM rolls Int/Sensitivity against 9, and she gets a Success Score of 4. The GM tells Bei-Heuh that the tablet is imbued with Yin chit, and may well have been handled by demons. Curiosity piqued, Bei-Heuh spends another day investigating, this time rolling a 16 for a total Success Score of 11. The GM tells her that the tablet is clearly of demonic origins, and that it is strongly associated with water. Yet another day increases her Success Score to 15, and she discovers that the tablet was once used to create a great flood. Still curious, she spends another day and increases her Success Score to 23. She finds a reference in her library to a tablet with the same inscriptions as the one she has found. According to her source, the tablet was given to a wu shih (mage) by a demon, who used it to cause the Yellow River to flood worse than usual, burying a small village that had slighted him. Realizing the dangerous power stored within the tablet, Bei-Heuh decides to lock it away and use it later for Hard Mojo.

Magical Items

Required to Use: None

Can Be Used for: Almost any Special Ability

Alchemists are by far the best Path at creating magical items; their Diffs are lower and each roll takes less time. The specifics of creating a potions, powders, devices, and talismans are found later, starting on page xx.

Each roll to create a Potion or similar product takes one working week, with a Difficulty of 9.

Each roll to create a Powder or similar product takes one working week, with a Difficulty of 12.

Each roll to create a Device takes two working weeks, with a Difficulty of 15.

Each roll to instill an effect into a Talisman takes three working weeks, with a Difficulty of 18. Your Difficulty to prime a Talisman is 24.

Lab Notes

Required to Use: None

Can Be Used for: Any

When you're working in your lab, it's assumed that you take notes of some sort on how you're doing things. If you keep these records on hand, you can use them to repeat Lab Work or Magical Items. As long as you are producing the exact same effect (creating a level 24 Ward, making yourself a Diff 30 Longevity potion, etc.), you can use your lab notes to decrease the Difficulty of the effect by half. This is **not** cumulative (repeating a project for a third time does not have 1/4 the original Diff).

Example: A few years after Cornelius created his ward against sorcery, a cataclysmic siege with an enemy mage destroyed it. After dispatching the intruder and cleaning up the mess, Cornelius sets about rebuilding his ward. Since he still has his lab notes from last time, he doesn't need to do a lot of the experimenting. This time, he's rolling Int/Warding against 9/25 instead of 9/50.

If you find another alchemist's Lab Notes, you might be able to decipher them and use them yourself. For any given project, make an Int/Occultism roll against the original Difficulty of the

effect. If you succeed, you can treat the Lab Notes as if they're yours. To keep their creations to themselves, some alchemists write their Lab Notes in a code that they only keep in their head. *Really* paranoid ones will use even more precautions, like computerized encryption and maybe even black ice.

The Alchemist's Hindrances

The greatest drawback that you face as an alchemist is your limited ability to use magic "in the field." Sure, you're great for long term projects and for creating magical items, but most of your Techniques take days or weeks to use. Sure, you *can* learn spells, but you don't start with any, and learning them is really tough. To get around this, you'll probably want to make yourself a whole lot of magic items. Another good plan is to sell or loan out potions and devices in order to get lots of Markers and other resources. A Big Brother Platinum account beats Knock any day.

Channels

It's not a very flattering analogy, but think of channels as mounts for spirits. Like a horse. A powerful spirit "mounts" your body, giving you all sorts of supernatural powers and one hell of a personality conflict. The spirit that possesses you can be virtually anything—a vodou loa, an animal spirit, an elemental, an angel, a demon (not fun), a ghost or ancestor, or maybe even a pagan god or goddess. Unless you're a truly exceptional case, you're always possessed by the same spirit, which should be the same as your Totem.

When a spirit possesses a mundane or non-channel, it's usually against that person's will. As a result, the spirit needs to crush the victim's will, taking over the body for its own purposes. Like a puppet, really. It's not a pleasant experience.

A channel, though, is a willing vehicle for his Totem, and when he's being ridden, the personalities of the two merge. This means that when you're possessed, you're still in control of your character. You do have a decidedly different personality, though. Each Totem has a set of Personality Traits listed with it, which you add to your own when the spirit is upon you. Being possessed also grants you a number of bonuses to your Attributes and Abilities, as well allowing you to use your Special Abilities.

Example Channels

Hougan: A priest of vodou, santeria, or one of the related religions. You may practice in private, but more likely you are a member of a religious community. Vodou is not really concerned about 'lofty' things like salvation and reincarnation—it's more about getting things done, here and now. *(Choose one of the loa for your Totem. Appropriate Special Abilities include Hex, Benediction, Warding, Entrancement, Mind Games, and Travel.)*

Shapeshifter: A were-beast, if you will. Any number of cultures and traditions would support this type of channel. You will likely have a deep affinity for your brethren creatures, and may often spend extended periods of time among them. Most shapeshifters are fairly solitary as far as humans go, but there are some communities

that are protected by an elite core of werewolves, weredogs, or even wererats. *(Choose an animal for your Totem, like Wolf, Eagle, Cat, or Dog. You'll want Shifting quite high, and you really should have Communion. Other good choices are Regeneration, Warding, Flight, and Travel. Zanshin might also be a choice for especially war-like Totems.)*

Medium: You are possessed by a spirit of the dead, and you can hear the voices of other ghosts as well. Your goals and ambitions depend on the type of ghost you're possessed by—a vengeful ghost will direct you towards righting some personal affront, while a protective ghost will try to steer you clear of danger. *(Choose a ghost or ancestral spirit for your Totem. Communion with the Dead is a must. Other classic powers include Tongues, Doppelganger, Benediction, Hex, and Permutations.)*

Divine Host: An angel or other being of goodness inhabits your body, directing you to do good. "Good," however, can mean any number of things. Your angel might be inclined to heal the sick and give guidance to the lost, or it might make a living out of hunting down hell-spawn and their followers. In addition to your Totem, you might also have the Mana Sources of Faith and Guardian Angel. *(Choose an angel for your Totem. Communion with the Divine, Healing, Benediction, and Warding are all appropriate. For a combative type, Regeneration, Zanshin, and even Evocation are also good choices.)*

Peyote Priest: You use one of the variety of peyote rituals practiced by many Native Americans, and in the course of the ritual you are possessed by your Totem. You might be ridded by Grandfather Peyote himself, or a spirit animal, an elemental, or an ancestral spirit. Regardless, you probably come from a Native American background, culturally if not ethnically. *(Choose a Grandfather spirit, an animal spirit, or an ancestral spirit for your Totem. Special Abilities will vary with your Totem, but Communion, Emotion, Tongues, Hex, and Healing are common. You must take the "Distant Totem" Hindrance.)*

Mouthpiece of the Gods: A personality of some sort—a Hindu or pagan god, a bodhisattva, a powerful kami, etc.—uses you as its personal avatar. You might be charged with renewing a dead religion, showing people the way to Enlightenment, protecting some sacred spot, relic, or person, or pretty much anything else. *(Choose a god or goddess, or create your own personality with the GM's approval. Virtually any Special Abilities are appropriate.)*

The Channel's Techniques

Constant

Required to Use: None

Can Be Used for: Sensitivity

As usual, Sensitivity is constantly active. Unless you are specifically Concentrating, your GM should make Emp/Sensitivity rolls for you.

Spontaneous

Required to Use: None

Can Be Used for: Visions

Channels sometimes receive messages from their Totems, which manifest as Visions. Your GM can roll to see if you get a Vision any time she feels like it. This can get in the way sometimes, especially if your Totem decides to contact you during a firefight.

Possession

Required to Use: All other Special Abilities

Can Be Used for: Sensitivity, Visions

This is your bread and butter. When your Totem is riding you, you can use most of your Special Abilities at will. The trick is getting your Totem to possess you.

If you've got the time, you can perform a ceremony. This is the best way to draw down your Totem; it just takes a while. The specifics of the ceremony depend on your Totem and your particular tradition—a hogan will do lots of dancing and maybe killing a chicken; a peyote priest will mark off a sacred space and eat a button or two while chanting; a divine host might spend an hour in intensive prayer. You should design your specific ceremony with your GM.

To perform the ceremony and summon your Totem, make an extended Will/Concentration roll vs. half the current Veil. You need to accumulate a Success Score of 40, and each roll takes two minutes. If you want, you can spend Hard Mojo, gaining an extra die to each Concentration roll for every point you spend.

If you don't have the time and facilities to perform your ritual, you can still try to get possessed. Roll an extended Will/Concentration vs. Veil/10. Each roll takes one combat round. You can use a Hard Mojo to increase your rolls, as with a ceremony.

Your Totem can also possess you when you go into physical or mental shock. If you fail a Grit Save (or a similar Mental Save) by 11 or more, then your mind and body are sufficiently whacked out—your Totem can take over. When this happens, it's not the usual merging of two beings. Your Totem takes complete control, often without regard to your personal interests or safety—after all, it's a spirit, and it's not used to thinking like a human. When your Totem takes over, your character temporarily becomes an NPC controlled by the GM.

The party starts once you're possessed. You get to use your Special Abilities, basically at will. Usually, they'll take effect during Phase 4 of combat (Slow Specials). Powers like Vanish, Zanshin, and Premonitions still take place as appropriate.

You also increase some of your other Traits. First of all, your Mental and Physical Saves each gain +1 die. You also get a +1 die bonus to Sensitivity and Visions rolls. Each Totem also lists a number of Attributes and/or Abilities that get a bonus. Wolf, for example, gives a +1 to your Stamina and a +1 per die bonus to all your Awareness and Brawling rolls.

Being possessed has a hitch, though. You gain a number of Personality Traits, also determined by your Totem. You have to play these out as if they were your own. Your Totem might also have

particular goals or urges, which you have to play out or resist. Wolf gets cravings for raw meat, while Baron Samedi tries to kill any opponent he faces. If you don't want to act on these urges, you have to roll a Mental Save (without the +1 die bonus) vs. 18 (or GM's call). If you fail, you give in and commit the act. If you botch, your Totem takes total control, and you temporarily become an NPC. If you win, you resist the urge but your Totem gets a little peeved. Resist too many times and your Totem might take off and not come back.

The Channel's Hindrances

Overall, channels are surprisingly powerful. When possessed, they get a wide variety of Special Abilities as well as better Saves, Attributes, and Abilities. But you need to be possessed in order to reap the benefits. Otherwise, you're pretty much a mundane with Sensitivity and mediocre Ability scores.

Since you're dependent on possession, you should keep some things in mind. The strength of the Veil directly affects how easily your Totem can mount you. A channel caught in a scientific research lab is a sad sight. You also have to watch out for people with Banishment. They roll against your modified Mental Save, but if they successfully banish your Totem, well, the jig's up. Not only do you lose your Special Abilities and other bonuses, but you're stunned for at least 3 rounds (more at the GM's call). Your spirit is banished and can't possess you until it can manifest again.

Another problem with being a channel is that you tend to freak mundanes out when you're being ridden. At the GM's call, this might lead to a 1 die penalty on all rolls to gain the respect and trust of mundanes. On the other hand, it might also translate to a +1 die bonus to intimidate or coerce them.

Finally, as a channel, you have to choose one of the following special hindrances:

Bond: You are tied to your Totem by a focus of some sort. Masks and costumes are very common, but other possibilities include medicine pouches, rings or other jewelry, or even a weapon of some sort. This is effectively a level 3 Bond (see Magical Weaknesses).

Taboo: You must avoid some action (or set of actions) lest your Totem abandon you. Choose an appropriate level 3 Taboo (see Magical Weaknesses). The Taboo should be appropriate to your Totem.

Vulnerability: Your Totem is adversely affected by something, like silver, salt, iron, holy items, or spring water. When possessed, you have a level 3 Vulnerability to this material; otherwise you have a level 1 Vulnerability. The Vulnerability should be appropriate for your Totem (silver if you are a wolf shapeshifter, for example).

Distant Totem: You may only summon your Totem through your special ceremony, and each roll takes five minutes instead of two. While this makes you a lot less versatile, it also makes it easier for you to control yourself when possessed. You get a +4 bonus to your Mental Save to resist your totem's urges and to dismiss it. Your Totem almost never takes total control of you.

Ambitious Totem: Your Totem is very fond of riding you, but he/she/it isn't fond of sharing control. On the bright side, you get a +1 per die bonus when trying to summon your Totem. On the down side, it's always waiting to take control. Any time you go into shock (failing a Grit by 11 or more, for example), your Totem jumps in and takes over. Likewise, you don't get the +1 die bonus to your Saves that most channels do, and any time you fail a Grit roll or shock-oriented Mental Save, you need to make a Mental Save vs. 18 to keep your Totem in check. Finally, all rolls to dismiss your Totem or resist its urges are at +4 Difficulty. This can be very dangerous if you've got a belligerent Totem.

The Faithful

Because of your unfailing devotion to your God—be you Christian, Jewish, or Muslim—you are capable of channeling His will through your mortal frame. You can see through deceptions, command unclean spirits, heal the sick, speak in tongues, and perform other “Gifts of the Spirit.”

Of course, in order to use these powers, your cause must be just, and your motives must be pure. This is, in fact, the great challenge of the faithful—they are granted amazing power, but they must resist the corruption that such power brings. If you ever attempt to use your powers in a selfish, unjust, or outright evil manner, not only do they not work, but you might lose favor with the Almighty. Even if you aren't using your Special Abilities, you are expected to act virtuously.

Example Faithful

Charismatic Christian: Arguably the most common of the faithful, you follow a protestant religion with astounding faith. Your life's goal is to spread the word of God and bear witness to his glory. Most Charismatic Christians believe that faith is the only way to salvation—living a good life and doing good deeds aren't enough. (*High Charisma and Leadership, but not all that much Religion—most refer only to the Bible and not to any human teachings. Good scores in Healing, Emotion, Tongues, and Visions.*)

Catholic Priest, Monk, or Nun: You are an ordained member of the Catholic community, and are well versed in the traditions and theology of the Church. As one of the truly faithful, you probably believe it is the church's duty to protect the innocent and provide for the needy, but that doesn't necessarily mean you agree with the Society of St. Jude. (*Decent Intelligence and high Religion. You might want to belong to a Group of some sort—a convent or monastery, an order, or the priesthood itself. High Benediction, Visions, Communion, and Emotion.*)

Judite: You are a member of the Society of St. Jude, a rogue organization within the Catholic Church. The Judites are the descendants of liberation theologians of the twentieth century. They believe in actively resisting and undermining the power of authoritarian and abusive rulers. As a result, they often support the Resistance, but they also try to restrain it from unnecessary violence. Judites can be ordained clergy, or they can be faithful lay-folk. (*Good Religion, Leadership, and maybe Subterfuge scores. A Group is also likely, as well as Resistance Contacts and Markers. High Benediction, Warding, Healing, and Clarity.*)

Exorcist: You are trained in confronting and combating demons and their infernal minions. The Catholic Church has a number of trained exorcists “on call,” so you might be one of them. You might also be a wandering Christian, Muslim, or Jew, intent on ridding the world of demonic influence. Your line of work tends to leave you somewhat humorless, and most exorcists retire after only a few years. The perils to one’s body, mind, and soul are too great to keep at it for long. *(Very high Will, with good Concentration, Religion, and Occultism. Good Benediction, Sensitivity, Warding, and Clarity are almost necessary, but a high Banishment is crucial.)*

Rabbi: You are a learned teacher of the Tora and the Talmud, and a leader of the Jewish community. While you may have studied the Kabala, it is more akin to the mage’s Path than your own. You rely on your personal relationship with Yaweh and the Scriptures, and model your life after the prophets of old. While this sometimes makes you unpopular within your community, you receive considerable respect—you preach with the authority of God, after all. *(High Charisma and Religion. Visions, Clarity, Emotion, and Benediction should also have good scores.)*

Ascetic: You follow a major monotheistic religion, but you also believe in a life of strict discipline and prudence. Your living quarters probably consist of a cot or floor mat, some simple toiletries, a bit of dull food, some religious paraphernalia, and your holy scripture. You shun contact with others and spend your days in prayer. You may well be a member of a monastic religious order. *(High Concentration, low Charisma. High Visions, Tongues, and Healing are appropriate. You might also have Dreaming or even Longevity.)*

Shaykh: You are an adherent of the Islamic mystical tradition referred to as “Sufism.” Through meditation, music, and pursuit of union with the divine, you are able to realize the vast potential of the human soul. You have dedicated your life to peace, justice, surrender to God, and freedom from material concerns. Needless to say, you find living in 21st century America a constant crusade. *(High Concentration and Religion, Clarity, Visions, Benediction, Emotion, and Healing are appropriate.)*

There are an almost limitless variety of the faithful. Others include: lapsed clergy, prophet, reformer, would-be messiah, millennialists, or a member of a specific order (like the Carmelites or the Jesuits). A little bit of research will go a long way.

The Faithful’s Techniques

Constant

Required to Use: None

Can Be Used for: Sensitivity, Clarity

Sensitivity and Clarity are always active. Unless you’re specifically Concentrating, your GM should roll Emp/Sensitivity and Emp/Clarity for you.

Preaching

Required to Use: Emotion

Can Be Used for: None

Your Special Ability of Emotion allows you to preach with holy authority. In order to use Emotion, you must be preaching to someone in some way, shape, or form. You could be preaching to your congregation, to a particular individual, or to everyone that passes by your soapbox. If you're using Emotion to increase the power of your preaching, then you don't need to do anything else. If you're trying to use your preaching to invoke an overwhelming Emotion, however, you need to make a successful Charisma/Leadership roll vs. 18 (adjusted by how receptive the audience is).

Prayer

Required to Use: All other Special Abilities

Can Be Used for: Sensitivity, Clarity

For pretty much anything else, you need to pray. You put your thoughts on God and put your faith in His power and mercy. You might need to make a Will/Concentration roll, especially if you're in a firefight, being tortured, or otherwise distracted. Then you roll your Special Ability, usually based on Will or Empathy. It takes at least one round to pray, plus one round for every point of Mojo you spend. Assuming you make your Special Ability roll, the effects take place during Phase 4 (Slow Specials).

You usually want to pray aloud, at least under your breath. If, for some reason, you can only pray in your head, all of your Special Ability rolls will be at -1 die.

You should remember that your Special Abilities are manifestations of God's divine Will. They are, for all intents and purposes, miracles. They might not seem like it—God works in mysterious ways, and He's got one hell of a backhand. Your Special Abilities often seem like Synchronicities (see the Trickster's Techniques). *"Good thing I came by when I did..." the park ranger said. "The storm's getting worse and there isn't another car 'round for kilometers..."* God's not always subtle, though, especially when dealing with His infernal enemies. The skies opening and a heavenly host descending to vanquish a legion of undead fiends is really quite appropriate.

Since your prayers are nothing less than God acting through a mortal frame, you can never use them for selfish, unjust, or evil purposes. If you attempt such a thing, you'll be breaking your Taboo and you might fall out of favor.

The Adversary, however, is often quite interested in such requests, and may well make himself available for assistance...

Laying on Hands

Required to Use: Healing

Can Be Used for: Benediction, Warding, Banishment

In order to heal the sick, wounded, or lame, you must lay your hands upon your patient and pray. Your patient must be either willing or restrained—you can't lay hands on someone that you're fighting.

If you use this Technique for Benediction, Warding, or Banishment, then you get +1 per die on your Special Ability rolls. If you're trying to use Banishment, the spirit is likely to resist. Try restraining the target first.

Congregation

Required to Use: None

Can Be Used for: Any non-Constant Special Ability

According to Christianity, wherever two or more are gathered in God's name, He is there. This is reflected in your Special Abilities. If you are praying with people of a similar religious tradition (Jewish, Muslim, Christian), total up the Faith Mana Sources that everyone else has (don't count your own). Divide the total in half, and add it to all of your Special Ability rolls.

Example: Demba, a devout Muslim, wants to protect his home from demonic harassment. He prays with his family, attempting to create a Diff 30 Ward against the Infernal. His wife has a Faith Mana Source of 3, while his two son's and his daughter each have Faith at 1. Demba doesn't get to add his own Faith, but the rest of his family add theirs together. $3+1+1+1=6$, and half that is 3, so Demba will add +3 to his Warding roll.

Consecration

Require to Use: None

Can Be Used for: Benediction, Warding, others at GM's call

As a true believer, you can consecrate a physical object to the Lord, imbuing it with some of his might. This allows you to make magical devices which can only be used for good. If you (or someone else) tries to use them for evil purposes, they automatically fail, and may permanently lose their powers.

You make a magical device much like any other Path would. You roll your Concentration based Special Ability against 24. Each roll to create it requires a complete day of uninterrupted prayer and meditation in a sacred space (the Veil must be 12 or lower). You may sleep for a few hours a night and may relieve yourself, but otherwise you should not leave your prayers. In addition to the usual point of Hard Mojo that you must spend for each roll, when you finally finish the enchantment (or give up on it), you are completely drained of Mojo and Edge.

If you've got a really good reason for it, your GM might also let you create Talismans with this Technique. Each roll would be against a Diff of 30 and would take a week of uninterrupted prayer.

The Faithful's Hindrances

As one of the Faithful, you've got some of the heftiest hindrances around—you've gotta be a good guy, all the time. You've got the equivalent of a level 4 Taboo; if you ever use your Special Abilities for selfish, greedy, unjust, or outright evil purposes, you'll be cut off from God. For minor infractions, you'll be able to atone—this will require a sacrifice of some sort, like donating a few thousand dollars, having a few cattle sacrificed, serving the poor for a few months, or maybe even some sort of quest. Ideally, you'll be doing a lot of this stuff anyway, which means that your penance should be *really* big.

If you do something really bad, like using a prayer to harm an innocent or to exact a hefty vengeance, you might find yourself permanently cut off from the divine, and possibly even Cursed as well. You might also draw the attentions of the infernal hosts, who will be more than willing to restore many of your lost powers... for a price.

Fringe Scientists

You could see it coming at the end of the twentieth century—quantum physics, Gaia theory, genetic memory, chaos theory, cybernetics, parapsychology. Science had beached itself on the shores of the unknown, and some of its explorers got out and started walking around. Most of them stayed within sight of the shore, applying the scientific method even when it seemed to go nowhere. Some, however, journeyed far from shore, leaving the mainstream scientists behind as they explored the fringe.

That's where you come in.

As a fringe scientist, you use your open mind and holistic training to explore realms of reality that, until recently, science refused to believe exist. You revel in ideas like the afterlife, psychic activity, and nonlinear time. You're generally ostracized from the mainstream scientific community, but you have explored theories they could never dream of.

Generally speaking, you don't need to bother explaining how most of your technology and experiments work. Your theories are ahead of their time in 2042; with our limited understanding, there's no way we're gonna understand them.

It's important to remember that you are still first and foremost a scientist. You have delved into realms usually dealt with by mystics, but you still use the experimental models that you were originally educated with. In other words, you are not a mystic that relies on science, but a scientist who looks into the mystic.

Example Fringe Scientists

Paranormal Investigator: You use your scientific training to understand paranormal and supernatural phenomena, namely other mystics and magical entities. You might be attached to a larger organization, like the Resistance or a corporation. You also might be a freelance consultant or self-employed dilettante. *(Very high Sensitivity. Warding, Clarity, and Binding are also appropriate. Good Fay Contacts are a plus.)*

Fringe Inventor (a.k.a. Psychotronic Engineer, Tesla Theorist): You're interested in creating fringe technology. You might be working on a single long-term project, or you might dabble here and there in your workshop. You could be self-employed, freelance, or employed by a larger group. *(Choose an interesting Special Ability or two to be your focus. Good choices include Telepathy, Teleport, Telekinesis, Obscurement, Glamour, and Weather. Depending on your personality, you might also want to take Bag o' Tricks to represent your lab or workshop. Invest in lots of Hard Mojo.)*

Otaku: Originally used to describe adolescent Japanese with an obsessive computer habit, otaku has come to mean someone who can get anywhere on the net, no matter how tight the security. A fringe computer programmer has a leg up here, not being limited to the traditional methods of cybernetics. You've probably got a rep as one of the hottest hackers around. (*Lesser Knock with Computers is almost a must, and Communion with Computers is also a good idea. Lesser Travel might also be useful, and Lesser Glamour. You'll also want good Computer Ops, Cyberspace Lore, and Cybernetics Abilities, as well as Cyberspace Contacts.*)

Neurophysicist: You're interested in the workings of the mind. Not just the brain, the *mind*. This means that you study brain physiology, psychopharmacology, and psychology, but it also includes a lot of quantum physics, chaos theory, and cutting edge cybernetics. As a result, you've got an uncanny understanding of the human mind, and can manipulate it quite well. (*Telepathy, Entrancement, Suggestion, and Domination are all very appropriate. You'll probably want good Estimate People, Empathy, and other social scores.*)

Nanotechnologist: You are on (or beyond) the cutting edge of nanite theory, and may well have made a breakthrough or two regarding atom-up engineering. If you've made these experiments public, you'll be sought after by virtually every major player out there—this stuff is *that* important. (*Greater or standard Crafting and Metamorphosis are appropriate. Regeneration or Healing might also work if you are interested in medical nanites. If you're really ambitious, or crazy, you might also choose Permutations.*)

The Fringe Scientist's Techniques

Lab Work

Required to Use: None

Can Be Used for: Any appropriate Special Ability

Fringe scientists are able to work in their labs and get impressive results, but they need time and resources.

Doing Lab Work is an extended roll, based on your Tech (or sometimes Int). The Diff of each roll is 12, and you need to accumulate a Success Score equal to the Difficulty of the effect you are trying to create. (See The Alchemist's Techniques, p. xx).

For each roll, you must spend either one point of appropriate Hard Mojo or five Resource points worth of Credit, Cash, or Gear. Also, each roll takes time, as determined by the category of the Special Ability you're using:

Lesser: Half a working day (about 4 hours) per roll.

Minor: One working day per roll.

Moderate: Two working days per roll.

Major: Three working week per roll.

Greater: One working week per roll.

Example: Cassandra is a corporate quantum theorist on the cutting edge. She wants out of the biz, though, and her employers won't let her go. She fiddles with her quantum field fluxer and her tesseract generator, and attempts to Teleport out of her lab/prison. She's trying to jump to the place where she grew up, which the GM determines should have a Difficulty of 24. Cassandra will have make an extended Tech/Teleportation roll vs. 12/24. She'll have to be somewhat subtle about this, so she can't work double shifts—she only gets one roll every two days (Teleportation is a Moderate Power). Her first roll is an 18, giving her a Success Score of 6. She doesn't have any Hard Mojo, but she does have a research budget in the hundreds of thousands, so she allocates 5 points of Resources and rolls again. This time she gets a 19, raising her Success Score to 13. She spends another 5 Resources and makes another roll. She gets lucky with a 24, bringing her Success Score to 25, enough to get her out of there. Six days and 15 Resources later, her employers find her lab empty except for the smell of ozone.

The GM can, if he chooses, not tell you how much Success Score you need to accumulate. In this case, you keep working until you think you've got enough points, and then let it rip. The GM compares your total to what you needed, taking the difference between them as your Success or Failure Score. If the GM had used this for Cassandra's teleportation trick, she might have figured that a Success Score of 13 was enough and initiated the jump. Since she would've been short by 11 points, she'd have an effective Teleportation Failure Score of 11, meaning she'd have teleported but phased in a good three meters off the ground.

Fringe Technology

Required to Use: None

Can Be Used for: Virtually any Special Ability

This is where the you can really cash in the chips. By applying your knowledge of fringe science, you can create all sorts of technological wonders. Psi meters, dimensional gateways, weather control machines, intelligent icebreakers, mind probes, regenerative serums, force field generators, cloaking devices—you name it.

What this means is that you can effectively make magical items. In fact, the alchemist is the only other Path that even competes with your abilities in the lab. As long as it's appropriate for the Special Ability and your particular slant on things, you can make Potions, Ointments, Devices, and Talismans. Use the rules on page xx; the time required and Diff for each roll are as follows:

Each roll to create a Potion or similar item requires two working weeks, with a Diff of 9.

Each roll to create a Powder or similar item requires two working weeks, with a Diff of 12.

Each roll to create a Device requires three working weeks, with a Diff of 15.

Each roll to put an effect into a Talisman requires four working weeks, with a Diff of 18. Your Difficulty to prime a Talisman is 24.

One advantage you have over other Paths is that you can substitute mundane Resources for Hard Mojo. Normally, you have to spend one point of Hard Mojo for every roll you make. If you

want, you can spend the equivalent of 10 points of Gear, Credit, or Cash. Yes, it's expensive, but sometimes that's a lot more practical than getting a hold of fairy dust. My advice? Buy lots of Contacts and use them for funding.

The Fringe Scientist's Hindrances

Well, they should be obvious. Unlike the other Paths, your Special Abilities don't travel well. You're pretty much limited to what you can do in your lab and what you can make as an item. You'll probably want to back your Special Abilities up with good solid scores in your mundane Traits, like Basic Tech, Medicine, and Investigation. Since you can replace Hard Mojo with standard Resources, you might want to get yourself some high Contacts and Markers.

Mages

All right, let's jump back to familiar territory. The mage's Path is the one that you, as a gamer, are probably most familiar with. You cast spells, right? Nice n' simple.

But don't be gettin' ahead of yourself, *lobo*. Sure, you cast spells, but that don't mean you can cast *any* spell. Your Special Abilities still determine what you can and can't do. If you don't have Emotion, you're not casting any Emotion spells.

Spells. What are they? Well, that depends on who you ask. The general consensus is that they're words and gestures of power that somehow resonate with the cosmos. This "resonance" gives you a certain amount of control over reality. And that's the goal, neh?

"The Science and Art of making Reality conform to Will." Thanks, Mr. Crowley.

It's a lot easier, though, to exert control over the spiritual realm than over the physical one—the dreamtime, after all, is ruled by emotion and symbolism, which is what your "words of power" are all about. That's why mages start with so many Special Abilities like Conjuring, Banishment, and Communion.

Mages—in some form or another—have been around in virtually every literate culture, and some non-literate ones. Obviously they're in European folklore—Merlin, Math, Gwydion, Vainamöinen, etc. But there's also the Wu Shih from China (called Wu Jen in Japan), the Jewish Kabbalist, and countless others.

Example Mages

Hermetic Wizard: You follow the classical Western tradition of magic, seeking to unlock your human potential by learning the True Names of people, things, and even gods. You pour over arcane tomes, scrolls, and hieroglyphs, attempting to unlock the mysteries of the ancients. (*High Occultism, Research, and Languages. Good Conjuring and Communion, too.*)

Wu Shih: You are a mage of the Chinese Taoist tradition. You concern yourself with the spirits of places and things, and call on them for favor and power. Most Wu Shih concern themselves with the nature spirits (or urban spirits), but some deal with ghosts and the spirits of the dead. Others actually deal with the Yama kings and their demonic minions. *(High Conjuring, Communion, and Banishment scores. Most Wu Shih choose a specific terrain for their Aspects, but the Dead and Infernal might also be appropriate.)*

Fang Shih: As a practitioner of *feng shui*, Chinese geomancy, you are sensitive the flow of chi through the world, and you can harness and redirect this chi to do amazing things. While you are not as concerned with spirits *per se* as much as other mages are, your chi manipulation makes you more than prepared for them. *(High Divination, Sensitivity, and Warding. You might want to buy Travel and Benediction as well. Take Specific Terrains for your Aspects.)*

Kabalist: You follow the Jewish mystic tradition of the Kabala. To you the Scriptures are not just the words Yaweh gave to Moses and the Israelites, but also a code for deciphering His True Name, the Incommunicable Name, the Name by which the universe was created. With the True Name, you can command spirits and possibly create life itself. *(High Religion, Languages. Good Binding, Communion, Banishment, and Animation. Divine and Infernal aspects are appropriate.)*

Necromancer: You deal with the spirits of the dead, often in an attempt to discover the future and other forbidden knowledge. While even this goal is somewhat distasteful, some of this tradition go even further, attempting to bind ghosts or to reanimate the dead. Such mages often draw infernal attention. *(High Conjuring, Binding, Divination, and Communion. Banishment and Warding can't hurt either. All aspects should be the Dead. Biology and Medicine are also appropriate.)*

Fraternal Mage: Like the fraternal alchemist, you belong to some occult society like the Order of the Hermetic Dawn. You can call upon them for training, information, and maybe even magical assistance and resources, but in return you must give them your loyalty. Academy mages are basically fraternal. *(Any Special Abilities are appropriate. You'll probably want high Fay Contacts and belonging to a Group is a must.)*

Technomancer: You're a mage, yes, but you concern yourself with the spirits and true names of the information age—computers. Your rituals often take place online, or at least they are generated by computer. *(Good Conjuring, Communion, and Warding, all with the Computer Aspect. Good Computer Ops, Cyberspace Lore, Cybernetics, and Cyberspace Contacts.)*

The Mage's Techniques

Constant

Required to Use: None

Can be Used for: Sensitivity

As with most Paths, a mage's Sensitivity is constantly active. Unless you're explicitly Concentrating, your GM should roll Emp/Sensitivity for you.

Spells

Required to Use: None

Can be Used for: Any Special Ability that isn't Constant and doesn't require a Ritual.

As a mage, spellcasting is your trademark. In order to use most of your Special Abilities, you study incantations of power, which allow you to focus your will and affect the world around you. To this end, you spend years studying arcane texts, pouring over ancient manuscripts often written in dead languages. However, once you learn these words of power and how to use them, you have a great deal of flexibility in their application.

What this means is, in game terms, that you don't have to have a specific "spell list" that dictates what you know (you do for Rituals, but that's different). Instead, it's assumed that for each of your Special Abilities, you know and have mastered enough spells and incantations to cover most applications.

Casting spells takes a bit of time, though. You have to consider the situation, consider the incantations you know, pick the right ones, piece them together with the right inflections, then actually cast the spell. Casting a spell takes at least round, plus an additional round for every point of Mojo you need to spend. The effects usually come up during Phase 4 (Slow Specials).

Usually, when you cast a spell, you speak the words of power aloud in a firm voice with at least some sort of gestures. However, once you've learned and internalized a spell, it's possible for you to use it without having to invoke it outloud. What this means, in game terms, is that you can choose to cast your spells silently or without gestures, but at a penalty. If you don't use gestures, you take a -1 penalty per die. If you don't speak, you lose a die.

Rituals

Required to Use: Greater and standard Animation, Crafting, Entropy, Metamorphosis, Weather, and Conjuring.

Can Be Used for: Any non-Constant Special Ability

While quick, flexible spells and incantations are all that's necessary for most Special Abilities, some require you to learn full fledged rituals. These are a lot more involved than your simple "abracadabra" type spells. You've gotta fuel them with Hard Mojo, and they can take hours to perform. More importantly, though, you've gotta learn each ritual separately.

This means that, unlike spells, you *do* have to keep a list of the rituals you know. Each ritual is a specific effect you're creating with a given Special Ability. If you had Conjuring (Divine), for example, you'd need to learn a ritual specifically for summoning an archon (a soldier of heaven).

But you'd need to learn a different ritual for specifically summoning Angelique, who's one of those soldiers. Likewise, with Crafting (Fauna), you'd need to learn one ritual to create a tree, and another one to make a wooden bridge. Your GM gets the call as to how specific rituals need to be—in other words, whether or not you need to learn one ritual to make an elm tree and another to make an oak.

When you learn a ritual, you need to record its Rigor (see “Learning a Ritual,” below). Then, when you cast it, you make an extended Special Ability roll, usually Concentration based. The Diff of each roll is 12, and you need to accumulate a Success Score equal to the Rigor of the ritual. Each roll takes 10 minutes, give or take, and requires you to spend one point of Hard Mojo.

Learning a Ritual

Obviously, then, you're gonna want to learn some rituals. First you need to know how to design them.

Ask yourself five questions:

What Special Ability are you using? Animation? Banishment? Communion? Some Special Abilities require you to use rituals, but that doesn't mean you can't use them for others. If you've got the time and resources to learn it and cast it, a ritual is a great way for an inexperienced mage to get some big results.

What is the effect your are creating? Think about it as if you were using the Special Ability, right then and there. What are the specific results you want? You need to determine what range the effect will work at, how long it will last, and what it will effect.

What modifiers will that have on your roll? A lot of Special Abilities are modified by what you're trying to do. Creating a Ward that lasts for the Series, for example, reduces your roll by 2 dice. Every roll you make when casting the ritual will take these modifiers. You should right them down.

What is usually the Difficulty of the effect? What's the Difficulty of the effect you're going for. If the Special Ability is usually an opposed roll, you need to decide what level the ritual will act at. For example, if you want to make a Telepathy ritual to read someone's mind, you could decide to learn the ritual with a Difficulty of 30. That means that the target would have to make a Mental Save (after modifiers) vs. 30 to resist you.

What do you want your Success Score to be? How high of a Success Score do you want? Some Special Abilities have vastly different effects depending on your Success Score. What you're choosing is what you want that Success Score to be, every time you successfully cast the ritual. Add the Success Score to the Difficulty of the effect, and that's the **Rigor** of the ritual.

OK, so you know what goes into a ritual—Special Ability, Effect, Modifiers, and Rigor. Now, let's talk about learning them. There are three ways to learn a ritual: 1) Someone teaches it to you. 2) You learn it from a book. 3) You make it up yourself. No matter how you do it, it's an extended Int/Special Ability roll. You need to accumulate the ritual's Rigor in Success Score. The modifiers that apply to casting the ritual (like the -2 dice for a permanent Ward) apply to each roll to learn it.

Getting someone to teach you a ritual is pretty tough, but it's a great way to learn. Obviously, whoever's teaching you needs to know the ritual, and they've gotta be willing to do it. Each of your Int/Special Ability rolls takes one working day (eight hours), with a Diff of 9 minus your teacher's Leadership. Finding a teacher, though, is the hard part. For a common spell (like Conjuring an earth elemental or making a basic Ward), you can make a Fay Contacts roll vs. the ritual's Rigor +10. For specific spells, though, you've gotta role-play it out.

If you find another mage's ritual written down, or most any other ritual that is somewhat mage-like, you can use the texts and notes to learn the ritual yourself. Each roll takes a two working days, with a Diff of 12. However, if the author had a higher Occultism score when she wrote it than you do now, you take a 1 die penalty to your learning rolls for each level of Occultism she had on you. So, say I've got Occultism 2 and I'm reading a grimoire written by a necromancer with Occultism 4. My Int/Special Ability rolls would be at -2 dice.

The final—and probably most common—way to learn a ritual is to make it up yourself. Each roll is against a Diff of 15 and takes a week. If you already know a ritual, and you just wanna make a slight change (like the range or duration, or the specific subject it effects), then making a new ritual is a lot easier. Each roll only takes 3 working days, against a Diff of 12.

At the beginning of play, total up your Intelligence, Occultism, and the levels of all your Special Abilities. Multiply this by two; you know a number of rituals with Rigors totaling up to that number.

The Mage's Hindrances

Overall, mages are surprisingly versatile and powerful. Sure, it's pretty obvious when they're using their Special Abilities, but they can do almost anything on the fly. All this power, though, has its costs. Mages spend their lives internalizing alien thought patterns and impressing words of power on their minds. The result? Mages' psyches tend to be a little... unstable.

As a mage, you've gotta pick one of the following hindrances:

Taboo: You need to avoid some particular action, like cutting your hair, touching the dead, having sex, etc. Little rituals and observances like this help keep you focused and, well, sane. Choose an appropriate level 3 Taboo.

Paranoia: Years of risking your soul and psyche in pursuit of power tends to make people a little protective of it. You take all manner of precautions to protect your power—you go to great lengths to hide your True Name, you triple encrypt all of your spells and rituals, and you incinerate all of your hair and fingernails. You spend most of your spare resources protecting yourself, and you don't make new friends easily.

Delusions: You firmly believe something that is not so. You might think that you're the child of a god, that you're invincible, that you're a messiah, that many people are actually demons in disguise, etc. The delusion should be related to the occult, and it should be quite serious.

Attention: Any time you use your magic, you draw the attention of a supernatural entity (or a group of entities). The entity could be hunting you outright, or it might be curious about your powers, or it might want something more insidious. Fairies, demons, ghosts, and even angels might be looking for you.

Player's Glossary

Ability: A Trait which represents learned and/or developed proficiency. There are two types of Abilities: Skills and Knowledges. Skills represent practical and directly applicable ability, while Knowledges represent accumulated information. An score of 0 indicates no experience, a score of 2 indicates basic proficiency, and a score of 6 is complete mastery.

Attribute: A Trait which represents your character's raw mental, physical, and social potential. A score of 1 is sub-human, a score of 3 is average, and a score of 6 is legendary.

Bakeesh: A gift, bribe, or fee that you pay to reduce the number of Markers lost after an unsuccessful Damage Control roll.

Chapter: A single playing session.

Contact: A Trait, much like Abilities, which determines how well connected you are in a given social scene. They are divided into Contact Groups, such as Resistance, Underworld, or Corporate.

d2, d4, d6, d8, d10, d12,d20: Abbreviations for the various types of dice used in *OE*. A "d4" is a four-sided die, a "d6" is a six-sided die, etc. A number will often precede such abbreviations to denote a number of dice. "3d10," for example, means "three ten-sided dice."

Damage Control: A social roll, like Cha/Subterfuge or Int/Bureaucracy, which you use to retain your Markers after asking for a favor.

Difficulty: A number you need to match or exceed for a roll to be successful.

Drama Die: A twelve-sided die which you roll at dramatic moments. Usually, a "12" means you got a Fortune and a "1" means you got a Misfortune.

Dramatic Roll: A roll which requires you to roll the Drama Die in addition to the standard dice.

Edge Pool: A representation of your ability to affect the real world. Edge points may be spent to improve or reroll dramatic rolls, to shrug off the effects of wounds, and to resist harmful behaviors. Edge may also be spent as Mojo.

Experience: How much you've improved or learned in a particular Trait. You spend Experience to increase a Trait's level.

Extended Roll: A series of individual rolls in which you need to accumulate a total Success Score.

Failure Score: The amount by which you miss the Difficulty on a roll. The higher your Failure Score, the more you messed up.

Favor: When you use your Contacts to get information or to get someone else to do something.

“...for every x points of...”: If the rules say something like “+1 die for every 5 points of your Success Score,” that means divide your Success Score by 5 and get that many extra dice. Unless the rules specifically say otherwise, round *up*.

Fortune: Something fortunate that happens which is beyond your control. You get a Fortune if you roll a “12” on the Drama Die.

Game Master (GM): The person that describes the world to you and the other players. She designs the Stories, plays the parts of Non-Player Characters, and referees the rules. The GM is important. Be nice to her.

Knowledge: An Ability which represents learned information, as well as methods for using that information.

Level: A numerical rating for a Trait. Usually goes from 0 to 6.

Lifepath: The character creation system.

Mana: A combination of your confidence, luck, willpower, fate, *chi*, psi, and overall personal power. Mana represents your ability to influence the world. Your Edge and Mojo Pools are each equal to your total Mana.

Mana Source: A Trait which increases your available Mana.

Markers: An abstract record of how many favors are owed to you or how many favors you owe. They may be positive or negative.

Misfortune: Something unfortunate that happens which is beyond your control. You get a Misfortune if you roll a “1” on the Drama Die.

Mojo Pool: A representation of your ability to affect the supernatural. When you use Special Abilities, you must power them with Mojo points.

Path: A general mystical tradition which you may follow, such as shaman, mage, trickster, faithful, etc. Your Path determines which Special Abilities you get and what Techniques you use.

Personality Traits: A Trait which represents some characteristic of your personality. It usually has little or no effect on mechanics.

Player: You and the people like you. The ones playing the game.

Player Character (PC): A character that you or one of the other players controls.

Resources: An abstract representation of your material or digital possessions.

Round: A unit of time in combat or other dramatic situations. A round is anywhere from a few seconds to a minute or so.

Scene: A single block of time in a story, with a clear beginning and end. A conversation, for example, or a fight.

Series: A sequence of stories involving the same characters. What we used to call a “Campaign.”

Skill: An Ability which is trained and practiced. Compare with *Knowledge*.

Special Ability: An exceptional Trait which allows you to break the usual rules of reality. Most people don’t have Special Abilities at all, even at level 0.

Story: An entire coherent sequence of events, usually with a hook, conflict, and resolution. A Story can be as short as a single Chapter, or it can be a number of Chapters strung together. In old gaming terms, we called this an “Adventure.”

Success Score: The amount by which you beat the Difficulty on a roll. The higher your Success Score, the more you succeed.

Technique: What you do to use a particular Special Ability. Your Techniques are determined by your Path.

Trait: A value that represents some aspect of a character. Most Traits are rated from 0 to 6. They include Attributes, Abilities, Contacts, Special Abilities, Resources, Personality Traits, and Mana Sources.

COMBAT

"Why don't we all just relax a little. After all, I'm fairly sure that there isn't anyone in this room who is not carrying a gun."

—Scott Free

ROUNDS

Violent conflict in Oblivion's Edge is fairly common. When it occurs, time breaks down into **rounds**, which are segments of time from 3 to 10 seconds (or so). During a round, you are able to run for cover, fire on a target, engage in hand to hand combat, or perform a variety of other actions.

Each round is broken down into the following Phases:

- 0) Declaration of Intent
- 1) Movement and Missile Fire
- 2) Fast Specials
- 3) Melee
- 4) Slow Specials

PHASE 0: DECLARATION OF INTENT

During this phase, the GM describes the scene, and determines what the NPCs in the battle will be attempting to do (though he obviously does not disclose this to the players). He then asks you, the players, what you will do. Theoretically, you should not have much time to decide or communicate.

If you declare an action, but then decide to change it before you act, your new action will be at a -1 die penalty to all related rolls.

PHASE 1: MISSILE FIRE AND MOVEMENT

During this phase, characters fire guns, throw knives, and launch arrows, as well as run for cover, charge opponents, and attempt to run away. All characters whose primary actions are using missile weapons or moving go during this phase, and must roll for Initiative.

INITIATIVE

Initiative for this phase is determined by rolling Wits/Awareness. There is no Difficulty for this roll, though almost everyone will receive modifiers based upon what they are doing, the size and speed of their weapons, and their fleetness of foot. The modifiers are explained below:

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The following chapter is an old version of the COMBAT rules. The new version is currently in revision. This section is included as an example of how the COMBAT rules will work, as well as a potential layout scheme.

Firing: If you are using a missile weapon of any sort, or bringing up a reaction arc, you must subtract your weapon's Speed rating from your Wits/Awareness roll.

Moving: If you are running, hustling, diving for cover, climbing stairs, or any maneuvering in any other manner, you may have to modify your Initiative roll. If the maneuver you are performing requires a higher Movement Allowance (see below) than you have, subtract -5 points from your Wits/Awareness roll for each level you fall short.

After everyone has rolled Initiative and applied modifiers, the order of actions can be determined. Characters act in groups, determined by their modified Wits/Awareness rolls. Each character that rolled from 0-4 goes at once, as does each that rolled from 5-9, 10-14, 15-19, etc. The GM should start with a suitably high group, such as "35 or higher," and call it out. All characters who rolled from 35-39 then act. The GM then calls out "30 or higher," and resolves those characters. The 25-29 group then acts, and so forth, down to the 0-4 group. **Note:** Any character who rolls lower than 0 **does not act in this phase.**

Individuals with Initiative rolls in the same group act at the same time, unless one of them chooses to change actions. Also, it is distinctly possible that actions resolved early in the round will negate the actions of character's acting later.

MOVING

Every character has a Movement Allowance, or MA, which determines how quickly you are able to move and maneuver. Like most Traits, your MA is given a level

THE CONCEPT OF MOVEMENT ALLOWANCE IS MEANT TO BE A GUIDE, NOT A HARD AND FAST RULE. IT IS EASILY THE MOST COMPLICATED ASPECT OF COMBAT, AND WHENEVER THE GM FEELS THAT IT IS BOGGING PLAY DOWN, OR THAT IT IS UNNECESSARY, IT SHOULD BE ESTIMATED OR JUST LEFT OUT.

MOVEMENT ALLOWANCE		
TOTAL	MA	WHAT YOU CAN DO IN A ROUND
2 OR LESS	IMMOBILE (0):	Duck, shoot, drop stuff, fall prone.
3-4	Sluggish (1):	Walk 1 METER, dodge, get up from being prone.
5-6	Slow (2):	Hustle 2 METERS, jump down from a table, dive, crawl 1 METER.
7-9	Average (3):	Hustle 3 METERS, tuck and roll, jump up a level.
10-12	Quick (4):	Sprint 4 METERS, roll and come up moving, vault a table, run up a flight of stairs.
13-15	Fast (5):	Bolt 5 METERS, do some basic acrobatics (handspring, cartwheel, etc.), running leap, climb over a fence.
16 OR MORE	Blinding (6)	Blaze 6 METERS, do an acrobatic routine.

from 0 to 6; it is determined by adding your Strength, Dexterity, and Athletics: You may perform any of the actions listed in your MA or worse with no penalty. If you perform an action that is in a higher category, you are at -5 to your Initiative for each step up. Thus, if I were Average, I could Hustle 2 meters, dive for cover, or pick myself up off the ground at no penalty to my Initiative. Or, I could vault over table at -5, climb over a fence at -10, or do a triple backflip with a roundoff at -15 (assuming, of course, that I make my Athletics roll).

Closing Distance

If you are using a melee weapon and your opponents are out of reach, you need to close the distance in order to do any good (or bad, as the case may be). To close the distance, you must follow the normal rules for movement. If you close the distance before your opponent acts, he will be in melee and will lose his declared action.

FIRING

When firing a gun or other missile weapon, you make your Attack roll vs. a Difficulty determined primarily by range:

Range Difficulties	
Range	Diff
Point Blank	6
Close	12
Medium	18
Long	24
Extreme	30

This Difficulty (and sometimes the Drama Die) is modified by situations such as cover, dodging, darkness, high winds, etc. Check the sidebar for a guide to these modifications.

Firing Types

Every missile weapon is described by its mode of firing. There are four modes: Single Firing, Semiautomatic, Automatic, and Continuous. The type of weapon determines what types of attack you may use, and the effects of those attacks.

Single Firing: This is the standard weapon, represented by revolvers, most shotguns, hunting rifles, crossbows, etc. It is capable only of taking single shots, which are resolved normally. Damage is equal to your Success Score plus your weapon's Damage Bonus.

Semiautomatic: These weapons, represented by the classic 9mm pistol, allow you to fire as quickly as you can pull the trigger. They are capable of both a single shot and burst firing. When bursting with a semiauto weapon, add +1 die to your Attack roll, but increase the Difficulty by +3. Damage is equal to your Success Score plus Damage Bonus. Bursting uses up about a fourth of the weapon's clip.

Automatic: The automatic weapon, a favorite of cinema, is represented by submachine guns, assault rifles, squad guns, and autoshotguns. When set to full-auto, they continue firing as long as the trigger is held down. Automatic weapons have a number of attack options open to them:

Single Shot: Just like every other weapon.

Burst: Holding down the trigger to send a number of bullets at your foe. Adds +1 Die to your Attack, and does your Success Score + Damage Bonus + Weapon Skill for Damage.

Spray: Firing full auto at a number of people. You may declare a number of targets up to your Weapon Skill, each of which must be within 2m of at least one of the others. Attack each target with a 3-round burst, but increase the Diff of each shot by +3 for each target past the first. Also, you are at +2 Misfortunes.

Missile Fire Attack Modifiers

Target is/HAS	Difficulty
No COVER	-6
DECENT COVER	0
EXCELLENT COVER	+6
Obscured (by dark, smoke, etc.)	+3
In A MELEE	+3*
Size 0	+6
Size 1	+4
Size 2	+2
Size 3	+0
Size 4	-2
Size 5	-4
Size 6	-6
UNAWARE OF ATTACK	-6
RUNNING	+ TARGET'S MA
DODGING	+1 PER 3 points of SUCCESS SCORE

Attacker is/HAS	
UNFAMILIAR WEAPON	+2
FIRING FROM HIP	+3
MOUNTED WEAPON	
W/OUT A MOUNT	+6**
FIRING 2-HANDED	
WEAPON 1-HANDED	+4*
SHOOTING FOR HEAD	+6
SHOOTING FOR LIMB	+4
TURNING WHILE FIRING	+2
IN HIGH WINDS	+2
RUNNING	+4*
UNLOADING OR	
SPRAYING 1-HANDED	+6**
DAMAGED GEAR	+1 TO +6*

* +1 MISFORTUNE

** +2 MISFORTUNE

FOR A LIST OF MISSILE WEAPONS AND THEIR RELATIVE STATS, SEE PAGE XX.

Unload: Firing full auto and burning all or most of your clip on a single target. You gain +3 dice to your Attack, and damage is your Success Score plus triple your weapon's Damage Bonus. However, Difficulty is +6 and you gain +1 Misfortune.

Continuous: Continuous weapons are either beam weapons or automatic guns with phenomenally high rates of fire. Heavy lasers, miniguns, vulcan cannon, particle throwers, and the infamous Banshee Flechette Rifle are all continuous firing weapons. Like automatic weapons, continuous weapons have a number of firing modes:

Single Shot: As usual...

Quick Burst: Depressing the trigger once causes a short burst of flying death. Adds +1 die to your attack roll. Damage is Success Score + Damage Bonus.

Burst: Holding down the trigger to fire a hail of shots or one long burst at your unfortunate target. Adds +2 Die to your Attack, and does damage equal to your Success Score plus double your weapon's Damage Bonus.

Spray: Firing at a number of people. You may declare a number of targets equal to your Weapon Skill, each of which must be within 2m of at least one of the others. Attack each target with a quick burst, but increase the Diff of each shot by +4 for each target past the first. Also, you are at +2 Misfortunes.

Unload: You concentrate your fire on the poor victim, devoting a considerable amount of ammo to his messy demise. You gain +5 dice to your Attack, and do your Success Score plus triple your weapon's Damage Bonus in damage. However, Difficulty is +6 and you gain +1 Misfortune.

Sweep: You rake your fire over an area, up to double your Weapon Skill in meters, attacking each target in the area with a full Burst. If you use this option, you will attack *everybody* in the area (unless using a cookie-cutter), and gain +2 Misfortunes on your Drama Die.

Dodging

If you are aware of a missile attack, you may attempt to dodge. Dodging is a Dex/Athletics roll, with which you attempt to reach the best cover in the immediate area. The Difficulty of this roll is 0, and you increase your attacker's Difficulty by 1 for every three points of your Success Score. If you are under fire by more than one attacker at one time, increase the Difficulty of your Dodge by +3 for each additional shooter. If successful, you add your dodge bonus to all of their Difficulties.

Unless you declare where you are attempting to end up, you take cover at the nearest possible point.



Cover is anything that will stop an incoming missile attack. Hiding behind cardboard boxes doesn't count as cover (though it does count as obscurement). Also, cover isn't indefinite—if a wall is riddled with gunfire, it will eventually crumble.

Dodging, while extremely useful, has its drawbacks. If

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you have not acted yet this round, and you choose to dodge, you forfeit your action. Also, if you had a reaction arc up and you dodged, the arc is lowered. However, if you already acted, you may dodge freely and with no penalty. Initiative's starting to seem more important, isn't it?

Dodging While Firing: When you are firing your weapon at the same time as someone else is firing at you, you can choose to do one of three things: forfeit your attack, forfeit your dodge, or try both. If you choose to dodge while firing, you must make a split pool roll, using the pool with the lower die type. Assign as many dice as you feel is appropriate to either your Dodge or your Attack. Also, both Drama Dice have +1 Misfortune.



Throwing

Thrown objects include knives, shuriken, grenades, rocks, and the occasional cinder block. If using a thrown weapon, such as a knife or rock, make your attack roll as if firing any other missile weapon, using the appropriate Weapon Skill. Some weapons, like thrown knives, have a Buffer and two Damage Bonuses. This is to represent hitting your target with the blade or with the butt of the weapon. If you hit with a partial success, you hit with the butt, and inflict the lesser damage. If you hit with a full success, you strike true with the blade, and inflict the greater Damage Bonus.

If you are throwing something special, like a grenade or a ball to be caught, then special rules apply. Throwing grenades requires a Dex/Athletics roll, with a Difficulty determined by the Range of the toss. Generally speaking, a grenade or other oblong object of reasonable weight has a range directly determined by your Strength. Close range is your Strength, Medium range is double your Strength, Long range is triple your Strength, and Extreme range is quadruple your Strength. As usual, range is in meters. Penalties may apply for obstacles, low ceilings, etc.

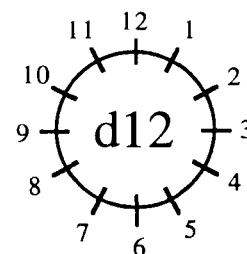
If you succeed, the grenade goes where you wanted it to. If you fail, the grenade lands one meter off target for every 3 points of your Failure Score. The GM should determine which way it goes, though she can use the scatter diagram if no immediate answer presents itself.

When throwing an object from one person to another, roll as if throwing a grenade. If the toss lands on target, then the catcher must make a Dex/Athletics roll vs. 9 to successfully catch it. If the toss is off target, the catcher's Difficulty increases by the thrower's Failure Score.

Shotguns

An ever popular weapon, especially in house-to-house combat, the shotgun fires a cloud of buckshot at its target, hopefully inflicting serious damage. Because shotguns fire a cloud, rather than a single shot, each pull of the trigger can be quite deadly to both the target and anything near it.

Scatter Diagram



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To represent this cloud of lead death, shotguns are given fairly high Attacks, a Buffer, and two Damage Bonuses. When shooting at a single target, roll to hit normally. If you roll a partial success (i.e. Success Score is less than the Buffer), then the target caught the edge of the cloud and damage is determined by using the lower of the two Damage Bonuses. If you roll a full success (Success Score equal to or greater than the Buffer) then you hit the target square, inflicting damage with the higher Bonus.



If your shot clips the target (i.e. you had a partial success), and there is another target right next to it, there is a chance you might hit that target as well. This is represented by the Drama Die. If you *want* to hit the target, you gain Fortune numbers equal to the gun's Buffer. If you *don't* want to hit the target, the Buffer turns into Misfortunes. If you hit, 1d10 + the lower Damage Bonus is inflicted.

Some shotguns also have the ability to "open the choke," which causes a wider spread of the buckshot. This is represented by a cutting the Range categories and Damage Bonuses in half, doubling the Buffer, adding 1 die to the Attack, and gaining +1 Misfortune. If a shotgun is sawed-off (has had the barrel shortened by cutting it with a hack-saw or laser), it is always considered to have an open choke.

Buckshot is most lethal against the unarmored. To represent this, any buckshot hit on a target with a Soak of 5 or lower inflicts double the Damage Bonus that should have been applied. In the same way, however, buckshot is exceptionally *un-useful* against the heavily armored. If the target has a Soak equal to or greater than 12 vs. Ballistics, the Damage Bonus of your shotgun is reduced to 1.

Shotguns may also be loaded with slugs, solid hunks of lead, usually wedged or pointed, instead of buckshot. When firing a shotgun with solid slugs, reduce the weapon's Attack by 1 die, but ignore the special rules regarding buckshot.

Opportunity Actions

You may, during Phase 0, declare that you are waiting for a specific event before you act. For example, you could declare that you will wait for a thug to start reloading before you bolt from cover, or you could wait for your friend to cause a distraction before sniping the enemy leader. There are an infinite number of possibilities.

In general, make an Initiative roll as if you were performing the action normally. The result determines at which point you are *prepared* to act. If the trigger event occurs before you are prepared, you act as if this were a normal action. If the trigger event comes after you are prepared, you act immediately. As always, if you Dodge before you complete your action, you lose the action you declared. Also, keep in mind that you must declare an Opportunity Action during Phase 0. You may

not change your declared action to an Opportunity Action mid-round.

If you declare an Opportunity Action but the trigger event does not happen, you may declare to keep waiting during Phase 0 of next round. If you do so, you do not need to roll Initiative—you are already considered to be prepared.

Reaction Arcs

A special type of Opportunity Action is the Reaction Arc. This common and useful tactic involves holding your weapon ready and covering an area, firing at anything that enters it.

You bring up a reaction arc like any other Opportunity Action, declaring it in Phase 0. At this time, you must also choose your planned mode of firing (single shot, burst, etc.). Then roll Initiative as if you were firing. You bring up the arc at the same time you would normally fire. Once the arc is up, you fire upon anything that enters it before they get to act. If there is a target in your arc at the time it is brought up, you fire upon that target. Once you fire, your reaction arc is lowered.

As with Opportunity Actions, if you have a reaction arc up when the round ends, you may declare during Phase 0 that you would like to maintain the arc. If you do this, you do not need to roll for Initiative. You automatically gain the jump on anyone that enters your line of fire.

You may choose to attempt to identify a target before firing upon it. To do so, roll Wits/Awareness, with a difficulty determined by the GM (15 is a good standard). A failed roll means a misidentification—a friend is seen as a foe, and vice versa.

Split Pool Shots

If you're feeling cocky, you may choose to split your Attack roll into multiple attacks by splitting your pool. To do so, declare the mode you will be firing in (single shot, burst, etc.), modify the Attack pool as appropriate, then split the pool as you see fit. If you are attacking more than one target, increase the Difficulty of all shots by +4 for each target past the first.

Fast Draw

If you do not have your weapon drawn at the beginning of the round, you may choose to fast draw. To do so, split either your Initiative or Attack pool (whichever has the lower die type) between the two. Apply modifiers to each roll **after** the pool has been split.

Example: Opportunity Actions

I AM HUDDLED BEHIND AN OIL DRUM GRIPPING MY 9MM SMARTGUN. ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DRUM IS A CORPORATE OPERATIVE, WAITING FOR ME TO STICK MY HEAD UP SO HE CAN BLAST IT OFF WITH HIS SUBMAC. ABOVE HIM, ON A CATWALK, I SEE MY FRIEND STEP FROM THE SHADOWS AND TAKE AIM. DURING PHASE 0, I DECLARE THAT I WILL WAIT FOR MY FRIEND TO SHOOT, THEN POP UP AND PLUG THE OP MYSELF. THE OP HAS ALREADY DECLARED A REACTION ARC ON ME, SO HE DOESN'T ROLL INITIATIVE. I ROLL A 14, AND MY FRIEND ROLLS A 9. I'M READY AT 10 OR BETTER, BUT I STAY CROUCHING. AT 5 OR BETTER, MY FRIEND SQUEEZES OFF A BURST, SHOTS BITING INTO CONCRETE. THE OP DROPS HIS REACTION ARC TO DODGE, AND I POP UP AND PLUG A FEW ROUNDS INTO HIS BACK. LOOKS LIKE I OWE MY BUDDY A DRINK.

Suppressive Fire

WHEN YOU ESTABLISH A REACTION ARC, YOU MAY CHOOSE TO SQUEEZE OFF A FEW ROUNDS TO LET ANY POTENTIAL TARGETS KNOW THAT YOU'RE COVERING THAT AREA. SINCE MOST PEOPLE WON'T WILLINGLY WALK INTO A LINE OF FIRE, THIS IS AN EXCELLENT TACTIC FOR DENYING AN AREA. IN ORDER TO KNOWINGLY ENTER A REACTION ARC, YOU MUST MAKE A MENTAL SAVE (MODIFIED BY PERSONALITY TRAITS SUCH AS BRAVE, RECKLESS, OR CHICKEN) vs. 15.

TWO-FISTED DEATH

If you have PISTOL AT LEVEL 3 OR HIGHER, you MAY PURCHASE THE COMBAT STYLE OF TWO-FISTED DEATH. This allows you to effectively use to handguns AT ONCE. How effective this style is depends on the type of guns you're using.

If you are using TWO SINGLE SHOT firing pistols, you may use TWO-FISTED DEATH TO MAKE A STANDARD BURST ATTACK, AS if you were firing a STANDARD SEMIAUTOMATIC pistol.

If you are firing TWO SEMIAUTO pistols, you MAY MAKE A TWO-FISTED BURST. You gain +2 dice to your ATTACK roll, but you also take +6 Difficulty AND +1 Misfortune.

SOMEONE WITHOUT THE TWO-FISTED DEATH style MAY USE TWO GUNS AT ONCE, but they gain NO benefit from it. In fact, if they try EITHER of the ABOVE MANEUVERS, they take AN additional -1 die penalty to their ATTACK rolls.

Snapshots

If you need to act early in the round, you may declare a snapshot. To do so, you exchange one die of your Attack roll for a +5 bonus to your Initiative roll. You may exchange as many dice as you'd like, but you can't reduce your Attack below one die. Also, you should apply modifiers for bursting, unloading, etc. **before** exchanging dice. While this tends to greatly reduce your chances of hitting, it's a great tactic for suppressive fire—you probably won't hit, but you will probably get your opponent to dodge and therefore lose his or her action.

You may elect to snapshoot with a reaction arc. The Initiative bonus increases the speed with which you bring the arc up, but the penalty to Attack only applies to the first round. If you maintain the arc next round, you don't suffer the snapshot penalty.

Aiming

If you have a target in your sights, and it does not leave your sights, you may spend your round aiming instead of firing or moving. For every round that you aim, you gain +2 to your eventual Attack roll. This bonus stops increasing after a number of rounds equal to your Will. If you are forced to dodge, or if you fail a Save of any kind, you lose your bonus.

Point Blank

Shooting someone at less than 1 meter is very, very messy. Double the weapon's Damage Bonus. Note that when firearms are used in melee, they will usually be at point blank range.

Shooting Held or Worn Objects

You may attempt this only with a single shot (bursting, spraying, or unloading are just too inaccurate). The Difficulty is increased by anything from +4 to +12 and up to +4 Misfortunes are gained, depending upon the size and shape of the object, how it is being held or worn, and whether or not it is necessary to hit the target without hitting the holder. If you hit with a Success Score of 3 or less, you hit the object, but also hit the target. If your Success Score is 4 or more, you hit the object only. If your Failure Score is from 1-3, you don't hit the object, but you do hit the holder. If your Failure Score is 4 or greater, you simply miss everything. If you *do* hit the target, the GM should determine the effects according to the situation and the Drama Die.

PHASE 2: QUICK SPECIALS

This includes any special abilities, technological equipment, computer programs, etc. that operate instantaneously, as well as delayed effect missiles, like grenades.

PHASE 3: MELEE

During this phase, all hand to hand combat takes place. This includes punching and kicking, wrestling, or fighting with swords, axes, clubs, knives, etc.

Unlike firefights, which are resolved action by action, hand to hand combat is resolved like the constantly evolving contest that it is. Initiative, Attack, and Defense rolls during Phase 3 represent not one single action, but a number of advances, retreats, fients, parries, and dodges, called an *exchange*. In all but the most exceptional circumstances, each individual will be involved in only one exchange each round.

To resolve Melee, break down all of the actual hand-to-hand fights into their individual exchanges. For example, my partner and I are in a brawl with three drunken gang bangers. I'm taking one of them, while the other two try to beat the snot out of my friend. In this case, there are two exchanges going on—me and punk #1, and my partner and punks #2 and #3. Each exchange will be resolved separately, but their effects will be applied simultaneously.

To resolved each exchange, follow the following steps:

- 1) Determine Range (Close, Standard, or Distant)
- 2) Declare Modes (Attack or Defense, Styles, Techniques)
- 3) Compare Advantages
- 4) Resolve

DETERMINE RANGE

There are three ranges for melee: Standard, Distant, and Close. Standard range is somewhere between a meter and two meters. You're keeping enough distance to see attacks coming, but you're still close enough to hit with an advance or a lunge. At Distant range, you are about three meters apart, give or take a few centimeters. Most weapons will be unable to hit at this range, which means you must close the distance before attacking. At Close range, you are within half a meter of each other, usually touching and often grappling. Large weapons, like most swords and spears, will be almost useless at this range, whereas smaller, convenient weapons like knives and brass knuckles will be unhindered.

If you are fighting at a range closer than that of your weapon's, your Weapon Advantage is considered 0 for this round. If you are fighting at a range further than that of your weapon's, then you may only Attack by Closing or Charging.

Unless circumstances obviously dictate otherwise, assume that the initial exchange begins at Standard range. The range may very well change as the fight progresses; this will be explained under Resolution, below.

FOR A LIST OF MELEE
WEAPONS AND STYLES
AND THEIR VARIOUS STA-
TISTICS, SEE PAGE XX.

DECLARE MODES

The next step involves choosing your modes. Your Mode is either Attack or Defense. If your mode is Attacking, then you are aggressing your opponent, feinting and attacking in such a way as to land a solid blow. If your mode is Defending, then you are giving ground, countering your opponent's attacks and waiting for an opening to strike back. **You may hit your opponent using either mode.**

In addition to the basic modes of Attack or Defense, there are less common options available, depending on your range. You may always declare a Reckless Attack or Desperate Defense. At Distant range, you have the option of Charging.

At the same time you declare your Mode, you must also declare if you are using any special fighting styles (like Karate or Long Weapon/Short Weapon) and/or any special techniques (like Close, Evade, Disarm, or Throw).

Unless you are in a Duel or being Pressed, you choose your Mode and any special maneuvers that you will attempt. The GM determines what any NPCs will be doing, then asks you to declare your intent. If you are fighting another PC, you should both reveal your intentions at the same time.

Special Techniques

THE FOLLOWING ARE A NUMBER OF SPECIAL MANEUVERS THAT YOU MAY USE DURING A MELEE EXCHANGE. REMEMBER, IF YOU PLAN ON USING THEM, YOU NEED TO SAY SO WHEN YOU DECLARE YOUR MODE.

Reckless Attack: WHEN ATTACKING, YOU MAY THROW CAUTION TO THE WIND. GAIN AN ADDITIONAL +1 DIE TO YOUR ATTACK, BUT YOUR OPPONENT ONLY NEEDS TO ROLL HIGHER THAN HIS WEAPON'S DIFF PLUS YOUR SKILL TO HIT YOU.

Desperate Defense: WHEN DEFENDING, YOU MAY CHOOSE TO ADD +2 DICE TO YOUR ROLL. IF YOU CHOOSE THIS OPTION, HOWEVER, YOU MAY NOT STRIKE YOUR OPPONENT, REGARDLESS OF HOW THE ROLL COMES UP.

Charge: WHEN AT DISTANT RANGE, YOU MAY CHOOSE TO HURL YOURSELF AT YOUR OPPONENT, USING MOMENTUM AS A WEAPON. YOU GAIN +1 ADVANTAGE, AND BOTH COMBATANTS' DAMAGE BONUSES ARE INCREASED BY YOUR MOVEMENT ALLOWANCE.

Close: WHEN YOU ARE AT DISTANT OR STANDARD RANGE, YOU MAY CHOOSE TO CLOSE THE DISTANCE ONE CATEGORY WITH YOUR OPPONENT. IF YOU DO SO, YOU LOSE 1 POINT OF ADVANTAGE. IF YOUR OPPONENT DOESN'T ATTEMPT TO WITHDRAW, YOU SUCCEED.

Withdraw: WHEN AT CLOSE OR STANDARD RANGE, YOU MAY ATTEMPT TO MOVE OUT ONE RANGE CATEGORY. LOSE 1 ADVANTAGE, BUT YOU SUCCEED AS LONG AS YOUR OPPONENT DOESN'T CLOSE.

Takedown: BY TAKING A -1 ADVANTAGE PENALTY, YOU MAY DIVIDE ANY DAMAGE YOU INFLECT INTO ACTUAL DAMAGE AND "TAKEDOWN DAMAGE." YOUR OPPONENT MUST MAKE A DEX BASED ROLL, USING ATHLETICS, BRAWLING, OR WEAPON SKILL, WHICHEVER IS HIGHER. THE DIFFICULTY IS THE AMOUNT OF "TAKEDOWN DAMAGE" YOU INFLECTED THIS ROUND. IF HE FAILS, HE IS KNOCKED PRONE.

Disarm: TAKE A -1 DIE PENALTY, AND APPLY NO DAMAGE IF YOU HIT. RATHER, YOUR OPPONENT MUST MAKE A STR/WEAPON SKILL ROLL VS. THE AMOUNT OF DAMAGE YOU WOULD HAVE INFLECTED. IF SHE FAILS, SHE IS DISARMED.

Drive: WHEN ATTACKING, YOU MAY TAKE -1 DIE PENALTY TO YOUR ATTACK ROLL IN ORDER TO DRIVE. IF YOUR OPPONENT ATTACKS, THEN YOU GAIN NO BENEFIT, AND WILL PROBABLY END UP CLINCHED. IF YOUR OPPONENT DEFENDS, HE IS DRIVEN BACK BACK 1d4 ADDITIONAL METERS. IF YOUR OPPONENT CAN'T RETREAT THAT FAR, HE TAKES A -1 ADVANTAGE PENALTY NEXT ROUND. OR MAYBE HE FALLS OFF A CLIFF...

Pull Blow: FOR EACH -1 ADVANTAGE PENALTY YOU TAKE, YOU CAN CUT ANY DAMAGE INFLECTED IN HALF. THUS, IF YOU TOOK A -2 ADVANTAGE, YOU COULD CUT YOUR DAMAGE TO A QUARTER.

Called Shot: YOU MAY AIM EXPLICITLY FOR A SPECIFIC BODY PART OR ITEM HELD OR WORN BY YOUR OPPONENT. IN ADDITION TO ANY PENALTIES IMPOSED TO YOUR ATTACK ROLL (SEE PAGE XX), YOU ARE AT -1 ADVANTAGE.



COMPARE ADVANTAGES

Each weapon and martial art has an Attacking and Defending Advantage, which represents their usefulness in combat. After you have declared your Mode, you choose the appropriate Advantage for your weapon, and compare it to your opponent's Advantage. The combatant with the higher advantage gains a +1 die bonus to his or her roll when combat is resolved.

Your Advantage is likely to be modified by circumstances, such as elevation, special techniques, psychological advantage, unfamiliarity, terrain, etc.

RESOLUTION

Combat is resolved according to the modes of the participants. When an Attack or Defense roll is asked for, always remember that weapons and styles have their own Difficulties, regardless of what your opponent rolls. If you fail to succeed vs. your weapon's Diff, you **can not** damage your opponent, even if you roll higher than he or she does.

Unless otherwise stated, a melee exchange has a Buffer of 5 (see page 🍏🍏). If your Success Score is 0 to 4, you have attained a Partial Success. If you have a Success Score of 5 or greater, you have attained a Full Success.

Compare the Modes of the two sides, then consult the following:

Defend vs. Defend: Nothing really happens. You both hold your ground, neither of you risking a real attack. Witty dialogue, insults, and staredowns may all occur in this situation. Though you actually do very little, this still counts as your action for this round—you are concentrating on your opponent. These pauses in combat can be excellent chances for role playing.

Attack vs. Attack: In this situation, both sides break stance and attempt to nail the other. This can get really nasty, with people lancing each other, cracking heads, etc. Both you and your opponent roll your Attacks. The results are determined by your rolls:

Tie Roll: If you both roll exactly the same, neither one of you hits, but you end up in a clinch. This means that your weapons are pressed against each other, locked up, and you both push and pull trying to gain the upper hand. You are in Close Combat, and must resolve combat from there.

Partial Winner: If you exceed your opponent's roll, but not by 5 or more, both you and your opponent strike each other. You each damage each other an amount equal to your Success Scores, plus **twice** your Damage Bonus.

Full Winner: If you exceed your opponent's roll by 5 or more, then you have hit your opponent without her hitting you. Damage is equal to your Success Score plus **twice** your Damage Bonus.

Attack vs. Defend: Arguably the most common situation, you advance upon your

opponent, attempting to find an opening in his defenses, as he retreats, fending off your blows while looking for a chance to counter attack. The results are determined by your rolls:

Attacker is Partial Winner: If you are attacking, and you exceed your opponent's roll, but not by 5 or more, then neither side hits. You may continue to Press your opponent back a meter or two, continuing your Attack next round. If you opponent cannot go any further back, she receives a -1 Advantage next round.

Attacker is Full Winner: If you are attacking, and you exceed your opponent's roll by 5 or more, then you strike your opponent without being struck yourself. You may Press your opponent, as above, maintaining the Attack next round. Damage is your Success Score plus Damage Bonus.

Defender is Partial Winner: If you are defending, and you exceed your opponent's roll, but not by 5 or more, then both you and your opponent strike each other. Depending on the situation, you may either be Clinched or Parted. Both of you inflict your Success Scores plus Damage Bonuses in damage. This situation also occurs if the rolls are tied.

Defender is Full Winner: If you are defending, and you exceed your opponent's roll by 5 or more, then you hit your opponent without being hit yourself. You will usually be Parted if this happens, but you may be Clinched in certain situations (say, if your opponent Charged). Damage is equal to your Success Score plus Damage Bonus.

Optional Rule: Maximum Press

Using this optional rule, you may only Press your Attack for a number of rounds equal to your relevant Ability Level.

After each actual exchange (not Defense vs. Defense), you and your opponent are Parted, Clinched, or one of you Presses the other. If you are Parted, you both step or stagger back, staying within Standard range (or Distant, if that's where you started). If you are Clinched, you slam together, hilt to hilt or body to body. You are now in Close range. In either case, there is a brief pause in the action, and Modes must be declared next round. If you Press your opponent, he must retreat a meter or two. If you wish, you may continue to Press, continuing to attack and keeping your opponent on the defensive. In this case, you remain at the same range. If you Press but your opponent cannot retreat any further, he or she is at -1 Advantage next round.

UNARMED COMBAT

Fighting unarmed is more or less the same as fighting with a weapon. Depending on your fighting Style, you have a Base, Advantage, Damage Bonus, Space, Range, etc., just like a weapon. Usually, though, the Advantage scores will be relatively low, compared to those of weapons.

There are, however, three major changes when fighting unarmed. First, you are at an additional penalty when fighting armed opponents. Second, you inflict Stun Damage rather than normal Damage. Third, you have an additional set of Special Techniques available to you.

When fighting unarmed against an armed opponent (or opponents), you are at a serious disadvantage. Because of the extra care you must take, your opponent's extra reach, and your general inability to block blows, you have a higher Buffer than usual. Normally, in any melee exchange, the Buffer is 5 (see page xx, above).

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However, when fighting an armed opponent, you must increase your Buffer by your opponent's Weapon Skill. This makes it more difficult for you to gain a Full Success, making simultaneous blows much more likely.

Another disadvantage of fighting unarmed is that fists and feet tend to do considerably less damage than clubs, knives, and swords. When you hit your opponent, any Damage that gets through her Soak is converted to Stun Damage, making it considerably harder to kill people with your bare hands.

The disadvantages of fighting unarmed are somewhat offset by its extra Special Techniques. In addition to using any of the Techniques available for armed combat, you may also declare a Hold, Escape, or Throw.

A *Hold* is an attempt to immobilize your opponent and possibly harm him or her by choking or breaking bones. A Hold may only be executed at Close range, but can be used while either Attacking or Defending. If you hit, you don't inflict any Damage—this round. However, for every 3 points of your Success Score, your opponent takes a -1 on any Attack or Defense rolls until he breaks the Hold. Once your opponent is held, you can start inflicting Damage normally next round. If you are not satisfied with the Hold you have on your opponent, you may choose to release it and go for another one. Likewise, if you are currently being Held, you may use a Hold to break out and get a reversal. Each 3 points of your Success Score reduces your penalty by 1. If you reduce the penalty to 0 you have broken the Hold, and can apply any leftover points to putting your Opponent in a Hold.

An *Escape* is an exclusive attempt to break a Hold. Your Mode is automatically Defense, but you gain +2 dice to your roll. For every 3 points of your Success Score, you can reduce your penalty by 1. If you reduce the penalty to 0, you have broken the hold and Escaped, putting yourself at Standard range.

A *Throw* is special form of Takedown, used to both knock your opponent prone and cause Damage. Like a Hold, it may only be executed at Close range, though you may use either Attack or Defense. If you successfully Throw your opponent, you inflict Stun Damage as with any other unarmed move, and you also toss your opponent Prone. However, if your opponent's Dexterity is higher than your Success Score, she may roll with the Throw and come up to her feat at the end of this round.

Certain Fighting Styles may also allow you to perform additional Techniques.

DUELING

The standard Melee rules assume that you are involved in a fast and dirty combat with more or less unimportant opponents. Sometimes, though, you will find yourself fighting an opponent one-on-one, matching wits as well as fists. In other words, you may find yourself in a Duel.

For the most part, Duels work just like normal Melee exchanges. However, there are a two primary differences: the Psychological Edge and Initiative.

Fighting With Your Hands Full

THE RULES FOR UNARMED COMBAT ASSUME THAT YOU HAVE TWO FREE HANDS WITH WHICH TO FIGHT. If ONE OF YOUR HANDS IS HOLDING SOMETHING OR OTHERWISE CONSTRAINED, YOU SUFFER A 1 die PENALTY ON ALL ATTACK OR DEFENSE ROLLS. HOWEVER, YOU ALWAYS HAVE THE OPTION OF DROPPING WHATEVER IT IS YOU'RE CARRYING.

Optional Rule: Escape and Knock

AT THE GM'S DISCRETION, YOU MAY USE THE ESCAPE Skill IN PLACE OF BRAWLING TO ESCAPE FROM A HOLD. Likewise, YOU MAY ALSO BE ABLE TO USE THE SPECIAL Ability KNOCK.

The Psychological Edge

At the beginning of the Duel, each fighter makes an opposed Will/Weapon Skill (or Brawling) roll with a Buffer equal to his opponent's Current Mental. One of you makes a Full Success, you have successfully "psyched out" your opponent and you have the Edge.

If you have the Edge, you gain a +1 bonus to your Advantage and your weapon's Initiative Bonus each round. This makes you more likely to control the combat. You lose the Edge any time your opponent hits you with a Success Score of 10 or higher. If he hits you with a Success Score of 16 or higher, not only have you lost the Edge, but your opponent has gained it.

When both of you end up Defending and neither of you has the Edge, you may choose to have a staredown. If you both agree to do so, you engage in another Will/Weapon Skill roll, as above.

Initiative

The biggest difference between Duels and normal combat is the importance of Initiative. First, declare if you are using any special Styles. Then, before you declare your Modes, you make an opposed Wits/Weapon Skill (or Brawling) roll with a Buffer of 5. Before making this roll, compare your weapon's Initiative Bonuses (remembering to add +1 if you have the Edge). The side with the higher score gains a +1 bonus to the Initiative roll.

If you make a Full Success, you control the Initiative. If your opponent makes a full Success, she controls it. If neither of you make a Full Success, the Initiative is uncontrolled. Controlling the Initiative gives you two bonuses. First, you gain a +1 Advantage this round. Second, and more importantly, you tell your opponent what her Mode will be this round—either Attack or Defense. Then, she must tell you any Special Techniques and she will be using. With all that in mind, you then declare your Mode and Techniques. Then resolve the melee as normal.

If you Press your opponent, you automatically control the Initiative next round, but you must Attack and she must Defend. If you don't Press (and your opponent doesn't Press you) then you must redetermine Initiative each round.

GROUPS

When groups are directly opposing each other, they should be broken down into individual melees. Often, the numbers won't break down evenly, and you will end up with someone fighting more than one opponent at a time. When this happens, the advantage is definitely in favor of the group.

Modes are declared by each combatant as usual, but the exchange is resolved slightly differently, depending upon the Mode of the outnumbered side.

SECOND INTENTION

YOU MAY BE ASKING YOURSELF, "HOW CAN I FORCE MY OPPONENT TO ATTACK IF SHE DOESN'T WANT TO?" THE ANSWER IS WHAT FENCERS REFER TO AS *SECOND INTENTION*. THIS IS A TACTIC IN WHICH A FENCER MAKES AN ATTACK THAT LOOKS REAL BUT HAS NO INTENTION OF LANDING. THE GOAL IS TO GET THE OTHER FENCING TO PARRY THE ATTACK AND RIPOSTE, INITIATING AN ATTACK OF HER OWN. WHEN SUCCESSFUL, YOU'RE EXPECTING THE ATTACK AND KNOW WHERE IT'S COMING FROM, WHICH GIVES YOU A DEFINITE ADVANTAGE. IT DOESN'T ALWAYS WORK, THOUGH. SOMETIMES THE OPPONENT DOESN'T TAKE THE BAIT, AND OTHER TIMES SHE TAKES IT TOO WELL AND PUTS YOU ON THE DEFENSIVE.

CHAPTER 3

Defending Against a Group: When you are outnumbered while defending, your opponents gain +1 Advantage and a +2 to their Attack rolls for every extra combatant. You make one Defense roll and compare it to the any Attack rolls, resolving each one individually. Attacks that normally hit you still hit you, and those that miss still miss. You, however, can only hit one opponent each exchange. You may, however, choose which opponent you strike.

Attacking a Group: When you attack a group, they each gain +1 Advantage and +2 to their Attack or Defense rolls for every extra combatant on their side. When you use this tactic, you must choose a target, then roll your Attack. You opponents all roll either Attack or Defense. Treat your attack normally, as with *Attack vs. Defend* or *Attack vs. Attack* above. Any opponent that you would parry is still parried, and any opponent that would strike you still strikes you. However, you can only strike your declared target.

In either of the above cases, you can decide to split your roll. To do so, divide up your dice into two or more separate rolls, and choose two or more targets. You compare your rolls to the appropriate targets. Any other opponents compare their rolls to your lowest roll. This allows you to strike more than one target at once.

FIREARMS IN MELEE

Though firearms are most effective at a distance, they are still quite useful in close quarters. Unlike most weapons, guns do not have a Defense roll—they are only capable of Attacks. Thus, if you are forced into Defending with a gun, you will have to use your Brawling or other Weapon Skill. If you declare that you are going to fire your weapon during Phase 0 but an attacker comes into melee range before you fire, you are forced into Defending, and may very well be Pressed. If you do gain the Attack, however, you may use any of your usual firing types (i.e. you can burst a single target, unload on him, or spray an advancing group). If this is the case, the outcome is determined according to your Mode, just as it would be if you were using a normal melee weapon. Remember that guns firing in Melee are usually within point blank range, and thus double their Damage Bonuses.

ATTACKING AN UNAWARE OPPONENT

If your opponent does not know you are about to attack, and cannot defend itself, you have a distinct advantage. Make an Attack roll, with the Difficulty being your weapon's Difficulty. If you succeed, roll for damage. The GM may increase the Difficulty due to special circumstances, such as Premonitions, an awkward situation, etc.

A MORE EFFECTIVE WAY TO FIGHT MULTIPLE OPPONENTS IS TO USE THE ZANSHIN SPECIAL ABILITY OR TO LEARN FIGHTING STYLES LIKE KUNG FU OR MUSASHI KENJITSU.



Oblivion's Edge

ATTACKING AN OPPONENT THAT HAS ALREADY ACTED

If your opponent has already acted this round, because it has made a missile attack or used a Special Ability, you have the distinct advantage over it. You automatically have the Advantage, gaining a +1 die to your Attack. Also, no matter what the outcome is, your opponent cannot strike you this round.

PRONE

If you find your self on the ground, and in poor position to fight, you take a -2 Advantage penalty, and cannot use the following Techniques: Reckless Attack, Charge, Close, Withdraw, Drive, or Throw. You may, however, choose to rise at a -2 die penalty to any actions for the round.

PHASE 4: SLOW SPECIALS

This includes most Special Abilities, and many technological devices.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The following are a number of factors that may affect any aspect of combat.

CALLED SHOTS

Normally, when you attack your opponent, you are assumed to be taking whatever openings you can get, with a higher Success Score indicating a more well-placed blow or combination of blows. Sometimes, though, you will want to explicitly aim for a location such as the head or a leg. You must declare your intention to do so during Phase 0. When making a called missile attack, you must be firing a single shot or a standard burst (no spraying, sweeping, or unloaded). In melee, you take a -1 Advantage penalty, in addition to any other penalties described below. In either case, any Initiative rolls you make are at -5.

Head Shots

Attacking the head is tricky, but rewarding when successful. Your Attack or Defense roll is at -6, but if you hit, only a Helmet can be added to your target's Natural Soak. However, you multiply the Soak of the Helmet by 3 for this attack only. If you do wound your target, he receives an additional +4 damage. Also, his Grit roll will have +3 Misfortunes.

Kneecapping

Affectionately known as "hamstringing" in melee, this is a shot intended to take the target's legs out. Reduce your Attack or Defense roll by -4. Only armor that covers the leg counts toward your Soak. If damage inflicted is over 16, reduce it to 16. If 6 or more Damage is inflicted, then the target is crippled, and immediately drops

prone and has an effective MA of 1.

Arm Shots

Called shots to the arm are much like leg shots. Your Attack or Defense is at -4. Again, natural Soak applies, but only armor that covers the arms helps. If more than 12 damage is inflicted, reduce damage to 12. If 4 or more Damage is inflicted, the arm is useless, and it drops whatever held at the time.

FAMILIARITY

The standard combat system assumes that you are fighting someone or something with which you have at least passing familiarity. If you are fighting something which you have never encountered before, then you receive a -4 penalty to your Initiative, Attack, and Defense rolls and -2 Advantage. Each round of fighting the opponent, you may roll Wits/Weapon Skill (or Brawling, etc.) vs. 12 to reduce the penalty by 1. For instance, if I've never encountered someone using a kasuri-gama, I'm unlikely to know where the attack is coming from, how the opponent will defend, and what tactics will work against him. But as I fight this opponent, I start to gain a sense of how the weapon works, until I may fight at my normal ability. It is often a good idea to use an exotic weapon for just this reason.

ENVIRONMENT

For the most part, problematic environments manifest themselves as penalties to various rolls, or as increases in the Misfortune numbers. For instance, if you are wielding a broad sword in a narrow hallway, you will receive one die penalties to Initiative, Attack, and Defense. If you are fighting in a room full of booby traps, both you and your opponent are likely to have three extra Misfortune numbers, fighting in dim lighting would likely cause one extra number. Generally, the GM should apply modifiers appropriate to the condition.

There are a few circumstances which warrant standard details:

Elevation: If you hold the high ground, you have the advantage over your opponent. Depending on the severity of the slope, you gain from a +1 to +6 bonus to your Initiative, Attack, and Defense rolls, as well as +1 to +3 Advantage.

Treacherous Terrain: This includes things like a ship's deck in a storm, a crumbling floor, a sheet of ice, a rope bridge, a bog, a surface cluttered with bodies or rubble, or the Killing Floor (read "Johnny Mnemonic"). Each round, everyone must make a Dex/Athletics roll to navigate the terrain. The Difficulty is based upon how unstable the terrain is. Also, if you are used to the terrain (you've got your sea-legs), then the Difficulty will be considerably less. If you fail your roll, you subtract your Failure Score from your Initiative, Attack, and Defense rolls. If your Failure Score is greater than 10, you totally lose your balance are knocked prone. Also, there may frequently be an increase in Misfortune numbers.

Absolute Darkness: If you are unable to see at all, you must make a Wits/Awareness

roll vs. 50 each round. Subtract your Failure Score from your Initiative, Attack, and Defense scores. Also, when fighting in absolute darkness, you have two extra Misfortune numbers.

Explosives and Areas of Effect

A number of weapons, devices, and Special Abilities produce their effect over an area, rather than targeting a specific victim. These effects usually act in one of three ways—a spherical blast, a wide cone, or a narrow cone. In all three, the potency of the effect is greater near the source, and lessens the further out you are when you get hit.

All area of effect attacks are rated as a number of ten-sided dice. This is the amount of damage taken at ground-0, directly at the source. The amount of damage you take is reduced as you get further from the source. How far away you must be before damage is reduced is determined by the shape of the blast.

A *spherical blast* reduces damage by 1 die every meter you are from the source. If you are under one meter away, you take full damage. If you are from one meter to two meters away, you take one less die. A spherical blast extends out in all directions.

A *wide cone* spreads out from the source at a 45° angle. Every two meters you are from the source, damage is reduced by 1 die. If you see the attack coming, you attempt to dive for cover. If you see the attack coming, you attempt to either dive for cover.

A *narrow cone* spreads out from the source at a 30° angle. Damage is reduced 1 die for every three meters you are from the source.

If you see the attack coming, you may attempt to dive for cover. You must declare which way you're going to dive, then roll Dex/Athletics. For every 10 points you roll, you manage to dive one meter. Hopefully, this will be enough to get you out of the blast, or at least diminish the damage.

ENCUMBRANCE

The ideal way to fight is in a tight, cool, light outfit that allows maximum mobility. This ideal, however, is rarely attained. Weapons, ammo, armor, and additional supplies all serve to bog you down in the combat environment. This is represented by your Encumbrance.

ENCUMBRANCE

LOAD IS LESS THAN...	ENC.
CARRY	0
CARRY x 2	1
CARRY x 3	2
CARRY x 4	3
...AND SO ON DOWN THE LINE.	

Every piece of equipment has a Load score. This represents its weight, bulkiness, size, etc. Your Encumbrance is determined by comparing your Total Load to your Carry, a trait equal to your Size + Strength. If your Load is no more than your Carry, you are unhindered. Once your Load goes beyond that, however, you start to pick up Encumbrance

points.

Each point of Encumbrance subtracts one die from any rolls which rely upon your mobility, most notably any Athletics, Brawling, Stealth, Initiative, 0-G Maneuvers, and melee Attacks and Defenses.

Also, each point of Encumbrance lowers your Movement Allowance by one step. You cannot carry so much Load that it would reduce you past Immobile.

DAMAGE

"Friends will help you move. Real friends will help you move bodies."

— Corey "The Butcher" Valenti

When you get hit, you are likely to take Damage, especially if you are not well protected. Generally speaking, on a successful attack, you inflict Damage equal to your Success Score plus your weapon's Damage Bonus. Your Damage Bonus, however, is often modified by the type of attack you are making (for example, unloading on a target with an SMG triples the Damage Bonus).

DAMAGE MODES

Every attack inflicts damage in one of several modes: Crushing, Slashing, Piercing, Ballistic, or Energy. Crushing attacks cause damage by bruising tissues, breaking bones, and causing internal bleeding. Slashing attacks cause damage by opening deep lacerations, harming internal organs, causing severe blood loss, and severing limbs. Piercing attacks wound by penetrating internal organs and by causing severe bleeding both internally and externally. Ballistic attacks cause damage by opening large wounds and shredding internal organs. Energy attacks usually burn, and may also cause respiratory and psychomotor failures (heart stopping, seizures, strokes, shock, etc.).

SOAK

If you are hit, you automatically "soak" a number of points of damage. This is represented by your Soak score, which is determined by your Size, Stamina, armor, and other factors. To determine your natural, unarmored Soak, cross check your Stamina with your Size on the Natural Soak Chart.

Your unarmored Soak may also be increased by cybernetic augmentations, mutations, Special Abilities, or other Traits.

Armor

Armor comes in many shapes, sizes, and colors, but its general purpose is always to absorb damage. How well it does so, however, is not so universal.

There are six types of armor, five of which correspond to the various Damage Modes. For example, a Kevlar Jacket is Ballistic Armor, while a firefighter's suit

NATURAL Soak CHART

	Size					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1) 0	0	0	0	1	1	2
2) 0	1	1	1	2	3	3
3) 1	1	2	2	3	4	4
4) 1	2	2	3	4	5	5
5) 2	3	3	4	5	6	6
6) 3	3	4	5	6	7	7

FOR A LIST OF COMMON ARMOR TYPES, SEE PAGE XX.

DAMAGE AND THE DRAMA DIE

A NUMBER OF THINGS CAN HAPPEN WHEN AN ATTACKER ROLLS A FORTUNE OR A TARGET ROLLS A MISFORTUNE. THE MOST COMMON RESULT IS THAT THE TARGET'S ARMOR IS DEGRADED. IF THIS HAPPENS, REDUCE THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOAK SCORES OF ONE OF YOUR PIECES OF ARMOR. IF IT IS REDUCED TO A PRIMARY SOAK OF 0, IT BECOMES WORTHLESS.

OTHER POSSIBLE DRAMATIC RESULTS INCLUDE INCREASED DAMAGE (SAY, +4), HITTING A LEG OR THE HEAD (RESOLVE AS IF THE ATTACKER MADE A CALLED SHOT, WITHOUT THE PENALTIES), OR ANY NUMBER OF CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVENTS (LIKE BAD GUYS FALLING THROUGH WINDOWS OR DROPPING THEIR WEAPONS).

is Energy Armor. Each Armor Type protects fully against its particular Damage Mode, but against other Modes it has half its usual Soak bonus. Hard Armor, the sixth Type, protects fully against *all* Damage Modes.

Armor has two Soak ratings—a primary Soak and a secondary Soak. The first is applied when the armor is the main piece of armor being worn, and the second is applied in addition to other armor. If a piece of armor doesn't have a secondary Soak (i.e. it is listed as "NA"), then it can only be used as primary armor. You may only wear one piece of primary armor at one time.

Armor also has a Load rating, which is used to determine Encumbrance (see below).

On your Character Sketch, you should keep track of your Soak totals for each Damage Mode. When you are hit with an attack, reduce the damage you take by the Soak total that matches the mode of the attack. If the damage is reduced to 0 or lower, you take no damage. Otherwise, apply damage.

Immunity

Some things are so bloody tough that are immune to some weapons. Inquisition Ironclads, for instance, can literally walk through small arms fire. This immunity is usually on top of impressively high Soak scores.

If someone or something has such an Immunity, it will be described in its description.

If you score a Critical Success (or get a Fortune) when attacking something with Immunity to your weapon, the GM may decide that you manage to damage it in some creative way, like jamming an Ironclad's limb actuator.

WOUNDS

For every point of damage you take, fill in one circle on the Damage Track, moving from left to right.

Your Damage Level is listed to the left of the Damage Track, and is a general description of how badly wounded you are. A normal, Size 3 person has five points of damage in each level. For each point of

Size over 3, add one point to each level. For each point of Size below 3, subtract one point per level. The Damage Table on your Character Sketch has seven dots. Unless you're Size 5 (which is unlikely), you should use a pen to permanently fill in any unneeded dots, as above.

DAMAGE TABLE

LEVEL	DAMAGE	GRIT	EFFECT (CUMULATIVE)
BRUISED	OOOOO●●	0	NONE
BLEEDING	OOOOO●●	3	-2 TO Physical rolls
WOUNDED	OOOOO●●	6	-1 DEX, WITS
MAULED	OOOOO●●	9	-1 TO PRIMARY STATS
CRIPPLED	OOOOO●●	12	PHYSICAL STATS TO 1
DEAD			PUSHIN' DAISIES

The Grit Save

Just to the right of your Damage Track is the Grit Number. Whenever you take Damage, you must make a Physical Save. The Difficulty is equal to the amount of damage you just took, plus the Grit Number of the total amount of damage you've taken. If your Save succeeds, then you grit your teeth and keep going, unfazed. If you fail, however, you have been stunned to some extent by your wounds. How badly stunned you are is determined by your Failure Score:



Failure Score	Effect
1-3	Phased. Stunned for the rest of the round, and you recover at the end of Phase 2 next round.
4-10	Down. You go into mild shock, and are out indefinitely. Every round in Phase 2, you may roll a Physical Save vs. your total amount of Damage to recover.
11-15	Out. You are knocked out, in shock, and in serious trouble. Until your wounds are stabilized, you must make a Physical Save vs. your current Damage or take another point of Damage. Once someone stabilizes your wounds, you may make a Physical Save vs. your current damage to wake up. Medical attention helps.
16+	Dying. You are down, out, and dying from severe system shock. You will be clinically dead in 1d4 rounds.

Damage Penalties

To the right of the Grit number is the effect of your wounds on game play. These penalties are cumulative, meaning that you apply the penalties for every Damage Level that you have any amount of damage in. Thus, if I had taken 14 points of damage, I would be at the Wounded Damage Level, and would receive a -2 to all my Physical based rolls *and* I would subtract 1 from my Dexterity and Wits.

Remember, you can spend a point of Mana in order to ignore one level of Damage Penalties for the current Scene.

Dying

There are two primary ways to die—you can either fail a Grit Roll by 16 or more, or you can take damage to exceed the Crippled Damage Level. From a medic's point of view, the first is *much* more preferable than the second. The actual mechanics of death and recovery are dealt with in Chapter xx.

Stun Damage

Certain damage is not intended to kill or maim, but rather to subdue. This is represented by Stun Damage. When you are hit with Stun Damage, you fill in the Damage Track as normal, except that the marks you use for Stun Damage should be somehow different from the marks you use for normal Damage. I recommend using an "X" to mark real Damage, and a "/" or "\" to mark Stun Damage.

When you take Stun Damage, it affects you just as real Damage does. You must make a Grit Save and apply penalties just as if you had actually been wounded. The

EXAMPLE: STUN DAMAGE

I AM SHOT BY A GUN SHOOTING GEL-ROUNDS FOR 13 POINTS OF STUN DAMAGE. THE 4TH, 8TH, AND 12TH POINT BECOME REAL DAMAGE, SO I MARK THOSE WITH X'S ON THE DAMAGE TRACK. I THEN FILL IN THE REMAINING 10 POINTS OF STUN DAMAGE WITH SLASHES. NEXT ROUND, I TAKE 6 POINTS OF REAL DAMAGE FROM A SHOT IN THE LEG. I TURN THE FIRST 6 SLASHES OF STUN DAMAGE INTO X'S OF REAL DAMAGE, THEN ADD AN EXTRA 6 SLASHES OF STUN DAMAGE TO THE END OF THE DAMAGE TRACK. ENTERING INTO PHASE 2, I'VE GOT 9 POINTS OF REAL DAMAGE AND 10 POINTS OF STUN DAMAGE. I FEEL LIKE I'VE BEEN MAULED. IN PHASE 2, I ROLL MY PHYSICAL SAVE VS. 19 (MY TOTAL DAMAGE), AND GET A 24. I SHRUG OFF 5 POINTS OF STUN DAMAGE, BRINGING ME BACK DOWN INTO WOUNDED.

difference is that you recover from Stun Damage *much* quicker than you do from real Damage. When you have sustained Stun Damage, you may spend a round "shaking it off." Every round you do this, you make a Physical Save vs. your total Damage (Stun Damage and real Damage together). If you succeed, you may reduce your Stun Damage by your Success Score. If you do not succeed, you try again next round with a +1 die bonus.

When you are hit with Stun Damage, every fourth point is **real** damage. Thus, if you took 6 points of Stun Damage, one of them would be real. If you took another 2 points of Stun Damage, the second one would be real.

If you take both real Damage and Stun Damage, the real Damage is applied *under* the Stun Damage. This means that real Damage fills continually from the first circle on the Damage Track, and Stun Damage is applied after it. If you already have Stun Damage and you take real Damage, the Stun Damage is displaced to the end of the Damage Track.

Falling

It's often been said that "falling's the easy part—it's the landing that gets you." This is true. When you fall, you must make a Stamina/Athletics roll, with a Difficulty equal to the distance you fell in meters times five. Also, for every 5m, you gain +1 Misfortune. So, if you fell out a window 4m up, your Difficulty would be 20 and you would have +1 Misfortune. If you succeed, you take no damage. If you fail, you receive your Failure Score in Crushing damage, which can be Soaked by armor.

If a fall is long enough to gain control of your fall, or if you purposefully jump, you gain a +1 die bonus to your Sta/Athletics roll. If you are bound or otherwise restrained, you take a -1 die penalty. If you are unconscious, paralyzed, or otherwise unable to react, you do not get to make the roll, and take full damage.

Fire

Flames and heat continue to inflict a random amount of Energy Damage every round. The number of dice is determined by the amount of your exposure, and the die type is determined by the heat and intensity of the fire.

<u>Dice</u>	<u>Exposure</u>	<u>Die</u>	<u>Intensity</u>
1	Tongue of flame	d2	Candle flame, stove top
2	Burning log, etc.	d4	Camp fire, standard oven
3	Clothes on fire	d6	Welding torch, chemical fire
4	Engulfed in flames	d8	Napalm, furnace, house fire
5	Submerged in lava	d10	Lava, molten steel
		d12	Plasma storm

Each round, roll the damage dice for the fire, as well as the Drama Die with up to +4 Misfortunes. Soak reduces the damage normally. Misfortune's can mean any number of problematic events, such as degraded Armor, the fire spreading and adding an extra die, flames leaping to nearby combustibles, etc.

If you are on fire, you may attempt to smother it with a Wits/Athletics roll vs. 15 or so. Every five points of your Success Score reduces the dice or die type by one.

Acid

One of the nastier forms of attacks, acid slowly eats away whatever it touches. The potency of the acid is rated as die type, while the amount is rated as a number of dice. On the first round of contact, the acid does full damage. Each round after that, it does one less die, until there is only one die left. After that, the acid does one die of damage of the next die type lower each round. The acid keeps reducing like this until it inflicts only 1d2 damage. After that, it stops.

When you are struck with acid, you gain +1 Misfortune for every die of acid damage you take on the first round.

The damage that acid inflicts is special, because it is one continuous attack rather than a set of repeating ones. Thus, the *total* damage done by the acid is reduced by your Soak, not the damage done each round. Once the acid has done more damage than your Soak score, all of the damage done by that dose becomes damage.

Electromagnetic Pulses

A favorite of the Resistance operatives and cyborg hunters everywhere, electromagnetic pulse weapons, or EMPs for short, deliver a powerful charge of energy to their target. This charge is sufficient to scramble all sorts of computer systems, including cyberwear.

EMPs deliver Energy based Stun Damage to any living thing they hit. Also, any electronics in the blast or on the person hit are likely to be shorted out.

If you take EMP damage, your Grit Roll gains Misfortune numbers if you have any of the following cyberwear systems: optics, audio, wetware, or limbs. For each system you have at Rating 4-5, add +1 Misfortune. For each system you have at Rating 2-3, add +2 Misfortunes. And for each system you have at Rating 1, add +3 Misfortunes. A Misfortune probably means a short in one or more systems, with effects including system shutdown, painful feedback, or severe seizures.

Any normal computers must make a Stability/Shielding roll vs. the Damage inflicted by the attack. If successful, the computer is fine. If it fails, however, it crashes and will need to reboot. If the Failure Score is 11 or greater, then the software has been corrupted and the machine needs service before it can reboot. If the Failure Score is 16 or greater, the machine is completely fried—all data is lost, and it would be cheaper to buy a new one than to fix it.

Example: Acid Damage

I AM splashed by a vial of strong hydrochloric acid, which starts at 2d6 damage. My Soak is 9. On the first round, the acid does 2d6 points of damage, getting a 7, which is absorbed. Next round, the acid does 1d6 damage, getting a 4. 2 points are absorbed by my Soak, and I take the other two points. Next round, the acid does 1d4 damage, getting a 2. Since my Soak has already been used up, I take both points. On the next round, the acid only does 1d2 points, resulting in a 1. Again, I take this point of damage, but the acid has stopped acting.