

Book 4:
The Darkness Manifest

THE DARKNESS MANIFEST

Introduction

“The Darkness. That Which Lies Beyond, encroaching and threatening all of reality with absolute, unforgiving, relentless annihilation. It doesn’t care who you are, where you’re from, or where your allegiances lie - it’ll destroy you anyway, in the end. Why? Simply because you are. Because you exist. As long as you’re in the Corridors there may be safety in numbers, but don’t feel too safe. Set one foot beyond, into the Void, and the chances are you’ll never make it back. You don’t want to go on Its turf, at least not without some serious shielding and firepower...”

At least, that’s what the Continuum will have you believe, and that’s what they drum into the hearts, minds, and souls of all their Students. But what secrets does the Darkness hold? What exactly is its relation to the Nephandi? How and why does it strike at the Realms (Corridors) suspended within it?

All these questions, and more, are addressed within this Supplement. While this is geared primarily at describing the adversaries the Continuum must face in their defence of Reality - and as such is best used in conjunction with the Continuum Files - the rules here can be freely adapted to more conventional Chronicles. In effect, this can be used as a general treatise on the Outsider faction of the Nephandi, as defined in the Book Of Madness.

Using this Supplement in the WoD

The excellent **Book of Worlds** presents the official White Wolf line regarding the Deep Umbra, portraying it as a neutral (albeit inherently dangerous) environment that can be molded into whatever the visitor wants it to be - a plain, etherspace, or the void of space. **The Darkness Manifest** changes all this, turning the Deep Umbra into an actively malevolent entity that seeks nothing but the destruction of all Pattern - this is true for any Tradition or Convention that journeys there, and not just the Continuum. Ultimately, this may greatly change the slant of the game and certainly should make adventuring in the Deep Umbra much more dangerous than normal.

The Darkness Manifest starts with a detailed account of the Metaphysics of the Deep Umbra, and how it relates to the Darkness. It then describes how the Darkness generally invades realities, and then presents a roster of the entities that serve the Darkness - the Darkness Manifest itself. Finally, a short story (and NPC) is presented to set the tone and illustrate the power of the Darkness.

Ultimately, I leave it up to individual Storytellers to decide how to incorporate this material into their games. You may wish to use the creatures described herein as powerful foes and explain their background and origins some other way. Alternatively, you may wish to use the background here as only the Continuum’s view of the Deep Umbra though this may be a little harder to explain in the grand scheme of things. However you use it, enjoy the material and do write to me if you come up with any ideas of your own to add!

Section 1: Metaphysicks

Concepts

To fully understand the nature of the Darkness and its connection to the Deep Umbra, it is necessary to delve into its metaphysicks. Cosmologically, the Deep Umbra surrounds every Corridor, and has no boundaries. It is literally 'without form, and void' - no permanent pattern permeates it, and it is free from the fetters of a single paradigm. No worldly force can ever hope to bring the Deep Umbra to heel metaphysickally - it would take infinitely long to do so, and the fact is that there can be no single dominant paradigm unless ALL of the Deep Umbra was converted at once. Being infinite to an even greater degree than the Corridors themselves, this task can never be accomplished, at least not by denizens of the Corridors. To explain - the Corridors can be thought of as infinite three-dimensional spaces. The Deep Umbra, however, can be thought of as an infinite 'supra-dimensional' space, possessing much more than three dimensions. This kind of supra-dimensional infinity transcends the mere three dimensional infinities of the Corridors, and is completely inconceivable by inhabitants of those realities. However, such (indeed, ANY) analogies can be misleading, as it implies that the Deep Umbra possesses such qualities as size, dimension, space, and time. It does not.

It would be paradoxical to actually class the Deep Umbra as any form of 'reality'. Indeed, the Deep Umbra does not actually 'exist' in any sense of the word. In fact, words cannot even begin to do justice to the true concept of the Deep Umbra. It can best be described as the complete absence of any kind of reality. To describe it as 'nothingness' is misleading, in that 'nothing' is still something. An analogy would be to compare 'zero' to the 'absence of a number' - the Deep Umbra corresponds to the latter.

In truth, any attempt to describe the Deep Umbra is to describe the undecipherable. Such an effort would fix it into a paradigm, and it lies beyond this. All that can be said is that it is locally defined by the paradigms of those who enter it - in the Deep Umbra, the visitors see what they instinctively expect to see, an environment that is fatal both due to its incomprehensibility and its very nature. No-one short of the Oracles (if even they can see it) can see what really lies underneath this, for this would require that the observer is free from all paradigm.

What makes the Deep Umbra even more unique is the reaction between it and a visitor from one of the Realities within. When a paradigm is brought in by the visitor, an imprint - a 'bubble of reality' - is created in the Deep Umbra by the very act of the visitor's capacity to observe what is around him and his personal paradigm. This 'reality bubble' extends as far as the visitor himself can perceive and experience though, and no two visitors are likely to perceive the same created environment.

However, the Deep Umbra is an inherently dangerous environment, because Pattern itself has no place there. Pattern is *actively* attacked by the very nature of the encompassing non-reality, and is consumed into nothingness in a matter of hours unless protected by powerful (Spirit 5) magicks or shielding. While a Mage may be able to survive in the vacuum of normal interstellar space by simply *believing* he can through normal magicks, the very nature of the Deep Umbra makes unprotected survival there impossible even for Mages. A Mage may believe he can breathe in the Deep Umbra, but his very being, his very Avatar, will still lose cohesion and he will die without protection. However, if suitable protective measures are employed the deadly environment can be kept at bay for a while at least. The hulls and shields of Technocracy spacecraft and Etherjammers are sufficient for this purpose, as are Deep Umbra Environment Suits (DUES). Thus, a Void Engineer believing the Deep Umbra is Outer Space will die quickly and painfully without the protection of his DUES (though the air supply therein may still be only temporary).

The Traditions and Conventions see the Deep Umbra in many different ways, but all are correct though paradoxically equally *wrong* about the nature of the Deep Umbra. The naturalistic Traditions see it as the Spiritual Void. The Sons of Ether see it as Etherspace, permeated by the Ether, while the Void Engineers attempt to equate it to the vacuum of Outer Space (see below). All are equally valid to the individual traveller, and all are equally deadly to the unprotected visitor. In truth however, the Deep Umbra is all of these and neither - it has no form, holds no pattern, has no inherent definition, and literally has no existence.

The Deep Umbra and Outer Space

One important point should be raised before continuing - **the Deep Umbra is NOT Outer Space**. Rather, it can best be thought of as the *spiritual representation* of Outer Space. Similarly, the Shard Realms are not the physical representations of the planets of the Solar System - they are their spiritual reflections. In the Outer Space of physical reality, Mars is the next planet out from Earth, a cold and dead desert world orbiting the Sun at a distance of 1.5 AU. However, in the spirit realm - in the Deep Umbra - it is the Shard Realm of Forces.

In the Technocracy-dominated physical reality of Earth, the planets move in the cold, empty vacuum of space. Ether does not exist there, and outer space is deadly to the unprotected traveller without exception. Stars are born, live, and die according to the laws of physics. The solar system lies uncolonised (except perhaps for one or two secret Technocracy bases on the Moon) and interstellar travel is still but a distant dream. The only way to Outer Space is by rocket or by powerful Correspondence magicks - either way, the traveller must be prepared (either technologically or magickally) for the environmental rigours of his destination and must be suitably shielded from the radiation, lack of pressure, hostile atmosphere (if on a planet) and/or the cold of space if he is to survive there. For now, Outer Space awaits as the next frontier, continuing to infinity beyond the atmosphere of Earth.

The Deep Umbra is a different matter however. As described in the **Book of Worlds**, the Awakened have established bases among the planets and satellites of the Solar System, and the Technocracy has even managed to create a vast structure - the Cop - around one of the stars in the Alpha Centauri system. Bases have been established on the Moon that scrutinise the Earth below. Battles rage for domination of the Solar System between the Marauders, the Technocracy, the Traditions, and the Nephandi. In **The Darkness Manifest** however, where the Deep Umbra itself fights against the intrusions of Pattern, there is good reason for the Technocracy and Traditions to be paranoid - as well as fending off raids from their usual enemies, they must be wary of assault by the forces of the Deep Umbra itself. And all of this occurs beyond the sight of the Sleepers, who are completely unaware of the Spiritual world on the other side of the Gauntlet.

The Technocracy *believes* that the Deep Umbra is the same as Outer Space, and attempts to sterilise its spiritual aspects and make it indistinguishable from the Outer Space of physical reality. It is likely that it will never entirely succeed in this effort - the Deep Umbra itself can never be brought to heel in such a way - but the individual realms within it (the Shard Realms and other realms) are quite susceptible to such sterilisation.

Systems

Entering the Deep Umbra is only possible by breaking through the Horizon, as described in the **Book of Worlds**. Commonly, Spirit 5 (**Break the Dreamshell**, Mage2 - pg. 219) is used to physically transport the traveller into the Deep Umbra, or Mind 5 to cast his mind forth into the Deep. Once there, the traveller requires Life Support to survive indefinitely.

Life Support must be provided by a separate Spirit 5 effect (**Deep Umbra Travel**, Mage2 - pg. 219) - this prevents the Mage's Pattern from being dissolved in the Deep Umbra - this is required even if the Mage arrives there in Astral form (ie. with Mind 5). Often, the vessels of the Etherjammers and the Technocracy are shielded in this way as a matter of course, and only need to make a Spirit roll to penetrate the Horizon.

Should the Life Support fail, the traveller is vulnerable to dissolution in the Deep Umbra. A successful Arete roll at difficulty 9 will allow the victim to at least breathe in a rudimentary reality bubble - the paradigm defined by the observer - but this only makes dissolution more comfortable and does not prevent it. No rules are given here to cover how long a victim lasts without even this rudimentary protection, but it should be no longer than a few turns. Arete rolls can be made in every turn of consciousness, but physical damage will be inflicted on the character while he suffocates. If the Arete roll succeeds, the character can survive for a number of hours equal to his Avatar rating + 1. During this period, he may attempt to attract attention or rectify his situation as he sees fit - however, as each hour goes by, his Avatar rating drops by one. Once it drops below zero the traveller dies, his Avatar consumed by the Deep Umbra and lost forever.

Subjective vs. Objective Reality

The world of mortals is a world of opposites - Light and Dark, Heaven and Hell, Left and Right, Up and Down, Right and Wrong... the list goes on. So too, one presumes, is reality itself - for a subjective reality to exist, there must be an objective reality that is 'right'. Subjective Observation requires something to Observe, after all, and this is presumed to be 'Objective Reality'. In the confines of a Realm, this much is true at least - indeed, some Mages believe that the Near Umbra is the Objective Reality of Earth, and that physical reality is merely our Subjective perception of this.

Beyond the Horizon, in the gulf of the Deep Umbra, this assumption does not hold. One might argue that the Deep Umbra is a wholly subjective reality, given that one's perceptions shape the reality perceived there. However, this is only true because beneath this - beyond the perceptions of visiting observers - lies the 'naked' Deep Umbra, something that has no existence, form, or definition. In effect therefore, the objective reality that one might assume lies underneath everything in the Metaverse **does not exist!** True, there are *local* objective realities within each Realm (those that define the existence of gravity and other basic physical laws, for example), but there is nothing that underlies the Metaverse as a whole. The natural form of existence in the Metaverse is NON-existence!

The implications here are quite controversial - if non-existence is the root of the Metaverse, then somehow existence must have sprung from it. If this is so, then will we ultimately return to it? Are the Celestial Chorus misguided in their belief in their origins in The One, a transcendental state of pure Quintessence? Should they not instead seek a return to the Deep Umbra, to their original state of primordial nothingness? Such quandries will doubtless plague philosophers for ages to come.

Existence within Non-Existence

Since reality in the Deep Umbra is defined by the observer, that reality always moves with him as he travels through it - he can NEVER leave this defined reality, since to do so would be to remove himself from his own paradigm. Attempting to perceive what by definition lies outside the realms of perception is by its very nature *absolutely* impossible.

However, the fact is that things DO exist within the Deep Umbra, despite having no-one to observe them. The Realms - Gaia, the Shard Realms, Arcadia, and the Periphery are obvious examples. In the more common paradigms, these correspond to the Corridors of the Continuum, the Worlds of Etherspace, and the Planets and stars of Technocratic Space - these serve as 'landmarks' in the otherwise fathomless Void.

No-one knows why the Realms exist. They are totally unlike the Void in which they are suspended, in that they are *real* - they are the stuff of Prime and Pattern. They are different in the basic fact that they *exist*, while the Deep Umbra that surrounds them does not.

Unlike the Deep Umbra, the Realms have definition, and several features that are common to all:

1) Quintessence. Most importantly is that despite common Gaiacentric belief, *all* Realms by definition are sources of Quintessence. Whether that Quintessence is compatible with that of Gaia's is another matter - most are not, which explains why the search by some Garou factions (and many Void Engineers and Etherites) for a 'Second Gaia' compatible to our own is proving so difficult - but the fact is that *some* form of Quintessential energy exists within each Realm to allow for its very existence.

2) Coherent Laws of Reality. While the laws of existence within each realm them are often quite different, they are at least internally consistent within that realm, and anything entering that realm is strictly bound to those laws regardless of its origin. The most commonly encountered expression of these laws is Paradox, which is common to every Realm in the Metaverse. This is true even in those without inhabitants, which supports the idea there is at least an objective level of reality that is local to individual Realms and always present there, even when there is no-one there to perceive it (of course, some argue that this proves nothing since there is no evidence to show that the Realm itself does not disappear when no-one perceives it - The argument rages on...). These laws can be circumvented by means that are by definition Magickal, but it should be remembered that it is these laws that define what is magickally Paradoxical or not. There are even some Realms where the laws of local reality are such that the very act of Magick itself is impossible!

3) Horizons and Near Umbrae. For reasons described later, the Deep Umbra is not a static environment - it is constantly attempting to destroy the Realms it contains. The Realms would have disappeared long ago were it not for the presence of the Horizons around them. It is not only Gaia that possesses the Horizon - they are a common and vital feature to all Realms that continue to exist today. The Horizons are simply the boundaries between each Realm and the surrounding Deep Umbra, and it serves as a protective membrane through which the Deep Umbra cannot easily penetrate.

The unstable environment immediately within the Horizon gives rise to a buffer zone between itself and the actual physical reality of the Realm - this is the Near Umbra. Like the Horizons, Near Umbrae are a common feature to all Realms that continue to survive in the Deep Umbra - without them the Deep Umbra would be able to easily penetrate to the physical reality of the Realm and annihilate it completely. Stable pockets within the Near Umbra are smaller realms that can exist within the confines of the Horizon - an example of one in Gaia is the Cyber-Realm - while near the Horizon itself lie the Shade Realms and the artificially-stable Horizon Realms of Mages. The unstable environments of the Near Umbrae make the local laws of reality more mutable and so all Magick to be cast more easily within.

Some Realms possess additional internal barriers - Gauntlets that separate the physical reality from the Near Umbrae within the Horizon - but this is by no means the case in every Realm. Certainly it is true on Gaia, but some argue that the Gauntlet here was created by the beliefs of its inhabitants and not by any more objective physical process.

Umbrood and Nephandi

Many of the Realms in the Deep Umbra provided stable environments in which life survived and thrived in. Like ourselves, the inhabitants of these other Realms gazed across the Deep Umbra and wondered what else was out there, and some left their homes and survived passage through the Void to nearby Realms to colonize and explore their surroundings. Some chanced upon Gaia and became fascinated by its potential and its inhabitants - these are known to us as the **Umbrood**. Some sought company and knowledge, others sought Quintessence, but still more turned their gazes to those Realms richer than their own and began to plot their destruction and came to be feared there as alien horrors and hideous monsters - the stuff of nightmares. Their dark passions corrupted them over time, and they further their goals by twisting and corrupting others to their ideals. They stop at nothing in their lust for the raw power of Gaia and other Realms, or the destruction of all life within - these former Umbrood are known as the **Nephandi**.

However, from beyond the Horizons something ELSE gazed upon the creatures of Pattern, and sought the annihilation of all...

In the Beginning...

Before there was Time, the Metaverse was without form, and void - such was the unsullied non-existence of the Deep Umbra. Then, Pattern inexplicably formed in the Void in a cataclysmic event known to some as **The Sundering**. It coalesced into the Realms, and in those Realms Space and Time existed, worlds formed and creatures of Pattern evolved, and they eventually left their homes and set forth into the Void...

The Metaverse was now split into two - the Deep Umbra (the non-existence that was the absence of all reality and Pattern), and the Realms (physical existence consisting of Quintessential energy, consciousness and Pattern) - where before there was only the Deep Umbra. The natural Order had been shattered, and the greater laws of the Metaverse sought a return to the balance. Pattern was an anathema to the Metaverse - a paradox on an unimaginable scale - and it needed to be corrected.

Unbeknownst to all the creatures of Pattern - the Umbrood, the Nephandi, and the inhabitants of the Realms - *something* shifted in the Void. To restore the previous natural state of Metareality, alien forms hitherto unseen in the Metaverse were born from the very non-existence of the Deep Umbra - their sentience and existence were without Pattern, yet still they existed. They held no individuality, and were a wholly alien kind of consciousness - forms through which the Void's will could become Manifest. Again, the true concept behind this is almost impossible to describe, but suffice it to say that the Void sought a return to its primal, unified state - and to do so required the total annihilation of everything with substance, sentience, Pattern, and Quintessence. It broke through and manifested in the Realms, and the inhabitants know these manifestations as the Pure Forms, Fallers, and the Zigg'Rauglurr (to name but a few). And so it was that the inhabitants of the Realms and all those born from Pattern - the Marauders, the Umbrood, and even the Nephandi themselves - learned of and grew to fear the Void.

The Darkness

The beliefs of the inhabitants of the Realms concerning what lies in the darkness surrounding their havens are many and varied. Some believe in Heavens and Hells, in Afterlives and Antelives, in Gods and Demons, and in Lights and Darknesses. Somewhere in the infinity of Universes, it is inevitable that somebody should come perilously close to the truth...

There is an organisation of human Mages on Gaia known as **The Continuum** that believes that the Realms (which they refer to as **Corridors**) are aberrations in the fabric of the Deep Umbra (which they call **The Darkness**) created from primaeval instabilities within it. Since the natural state of the Deep Umbra is non-reality, they believe that it perpetually seeks to destroy the instabilities of Pattern that permeate it, and so restore the natural order of non-existence. They are more correct than they can possibly know...

As the Continuum struggles against the forces of the Darkness, their experiences on the battlefield of realities serve only to reinforce their belief that they are right. Their pleas for aid and attention from the other magickal powers of the world - their former allies in the Technocracy and their potential partners in the Traditions - fall on the closed ears of those who would rather seek to solidify their temporal power base or who would choose to struggle instead for global and personal Ascension. Yet the Continuum do find allies in other realities, and together they grimly turn to face the Darkness that threatens to envelop all...

Section 2: Invasion

*“I came to rip you up, I came to shut you down,
I came around to tear your little world apart,
And break your soul apart...”*
- Garbage, ‘Vow’

Most of the victims of the Darkness don’t even know they’ve been annihilated, or even that they exist. As described in ‘The Labyrinth of Time’, the Darkness destroys many Virtuals during what is termed ‘**The Drift**’ - that undefinable moment when a Virtual exists outside of time and pattern after separating from its parent reality. Cast adrift in the Darkness with no Prime flowing through them, the Virtuals are extremely vulnerable to dissolution during the Drift.

It is not known why some Virtuals survive the Drift and others do not. There are many theories - the likelihood of the event that caused the Virtual happening, the subconscious will of the Virtual inhabitants to survive, or just blind luck - nobody knows for certain. What matters is that time freezes within every Virtual that splits from a higher Order reality, and restarts when it reconnects to Nexus (the Shade Realm of Time). In the Virtuals that survive, the inhabitants don’t even notice the shift, since it happened outside Time. Similarly, the duplicated inhabitants are simply erased along with the rest of their reality in those Virtuals that are dissolved by the Darkness, without being aware of their own existence.

Beach-heads

However, this is not the only way the Darkness can overcome a Reality - direct invasion is always an option. This requires the penetration of the Horizon and the establishment of a **beach-head** in the targeted reality. The exact nature of the beach-head varies from invasion to invasion, but it usually involves the implantation of several Manifestations that act to weaken the area further and burn a hole through the reality, creating Spatial, Temporal, and/or Dimensional Rifts that can spread rapidly through the reality if left unchecked and consume it entirely. In higher Order realities (usually Order 0 and 1), such invasions are uncommon - however, in lower Order realities (Order 2 and 3) the Darkness can more easily establish a beach-head, making them much more vulnerable to dissolution.

Beach-heads are especially dangerous as they serve to bring the Darkness closer to the physical reality being invaded, at the expense of the local Near Umbra. In effect, the Horizon is forced towards the Gauntlet until the two barriers merge, so that the Deep Umbra and the Physical reality border each other directly in that area. This allows non-Pattern Manifestations to be deposited much more easily in physical reality, ultimately hastening the destruction of the barrier between reality and non-reality and allowing the Darkness to flood through.

On many occasions, the initial breakthrough into the reality is actually caused unwittingly by the actions of the local inhabitants. Pressure Points - local weak spots in the invaded reality - created by strong Temporal resonances (historical simulations, for example) frequently allow Zeitgeist to manifest, and Paradox caused by misfiring Time effects also weakens the Horizon enough for Manifestations to come through. Beach-heads are frequently established in sparsely populated locations (abandoned buildings and structures, remote country houses etc.) where a few people - those that set off the chain of events - are present. On rare occasions, Manifestations are even actively summoned by inhabitants, an act that endangers all of the reality. Most dangerous of all are the Dark Nomads, who can traverse the Labyrinth and create gateways for the Darkness with impunity - many realities have fallen to the Dark Nomads.

Continuum Response

*“I’ve seen the anger and I’ve seen all the dreams,
Watched an existence torn apart at the seams,
And though I may seem helpless,
I will do all that I can do...”*

- Sarah McLachlan, ‘Shelter’

The Continuum constantly monitors the Horizon from Central Office, scanning for new beach-heads. Where it finds them, a Response Team is despatched to the target reality to deal with the Manifestations. A Response Team usually consists of two to four Repulsion Branch Agents, assigned to best fit into both the destination reality (a Saurid Agent would look very out of place in a human-dominated reality, for example) and to cope with the situation at hand.

Frequently, Response Teams are fixed partnerships, with each Agent assigned to best complement his or her partner’s abilities - at least one Agent must be able to locate the disruption to the local reality caused by the Manifestations, and one other must be able to deal with the Manifestations themselves and seal the breach.

The Teams’ task is straightforward - to seal the beach-head, destroy any Manifestations in the area, and repair the damage to the Horizon in the area - and nothing else comes above this. Repulsion Branch Agents can and should interact with the local inhabitants where necessary, and should try to accomplish the mission objectives with minimum local disruption where possible. However, if extreme measures are necessary the Agents are cleared to use them - after all, the Team is there to neutralise the threat to reality, not molly-coddle the inhabitants - and if the sacrifice of some of the locals is necessary to seal the beach-head then that must be the way to proceed, though this is always the last resort. While many Agents detach themselves emotionally from the task at hand and perform their duties with clinical precision, some do show concern over the locals caught in the crossfire. The balance is hard to maintain, but ultimately the Teams have a responsibility to take whatever actions are necessary to repel the invaders and maintain the safety of reality.

Section 3: The Darkness Manifest

*“Sometime soon for all to see,
The walls are slowly breaking down,
And someday we’ll be free”*

- Sarah McLachlan, ‘Trust’

The forces of Darkness can be divided into two main types - ‘**Agents**’ and ‘**Manifestations**’. The primary forces of the Darkness are those without Patterns, known as **Manifestations**. This term comes from their description as ‘The Darkness made manifest’, or more simply ‘The Darkness Manifest’. Older texts have more formally referred to them as ‘**The Unformed**’ or ‘**The Uncreated**’. In the more vulgar argot of more recent times, Manifestations have been described as ‘**Nulls**’. Of course, the entities themselves require and use no words to describe themselves - their actions speak for themselves.

Agents of Darkness are those Pattern entities that willingly aid the Darkness’ cause - this includes cultists, the more nihilistic *barabbi*, the Klassha’a, and Dark Nomads. In effect, these are traitors to existence, who aid the forces that would annihilate everything. In every case, however, the Darkness will destroy the Agent along with every other Pattern - most either know and accept this fate, or mistakenly believe that they can escape it. However, it should be noted that some entities - Empty Ones in particular, being Manifestations with Pattern form - defy categorisation.

Stats are not given for any of the creatures and entities described below - they are solely descriptive so that the Storyteller can incorporate them into his chronicles as he sees fit.

Accelerators

The Continuum is unsure if these are real creatures, phenomena of the Darkness, or some other unknown effect within the Labyrinth of Time. Whatever they are, Accelerators affect entire Virtuals, pushing them forwards through time (sometimes up to several millenia) in an instant and freezing them until the timeline of the rest of the Labyrinth catches up with them. Visitors to a Virtual that is thusly frozen are not themselves affected, and can explore freely. However, when an Accelerator affects a Virtual, EVERYONE within it at the moment of temporal acceleration is effected. While frozen, the Virtual is effectively defenseless and highly vulnerable to destruction by The Darkness unless beings from another Virtual decide to protect it.

The Broken

It takes a strong mind to face the Darkness, and many Continuum Agents are irrevocably changed by their experiences with Manifestations. While most are able to hold on to their sanity, there are inevitably some minds that break under the strain - most are younger, less experienced Agents who have not had a chance to harden themselves against the Darkness. More often than not they are Agents that have failed in an important mission, possibly destroying an entire Virtual and all its inhabitants in the process. The shock of what they have allowed to happen (whether their actions could indeed have made any kind of difference in the first place or not) and the ensuing feelings of helplessness and despair serve to drive them over the edge - a Garou watching the victim of such an experience would undoubtedly say that he had succumbed to Harano.

Those who fail to recover from the shock are known as **The Broken**. They break off contact with their former comrades and wander across realities, generally avoiding the Darkness rather than facing it. They tend to lash out at everything around them, always trying to convince those around them of the pointlessness of existence. A few even sometimes actively establish a Beach-Head for the Darkness to come through, thus sending more realities to their doom.

Continuum Agents *never* willingly serve the Darkness - their training is too stringent to allow this to happen (though some are lost as casualties of war and become Empty Ones) - it is experience and the attrition of willpower that serves to drive many to Break as described above. The Broken are viewed with pity by the rest of the Continuum, and are if possible dealt with non-violently and with some degree of compassion. Some have been known to recover with outside help, but even these are never allowed to return to active duty again. Those that do not usually commit suicide.

Bubbles

These phenomena are among the most bizarre forces in the Metaverse. Bubbles are transparent spheres, varying in size from one inch to one mile, that float throughout the Labyrinth. Usually when encountered the Bubble will contain a small object (perfectly preserved) or a creature (usually withered and shriveled, but also in excellent condition). If a person should encounter an empty Bubble (devoid of anything, even air), then he runs the risk of being entrapped within it. Once trapped within, there is no way to escape or destroy the Bubble (provided the entire being can fit within). The Continuum believes that Bubbles are completely indestructible, able to withstand even the Darkness itself. However, some believe that Bubbles are actually infinitely slow “digestives” of the Darkness, eternally consuming whatever is within. The Modi have yet to find an empty Bubble big enough for all of them to enter.

Dark Nomads

*“This world rejects me,
This world threw me away,
This world never gave me a chance,
This world’s gonna have to pay...”*
- Nine Inch Nails, ‘Burn’

While the Broken have the luxury of compassion from their former peers, the Dark Nomads have nothing to fall back on. Nomads (described in Appendix 1) in general are lonely creatures, forced to continuously move from one reality to another by a pull known as ‘the Siren’. Such endless upheaval drives many over the edge, and many suffer the same fate as the Broken - however, Dark Nomads are much more dangerous. Many are driven to lash out against the realities that reject them, wandering through the Labyrinth and using their Ways to allow the Darkness to flood through. They are more than capable of individually destroying entire realities through the use of their powers, making them very dangerous individuals indeed - fortunately, they are quite rare. Additionally, it is rumoured that these Agents of Darkness have developed their own Dark Ways to better tear their way through the labyrinth. In addition, they are at least equal in more mundane ways to the Repulsion Branch Teams that track them down, and are quite powerful, cunning and ruthless - they can generally be put down only with great difficulty, if at all.

The Empty Ones

Sometimes a mind of a Pattern being briefly connects to the Darkness for some reason: most often this occurs when an inexperienced or hubristic mage attempts to establish mental contact with a non-Pattern Manifestation of the Darkness such as a Faller or a Pure Form. The victim's mind is exposed directly to the anti-existential gulf that is The Darkness, which immediately tries to invade the mind. Sometimes the victim can break the contact before it is too late, but he is often mentally or spiritually scarred first - insanity is a common consequence of such an experience. However, in many cases the victim is completely overwhelmed by the Darkness, which floods in and annihilates the victim's mind. Once this foothold is gained however, the Darkness cannot easily spread from the mental plane into the physical plane. The victim instead becomes a puppet of the Darkness - essentially a Manifestation given a Pattern form - referred to as an '**Empty One**'. Empty Ones usually work to open up the reality for the Darkness and frequently band together into cult-like groups in order to more easily sabotage its defenses. Mental contact with an Empty One also serves to spread their kind, since the Darkness has now taken hold in their minds.

Fallers

The existence of the Fallers is largely theoretical to the Continuum at this point. A research team noticed fluctuations in the local time-stream on a routine data-gathering expedition in an uninhabited Virtual, and determined that something was traveling backwards through time and was about to appear. Ten minutes later one of the members was comatose, three had disappeared into the future, and two were dead and partially devoured. Through mental probing of the comatose victim, the Continuum was able to discover that a species of insect-like creatures was 'falling' from the future into the past, and that they used sentient life from the times they entered to fuel their backward journey and take their place in the future.

Further inconclusive encounters with the Fallers have yielded enough information to allow the Continuum to at least theorise about their nature and behaviour (though as yet no-one has seen a Faller in the flesh). It appears that Fallers are beings that travel linearly (but in a non-continuous manner) through time, jumping from the future towards the past. As they travel, they devour Quintessence from Patterns around them in order to power their jumps back through time - the amount of Quintessence devoured generally determines the span of the jump. This puts Mages at great risk, as their Avatars can provide much fuel for the Fallers' journeys. The Continuum fears that Fallers cannot be affected by anything outside of their timestream, and that the only way to stop them is to freeze time in an area and let them fall into the frozen moment where they are vulnerable.

Fallers are actually very insidious agents of the Darkness, whose sole purpose is to destroy Virtuals. They arrive at the end of the timespan of the Virtual Corridors (perhaps where the walls of the Virtual are the weakest) and travel back in time along the Virtual, devouring any Quintessence along the way. When they arrive at the *start* of the Virtual Corridor (remember that the universe before the Virtual branched off from Main Corridor is also duplicated when the Virtual is created), they are very powerful through the Quintessence they have devoured along the way, which allows them to devour the nascent Virtual universe before it even has a chance to form - of course, this means the Virtual effectively never existed. Since they are agents of the Darkness, the Fallers themselves are unaffected by the destruction of the Virtual - however, since the Virtual itself never formed (because they ate it when it was young) all the Quintessence they absorbed never existed. So they leave the 'destroyed Virtual' with no more Quintessence that they started off with, and then move on to another Virtual, where they arrive at the end of that Virtual's timestream relatively weak and start the whole process again. There are obvious similarities between the Fallers and the Zigg'raugglurr in MC, and it is believed the two are related somehow.

Labyrinth Worms

These small creatures appear as glowing, sting-like ripples, similar to waves of heat. They burrow among Virtuals, consuming unnoticeable amounts of Quintessence and time from the area they appear in, only to leave the Virtual and excrete their meal into another. No one knows exactly how they reproduce, but it is believed that the process of consumption, mixed with Virtual travel, allows them to "splinter" into more worms. The worms might populate in uncontrollable numbers, except for that fact that many creatures of the Darkness (especially the Fallers and Temporal Locusts) find them to be delicious. Whatever they are, they hint at the existence of a complex Metaversal temporal ecosystem of which Continuum researchers have barely scratched the surface.

Modi

Modi are a strange race of giant hovering golden disks - the discs themselves are covered with faintly glowing silver runes, but a Modi's most distinctive feature is the sentient, slightly Olmec-appearing humanoid face on one side. They are rumoured to have originated in a Virtual where the ancient Olmec civilisation succeeded in creating sentient Artificial Intelligences, but were then themselves wiped out somehow (possibly even by their creations). Regardless, the Modi are highly intelligent and have carved out their own place in the Labyrinth of Time.

Modi possess seemingly Oracular knowledge of Time (and limited knowledge of some other Spheres), and are incredibly arrogant and haughty beings. They see the Darkness as being 'below them', and as such continually look for ways to avoid or escape from its predations entirely - indeed, such is their arrogance that they believe they can ultimately control or even completely neutralise the Darkness. The Modi move backward in time to avoid the effects of the Darkness (further adding to their hubris, as this leads them to believe that the Darkness can never keep up with them), and there are rumoured to be large concentrations of Modi located at or near the beginning of the timestreams of several Virtuals - Modi appear to be completely impervious to the incredible magickal and physical energies prevalent during these periods. These Modi Strongholds are incredibly well-defended and the Modi cluster there, believing that they can withstand any assault the Darkness throws at them.

However, the presence of the Modi near the start of a Virtual's timestream is potentially quite destabilising. The Modi can quite easily (through arrogant misjudgement) inflict untold damage down the timestream if they should accidentally tamper with history so early in the Virtual. Modi are generally aware of this fact through bitter experience, and this knowledge further adds to their total paranoia. The Continuum actively tries to keep the Modi away from Main Corridor itself, as if they ever manage to create a Stronghold there they could severely compromise the temporal security of MC.

In addition, entities such as the Fallers and Dark Nomads actively track down the Modi through the timestream, and are quite capable of giving them severe problems despite their ability to travel through and manipulate time - Fallers are particularly dangerous, arriving as they do at the start of a Virtual having absorbed all the Virtual's quintessence. Doubtless, the battles waged between the Modi and Fallers are stupendous in scale, as both sides have access to vast amounts of energy with which to fuel their assaults - however, at this point it is not known which of these two factions are is more dominant.

The Continuum has only recently discovered the existence of these paranoid and immensely powerful creatures, and is still studying them from afar whenever possible. Attempts at contact are troublesome at best as the Modi rarely deign to even notice the paltry inhabitants of the realities they pass through, let alone stop and talk with them. Given their unpredictable nature, the Continuum is highly wary of the Modi and will remain so until a more thorough evaluation is made.

Acropoli

Created by the Modi, Acropoli are one of their biggest and most daring experiments. Acropoli are giant (30,000 miles long) sentient cylinders that travel from Virtual to Virtual, siphoning off small amounts of Quintessence from each one they visit. Once they've accumulated enough Quintessence (the Modi don't know exactly how much that is), the Acropoli will converge within a single section of a weak Virtual, and "overwrite" the entire reality with a stronger one - hopefully strong enough to create an entirely new Corridor into which the Modi can migrate and defend as their own. In their quest for Quintessence, the Acropoli have been known to absorb trillions of Temporal Locusts at once, adding their combined power to its infinite reserves. While all Acropoli are loyal to the Modi, they have been known to take "creative steps" in achieving their mission, and can be a threat to weaker Virtuals that would otherwise like to remain the way they are.

Null-whales

Nobody knows what Null-whales look like, or even if they have any kind of appearance at all. They seem to be beings of Darkness that move just outside (or beneath) realities, reaching in using unknown means to break the chains of causality. When a Null-whale interferes, actions have no effect: a fired bullet will hit nothing (seemingly disappearing), dropping a stone will not cause it to fall, light will not illuminate.

Null-whales are very powerful, but do not seem to care much about individual beings or worlds. Instead they try to sabotage the crucial events that hold realities together by removing their effects. To do so they have to slowly build up their presence in the vicinity of the event (both temporally and spatially), until it will be isolated and impotent - such a build-up is distinctly apparent to those with Time 1. They seem to especially seek out events that will create many new virtuals, such as chaotic periods where the whole of history is in balance, and forcing it down one particular path. It is believed that they somehow gain sustenance from the alternative realities that these "critical moments" would otherwise create, devouring them in the instant they are created. Thus, a shell meant to kill Hitler in World War 2 would be caused not to kill him, and the Null-whale would devour all the realities that would have been formed had Hitler died then. If this is true, then devouring lesser realities (such as Indistinguishables based on the fall of a leaf) may be possible, but it is likely that such meals would be barely sustaining at best.

Stopping the Null-whales is extremely difficult since they are impossible to directly reach - even with magick - but clever mages have used Time magicks to manually create new causal connections or by working to change things so that the event will occur elsewhere.

Pure Forms [adapted from the 1st edition Mage rulebook]

Pure Forms are among the most dangerous minions of the Darkness. Their appearance alone can bend even the strongest minds, as they appear as floating patches of sheer non-existence around which reality can be seen to flow like water. They are the Darkness personified, mobile holes in reality that irrevocably annihilate anything they come into contact with - anything they touch is instantly obliterated, the Pattern locally and permanently disrupted - however, sufficiently energetic contact (such as bullets or Forces magicks) can damage them first. They can cause widespread physical destruction, as although only the part of the Pattern they touch is disrupted this is often sufficient to cause the rest of the structure to collapse. In addition, their presence in an area can cause damage to other aspects of reality, as if they are not dealt with they will eventually 'burn through' physical, spiritual and then Quintessential reality itself, leaving a gaping hole through which the Darkness can easily invade.

Pure Forms are extremely difficult to deal with, as they are essentially only vulnerable to magick or high-energy weaponry. They are especially drawn to large concentrations of Quintessential energy, such as those found in Avatars and Nodes. They gain no sustenance from the destruction of Pattern or Quintessence, but simply destroy it. Fortunately, Pure Forms are quite rare as Darkness Manifestations go, generally only occurring around Beach-heads where physical reality is in direct contact with the Darkness, but are priority targets of the Continuum when they do appear.

Shatters

Darkness Manifestations occasionally find ways to penetrate the hairline fractures of Darkness that naturally lie between realities in the Labyrinth of Time, and some manage to 'hitch rides' on unwary travellers as they pass through between the Virtuals and wreak havoc in the realities they arrive in. **Shatters** are one such type of entity, manifesting as a form of psionic "virus" that infects Virtual travellers as they travel between realities. Shatters infect Patterns, immediately acting to break down the mental, physical, and spiritual patterns of their hosts.

Infection slowly drives victims insane, filling them with paranoia and delusions of grandeur, but the primary effect is to gift them with the ability to shatter the Patterns of any objects around them. As the host's madness escalates, this Shattering increases in intensity and the host develops the ability to direct it somewhat. Objects around the host splinter into thousands of shards, which in turn splinter into millions, then trillions and so on, until the very quintessence of the item itself is broken apart into nothingness. Also, as the host's madness increases, the Shattering effect begins to effect him (though he retains consciousness throughout), and it becomes even more contagious to Life patterns. Shatter Plagues are justifiably feared throughout the Labyrinth, as the only way to treat them is with advanced Life and Prime techniques - however, many lower Order Virtuals have succumbed to the Shatters and have been completely 'shattered' into nothingness.

Temporal Locusts

These strange insect/arachnoid entities travel in hordes and swarms of almost infinite size. Travelling from reality to reality, the swarms consume everything within their path, growing in number for every world they devour. Quintessence devoured by the swarm is used to create more Locusts, but strangely it is possible to convert the Quintessence used for this purpose back into real matter - a detail exploited by the Modi and their Acropoli. The Continuum believes that this property indicates that Temporal Locusts were originally Pattern entities adapted for use by the Darkness, that have not been fully converted into non-Pattern entities - instead, the Quintessence is held within them until they themselves are destroyed. If no Quintessence is available for the Locusts to devour, they turn on each other instead, which completely destroys the stored Quintessence.

Temporal Locusts are highly effective at destroying Lower Order realities, and can be a serious threat to higher order Virtuals too.

The Twisted Ones

These bizarre Manifestations exist as warpings of the flow of time, knots or shockwaves that cannot be unravelled by anything outside the Darkness. They are created as a byproduct of the destruction of realities by the Darkness. Most have no consciousness at all, but some are strangely sentient (possibly through the entrapment of the consciousness of Patterns during the destruction of a reality) and similar in behaviour to Pure Forms (q.v.). They spread throughout the Labyrinth, seeking out other temporal disturbances where they cluster, wreaking havoc with time and generally weakening reality. Their effect on the timestream is quite noticeable - small areas can suddenly be replaced by the same area from a few seconds in the future or past (which remains out of sync with the rest of the reality), time repeats for several seconds (rather like a scratched record), and other such reality-weakening temporal hiccups can occur.

Zeitgeist (Time Ghosts)

Zeitgeist are classic Darkness Manifestations, and are the ones that give Wraiths such a bad reputation among the Continuum. Zeitgeist arise from short-circuits through time, and can be formidable foes. Such short-circuits are usually inadvertently created by the actions of the inhabitants of Virtuals and Main Corridor during re-enactment of events that occurred in the past. Anything that can bring back images from the past - whether an accurate historical recreation (a very potent creator of Zeitgeist), a traditional song or nursery rhyme, or even tampering with old photographs - can create Zeitgeist.

The resonance with the more distant time period being emulated weakens the walls of the Corridor, creating what Continuum Agents call a **Pressure Point** that allow Manifestations to enter the timestream. The physical form they take is compatible with the resonance that created their entry point, so that the 'images from the past' are effectively made real - these 'physical ghosts' are the Zeitgeist.

Zeitgeist are intelligent and cunning entities that come in a variety of forms that have brought about the demise of several Continuum Teams. One of the first documented encounters with the Zeitgeist occurred several hundred years ago when the **Vanguard** (the organisation that would later become the Continuum) confronted them on a certain galleon on the high seas, resulting in the legend of the Mary Celeste (it should be noted that the original ship was sunk by the Vanguard following this incident - the vessel later found by sailors was a duplicate created to prevent Sleepers from discovering what *really* happened there). In other incidents, they have been seen among the extras provided for the filming of epic and accurate historical dramas, in laboratories experimenting with reproducing and restoring old photographic images, in commemorative war parades, and so on. In one recent case, they broke through in an old country house as the mother of the family read a favourite nursery rhyme to her daughter - in that instance, one member of the Continuum team sent there was trapped by the Zeitgeist in a painting of an old cottage in which a woman had been executed by soldiers in the 1600s, and very nearly experienced the same fate! These incidents reveal that Zeitgeist are very cunning, very intelligent, and extremely dangerous.

Generally, the only way to stop Zeitgeist is to remove the resonance that causes the Pressure Point, which if left unchecked evolves into a Temporal Rift that slowly spreads throughout the reality - this often involves calling in the Repulsion Branch Specialists. However, in some cases - especially if caused by an accurate historical recreation - it is better to see the resonance through to its natural conclusion and then trap and destroy the Zeitgeist at that point.

Section 4: Silhouette

Melissa paused and squinted at the plant before her - it was hard to examine in the dim light of the stars that illuminated the sky above. She sighed wearily - it looked like another new species, which meant more hours slaving over it at the Lab. She gave thanks to the Earth Mother here for the new species she had found, then begged forgiveness for what she was about to do. She had to pick the flower and carry it back with the others, which was that part of the job she didn't like - as a Verbena, she believed all Life was sacred, even if it did have blue leaves and stung you every time you touched it. She sighed again - the work here was tedious and upsetting, but had to be done - and plucked the plant from the cold ground.

Oh well. It would be sunrise soon - that at least she looked forward to even if it wasn't the sun of her home, Gaia. Except that it was, in a way. Midgard WAS Earth... just a different one, that was all. Some things were the same - the sun, the air, the moon in the sky above - but something had changed early on in the history here. VERY early, in fact - no animal life had evolved here, but oh... the FLORA! The air was alive with the magickal smell of flowers, of pollen, of spores and seeds and LIFE! That was the only reason she remained here - she felt as alive as the land itself. If only the others here felt the same... but they were an odd bunch, pottering about in their labs and ready rooms, muttering about Virtuals and Labyrinths and Singularities and Corridors. She gathered they were called the Continuum - which didn't sound very familiar to her at all - but they seemed a reasonable bunch. A bit too scientific for her liking though, which stifled her somewhat. She didn't understand much of their technobabble - all she could follow was that Midgard was an Alternate Earth and that it needed to be catalogued and recorded, and that meant endless pre-dawn sample collecting expeditions outside the Base. There were a few other Verbena here, but they were only present at the request of the Continuum. They were generally the only ones here she felt comfortable with at all. One of them - Daniel - she felt *very* comfortable with, and she smiled as she remembered the night before...

Heads up - the sun rises soon. She put down her sack of samples and settled down on a small rise - a huge field of green and red and blue stretched out before her as far as she could see in the dim light. Behind her, about two hundred metres away, lay the red-brick sprawl of the Continuum Outpost. The Continuum *always* built red-brick buildings - it was apparently one of their few traditions. They didn't look *too* bad, but she still thought they were a blot on an otherwise unblemished landscape.

She frowned. Something was... odd. The sun was supposed to rise any minute now, but there was no still sign of the dawn. She squinted, straining to see anything in the gloom - perhaps it was heavily overcast or something. No... the stars were clearly visible, low in the horizon where the sun should be rising.

All of a sudden Melissa felt very vulnerable and alone. The sun should have started to rise by now, she was sure of it. What was going on? The natural silence around her started to become oppressive - VERY oppressive. Something was building in the air, something *hideous*...

She was already running to the safety of the Base when the stars in the east began to go out one by one, devoured by a wave of oncoming Darkness...

The alarms had started as soon as the Darkness was sighted. Melissa burst through the gates, panic in her eyes. Daniel, she had to find Daniel! But there were people running everywhere - she'd be lost in seconds! The Control Room - that would be a good place to start. She fought her way through the crowds, and stepped into ordered chaos;

“Midgard to Nexus, come in please. We are under attack. Repeat - Midgard is under attack. Outer and Inner defences have been breached, the Darkness has penetrated our defences. Method of entry unknown, we NEED immediate assistance! Repeat - Midgard to Nexus, we are under attack...”

“Any word from the Repulsion Unit? Dammit, what the hell is hitting us?! Are the Perimeter Defenses operative? Get them online! How long do we have ‘til projected Dissolution? DAMN! Get the Analysts out of here, NOW! Sound the Evacuation Alarms!”

The Base Commander noticed her standing agape in the doorway.

“Get her out of here NOW!”

An Operative rushed to take her outside; it was Josh Hastings, one of her few friends among the Continuum. He took her aside in the corridor as the alarms sounded.

“Missy, what are you doing here? You have to get out...”

“What’s going on Josh, I’m terrified! What was all that about ‘Darkness’ and ‘Dissolution’? Are we going to die?”

“Something’s broken through our defences, cut us off from outside. The Darkness is pouring in from Beyond...”

There was a loud thump, and the walls shook.

“It’s pounding on the Perimeter - you have to go! This battle isn’t yours - you have to get to the Portal before it’s too late! GO!!”

“But... Daniel - “

“- Is probably down there already! You both know the drill - get out now, while you still can! MOVE!!”

“HASTINGS! We need you in here NOW!!!”

“I have to go. Take care Melissa, may your Goddess watch over you. Good luck!”

With that, Josh rushed back to his post in the Control Room, and Melissa was swept away in the tide of people.

The walls shook again, with more force this time. Melissa choked back her tears - Daniel was nowhere to be found, though another Verbena claimed to have seen him heading for the Portal earlier. He was still alive - she'd know if he wasn't - but where *was* he? The ground shook, and this time the walls exploded inwards, showering the corridor with rubble. Some of the crowd were hit by masonry and fell bloodied to the floor; the throng panicked and then the screams started as unearthly wind howled through the remains of the wall. As she stopped to tend the injured, laying her healing hands on their wounds, she glanced at what lay beyond the ruined wall, and terror chilled her to the bone.

The verdant fields that she had been working in only an hour earlier were gone - all that was left was grey ash. The sky swirled with whorls of ultimate black - approaching was a huge gash in the sky, an inverted whirlpool whose maw was... indescribable. Beyond all colour, it wasn't black - it was sheer *nothingness*, devouring all below it. Debris funneled up to the gaping maw and was dissolved within. Black lightning crackled between the ground and the sky, but most terrifying was the lone figure on the crest of rock in the foreground that had been thrust up during the chaos, back-lit by the negative anti-flashes of the lightning. There on the jagged outcrop stood the silhouette of a man, arms outstretched to the hole in the sky in exultant triumph, its clothing billowing around it in the howling winds. The maw passed him overhead and he moved, directing it on towards the Outpost. And even above the roar of destruction, she could hear his laughter...

Melissa saw this only for a brief instant, but the image was burned into her brain forever. She gasped and stumbled away from the terrible sight, pushing with renewed vigour through the surging crowds. There wasn't much time left...

The pounding was relentless by the time she reached the Portal Room. Here, Continuum Agents had managed to calm the crowd enough to have them filing orderly through the shimmering gate suspended in the centre of the room. She felt Mind magicks at work here, but allowed them to affect her - after all, it was safer to not to panic here. She marveled at the calmness of the Agents that herded the evacuees through the Portal - they must know they were doomed now, but still they did their duty. This thought gave her something more to hold on to, though thoughts of Daniel were pressing through to the front of her mind. She couldn't see him anywhere...

Suddenly there was a grating screech, and the ceiling gave way. The stability broke immediately as people were crushed in the rubble and the hideous noise from outside drowned out the ensuing screams. Melissa picked herself up - miraculously escaping with only cuts and bruises - and looked towards the Portal. It was beginning to flicker, and the roar of the Maw was deafening now. She made an agonising choice, as it seems did a few others who could still stand. To stay and help the wounded meant certain death for her. Her only chance was to dive through the Portal before it closed. She dashed for the unstable gateway and hurled herself through...

As the Portal slammed shut forever behind her, she found herself falling in the dark. Midgard lay suspended behind her, and she felt the realm itself scream as its lifeblood was devoured by the Darkness, raped by Oblivion. She screamed, and the sound of triumphant laughter from the Silhouette was the last thing she heard before she too was engulfed by the Darkness...

She was almost surprised to wake up, especially in a forest. It was daytime, and she could hear animals rustling in the undergrowth; she was definitely not on Midgard, and the blood and dust on her testified that it had been no nightmare. She remembered death and destruction, and the howling winds of annihilation... and that terrible laughter. There was no sign of anyone else from the Base - she was alive... but at what cost?

She cried for hours. Her friends were probably all dead, the lush reality that had been her home annihilated by a horrible force, and she was utterly alone. The reality she was in seemed like Earth, and the ambient life-force here seemed reassuringly familiar... yes, she had to be on Gaia again. But where? And was Daniel here too somewhere? She concentrated a while... yes. She could feel his presence somewhere... he was alive! The special bond they had forged as lovers still held, and it would be felt no matter where they were, as long as they lived. She picked herself up, charged with new-found hope; she would find him, and they would be together again. She knew they would. She also remembered the laughing silhouette that had doomed her world, and vowed that she would somehow avenge the destruction of her home...

CHARACTER STATS

Name: Melissa Stillbrook ('Missy' to her close friends ONLY)

Essence: Primordial

Nature: Caregiver

Demeanour: Survivor

Tradition: Verbena

Chantry: Continuum Outpost, Midgard (destroyed)

STR: 2

CHA: 4 (fiercely proud)

PER: 2

DEX: 2

MAN: 2

INT: 3

STA: 2

APP: 4 (captivating)

WITS: 3

Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Expression 1, Intuition 2

Etiquette 2, Meditation 2, Melee 1, Research 1, Survival 3

Cosmology 3, Culture 2, Enigmas 2, Lore (Kindred) 1, Medicine 3, Herbalism 2

BACKGROUNDS: Avatar 5, Destiny 5

SPHERES: Life 3, Prime 3

Arete 3

Willpower 9

Quintessence 9, Paradox 0

MERITS/FLAWS: Total: -1

Merits	Flaws
True Love +1	Nightmares -1
Iron Will +3	Vengeance -2
Twin Souls (Daniel) +4	Lifesaver -3
	Flashbacks -3

STORYTELLER NOTES

GENERAL BACKGROUND: Melissa Stillbrook is a young Verbena who worked for a group called the Continuum, an organisation devoted to the defence of reality and all its alternate worlds (Virtuals) against The Darkness. The Continuum believe that the realms of Pattern are aberrations in the true fabric of the Metaverse - that represented by the non-existence of the Deep Umbra. The Darkness is the corrective force of the Metaverse, continually assaulting the Pattern Realms with alien non-Pattern entities (Manifestations) that defy description, though sometimes misguided individuals (Agents of Darkness) from within the Pattern Realms themselves serve the Darkness willingly and act to weaken or destroy realities themselves. More information can be found in The Darkness Manifest on the Continuum Hub.

Midgard was a Virtual - an Alternate Earth - where animal life never evolved. It was destroyed by a very powerful Agent of the Darkness known as a Dark Nomad. Nomads are strange beings that are unique throughout reality - no alternate copies exist of them in any Virtual or Indistinguishable. Many wander throughout the Labyrinth, picking up knowledge here, touching lives there, and generally forever wandering. Some however grow bitter with their fate, or go insane with loneliness - many kill themselves to end their torment, but some lash out against reality and deny it its right to exist by serving the Darkness - these are the Dark Nomads. More information on Nomads can be found in Appendix 2 of the Continuum Hub (Nomads).

Note that the Dark Nomad himself is not after Melissa - he cares not whether one or two survivors escaped from Midgard or any other Virtual he has helped to destroy - though some minor Manifestations locked onto her whilst she was momentarily adrift in the Darkness after she stepped through the Portal from Midgard. These followed her through when she arrived on Earth and are currently hunting for her there, though she does not yet realise this. They are NOT very powerful though [i.e. no Pure Forms here!].

Daniel IS alive somewhere, but Melissa doesn't know where. It is possible that he is not even on Gaia, and that the Portal sent him through to another Virtual or Realm. Melissa suspects that in its last moments the alignment of the Portal from Midgard was skewed - the carrier beam for the Portal momentarily lost cohesion (explaining her brief and unexpected drift through the Darkness) but the signal to Earth was re-acquired and she eventually made it through.

While she is always searching for Daniel (and any Continuum Operatives, for that matter), she is presently recouping in this reality (which she strongly suspects is Main Corridor - the 'Real' Earth) and offering her assistance to those who need and deserve it.

CHARACTER: Melissa is a classical English rose - beautiful, proud, headstrong, and absolutely pig-stubborn. She has very strong emotions, and (like any Verbena worth their salt) is not remotely afraid to show them. There are two things she cannot abide - one is being talked down to (she'll bite the head off anyone who tries that), the other is being called 'Missy' by anyone who is not a very close friend. Her name is Melissa, and woe betide anyone who calls her anything else without her say so!

While this may make her sound like a prize bitch, she is actually very amiable. She is open, honest, loves to laugh and express her feelings openly and to LIVE. She is also a very sensitive young woman, and loves Life and passion. She is loathe to harm any living creature (save for food), and will certainly not kill anything living. She lives to heal, to soothe, and to ease the suffering of others, both physically and mentally - and she has been severely affected by the destruction of her home, probably to a greater extent that she accepts. She has nightmares and flashbacks quite often - usually of unnamable creatures of solid shadow chasing her, of darkness engulfing her, of standing helpless as those she knew and loved were all destroyed in an instant - but she really doesn't want to admit to them or to let them overwhelm her. All she wants is to find Daniel so they can be together once again.

CHARACTER HISTORY: Melissa was born in August 1974 on Main Corridor Earth, an only child, to an aristocratic family - her father was a Lord who owned much of the parkland in southeast England. She spent her childhood in the family manor in Kent, being spoiled by her overprotective mother and generally being raised the old fashioned way, with nannies and tutors and the like. She was an intelligent child - highly precocious, and very adventurous - and was quickly stifled by the lifestyle at home. By the time she reached her teenage years, she had grown to be quite a handful for her exasperated parents, who packed her off to boarding school. Even there, the teachers found her extremely difficult to deal with as she would never do as she was told - the boys there didn't have much better luck, as none of them could keep up with her zest for love and life.

However, she did attract the attention of the local Verbena coven, and it didn't take long for her to find her true calling in the strange band of hippies that lived in makeshift huts hidden in the woods a few miles from the school. She learned about the Earth Mother and the living world around them, and was fully initiated to the Verbena very soon after.

After a few years though, she felt something tug at her. She felt she didn't belong in the Coven anymore, that she was missing something elsewhere. Then the stranger knocked on their door and asked for assistants to help their research. While many of the Verbena didn't trust him at all, Melissa knew that she was destined to go with him. Her companions didn't quite see it the same way though, and they departed somewhat acrimoniously.

Despite this setback, Melissa came with the stranger to Midgard, where she was introduced to the Continuum, to her work, and to the other Verbena brought along to aid in the classification of the floral species on the Virtual. There she met Daniel, and both knew they had found their other halves. Their love for each other was an inspiration for the rest of the Verbena in the otherwise sterile Outpost, and they were joined in a glorious ceremony in a nearby forest under a perfect moon. Three months later, they were separated during the destruction of Midgard, and neither will rest till they are re-united.

AVATAR: Melissa's avatar is The Healer. In fact, the Avatar is very similar to Melissa, but has a stronger, more confident personality. She appears to Melissa occasionally, as she would appear when she reaches her early/mid 30's - more mature and more experienced - and guides her when she needs guidance and encourages her she has lost all hope. She shows the same kindness towards Melissa as she would show anyone else who needs help and healing. The interaction the Mortal and the Avatar have is very unusual among Mages - essentially a mother/daughter relationship.

OTHER NOTES: Melissa gets on pretty well with most people, even those who embrace more technological paradigms. Her experience with the Continuum opened her mind a little, and proved that technophiles were really not as bad as the Verbena she spent much of her formative years were telling her - she also does not feel quite so stifled by cities as they were, but would still rather be in the great outdoors. She will take people as she finds them, but cannot bear to see needless pain and suffering inflicted - she does not take kindly to violent people. She especially cannot stand Vampires, believing them to be abhorrent abominations in the face of true life and of Gaia, and will do her best to remove such blots from the land. She has encountered one or two on occasion and knows a little about Vampire behaviour and society, though much is hearsay and garbled rumour.

Verbena in the British Isles (especially the south) may not react to her very kindly - she has a somewhat tarnished reputation there after she abandoned her total naturalistic lifestyle to join the Continuum Scout. They generally see her as having sold out, and so may not appreciate her presence there again. She has not yet ventured over to England (she arrived from Midgard in a forest in the Cascades in the American Northwest, and managed to head down to California from there where she currently (temporarily) resides), and so is not aware of the extent of the bad feeling towards her there yet.