The Continuum
(version 2.5)

by
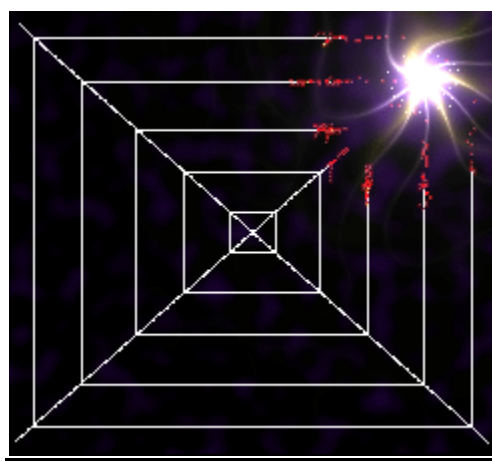
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INTRODUCTION TO THE CONTINUUM

Introduction to the Continuum and Nexus

The Continuum and Nexus basically represent a change of direction for Mage. Originally, it started out as a little homage to a rather obscure (but *very* Magey) early 80's British Sci-Fi series called *Sapphire and Steel*, starring Joanna Lumley and David MacCallum. The series itself is a bit heavy, but the stories are excellent and the ideas are quite unique. If you can get hold of some of the videos of these, then they are certainly worth watching! It revolves around two Agents who are dispatched by an unknown extra-dimensional organisation to deal with the invasion of very alien creatures who dwell 'beyond the Corridor of Time'. Indeed, one of the creatures they face bears an uncanny resemblance to a Nephandi Pure Form (found in the back of First Edition Mage).

This got me thinking as to how I could incorporate them into Mage, and the result was the Continuum. Originally, this was designed to replace the Cult of Ecstasy as the Tradition that specialised in Time (I felt that the CoX had very little connection with Time), but in the final draft I decided to keep the Cult as a Tradition and put the Continuum *outside* the Traditions and the Technocracy. Thus they are neither a Tradition nor a Convention - they're just the Continuum. The role of the Continuum itself is to guard reality against invasion by the Darkness (i.e. the Nephandi).

The full supplement is divided into 5 Books:

Book 1 details the Continuum (i.e. its origins, history and methodology), its Paradigm, Policy towards other groups, and some Continuum Procedures (Rotes). Everything is described largely in terms of the Continuum's Paradigm, which means that it is advisable to read through the Paradigm Page first so the rest can be understood fully.

Book 2 details Nexus, the Shade Realm Of Time. Nexus is home to the Continuum, and is a very strange realm filled with all manner of strange creatures and Temporal anomalies. From there, Continuum Agents can access the Labyrinth of Time, an infinite tree of possibilities - almost every alternate reality can be found in the Labyrinth. However, the Labyrinth is under constant attack by the Nephandi (The Darkness), who seek to destroy it all. This book describes the metaphysicks and Alternate Realities within the Labyrinth of Time, and also the methods of accessing Virtuals.

Book 3 covers the Virtuals themselves. Detailed descriptions of the individual Alternate Realities are included, with an ultimate view to providing self-contained alternate settings for Mage should the Storyteller so desire.

Book 4 is the Darkness Manifest, describing the Deep Umbra in great detail and revealing some of the alien horrors that Continuum Agents must face in the field. This is essential for understanding the reasons behind the Perpetual War the Continuum wages on the Darkness. It can also stand alone as a treatise on the Outsider faction of the Nephandi. The short story 'Silhouette' introduces Melissa Stillbrook, a young Verbena employed by the Continuum who is the sole survivor of a realm destroyed by the Darkness. This is intended to give you an idea of what shapes Continuum characters, as well as describe an assault on a reality by the Darkness.

Book 5 contains material not easily classified into the Four Books described above. A **Glossary of Terms** is provided as a reference to some of the new material introduced herein. **Nomads** details an enigmatic and powerful race of wandering beings that roam the Labyrinth of Time, that may help or hinder Continuum agents. A Nomad Character Sheet is also presented. **The Vanguard** presents the precursor organisation to the Continuum and fills in some gaps in the the history, for use with *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade*.

Theme

The 'theme' of the Continuum and Nexus is two-fold - the most obvious is Covert Investigation. All Branches of the Continuum are involved with intelligence gathering and target neutralisation on both Earth and the Virtuals. Adventures centred on such a theme should involve plenty of intrigue, suspense and (to a certain extent) paranoia as the characters should be kept on their toes in possibly hostile social environments on strange alternate worlds.

The other main theme is harder to run, but provides plenty of opportunity to open Players' minds to the more unusual aspects of the Tellurian and the Labyrinth - this is the exploration and interpretation of the Mysterious Unknown; the Strange, the Weird, and the Unusual. Enigmatic alien artefacts on empty worlds, disappearing cities, mind-blowing mystery, strange forces shaping realities, civilisations never encountered before, and so on. Bear these themes in mind when designing your own Virtuals and Continuum Chronicles.

An Alternative Chronicle: The Continuum vs. the Technocracy

The rules presented herein are designed to fit in with the normal Mage background, without changing the general slant of the game. One can either have adventures on Earth, or one can roam through the Virtuals, but neither should have a significant effect on the other. The Virtuals should remain largely separate from the rest of reality, outside the Ascension War.

However, it is also entirely possible to change the course of the entire WoD, or even abandon it completely and run this as an entirely new game in its own right using the Storyteller system. One obvious alternative is to have the Ascension War fought almost exclusively in Nexus and the Virtuals. This would take the form of the Technocracy (who seek to control and solidify reality in the Virtuals) against the Continuum and the Traditions (who seek to prevent this and let each Virtual evolve on its own to its own destiny). In effect, the arena of the Ascension War is now infinitely larger - not only does it take place on the Earth we know, but it also rages across all the other possible Earths! If this is to be a viable option, then the rules governing Continuity would most likely have to be altered, and it is also likely that such a scenario would occur following the Technocracy's Victory in the Ascension War in Main Corridor itself - the Traditions would possibly be forced to retreat to the Virtuals and take up the War there. However, I have not included specific details of how to manage this, as I feel that it is too great a change to the game's background. However, individual Storytellers may wish to do so, and the rules provided here can give a necessary starting point from which to do this.

<u>Virtuals</u>

Several Virtuals are presented in this supplement. These are descriptions of the alternate realities found within the Labyrinth of Time, in various levels of detail. The ultimate intention is for these 'worldbooks' to be used either as a transient setting (i.e. Agents visit them and then leave), or as whole new alternate settings for Mage. When designing Virtuals, remember than there are an infinite number of alternate possibilities - Storytellers should only be limited by their imaginations.

The Virtuals marked with a * in the list below are described in more detail in Book 3: Virtuals. The other Virtuals are mentioned in various parts of the Continuum but have not yet been fully described. Remember, *these are by no means the only Virtuals in existence*. There are *billions* of Virtuals within the Labyrinth of Time...

Virtual	-	*Description*
Aegypt	-	An Egyptian civilisation survives to the present day.
Armageddon	-	The Cuban missile crisis erupted into nuclear war.
DarkSphere*	-	A dark world where Vampires have wrested control of the Earth from humanity.
Dominion*	-	The Restoration movement succeeds in creating a rationally theological Technocratic state.
Fungal Wind*	-	A Second Order Virtual (branching off from Armageddon) where the Cuban missile crisis erupted into *biological* warfare.
Lemuria	-	The Dreamspeakers won the Ascension War (primitive societies).
Lucifer*	-	Life never formed on Earth.
Neverland*	-	All higher lifeforms mysteriously disappeared from Earth in 1993...
Reich	-	The Nazis won the Second World War.
Sauron	-	A Dinosaur civilisation flourishes. Humans do not exist.
Southron*	-	The Confederacy flees to South Africa after defeat in the US Civil War, eventually becoming the powerful Sabbat/Technocracy-dominated Southron Republic.
Terra Prime	-	The Technocracy won the Ascension War (very high technology).
Wotan*	-	An enigmatic god-like entity rules the Earth.

It should be noted that the Virtuals that the Continuum spends the most time in are not the inhabited ones (like Reich or Aegypt) but are rather the ones that are left mysteriously untouched by sentient life (e.g. Lucifer and Neverland). I think that designing Virtuals along these lines would do the Continuum the most justice. However, the Continuum maintains spies and observers in all the inhabited Virtuals, leading to the possibility of running adventures of more high-risk, covert natures...

Remember that the Continuum are Technocratic Mages, who require devices for their effects! (see 'foci' in the Continuum Description). Also, Talismans (such as Travel Bracelets, Laser Rifles, Temporal Disturbance Trackers and so on) are commonly used by Continuum Agents.

Bibliography

Some inspiration is always a good thing, and there's plenty of it out there! Here's a brief list of things that may prove useful!

Books:

Furious Gulf and *Sailing Bright Eternity* by Gregory Benford. Excellent hard sci-fi books in their own right, these are the third and fourth books of the Galactic Centre Tetralogy. They describe a inhabited region inside a huge black hole, and an area of altered Space-Time within known as the Lanes. The idea of TimeStone (and a few other things...) were adapted from these books - they give the right kind of feel as to how Nexus should be.

GURPS Alternate Earths and *GURPS Timeline* by Steve Jackson Games. Excellent resources with lots of ideas and detailed Alternate Universes. GURPS Timeline is especially useful for finding Branching Points in history from which new Virtuals can be spawned.

TORG by West End Games. Now this is a real gem - the world books for this make excellent Virtuals! I'm sure I'd love the game itself, if only I could get used to those blinkin' cards!!! :-)

The Great Book of Amber by Roger Zelazny. A very fine series of books about a group of beings who 'flow' between realities. Well worth picking up and plundering for ideas.

TV:

There are loads of Time Travel Series flying about (*Quantum Leap*, *Time Tunnel*, etc) but only a few are going to provide much inspiration for Nexus and the Virtuals...

Sapphire And Steel. Obscure but very underrated early 80's British Sci-Fi series that provides much of the inspiration for the Continuum. If you want to get the right kind of atmosphere for stories involving the Continuum (particularly the Repulsion Branch), as well as some nice ideas for Nephandi, then try and get hold of this! I know it's available on ITC Video in the UK, but I'm not sure if it's easily available elsewhere.

Sliders. US Sci-fi series. And lo, purely by coincidence, a TV series appears that focuses on travelling to alternate realities...! It follows a group of people who must 'slide' between alternate timelines, trying to find their way back to their own reality. A good source of ideas for Virtuals.

Stargate. US Sci-fi series/film. The Egyptian world in the Stargate movie is a pretty big influence on my thoughts for the Aegypt virtual (which may someday may be published here whenever I get round to it). The series has quite a few nifty ideas in it too.

The X-Files. While they haven't done a time travel episode (yet...), the investigative nature of the series should give you an idea as to how the Continuum (especially Target Neutralisation) operates in the field.

There are probably more, but I can't think of any right now!

Acknowledgements

Finally, I must thank those responsible for helping me to get this all published! Certainly, without the contributions of **DJ Babb** and **Anders Sandberg**, this monster would never have gotten off the ground. Many of the ideas in here came from these two guys, and I really appreciate the patience and time that DJ and Anders put into helping me, and for putting up with all my emails! I am doubly grateful to them for writing some amazing supplementary material (DJ for the *Nomads* rules, and Anders for the *Labyrinth Of Time* rules) for the Continuum - I never dreamed that OTHERS would want to add so much in so much detail to the core idea! Thanks also to **Arthur-Trevor D.M. Lasher**, who provided the excellent *Southron* Virtual to get the ball rolling on Virtual design, and also to **Lee T. Herndon** for the equally good *Dominion* Virtual. And of course, I am indebted to Anders for letting out the room on his vast Mage Pages for the Continuum originally, to **Abe Dashiell** for also putting the rules up on HIS site and for doing much of the HTML formatting of these pages (thanks a lot, Abe!), and to anyone else who's given the Continuum some room on their web sites! Thanks a lot guys!

That's it from the preface - I hope that you enjoy these new rules, and hope even more that you find them useful :-)! I've left a lot of the specific details about background deliberately open-ended, so that Storytellers can decide for themselves what to include in the Virtuals.

If anyone has any questions, comments, ideas, etc, then I can be contacted via my website at:

http://www.evildrganymede.net

Thanks for reading this, and enjoy the show!!!!!

CREDITS

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Book 1:
The Continuum

THE CONTINUUM TRADITION PAGE

Speciality Sphere: Time

History and Overview

The Continuum is an unusual group of Mages, separate from both the Technocracy and the Traditions (though it was once part of the former), who specialise in the Sphere of Time. They are entirely devoted to the defence of reality against assaults from the Deep Umbra, which they call '**The Darkness**'.

The Continuum has existed (though not as an organisation) since the dawn of Man, as individual Mages from the various Traditions who constantly battled the Nephandi. After the Mythic Age, these Mages joined the Technocracy when they discovered that the nascent organisation also sought the defence of reality. During this time, the previously individual Mages that fought the Darkness found new purpose together, and formed an organisation known as 'The Vanguard' - one that later evolved into The Continuum. A large majority had studied the Sphere of Time to aid them in their battles against the Darkness, and a Construct (**Central Office**) was set up in the Shade Realm of Time (**Nexus**). This Realm was found to contain access points to many alternate realities, or **Virtuals**, which were observed, explored and catalogued. The Vanguard expanded their activities to protect the Virtuals too, and the umbrella of their activities came to cover what was to become known as the entire **Labyrinth of Time**.

After a while however, they felt they had become trapped in the Technocratic Agenda and the Ascension War, which they felt was meaningless given the true Perpetual War with the Darkness. In addition, they were increasingly becoming aware of dark plots within the Conventions that would wrest control of Nexus from the Vanguard.

The tension built between the Vanguard and the other Conventions until 1905. The Vanguard had long known that Time was not constant but relative to the Observer, and had been pressing to release this concept to the Masses for many years. However, the Technocracy forbade them from publishing, since this was scheduled to be revealed far ahead in their Timetable. The Vanguard itself then announced that one of their researchers had 'rebelled' and had published the Theory regardless. The resulting paradigm shift was far more dramatic than the Technocracy had ever imagined, as the traditional Newtonian/Copernican system was swept aside by the new Special Theory of Relativity. Suddenly, Sleeper scientists had the answers to those nagging problems that had started to plague the Newtonian Universe - this in itself Awakened a few of their Avatars. There was now a new way to describe the Universe.

The Void Engineers also made unexpected gains, when it was realised (and popularised) that Space Travel was now a step more 'tangible' - by sending someone to distant stars at extremely rapid velocities, he or she would age relatively more slowly than those left behind. This made people more accepting of the concepts of Extended Space Flight, a goal of the Void Engineers.

The Technocracy as a whole, however, was not impressed. Still reeling from the defection of the Sons Of Ether, the Technocracy attempted to clamp down on the Vanguard's 'subversive behaviour'. Further (covert) investigations revealed that the publication of the Relativity Theory was actually intentional, despite the Vanguard's protestations of innocence. This was all the excuse the Technocracy needed, and in an emergency Symposium the Vanguard was declared an enemy of the Technocracy and an attempt was made to destroy them. However, the Vanguard had foreseen the attempt and set numerous booby-traps that killed or trapped many of their enemies. Damage was heavy on both sides, but the Technocracy simply was not able to prevent the Vanguard from leaving. Rather than divert more forces into tracking down the rogue Convention, it was decided to consolidate the remaining Conventions of the Union into a more cohesive force. The First World War also prevented the Technocracy from taking immediate action.

Alone for the first time in over 300 years, and aware that it could not possibly defend against possible later reprisals from the much more powerful Technocracy on Earth, the Vanguard retreated to Nexus. Central Office became a fortification, and the former Convention gave itself a new name - **The Continuum** - and recruited many Mages from the Traditions, who were keen to woo the them to their side of the Ascension War. By the time the Technocracy could begin to retaliate effectively, the Continuum had become too firmly entrenched on its home ground. The Technocracy simply could not afford to divert the manpower to destroy the Continuum and a stalemate was declared, even though the Continuum had managed to elaborate on their earlier theories and published the General Theory of Relativity in 1915.

While Nexus and its Virtuals were obviously a valuable prize, the Technocracy realised (much to its chagrin) that the Continuum was more valuable alive, since they had absolutely no interest in the Ascension War and served a useful purpose by combating the Nephandi as and when they appeared. Outright hostility between the two ceased, and Nexus was left to the Continuum, although covertly the Technocracy still seeks to somehow regain control of their seceded Convention and their Realm.

Having no urge to participate in the Ascension War, the Continuum was not interested in joining the Traditions either, despite repeated attempts by the Council of Nine to persuade it to do so. Instead, the Continuum concentrated on the struggle against the Darkness. However, it has accepted Mages from the Traditions into its ranks and often allies with them where they have the same targets. It still does not trust the Technocracy, and their paths often cross. Encounters between the two often escalate into full-blown animosity. Despite the fact that the Continuum targets the Darkness, Marauders, and Wraiths (forces that the Technocracy also consider dangerous), the Technocracy sees the Continuum as a potentially dangerous foe should it ever decide to actively go against them again, and is often obstructive to their cause. It is also rumoured that some elements within the Technocracy seek to use the Darkness for their own ends, and as such would rather deal with it on their own terms. As a result, the Continuum has had to divert a significant part of its forces to defending itself from its former 'employer'.

As described above, the Continuum sees itself as separate from both the Traditions and the Technocracy. They view the Ascension War as a struggle in a burning house - Reality is under siege from beyond, and the only powers capable of protecting it are locked in their 'petty War'.

Today, the Continuum is a rather militaristic organisation. While there are many non-combat personnel, its main focus is on the Perpetual War with the Darkness and the organisation's defence against the Technocracy.

The Continuum is divided into three main Branches:

- **Repulsion Branch** is the most important Branch, and is largely concerned with combating the more esoteric Manifestations of the Darkness, which the Continuum see as dwelling 'beyond the Corridor of Time'. Wherever Manifestations break through into our reality, Repulsion Branch is there to close the rift and destroy the intruders. The Continuum believes that the Traditions and the Technocracy are too busy fighting their Ascension War to realise the magnitude of this threat from beyond. Repulsion Branch also often deals with Marauders and Wraiths where they prove too much for Target Neutralisation (see below).

- **Intelligence Acquisition** collects information against its enemies on Earth, and forecasts any future attacks using their expertise in Time and Chaos (Entropy).

- **Target Neutralisation** applies the knowledge gathered by Intelligence Acquisition and is the part of the Continuum most commonly seen on Earth. This Branch deals almost exclusively with more mundane enemies of the Continuum, including Agents of the Darkness, the Technocracy, Marauders, Wraiths, and other antagonistic groups in the Labyrinth. They also are the Branch that most often works with Mages of other Traditions.

Philosophy

- **Repulsion Branch**: We must repel the Darkness at all costs. It is enough that it seeks to destroy reality - *then* where will the Traditions and the Technocracy fight their Ascension War? They can struggle against each other for as long as they like, but in the end the forces from beyond the corridor of Time will devour all - while they fight each other the Darkness can only gather its strength. Once both sides are weakened enough, it will step in and destroy everything they have fought for.

    We must ensure that this never happens. Since neither side wishes to listen to reason, it is left to us to fend off the Darkness' continuous intrusions. We have held It off so far, but how long can we continue without the full attention of our Awakened brethren? No matter - we have a mission to protect the Corridor. Should we fall, the Labyrinth will be left wide open. Perhaps then our 'brethren' will realise the folly of their ways, but by then it will be too late...

- **Intelligence Acquisition**: We are the advance guard of the Continuum. Should there be an assault against us, we will know of it long before its initiation. We are the early warning system of Reality, forever vigilant for Nephandi attack. We have a job to do, and we do it well.

- **Target Neutralisation**: We are the Front Line in this reality. We seek and destroy the enemies of the Continuum on Earth, and we secure and protect its allies.

Organisation

- **Repulsion Branch**: It is believed that this Branch of the Continuum is directed by the Oracles in person, whomever they might be. Certainly, no Repulsion Branch Agent knows the origins of his or her mission orders - and no Agent ever questions them. They know the gravity of their situation, and do what must be done. Agents simply receive their orders - strangely, they are completely unaware as to how they know their mission. All they know is that they have been briefed before the mission, and will be de-briefed afterwards.

    There are two types of Repulsion Branch Agent - the **Field Operatives** and the **Specialists**. Much of the mission work is done by the Field Ops - should a situation get out of control, the Field Ops can call in the Specialists to patch things up. Specialists are usually the Adepts and Masters of their field, while Field Ops have Sphere levels between 1 and 3. Field Ops are frequently assigned in pairs or threes. These partnerships are usually fixed, until one partner is killed or lost in action. The ability to work as part of a team is essential to Repulsion Branch Agents, as each Agent's magickal abilities frequently complement those of the other team-members. Specialists work alone, but are never dispatched into the field unless called upon by the Field Ops.

    The **Earth Section** of the Repulsion Branch is but the final obstacle for any invaders. Most of the Repulsion Branch guards the Horizon into the Deep Umbra, continually fending off assault from the Darkness. Occasionally, some slip through the net and must be stopped by Earth Section (usually from within our own reality) before damage is done. Earth Section closely liaises with Target Acquisition.

- **Intelligence Acquisition**: Intelligence Acquisition is based primarily on Earth, and is organised in a similar fashion to military intelligence gathering organisations. It is important to realise that this part of the Continuum takes part in both intelligence acquisition (through Time, Chaos (Entropy) and Mind effects) *and* in Target Neutralisation, which takes out the perceived threat. Neutralisation Agents frequently have potent Forces, Matter, and Life scores in order to best affect any opponents. While Intelligence Acquisition focuses on any forthcoming attacks, any extra-dimensional assault (i.e. The Darkness) is directed to Repulsion Branch, and any attacks from within Reality (usually Technomancer or Marauder) are directed to Target Neutralisation.

- **Target Neutralisation**: Target Neutralisation is based primarily on Earth, although there are many significant cells scattered around the other Virtuals in the Labyrinth of Time. They deal mainly with the less esoteric enemies of the Continuum - as such, they are not quite as specialised as Repulsion Branch since they have to deal with the Technocracy, Wraiths, the odd Marauder, and other antagonistic magickal groups in the Virtuals. In addition, they must often acquire certain targets alive (such as new recruits for the Continuum) and protect them from their enemies. Target Neutralisation is a highly militaristic organisation, which liaises closely with Intelligence Acquisition and the Earth Section of Repulsion Branch.

Meetings

- **Repulsion Branch**: Much of Repulsion Branch is based in Nexus, in the Home Chantry of Central Office. The Specialists and Field Ops of the Repulsion Branch are dispatched from here to Main Corridor (Earth) or to one of the Virtuals or Realms which are under attack by the Darkness. Some Repulsion Agents are based on Earth, often in other Chantries. They often work in teams of two or three, and often work with Target Neutralisation Agents.
- **Intelligence Acquisition**: Acquisition Chantries (called *Stations*) are located in many of the Realms and Virtuals of Main Corridor, as well as in the Near Umbra and Earth itself. A complex network of sensors and look-outs around each Station provides the information that is relayed to the Repulsion and Target Neutralisation branches.
- **Target Neutralisation**: Target Neutralisation are often associated with members of other Traditions in Chantries on Earth. These are sent out as Strike Teams to the Target Location in order to neutralise the target if hostile, or acquire the target if 'friendly'. Out of mission time, these Agents can continue their normal research.

Initiation

General Initiation: The Continuum gains its recruits from numerous sources. On Earth, Intelligence Acquisition keeps an eye out for any Sleepers who have experienced the Darkness and survived to tell the tale. While they may be in deep shock from this experience, it has been shown that in some it goes some way to awakening their Avatars - they often begin to question what they have seen, which is the first step to becoming Sapient. Although many eventually recover from the ordeal, they become perfect targets for either the Technocracy, looking for more Avatars to swell their ranks, or Nephandi eager to finish what they started. Acquisition dispatches Target Neutralisation teams to escort the 'Initiate' to Central Office, the Continuum's Chantry located in Nexus, Main Corridor's Shade Realm of Time, where he or she is introduced to the ways of the Continuum and fully Awakened. Those who do not Awaken as a result of their brush with the Nephandi are usually held as Acolytes for the other Branches. The Continuum also recruits from the Virtuals, and has an extensive network of Sleeper allies within the Labyrinth (who are of course completely unaware of the Continuum's true nature).

- **Repulsion Branch**: Most Agents are specifically trained in Repulsion Branch from their initiation. However, many Agents also voluntarily join Repulsion Branch from Target Neutralisation or even from other Traditions (although this is rare). They too are escorted to Central Office to undergo Training.
- **Intelligence Acquisition**: This is a much more open Branch of the Continuum. It approaches those in other Traditions who choose to specialise in Time and Mind and requests that they join this Branch. It also keeps an eye out for Sleepers who self-awaken and show aptitude in the Time Sphere - it then picks them up (usually with a Target Neutralisation team) before the Technocracy can acquire them.
- **Target Neutralisation**: Many of the Agents who join Repulsion Branch work in Target Neutralisation first, honing their skills on more mundane enemies than the Darkness. Some remain in Target Neutralisation, training others who come to join the Front Line on Earth.

Other Information

Chantry

The main Chantry for the Repulsion Branch is **Central Office** in Nexus, the Shade Realm of Time. Intelligence Acquisition and Target Neutralisation are based on Earth, and they share a main Station known only as '**Control**', located in a hidden underground bunker in the City of London, England.

Acolytes

- *Repulsion Branch*: The Sleeper Network. All members of Repulsion Branch itself are fully Awakened. However, the Continuum maintains an extensive network of spies and observers (all unaware of the Continuum's true nature) within the Virtuals that Repulsion Agents most often interact with - this is the Sleeper Network.
- *Intelligence Acquisition*: Detectives, Policemen, Public Records Clerks.
- *Target Neutralisation*: Soldiers, Armed Forces, Survivalists.

Sphere

Time. All Agents receive some training in the Sphere of Time, but many of the other Spheres are also extensively studied. Many Target Neutralisation Mages concentrate on Forces, Correspondence, and Matter to attack or protect their targets. Intelligence Acquisition Mages usually also specialise in Entropy (Chaos) to best assess probabilities and Mind. Repulsion Branch Agents usually have high scores in Correspondence, Mind, and Forces. Spirit is also popular among all Continuum Agents in order to enter and leave the Umbra - however, most are equipped with Talismans that duplicate common Spirit effects.

Foci (Apparati)

Since they have spent a few hundred years as members of the Technocracy, Continuum Agents require Apparati for all their effects until their Arete reaches 5. However, they are not quite so reliant on physical apparati as their counterparts in the Technocracy.

Spheres	Focus
Correspondence/Mind/Spirit	Observation
Forces/Matter/Life/Prime	Device
Entropy	Calculator
Time	Timepiece

Observation: Observation is the key to Continuum Magick (see the **Continuum Paradigm Page**). An Agent must concentrate for a few seconds to Observe the desired effect for it to occur. This requires at least one round of meditation per Sphere dot, and a total of at least one point in the Meditation skill (regardless of the level of the effect).

Note that Countermagick can be cast in the same round as the incoming effect, and does not require such meditation. Fastcasting is also possible, and allows the effect to be cast in one round with a penalty of +1 to the difficulty. All effects for Spheres that do not need a physical focus (i.e. Correspondence, Mind, and Spirit) **must** be cast through Observation.

Calculator: Chaos and Entropy calculations must be done on some form of calculating device, be it abacus, calculator, or computer.

Timepiece: **Unique Focus**. Frequently, this is a pocket watch of some sort, though most Agents nowadays prefer a digital watch. Many Agents use their Virtual Travel Bracelets as their Unique Time Foci. The timepiece helps to focus the Agent's mind on the Observation of Time.

Device: A device is a generic form of high-tech Apparatus. Continuum Agents are completely incapable of using Matter, Forces, Prime, or Life without a relevant device. Note that devices are not specific to each effect the Agent casts, and do NOT have to be true Talismans. Examples of devices include handheld Scanners, energy rifles (Forces), Medikits (Life), Microtools, Conversion Beamers (Matter), Flow detectors (Prime), and so on.

Concepts

Soldier, Information Gatherer, Secret agent, detective, anyone who's discovered things they weren't meant to know.

Quote

"Dark forces are at work here...and they're very cunning so far. This could be a trap..."

Stereotypes

The Continuum's opinion of the Traditions is described below. The Traditions' opinion of the Continuum is denoted in *italic script* below this. [Note that many of the subtraditions here can be found in the various Mage Archives on the Net.]

Traditions

Akashic Brotherhood, Verbena, Cult of Ecstasy: They are too wrapped up in their own primitive views of reality to see the threat from beyond.

They overestimate the magnitude of the Nephandi threat. Our immediate struggle against the Technocracy is much more important.

Celestial Chorus: They are far too focused on their 'One', and are worryingly ecclesiastical. However, they can be quite useful allies in the Perpetual War.

They are committed fulltime to the destruction of demons and devils. This can only be good. We are not blind to the threat from beyond.

Dreamspeakers: They know of the threat posed by the Darkness but focus too much on the Earth. They should realise that Earth is but part of the Labyrinth, which will be destroyed should the Nephandi break through. Still, we respect their views - after all, their existence means that we can devote less troops to protecting the Earth itself.

They speak wisely of the threat from the Nephandi, but we are powerless to aid them at the front line of the Horizon. It is our place to protect Gaia from harm, and theirs to guard the Near Umbra.

Euthanatos: A worrying group of fanatics and murderers. Despite their <ahem> good intentions, many are prime targets for corruption by the Darkness. Most of them seem to attract ghosts like moths to a flame, which we must endeavour to extinguish.

Close-minded scientists! They think we are agents of darkness!! Don't make me laugh... There's nothing wrong with what we do. They overestimate the threat of the Nephandi!

Necromancers: These blind fools serve the Darkness! We aim to locate and destroy all their cursed artefacts, and have diverted several task forces to such missions.

A constant thorn in our sides. Fortunately, they seem to be making no more headway in their quest to seek and destroy the Pages than we are in finding them ourselves.

Order of Hermes

The Houses Of Hermes: Fascinating history, but all too often their power is directed inwards rather than outwards to the protection of reality.

While the threat is real, we must focus on this Reality. Let the Continuum deal with the Nephandi.

Goetia: Given their past record, we don't trust this group one bit. Whenever one of their Dark Magi shows up, we're always there to destroy them. It's bad enough that the Nephandi can force their way through, but an open doorway into our reality is totally intolerable.

Goetia: They've just got it in for us - we dumped all that demonic stuff long ago.
Dark Magi: Another one of our myriad of mortal enemies - they are fools if they think they can stop us, like all the others.

Cabalists: Their magic is unusual. They are slightly sympathetic to our cause, and combat the Nephandi in their own way.

Any defenders of reality against the Qlippoth are worthy of respect. Theirs is a lonely and dangerous path, but one on which we must ultimately tread as well.

Enochians: More unusual magics. We are not entirely certain of the origin of the Enochians' spirits, and there is a suspicion that they may well be Agents of the Darkness. We have them under constant surveillance.

They are somewhat suspicious of us for some undeserved reason. This is not appreciated, but our way is bound to draw fear from the ignorants.

Rosicrucians: Another pointless group. All their secrets cannot protect them should the demons come knocking on their doors.

Useful but somewhat esoteric. I wonder who watches these Watchmen...?

Orphans

Hollow Ones: A sad indication of the state of human society today. Regardless, the existence of this group and of other Orphans is something that we did not foresee. Clearly, something important is about to happen...

*What, protect **us** from the Nephandi? Don't bother, they've been here for ages...*

Discordians: Pointless buffoons.

Continuum? We don't need no stinking Continuum! Eris will be there for us, or maybe she'll be brushing her teeth at the time. What do we care anyway?!

Cerebus: Interesting and useful individuals - we could do with some of them in Acquisition.

Another reject from the Technocracy? Boy, there's really something wrong with those bastards if they lose three Conventions in fifty years! But anyway, this lot isn't actually that bad - we help each other quite a bit actually.

Sons Of Jupiter: They fight the War against the Nephandi in their own way, but are too easily distracted by the Chimerae and their ancient artifacts. If only they'd focus on the Horizon instead...

They may not realise it, but we're allies in the Eternal War - any help is appreciated in our struggle. They do seem a little distant - perhaps they have focused too long on the Deep Umbra.

Trenchcoaters: Unfortunately, there are always a few who get away - most of these should be in Repulsion Branch. Still, they at least tolerate us, which is an improvement on their relations with the other Traditions.

They're a useful alternative to us, and they want to protect Reality as much as we do, but they're really off this planet. Still, we can get along since most of them have also seen the horrors that are really out there, poor sods.

Wanderers: Nice idea, but just seeing what's out there doesn't stop its destruction. Action is more important than plain experience. Still, the ones that roam the Umbra are at least aware of the problem.

It's a dirty job, but somebody's *gotta do it, I suppose!*

Sons of Ether: Extremely useful allies, if not somewhat unconventional. They were once our brothers - their secession from the Technocracy provided our window for escape from their oppressive and misguided Time Table. Their devices are without rival. However, they are still rather too complacent with regards to the threat of the Darkness.

We'll deal with the Nephandi as and when they appear. Of course, to have this lot get there first saves us a lot of bother.

Virtual Adepts: We saw this little Schism from our former 'employers' coming. Their ideas of virgin new Virtual Worlds are interesting, but should we fall their worlds will be destroyed as surely as our own.

The Continuum have got it all wrong - our worlds can survive anything the Nephandi throw at them.

Technocracy

The Technocracy: Our former employers. Once perhaps they held the light of Reason - now they are driven by their Timetable and the domination of Main Corridor. We tried to show them the Darkness scratching at the door, but they were too wrapped up in their petty schemes of Ascension. We're better off having left them.

Their secession allowed us to consolidate into a stable Union after the Sons defection, and also allowed us to focus more on this reality - the Continuum form a useful buffer between us and the Nephandi. Of course, we'll take back Nexus once we've won the Ascension War here, and then take the War to the Labyrinth. Whether the Continuum will still exist at that point is up to them...

Iteration X: We didn't have much to do with this Convention when we were part of the Union. They're terrifying! Their unstoppable quest to join Man and Machine is perverse and unnecessary - the Darkness devours Metal just as easily as it does Flesh.

Just like the others, all Defectors from the Union will be destroyed without question, mercy, or exception.

Progenitors: These modern Mengeles are *repulsive*. Like the rest of them, the Progenitors won't see the danger from Beyond until it's too late. Of course, some of the horrors spawned from their vats are as bad as any the Darkness creates...

We never had much to do with these - they were always way out there with the Void Engineers. But good riddance to dead weight anyway.

New World Order: Along with Iteration X, this Convention sums up all that is bad about the Technocracy.

We know more about the Continuum than they realise...

Syndicate: Materialistic fools - money won't buy off the Darkness...

Shame they don't spend much time in this reality - we'd love to suck their assets dry...

Void Engineers: We often worked with the Void Engineers while we were in the Union, but they too have stagnated with the rest of them. They presume to know much about the Darkness, but their mistake is to seek to define and control it - more often than not, the Darkness is too powerful for them and *they* become Its pawns instead. I wouldn't be surprised if this whole Convention Falls one day.

Spare me the mumbo-jumbo about living Darknesses - Space is Space, virgin territory to be explored and controlled.

THE CONTINUUM PARADIGM PAGE

The Paradigm as described here is probably only important to Agents of the Repulsion Branch. Continuum Agents within Intelligence Acquisition and Target Neutralisation tend to be more 'Earthbound' than those in Repulsion Branch, so many 'round down' their personal paradigms to a much less esoteric level. For example, a Target Neutralisation Agent is probably more likely to just Teleport (i.e. think 'I need to get from A to B in no time at all' and then teleport) than to think about exactly how he is moving across the Corridor in a Space-Like Path. As a result, Repulsion Branch Agents sometimes think they take their job much more seriously than their Acquisition/Neutralisation counterparts...

The Paradigm

The Corridor: Reality is an endless Corridor, with Time as its length and Space as its width. The Corridor is under constant attack from the Darkness [Deep Umbra/Nephandi] beyond its walls and its agents within. The walls of the Corridor must be continually guarded, and any holes in its walls must rapidly be sealed before any permanent damage is done.

The Labyrinth of Time: The Corridor is just one part of an overall Metareality - the Labyrinth of Time. Within the Labyrinth lies almost every possible Alternate Reality to our own 'Main Corridor' and all of it is under constant threat from the Darkness. Other Corridors, with their own Labyrinths of Time, are believed to exist elsewhere in the Darkness.

Magick

Observation: An Accepter [Sleeper], sees events around him as they have been defined by the Observations of other, more astute Observers [Mages] - Observing an event fixes it in time and space (i.e. the Corridor). Observers are able to see what they want to see, thus fixing events in the Corridor according to their own requirements.

Spheres

Correspondence: *Space-Like Paths (Sidestep)*. By travelling along a 'space-like' path (effectively, by moving sideways) in the Corridor, an Observer can bypass Time and travel great distances instantaneously. By shifting one's perceptions along the width of the Corridor, an Observer can sense distant events and locations. By reaching across the Corridor, an Observer can physically affect these distant locations.

Note that it is not possible for Accepters to travel across the Corridor in this way - the closest they can ever get is the theoretical maximum of the speed of light (c), which itself cannot travel across the Corridor instantaneously. However, acceleration to such velocities warps the fabric of the Corridor such that Special Relativistic effects can occur to slow the subjective passage of time. Observers travel on Space-Like Paths so both t (absolute travel Time) and τ (*Tau*, subjective travel Time) = 0.

Entropy (Chaos): *Quantum Mechanics*. By Observing events at the Quantum Level, an Observer can control probability and randomness.

Mind: *Opinion*. One of the more esoteric concepts within the Paradigm of the Corridor -- since Observation defines reality, opinion of what one sees plays a critical role in determining what one has just seen. Thus, Opinion is also a vital factor in fixing reality.

Prime: *The Flow*. All things are pushed in one direction through the Corridor - the current that drives them is the Flow. By increasing or decreasing the density of the Flow through an object, it can be more or less firmly anchored to the Corridor. Decreasing the Flow density causes an object to become inherently unstable, until it completely discorporates when the density reaches zero.

Spirit: *Opening the doors*. There are many 'side doors' in the Corridor, through which Branch corridors with differing parameters to our own may be entered. Other True Corridors (as opposed to Branches) do exist, but are presumably also under constant siege from the Darkness in which they rest.

Time: *The Corridor*. The infinite length of Corridor itself represents Time. The Flow passes through everything within the Corridor. While manipulation of the density of this Flow affects an object's inherent stability, the Flow also imparts a *force* to the object while it passes through it (that is not related to its density) that pushes it along the Corridor. This force is uni-directional in Main Corridor - it only pushes the object in one direction (forwards through time). Manipulation of this force affects the speed at which an object travels down the Corridor.

Increasing the forward motion makes Time pass at a faster subjective rate - decreasing the forward motion makes Time pass at a subjectively slower rate. Anchoring the object to Corridor so that it has no forward motion freezes that object in Time. Experiments are currently underway to reverse the direction of motion in a test object, but all attempts so far have failed -- the reversal of causality (cause and effect) that results creates a Singularity since such phenomena are not stable in the Corridor.

Pattern Magick

Forces: *Interaction*. All forces (Gravity, Electromagnetic, Strong and Weak) are manifestations of unseen interactions between particles. Only in certain circumstances do these interactions manifest as real particles such as photons and electrons. By Observing these interactions, an Observer can influence the forces that affect the macro/microscopic world.

Matter: *Mass-energy*. $E=mc^2$. Mass has energy, and energy has mass. All physical objects, whether solid, liquid, gaseous, or plasma, possess this mass-energy. Observers can convert ambient energy into mass (transferring it from extremely distant parts of the Corridor to their present location if necessary) and fashion this into any material they desire through Observation and Opinion. Note that the total amount of mass-energy in the Universe is constant, so even Observers cannot spontaneously create mass-energy - it must exist already in another form.

*[Note that this is just background - in reality, Matter as used by a Continuum Agent will itself draw the energy from elsewhere in the Universe (say, a cloud of interstellar gas a thousand light-years away, or the air around the targeted object) to create the material/object. Correspondence or Mind are **not** required to use Matter)].*

Life: *Biomass*. Living beings are still constructed of basic matter, but this interacts in a complex (biochemical) manner to fuel the body. Affecting Living creatures requires more finesse and concentration than that required for non-living material, and by necessity the problem must be approached from a separate direction.

[Life is affected in a similar way to Matter, but since living bodies are much more complex than non-living material, a new approach must be set up in the Observer's mind - hence, Life is a separate Sphere from Matter].

Arete

Astuteness. More Astute Observers can understand the Corridor better by seeing in more detail. Observers become more astute through experience, by noticing the subtle nuances in every Observation.

Quintessence

Energy. Energy is an unusual quantity. While in the conventional universe it manifests as a force or as mass, the truth is much deeper than this. Energy is in fact a physical manifestation of the density of the Flow, the current that perpetually pushes events forwards in time along the Corridor. In the physical world, the Energy Density of the flow can manifest in many forms in the right circumstances. This Energy can be used to back up Observations, ensuring they are perceived correctly.

Paradox

Singularity: Instabilities created by poorly Observed events in the Corridor result in the creation of Singularities [Paradox Flaws and Spirits]. In some cases, the disturbance is so severe that Naked Singularities arise, which necessitate the creation of an Event Horizon around the Observer which shields the surrounding Corridor from the instability [i.e. a Paradox Realm - since nothing originating in the Corridor can penetrate an Event Horizon, the Paradox is enclosed and Reality is effectively shielded from the instability while the Observer negotiates the Paradox Realm set up within the Event Horizon].

Awakening/Ascension

Sapience (Sagacity): Accepters who start to question what they see become Sapient. By doubting the Observations of others instead of just accepting them, they formulate their own Opinion and so become Observers themselves.

It should be noted that the Continuum does not believe in Ascension. The struggle against the Darkness is continuous, and so can never have such a culmination (other than the total destruction of Main Corridor)...

Mage-Specific Backgrounds

Arcane: *Covering the Tracks*. Observers are capable of seeing Reality in its true form - the Corridor. By looking behind them [in the past], they can cover their tracks so they pass with very little trace along the Corridor.

Avatar: *Dense Flow*. Observers exist because the Flow through them is denser than the Flow through normal Accepters. In addition, Observers can draw upon this excess density as a kind of Energy 'battery' with which to back up their Observations.

Destiny: *Recognition*. Some Observers are simply very good at what they do, or show a faint hint of extraordinary talent - as such, they deserve recognition.

Dream: *Scanning the Labyrinth*. Since the Labyrinth contains everything that is or has been in existence, it is possible to scan its contents (at least in the immediate vicinity) for knowledge that the Observer may require.

Node: *Energy Concentrations*. The Flow through some regions of the Corridor is denser than normal - more Energy can thus manifest in these locations.

Continuum Policy

Terminology:

- **Metaverse**: The sum of reality - the Metaverse can be thought of as an infinite region of Darkness, within which are suspended the Corridors.
- **Corridor**: A single universe, with all its branches (Realms). Arcadia is a Corridor.
- **Main Corridor (MC)**: Our own Universe, encompassing all the Realms and the Near Umbra.
- **Labyrinth**: All the Virtuals (and sub-Virtuals) associated with a Corridor.
- **The Labyrinth Of Time**: All the Virtuals (and sub-Virtuals) associated with Main Corridor specifically (a.k.a. '**The Labyrinth**').
- **Nexus**: Main Corridor's Shade Realm of Time, the Chantry Realm of the Continuum.
- **Virtuals**: Alternate universes that can usually only be accessed via Portals.
- **The Perpetual War**: The continuing defence of Main Corridor against the Darkness.

Nephandi/The Darkness. The Continuum's view of the Nephandi is somewhat different to that of other magickal factions. While they acknowledge that there are many entities that seek to induce the Fall of individuals through moral, physical, and spiritual corruption, the Continuum does not usually actively hunt down these beings.

The real *raison d'être* of the Continuum lies in the Deep Umbra that surrounds the Main and other Corridors, a state of non-existence that it calls **The Darkness**. The Darkness appears to have always surrounded the Corridors, and has always acted to destroy them. The Continuum believes that the Darkness represents the natural state of the Metaverse, with the Corridors being unstable imperfections in its fabric. As a result, the greater laws of reality always try to correct these flaws by attempting to destroy them. However, the destruction of the Corridors would be the destruction of all physical reality and its replacement by absolute nothingness. Since the Darkness is infinite, the Continuum never seeks to 'win' the war against it - its actions are entirely defensive, dealing with invasions as and when they occur in the Labyrinth.

The Continuum continually acts to defend the integrity of the Labyrinth from the 'corrective forces' of the Darkness and any who would aid them. The Darkness commonly attacks Corridors by invading them with 'Manifestations' - alien, non-Pattern entities that usually utterly destroy the reality around them. The Darkness is frequently (and probably falsely) attributed with a form of pseudo-sentience by Continuum researchers, probably because of its tenacity and persistence in its drive to destroy realities by any means possible - as such, Manifestations are often described as physical representations of Darkness' desire to annihilate the Corridors. Alternatively, it may break through the Horizons around Corridors and use the inhabitants therein for its own ends (usually to open pathways to allow *bona fide* Manifestations to enter), thus creating 'Agents of Darkness'. Other magickal researchers commonly label both these types of entities as 'Outsider Nephandi' - the Continuum describes any entities working to aid the Darkness as 'The Darkness Manifest' (for more information, see **Book 4: The Darkness Manifest**).

Continuum policy regarding the Manifestations and Agents of the Darkness states very clearly that they should be sought out and destroyed *no matter what the cost*. The Continuum has in one form or another been defending the Labyrinth from invasions by the Darkness for thousands of years, and as a result the Continuum is quite fanatical when hunting these beings. If the invading entity is powerful, whole Squads of Agents are despatched to engage, contain, and destroy it. The degree of fanaticism is such that the Agent's death is a readily accepted risk, so great is the price of allowing the Darkness to survive in the Labyrinth.

The Continuum also repulses invasions by the Darkness in the rest of the Labyrinth as and when they occur. While in some cases the local inhabitants of the invaded Virtuals can cope with the intrusions of the Darkness (particularly if just Agents are involved), some invasions require Continuum aid - more often than not, the Continuum is much more effective against Manifestations than the locals.

The Marauders: The Marauders are the second main enemy of the Continuum after the Darkness. They are a constant thorn in their sides, since their immunity to Paradox applies even within Nexus. The Continuum is not entirely certain of the origin of this bizarre group of Observers. It is believed that they are from our own Corridor, and represent Observers who have become Sapient in a highly stressful environment. Some believe they have come face to face with the Darkness and have been driven insane by it. Certainly, the Darkness holds many alien horrors that can drive even Observers insane - even Continuum Agents do not enter it without substantial protection.

Marauders originating in Main Corridor are fully capable of entering Nexus and the Virtuals, and have managed to contaminate a significant number of inhabited Virtuals. In addition, the Marauders' disruptive activities can (often unintentionally) provide gateways into the Labyrinth that the Darkness can exploit, so the Continuum makes every effort to drive them back from whence they came.

Virtual Marauders, while limited to their own (and Lower Order) Virtuals, have been proving a problem since there are reports that some have kidnapped MC Mages (and Virtual Mages with Temporal Avatars) and somehow 'transplanted' the Temporal Avatar to their own bodies, effectively turning them into MC Marauders able to access any Virtual, Nexus, and Main Corridor.

It is not known why the Marauders are so interested in the Labyrinth, which they see as a playground of sorts. Perhaps it is because it represents the 'Dynamic' aspect of Time - the infinite possibilities that lie in the alternate universes of the Virtuals. Many think that the Marauders seek to 'free Time' from the constraints of the Virtuals, creating a realm where all the alternatives exist at once. Regardless of their motives, the Continuum repels Marauders wherever they are found in the Labyrinth.

The Technocracy: The MC Technocracy is not allowed within Nexus, under any circumstances. The Continuum is aware of what the Union could do if given access to the Virtuals, and does not wish to take the risk of them invasively plundering the resources of the Virtuals to give them a huge advantage in the Ascension War. Although generally not openly hostile, the Technocracy still attempts to subtly undermine the Continuum's efforts and proves a constant thorn in the Continuum's side even today, obstructing them whenever they cross.

The Traditions: The Continuum sees itself as separate but allied to this group of Observers, since it now has much more in common with them than the Technocracy. Most of the Traditions are too focused in their 'struggle' against the Technocracy, which serves no purpose - who would be left to pat the winner on the back should the Corridor collapse to the Darkness? The Continuum believes they should focus instead on the real enemy - the Darkness. Many of the Traditions leave the Continuum alone, and while some do not trust them, they do acknowledge that someone has to take the defence of reality seriously. However, only the Celestial Chorus, Dreamspeakers and Cabalists are sometimes helpful to their cause in their own way. Ideally, the Continuum would gladly see some Traditions destroyed outright - the Necromancers and some Goetics actively aid or seek the Darkness, which cannot be tolerated. The Continuum distinctly distrusts the Euthanatos, believing they deal too much with Wraiths and so are a threat to the stability of the Corridor.

While the Continuum remains comparatively open with the Traditions, it frequently has to hold them at bay from raiding the Quintessence of the Virtuals. Tradition Mages are extensively vetted before they are allowed to enter Nexus, and those seeking to join the Continuum must often pass stringent tests and examinations to do so. Any allied mage found compromising the security of the Realm, Virtuals, or Central Office is dealt with extreme prejudice...

The Ascension War: The Ascension War between the Traditions and the Technocracy is something that never ceases to amaze the Continuum. They liken it unto a battle in a burning house, with the walls collapsing all around the combatants. The Continuum believes that both factions should cease their childish bickering and pitiful power plays and devote themselves to the defence of the Corridor against the Darkness outside.

Virtuals: The Continuum has a fixed policy regarding the inhabited Virtuals (i.e. those that contain indigenous sentient beings) - it only deals with them as and when necessary, and even then only with Awakened members of that society. Sometimes it actively Quarantines them (as in the case of the more hostile Virtuals such as Reich and Terra Prime). 'Hostile' entities with Temporal Avatars originating in these Quarantined Virtuals who attempt to leave are quickly hunted down and 'contained'. This involves Mind, Prime and Spirit manipulation which blocks the Temporal Avatar and prevents it from leaving the Virtual (see 'Rotes'). However, many have escaped this fate, and most have gone on to join the Technocracy on MC Earth. A few fight a guerrilla war on Nexus itself, but these are rarely a significant threat to the Continuum.

In many cases, the Continuum does not actively involve itself in the internal affairs of an inhabited Virtual. It is only in those Virtuals that are considered a threat to the surrounding Labyrinth that the Continuum becomes active, and even then the activity is never overt. The Continuum currently aids Underground organisations on Aegypt and Reich, providing 'anonymous' help and supplies only when the rebels have their backs to the wall. Indeed, the Continuum is largely responsible for the surprising longevity of such rebellious organisations, but this is as far as support goes. In no circumstances does the Continuum *openly* come to the aid of the organisations it supports. In any case, it always maintains strict anonymity (or elaborate cover stories) to prevent knowledge of Higher Order Realities spreading to the populace of those of a Lower Order. In most cases therefore, the Continuum leaves the inhabited Virtuals well alone, though it often welcomes those with Temporal Avatars from the Non-Quarantined Virtuals (or the few non-hostile refugees from the Quarantined ones) who blunder through to Nexus and discover the truth about the extent of the Metaverse. Indeed, many of the Continuum's finest agents are from other Virtuals.

Many Continuum agents in the field are extremely careful, and Intelligence Acquisition sets up complex identities for them to allow them to fit into the Virtual more easily. Indeed, Intelligence Acquisition maintains extremely detailed records of the cultures found on every Virtual that the Continuum is involved in, and Central Office houses extensive facilities to disguise and protect its Agents there. In some cases (e.g. Sauron), the Agent even has to be physically changed to fit in!

Although there are a vast number of Nodes available to tap among the Virtuals, the Continuum leaves those in the inhabited Virtuals to their inhabitants - there are plenty of Nodes to be found in the uninhabited Virtuals. However, the Continuum has an open policy when it comes to the uninhabited Virtuals - those that are not populated by sentient beings. These it uses for resources (minerals, Quintessence, etc) and exploration. Many uninhabited Virtuals are simply catalogued and forgotten about, but bases are frequently set up in the more unusual Virtuals (such as Neverland and Lucifer).

The Umbra: The Penumbra represents the periphery of the Corridor, nearest its walls. Since the Corridor is infinite in length and width, only Observers (not Accepters) can perceive its Walls. The Three Umbrae are explained as frequency variations in the Corridor - all are superimposed over physical reality, but occur at different 'metaphysickal frequencies'. Perceiving and entering the Umbrae is achieved by shifting one's own frequency to match that of the desired Umbra. By entering the Periphery, an Observer can easily find doors into Branch Corridors, while at the same time being able to perceive 'normal' reality. By entering these side doors, Observers can enter other Realms in the Umbra.

In some places, doors may lead directly into the Darkness that surrounds the Corridor [i.e. the Deep Umbra]. Such doors are sought out and are continually guarded, since they present an obvious route for the Darkness to enter the Corridor. More adventurous Observers claim to have seen other Corridors [i.e. Realms in the Deep Umbra] suspended in the Darkness around our own, but the Continuum cannot afford to expend its limited resources by investigating them and defending our own at the same time. It is assumed that these other Corridors are also under siege by the Darkness.

Wraiths: The Continuum holds what appears to be a violently paranoid opinion of Wraiths - it actively seeks and destroys them wherever they exist! In their view, when something dies it may leave an '**Imprint**' of itself [i.e. a Wraith] on reality - a good analogy would be to equate the Imprint to an after-image left on the retina after a bright light is shone into one's eyes.

The Continuum perceives these Imprints as a very real threat to the Corridor's integrity, for it is through them that its walls become weakened, allowing the Darkness outside easier passage to reality. By resonating with the Imprint's desires, the invader can manifest itself within the Corridor. Lingering memories and desires, nursery rhymes, and even old photographs have proven to be a major thorn in the side of the Continuum as it fends off attempts by the Darkness to break through the weakened walls.

There is much debate on whether or not these Imprints are sentient. Some argue that Imprints are just that - emotional after-images left on reality, with no sentience or intelligence. Others (especially those who have come face-to-face with Wraiths) believe that they are indeed sentient, but can be driven, used, or tricked by the Darkness into acting as a gateway into the Corridor. All factions believe that while these Imprints may or may not be a direct threat, they remain a weak link through which the Darkness can break through, so they should be removed wherever found. Some Agents actively seek and destroy Fetters in order to loosen the bonds of a Wraith to the Living World.

[In game terms, the Continuum sees Wraiths as a direct link to the forces of Oblivion, toys to be used by the Darkness to penetrate the walls of the Corridor. As such, they believe that Oblivion is not actually a sentient force in itself, but rather a means by which the Darkness can more easily access Main Corridor.

Chronicles involving the interaction/confrontation between Wraiths and Continuum Agents (especially Repulsion Branch) are potentially the most interesting of all. Inspiration can be found in the early 1980's British Sci-Fi Series 'Sapphire and Steel', starring Joanna Lumley and David MacCallum. Indeed, the Paradigm of the Continuum is extrapolated from information hinted at in the six adventures that made up this series - Adventure 2 in particular is a very good example of Wraiths being used by the Darkness for its own ends. As an aside, Sapphire and Steel themselves can be considered as Repulsion Branch Field Ops (with Lead and Silver (who also appear in the series occasionally) as Repulsion Branch Specialists)].

Spirits: Inhabitants of our Branch Corridors. The Continuum is curious as to the nature of these creatures and how they interact with our own Corridor. However, it is aware that some of these beings either willingly or unwillingly serve the Darkness, so it treads very carefully when dealing with them. All attempts are of course made to destroy any who do serve the Darkness.

Garou: The Continuum views the Garou as natural hybrids of the forces within this Corridor and its Branches, since they exist at or near the Periphery (i.e. the Walls of the Corridor). If the Continuum knew enough Garou cosmology, they would probably believe that the Wyrm is yet another manifestation of the Darkness. It is not certain that the Garou (of Main Corridor at least) are aware of the existence of the Continuum, but where they can, the two sides prefer to leave each other to fight their own battles with the Darkness on their own terms.

Vampires: The Continuum knows much about the nature of Vampire biology and society, having encountered them in various forms across the Labyrinth. The general consensus is that they are a form of unusual but natural lifeform unique to our own Corridor, possibly forming when an Accepter dies while becoming Sapient to create a partially-Sapient creature. All of this is conjecture - if truth be told, Vampires are a largely unknown quantity to the Continuum. However, it is believed that there is no general connection between the Darkness and these entities. Wherever possible, Vampires should be studied (carefully!) by Continuum Agents, although their paths rarely cross. Nevertheless, the Continuum is aware that some of these creatures [though not necessarily the Sabbat] are actively aiding the Darkness, and tries to seek and destroy these when they can.

Changelings and Faeries: The Continuum is aware of the existence of these creatures, and studies them wherever possible. Faeries themselves are cited as proof of the existence of other Corridors, and are believed to originate from a separate 'nearby' Order 0 reality - another Corridor known as 'Arcadia' - Changelings appear to be exiles from this other Corridor. Very little is known about the Arcadia Corridor, and some Observers believe it to have once been a Branch of our own. How and when it separated from our own would be of great interest to the Continuum if it had the time to study it (and the patience to tolerate any Changelings they may debrief).

Sleepers: Accepters. Those whose lack Sapience and so are unable to Observe the Corridor. Accepters merely accept the Observations of others as fact (hence their name). However, while they are incapable of forming their *own* opinion and making their *own* Observations, they are capable of instinctively Contradicting observations made by Observers that go against their accepted world-view. Such Contradiction is dangerous to careless Observers, as it can set up Singularities and Event Horizons to plague them - by making Observations that can fit in to an Accepter's world-view, an Observer can avoid these problems.

Continuum Rotes

The Continuum retains its Technocratic paradigm when using magick - it refers to Rotes as 'Procedures', and indeed sees its magick as a form of science. The Continuum refers to its members as either 'Agents' (if in Target Neutralisation or Repulsion Branch) or 'Scientists' or 'Researchers' (if in Intelligence Acquisition). Other Mages are referred to as 'Observers' (given that the Continuum defines magick as Observation in its paradigm).

ROTES INDEX

Cross-Time Co-ordination	Reality Check
Detect Portal	Sense Timestone
Detect Vortex	Temporal Containment
Labyrinth Map	Translator
Open Portal	

Two procedures - *Labyrinth Map* and *Open Portal* - are the workhorses of the Continuum, and are essential for travelling through the Labyrinth of Time. These Procedures (and others) are described below:

Cross-Time Co-ordination: Mind 3, Spirit 2, Time 3

This Procedure allows a Continuum Agent to mentally link up to his most nearby Copies. The effect is subtle, since the Copies are all so similar that they will not notice any difference in their mental processes. However, echoes from more remote versions may be vaguely perceived since the Copies have also probably used this Procedure. The effect is a strange group-mind feeling that helps the Agent to remain a continuum in the field, allowing him to take useful action against a Flowing being.

Detect Portal: Time 1

Using this Procedure, the Agent can detect any Portals within range. Portals themselves are invisible within Virtuals, but are quite visible in the Shade Realms of Time - they appear as shimmering, translucent brown-tinted windows. Note that this Procedure can detect Gateways as well. An additional Correspondence 3 component allows the user of this Procedure to scan all of the local reality for Portals. Since Portals only mark the arrival point from one reality into another, it is only useful to know their exact location if it is necessary to monitor traffic arriving from other realities.

Detect Vortex: Correspondence 3, Entropy 1, Time 2

This Procedure is used to scan for Vortices and their related Flows. It scans through the reality that it is cast in and all its Indistinguishables in an attempt to find the Flowing being itself.

Labyrinth Map: Spirit 1, Time 1

This Procedure is one of the most commonly used by any traveller through the Labyrinth of Time. It must be cast before attempting to travel through a Portal, and is required in order to locate a destination reality in the Labyrinth. The Procedure allows the caster to visualise the Labyrinth and find the Virtual he wishes to enter. At least one success allows the caster to make an **Intelligence + Cosmology** roll at Difficulty 9 (or **Intelligence + Virtual Cosmology** at difficulty 7, if he possesses that Knowledge). If the caster rolls at least one success on *this* roll, he has located the reality he wishes to travel to and can attempt to open the Portal (using *Open Portal* (q.v.)) and travel through it to his destination.

Open Portal: Spirit 3, Time 3

The other essential Procedure used by travellers through the Labyrinth of Time, *Open Portal* (as the name suggests) opens the local Portal and allows the caster to travel through it to other realities. To successfully arrive at his desired destination, the traveller must successfully negotiate the Temporal Gauntlet that separates realities from each other within the Labyrinth. For more details on how to travel through the Labyrinth of Time, see '**Accessing the Labyrinth**'.

The caster always arrives at the location of the Portal (the Portal Site) in the destination reality. A Correspondence 3 component can be added to the effect to teleport directly to a (known) specific location in a reality after arrival therein.

The Temporal Gauntlet is similar to the Spirit Gauntlet familiar to Dreamspeakers, and its existence prevents unrestricted cross-Virtual contamination. The difficulty of the *Open Portal* roll required to penetrate it is largely dependent on difference in Order between the origin and destination reality as shown in the table below. The Temporal Gauntlet must be successfully negotiated in order to enter *and* leave a reality.

- If the caster gets the required number of successes shown on the table below (or more), he travels to his destination reality *instantaneously*.
- A Failure (i.e. no successes, or less than the required number of successes) means that the caster cannot penetrate the Temporal Gauntlet on this attempt and must either wait a while and try again, or he may spend a Willpower point and try again immediately (at +1 difficulty).
- A Botch means the caster has become stuck in the Temporal Gauntlet - a very hazardous experience since agents of the Darkness often prowl this interface, looking for trapped travellers.
- On a *Catastrophic* Botch (a result of '1' on all dice), the Agent may open a gateway directly to the Darkness instead...

Open Portal Difficulty Table

Difference in Energy Rating	Successes required	Difficulty
Enacted at Portal Site*	1	3
± 0	2	5
± 1		
± 2	3	6
± 3	4	7
Travelling between a Physical Reality and that reality's Shade Realm of Time**	3	7

Modifiers (cumulative)

Situation	Successes Modifier	Difficulty Modifier
Destination reality Unstable (Rating U)	+1	+1
Origin reality Unstable (Rating U)	+1	+1

Notes: The maximum possible difference in Energy Rating is ± 3, corresponding to a jump between Orders 0 and 3.

*: This is **always** used if the *Open Portal* Procedure is attempted at a Portal Site (within a 10 metre radius of the Portal) in any reality. All modifiers are ignored unless the destination Virtual is Unstable (see '**Virtual Classification Scheme**'), in which case the penalties shown on the Modifiers table do apply.

**: This is the difficulty for indigenous inhabitants to enter their reality's Shade Realm of Time from its Physical Reality (or vice versa) using *Open Portal* in order to access the Labyrinth.

Example: A Continuum Agent in Aegypt (a 1st Order Virtual) uses *Open Portal* to travel to Fungal Wind (a 2nd Order Virtual). The difference in Order is +1, with no applicable modifiers, so the final target is **2 successes at Difficulty 5**.

Reality Check: Prime 1

This extremely useful Procedure is often enacted as soon as an Agent enters a Virtual - it allows the Agent to sense that reality's Paradigm. This can not only give the user an indication of the local Sphere Ratings, but can also give him a sense of what can pass for Coincidence and what is considered Vulgar there. More successes on this roll yield more detailed information - one success might only indicate whether the Virtual is dominated by a Technomagickal or Mystickal paradigm, two will yield as much information as described in the 'Magick Factor' section of the Virtual Classification Scheme, while three or more will give the Agent a feel for the exact Sphere Ratings of the reality. Failure to use this Rote often results in Paradox striking the Agent as he unwittingly goes against the local Paradigm.

Sense Timestone: Matter 1, Time 1

Timestone is a strange and rare material unique to Nexus, found only in a few rare exposures in the more rugged regions of the realm - it is believed to be the fundamental material from which Nexus is constructed. One kilogram (2.2 lbs) of Timestone can be used as 1 point of Tass for Correspondence or Time effects only, and even so it works as such only within Nexus itself.

If taken outside Nexus, its distinctive signature can easily be detected by Mages using this Procedure - a small fragment is always built into Virtual Travel Bracelets, so any searches for Agents missing in action in the Virtuals and wearing these Bracelets are greatly aided by this rote. Indeed, with an additional Correspondence 3 component, the user of this Procedure can scan all of the local reality for Timestone.

Temporal Containment: Mind 4, Prime 5, Spirit 4, Time 1

Temporal Containment is the means by which the Continuum prevents those 'undesirable elements' with Temporal Avatars from leaving their realities. Often, these are Virtual Inhabitants who somehow deliberately manage to penetrate the Temporal Gauntlet around Quarantined or even Sealed Virtuals, though in some cases such beings may be refugees fleeing from that reality. Containment is however treated on a case by case basis, though most are Contained and returned to their Virtual otherwise unharmed, having no memory of the Labyrinth at all.

Containment is a complex Procedure that makes the Temporal Avatar completely opaque to the Temporal Gauntlet, preventing it from passing through a Portal by any means. In addition, all memory of leaving the Virtual is removed and a permanent mental block is set up to prevent him from doing so again. This Mind manipulation includes the removal of the memory of ever having been Contained in the first place. Containment can only be detected by Mages from Main Corridor, using a conjunctional (Time 1, Spirit 1, Prime 1) conjunctional effect - Virtual Mages cannot detect Containment, and so cannot try to remove it.

Containment can only be removed by powerful magicks cast by MC Mages, but anyone attempting to do so must possess all the Spheres at least at the levels used in the Containment (i.e. Prime 5, Spirit 4, Mind 4, and Time 1) - anything less and the Containment cannot be removed.

Containment cannot be attempted on an Avatar originating in Main Corridor - it is only effective on those originating in a Virtual.

[Temporal Containment is a very complicated Procedure. First, Prime 5 is used for two purposes - to set up the Containment itself, and to actually affect a living Pattern. A conjunctional (Spirit 4, Time 1) effect is then applied to render the target's Temporal Avatar totally opaque to the Temporal Gauntlet. This prevents him from ever passing through the Temporal Gauntlet again - travel through a Portal becomes impossible for the victim of Containment. Finally, Mind 4 is used to remove all knowledge of leaving the Virtual and the Containment itself. This is cast as a single Rote, often by a group of Continuum Specialists. Five successes must be gained between those casting the effect to make the effect Permanent, and all must possess the required Spheres.

The effect can be countered as normal as it is being cast (though in most cases the target is rendered unconscious at the time). It can only be removed afterwards by an MC Mage possessing the Spheres used to cast the Containment - i.e. Prime 5, Spirit 4, Mind 4, and Time 1 - so he can fully perceive the magick he is attempting to remove. Virtual Mages cannot attempt remove Containment themselves, since they are unable to perceive the Containment to begin with - an MC Mage must do this for them, and no Continuum Mage will do so unless directly contradicting Central Office and risking the wrath of a Continuum Tribunal.

A Contained Temporal Avatar cannot travel through a Portal - neither to its Shade Realm of Time nor to any other reality - and remains trapped in his home Virtual until such time as the Containment is removed (if ever). He retains no memory of the Labyrinth at all, or of ever having left his reality. In addition, a subliminal suggestion is implanted that always dissuades him from ever trying to leave his reality again. Contained Avatars can only be detected by MC Mages using a conjunctional (Sprit 1, Time 1, Prime 1) rote. Obviously, the Continuum cannot Contain every 'undesirable' who travels through the Labyrinth - rather, they focus on those from highly xenophobic, warlike, or otherwise dangerous races who somehow manage to enter Nexus.

Containment is often performed in Nexus itself, after the 'undesirable' has been captured. He is then returned to his home Virtual by the Continuum (Containment usually has a time-delay built into it to allow the return of the Contained being to its own reality), with no memory of his experience outside his reality. However, not all those coming in from the Quarantined/Sealed realities are 'undesirable' - some for example are refugees. These are often adopted for some purpose in the Continuum.]

Translator: Mind 3

This extremely useful Procedure allows the Agent to understand any language spoken to him, and at the same time allows anyone else to understand the language spoken by the Agent himself. This includes any visual component to the language as well - any extra components such as body movements and tail motions can therefore be used and understood (assuming the Agent's body has been modified to allow for such movements).

[This rote works by reading the minds of anyone speaking or being spoken to and translating thought patterns directly into languages that can be understood by the individuals involved - those involved think that the other person is speaking their language. This only translates and transmits spoken words, and not the thoughts BEHIND those words - however, the intention of the spoken words is translated accurately (unless the effect Botches...). Thus, an Agent may talk to an Aegyptian in English, who is fooled into thinking that he is being spoken to in Aegyptian. When he replies in Aegyptian, the Agent will hear his answer in English. If the Agent lies to the Aegyptian, his lies will be heard - if he utters an expletive, that will be translated into an Aegyptian equivalent.

If a visual component is involved (as in the case of the *lingua franca* on Sauron, which involves complex body and tail motion), the effect creates an illusion of the required component in the listener's mind. However, the 'speaker' must be physically capable of using such components to start with - i.e. he has to have been already physically modified (by Life effects) to use them. This is because the Translator effect cannot create a complete physical illusion around the user and so (for example) cannot make a human appear as a Saurid].

<u>Book 2:</u>
<u>The Labyrinth of Time</u>

THE LABYRINTH OF TIME

The Nature of the Virtuals and the Metaverse

Some periods of History appear to result in the creation of an Alternate Corridor to the **Main Corridor (MC)** representing Earth. History may take a very different course in these Alternate Corridors, known as *Virtuals*. Within these Virtuals, an exact duplicate of MC is created, but with (initially) one difference - the outcome of the event. The ENTIRE previous timeline of MC is duplicated within the Virtual - time within the Virtual does not merely start from the moment the 'branching' took place. Instead, the entire history of Main Corridor is duplicated *exactly* in the Virtual, all the way back to the start of time within Main Corridor - in effect, the Virtual is 'retro-fitted' with MC History right back to the beginning of Time. After the branching, events follow their natural course in the Virtual, though this is now based on the different outcome of the initial event that created the Virtual.

A Branching happens when an event is about to occur in MC - many alternate possibilities are created just prior to the time the event actually occurs. Looking up Main Corridor's Timeline, each possibility represents a 'Virtual Future' which may come to pass depending on the outcome of the event. When the time comes for the event to take place, one of these Virtuals 'crystallises', or becomes Real. This former Virtual now represents the final outcome of the event in MC. The other Virtuals at this point 'shear off' from the Main Corridor, and these 'failed' Virtuals are cast adrift in the Darkness. Depending on a variety of largely unknown factors, many (if not most) of these Virtuals are rapidly dissolved by the Darkness, but some survive for long enough to be captured by Nexus and made Real once more.

The Darkness itself requires some further explanation. It represents the corrective forces of the Metaverse. The Corridors themselves are actually aberrations in the fabric of the Metaverse, and as a result are quite unstable. To restore equilibrium, the Darkness (the natural fabric of the Metaverse) seeks to dissolve these instabilities. On Main Corridor (the only True Corridor about which anything concrete is known at present, though two others - **Arcadia** and **The Periphery** - are known to exist), these attempts at correction manifest on the whole as seemingly intelligent entities seeking to invade and destroy our reality - the Continuum's sole purpose is to repel these invaders. The Continuum is fully aware that it can never 'win' this Perpetual War, and as such solely operates defensively, foiling invasion attempts as and when they occur. To some, these invasions appear to be driven by individual entities - for example, the Garou see an entity known as the Wyrm. However, the Continuum know that these entities are but the physical representations of a much greater concept. In a sense, the Darkness itself (and its physical representations) may be considered as sentient in an extremely alien way. It cannot destroy our Main Corridor directly, but instead seeks to weaken it from the inside through these invasions. As such, It manifests within the Labyrinth as destructive entities that annihilate reality around them, or uses the inhabitants themselves to open up pathways for it to invade through. Although the Continuum destroys or banishes Wraiths where it finds them (due to the fact that they seem to weaken the Walls of the Corridor where they appear), the Oblivion of these Ghosts is probably much closer to a true understanding of the concept of the Darkness than the Wyrm.

Nexus itself is unusual in the cosmology of the Continuum. Being a Shade Realm, it is directly attached to Main Corridor, running parallel to it (unlike the Branches [Realms], which radiate from the sides). However, it borders directly on both the Darkness and Main Corridor itself - thus, in Mage terms, it is a Horizon Realm with access to both the Deep Umbra and the Near Umbra and Earth. It can therefore collect Virtuals that are cast adrift from Main Corridor before they are lost in the Darkness.

It is not entirely clear what factors allow certain Virtuals to survive dissolution by the Darkness. The probability of their outcome is very likely to be one factor, although the amount of Energy (Quintessence) they hold also appears to be important. Sometimes it just seems to be the will of its inhabitants' existence that gives the Virtual strength against the Darkness. One possibility, which the Continuum or any other mortal is completely unaware of (and is quite possibly afraid to consider), is that Nexus itself is *actively* saving Virtuals from destruction. This also raises the question of whether or not Nexus itself is in fact the Oracle of the Continuum.

Nexus is surrounded by thousands (if not millions) of First Order Virtuals (i.e. Virtuals derived directly from Main Corridor), accumulated it seems from the beginnings of our own Corridor. These Virtuals surround Nexus like a fibreoptic cable, with Nexus being the core 'fibre'. The physical connections between Nexus, Main Corridor, and the Virtuals are complex, and are explained later (see 'Accessing the Labyrinth')- to summarise, Virtuals can be accessed from Nexus via the natural Portals that exist there. Nexus can also be naturally accessed from Main Corridor itself via the Portal located therein. Timestone Exposures on Nexus connect to ANY Virtual in the Labyrinth of Time (but a random one). Artificial means - such as the Continuum's standard issue **Virtual Travel Bracelet** (or any equivalent rote or ability) - grant access to ANY Virtual within the Labyrinth of Time, but the difficulty of the effect skyrockets for more 'distant' Virtuals. In addition, there seems to be some metaphysical barrier that prevents different and incompatible Virtuals from intermingling. Thus, a Virtual where the very physical and natural laws define Reality to consist solely of Radiation (with no matter) is going to be extremely difficult (if not impossible) for an MC human (who comes from a Universe where Matter dominates) to access.

Nexus itself seems to be a Pseudo-Corridor - similar to MC but not quite the same. It possesses some kind of MetaGravity, that allows it to attract drifting Virtuals. Being a Branch (albeit an unusual one) of MC, it also has the Flow travelling through it. The Flow represents Prime, but it also pushes objects within the Corridor (and all of its Branches (including Nexus)) forwards through Time.

When a Virtual splits from MC, Time freezes within it, since it is now no longer sustained by The Flow while adrift. If a Virtual has no Flow, it is temporarily rendered both 'unreal' and 'outside Time' - this makes it very vulnerable to invasion by the Darkness through the 'open ends' of the Virtual. In all cases, if the Darkness breaks through to the drifting Virtual, it and all its Branches are entirely discorporated *instantaneously*... mercifully, its inhabitants (frozen in their internal 'subjective' timeframe) are not even aware of their destruction (they are not even aware of their existence at this point).

If a Virtual survives its drift in the Darkness and is re-attached to Nexus, the Flow resumes through it. This restarts the flow of Time through the Virtual, and its inhabitants continue their existence completely unaware that their future is different to that of Main Corridor (although their past is the same). As far as they are concerned, their future is the correct future, and the *only* future. This is due to the **Law of Continuity**, described below.

It should be emphasised that this whole sequence of shearing/drift/reconnection takes place *outside the flow of Time*. In the Virtual itself, no time has passed. In MC and Nexus, the Virtual rejoins apparently at the moment it separated. Effectively, from an MC perspective, the Virtual shears off and instantly reappears at Nexus (assuming it survives its drift through the Darkness). Thus the 'clocks' of MC, Nexus, and all its Virtuals are the same.

This synchronicity of all the 'clocks' of each Virtual with MC and Nexus occurs because of the way Time works. There is a constant flow of Time in the Main Corridor - there is a definite beginning (at time $t = 0$; the Big Bang, or creation of the Universe) and presumably there will be a definite end. Virtuals shear off at a certain time (corresponding to the event that creates them - a Virtual in which the 1906 Great San Francisco Earthquake didn't happen would shear off from MC at this time), after which Time progresses at the normal rate in both Virtual and MC. Time is strictly linear and unidirectional in Main Corridor and the Virtuals (although in Nexus, Time is not fixed, and can flow at a changing rate in any direction), which means that it is the Present Day (i.e. whenever you're reading this) on all the Virtuals. Thus, there are no Virtuals whose local time is before or after the Present - they are all synchronized with Main Corridor - though the extent of any technological, social, or even physical evolution up to 'the present day' within a Virtual will vary depending on the exact circumstances within it.

A Virtual contains a 'less potent' (see 'Virtual Quintessence' below) duplicate of *everything* (even Nodes) that was contained in the Main Corridor when it separated. Nexus itself is fuelled by many thousands of Nodes in many different Virtuals (and in MC), so it is a huge Realm - even though most are weaker than MC Nodes, there are so many that it makes little difference.

On the Cosmology and Metaphysicks of Virtuals

It should be noted that Virtuals are NOT actually Realms as described elsewhere in Mage. Rather, they are almost identical copies of their parent reality, *including everything from the Near Umbra out to the Horizon*, with a few major differences in their histories. As such, they have access to the same Nodes as they did in MC, which are also reproduced in the Virtual. However, the critical difference is that the Virtual's Nodes are weaker in strength. In effect, the Virtual is a 'less potent' copy of MC. Life exists as normal (where the physical conditions allow) in the Virtuals, and is completely indistinguishable from and compatible with normal life in MC (again, assuming the physical conditions of the Virtual allow it).

Human civilization appears in many alternate forms - on the Virtual called Aegypt, the ancient Egyptian civilization never collapsed, and continues to the present day. On Reich, the Nazis won the Second World War and are enjoying the 50th year of the 1000 year Reich under Ernst Hitler, son of Adolph. On Armageddon, the Cuban Missile Crisis erupted into a full-scale nuclear exchange, and the planet and humanity are recovering from the Nuclear Winter that resulted.

Then again, there are equally many where human civilisations, or even life, does not exist. On Sauron, a dinosaur civilisation flourishes. On Lucifer, Life on Earth was never even created. On Neverland, all animal and human life on Earth suddenly disappeared without trace on January 18th 1993.

To re-iterate, ALL the Virtuals exist in the NOW. It seems there is an underlying, objective sense of Time that runs throughout the entire Metaverse - all Corridors appear to have begun at the same time. Thus, in all the Virtuals, it is the present. No 'future' or 'past' Virtuals exist, although technological differences may arise because of the dominant attitude of the civilizations in that Virtual. For example, on Terra Prime, the Technocracy has won the Ascension war and the technological level is very high (this Virtual is Quarantined by the Continuum, and is continually guarded and observed). On Lemuria, the technology level is very low, and society very primitive, since the Dreamspeakers have won the Ascension War there. But on both of these Virtuals, it is still 'the present day'.

Virtuals also contain duplicates of their cosmologies, which the Near Umbra and all the realms within it out to the Horizon. As such, they do have their own Shade Realms of Time, and these always contain Lower Order Virtuals derived from the parent. For example - Armageddon is a 1st Order Virtual derived from MC, in which the Cuban Crisis resulted in an extensive nuclear exchange. Fungal Wind is a 2nd Order Virtual that is in turn derived from Armageddon - here, the Cuban Crisis erupted into a furious *bioweapon* exchange. To the 1st Order, both Virtuals result in a war of some sort, which never occurred in Main Corridor. However, to the 2nd Order, Fungal Wind resulted in biological warfare, making it more 'distant' from Main Corridor than Armageddon, since in both these realities the exchange was (or would have been) Nuclear rather than Biological. Some Continuum Researchers refer to the 'Order' of a Virtual as its '*Generation*', while others refer to it as its '*Level*'. For example, Armageddon may sometimes be referred to as a '1st Generation' (or 'Level 1') Virtual.

Virtual Shade Realms of Time only grant access to Virtuals of a Lower Order than the reality they are situated in. The actual physical environment within these Virtual Shade Realms is very similar to that of Nexus - however, depending on whether or not the Continuum (or an equivalent) exists in a Virtual, the Virtual Shade Realm might not be inhabited. Thus, Virtual Shade Realms of Time might not contain Central Office, but may instead contain the Main Chantry of another Tradition which focuses on Time (or remain completely uninhabited). However, in all cases there is no direct natural connection between the Virtual Shade Realms of Time and Nexus itself.

It appears that 3rd Order Virtuals are the weakest that can exist in the Labyrinth - lower (Integer) Order Virtuals simply do not have enough cohesion to survive destruction by the Darkness while they drift from their parent Virtual.

The Law Of Continuity

The inhabitants of the Virtuals view their realities (which they usually refer to as Earth as well - the names given earlier are the Continuum Codenames for the Virtuals) as the ONLY version of Gaia. They are normally completely (below Oracle level, at least) unaware of the existence of any Higher Order Virtual beyond their own 'sub-Labyrinth', or of Main Corridor itself.

This is the result of a Metaversal **Law Of Continuity**, which states that a Virtual should remain completely unaware that it is now not the 'official' Universe. Thus it retains access to its Realms and Near Umbra as normal (i.e. the Virtual has its own self-contained Cosmology duplicated with it at its formation). This Cosmology is completely separate from those of MC and other Virtuals, and as such can only be accessed from the Virtual itself. It cannot detect that it is now a Virtual, and never will. This is an inviolate law throughout the Labyrinth, and as such preserves Continuity in all the Virtuals. In fact, the only thing *all* Virtuals have in common is the Deep Umbra, which surrounds them all - this can be easily explained when one realises that losing access to the Deep Umbra through the act of becoming a Virtual would violate the Law of Continuity.

The Layers of Time

The Labyrinth of Time can be thought of as a inverted tree splitting into more and more branches as one travels down it. Each 'level' of the tree is the Order (or Level, or Generation) of the Virtual - Main Corridor, at the top of the tree, is Order 0 - the highest Level. Aegypt, Armageddon and so on are on the next level down, and are Order 1. Fungal Wind (and other 'sub-Virtuals' deriving from Order 1 Virtuals) lie at Order 2, and *their* Virtuals lie at Order 3 (the lowest known Level). Of course, there is a possibility that Main Corridor is actually a Lower Order Virtual of a yet more potent reality - if it were, MC Mages would not be able to detect this fact by any known means (since the Law of Continuity states that a Lower Order Virtual can never be aware of a higher one). Quite what the nature of such a 'higher reality' would be is anybody's guess...

The levels of the Labyrinth of Time are often referred to as the **Layers of Time**, and are illustrated in the diagram below.
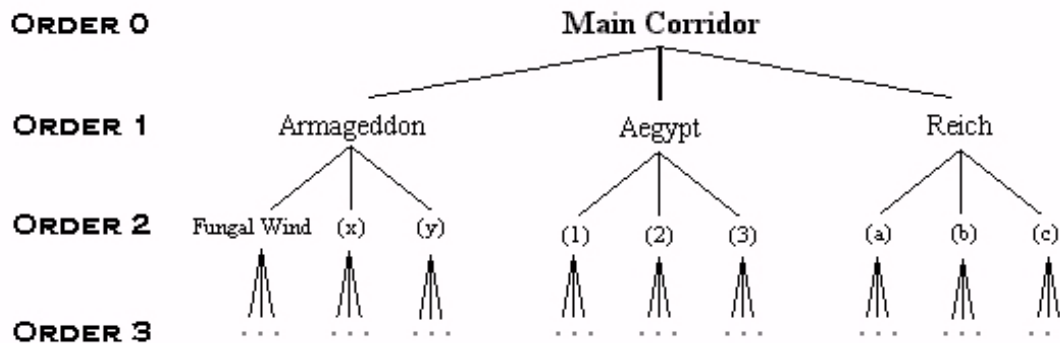
The Law of Continuity means that a Magickally Awakened inhabitant of the Labyrinth of Time can only travel to those Virtuals whose Order is both BELOW that of their own, and only along their own branch of the Labyrinth (i.e. they cannot move sideways along their Layer). Thus a Mage from Armageddon may only travel down his branch to Fungal Wind or any other Order 2 or 3 Virtual derived from Armageddon. Non-Awakened Virtual Inhabitants may not travel to any Virtuals, even those of a Lower Order.

However, the situation is complicated by the fact that some Virtual Inhabitants may possess '**Temporal Avatars**' instead of normal ones. A Temporal Avatar grants the owner the potential to access any reality in the Labyrinth (including Main Corridor), irrespective of whether it is of Higher or Lower Order - in effect, they become exceptions to the Law of Continuity. Many Continuum researchers believe that Temporal Avatars may actually have originated on Main Corridor but have somehow been translated further down the Labyrinth, since they are effectively of Order 0. However, this hypothesis fails to explain Burnout (see Page 42), so this is still somewhat of a mystery.

It should be noted that possession of a Temporal Avatar does not require that the inhabitant Magickally Awaken later in life at all (though this may happen) - therefore it is entirely possible that a Virtual Inhabitant may possess a Temporal Avatar and not be capable of using True Magick. It should be further noted that all inhabitants of Main Corridor, be they Magickally Awakened or not, possess Temporal Avatars since they are from the Order 0 reality.

In order to travel <u>at will</u> through the Labyrinth (in any direction), a being *must* be Magickally Awakened. If a being only possesses a Temporal Avatar, he can travel to other Virtuals only by artificial means - usually if he uses a Device (such as a Virtual Travel Bracelet), or if he is transported to his destination by someone capable of doing so. To summarise:

Any being who possesses a Temporal Avatar and is Magickally Awakened may enter any reality (including Main Corridor) at will using True Magick. This applies regardless of whether or not the being is from MC or a Virtual.
Any being who possesses a Temporal Avatar but is not Magickally Awakened can *potentially* enter any reality (including Main Corridor). However, because he is not Magickally Awakened he will require artificial means to travel through the Labyrinth since he cannot use True Magick to do so. This applies whether or not the being is from MC or a Virtual.
A Magickally Awakened Virtual Inhabitant who does **not** possess a Temporal Avatar may only travel to (and is only aware of) Lower Order realities on the same branch of the Labyrinth as his home reality.
A Virtual Inhabitant who is not Magickally Awakened and does not possess a Temporal Avatar cannot perceive (or enter) any other Virtual by any means.

Cross-Virtual Invasions can and do occur in the Labyrinth (especially around the more expansionistic Virtuals such as Reich) but *are* subject to problems, not least of which is the fact that invaders need to be Magickally Awakened and/or possess Temporal Avatars to travel to the target Virtual - this makes invasion troops a much rarer commodity than one would initially imagine. However, Magickally Awakened invaders from Main Corridor are especially dangerous, since they would be able to invade any Lower Order reality at will. The threat of such 'Invasion from Above' (as the Continuum refers to it) is one reason why the organisation is so keen to keep the MC Technocracy out of the Labyrinth.

Another major problem is the Paradox that can be accrued by the invaders as a result of Paradigm differences between the realities. For example, a technological reality invading a mystical reality would find its technology useless there as local Paradox acts to prevent it from working. However, where paradigms are similar enough (as is usually the case when invading a Lower Order Virtual derived directly from one's own), there is no such barrier and the invasion can proceed as normal, based of course on resistance from the natives and the logistics of cross-virtual invasion - the Zeitsturmtruppen of Reich has spread the Iron Eagle's wings over many of Reich's own Virtuals in this way. Rumours abound that the Fuhrer is trying to amass an army of both Magickally AND Temporally Awakened troops in order to invade other Realities not connected to Reich...

Temporal Avatars

On the whole, Virtual Mages (and other Magickally Awakened/supernatural inhabitants such as the Garou) are completely unaware of the existence of Nexus, higher Level Virtuals, and Main Corridor. They simply cannot perceive, interact with, or enter any of these other Realities. However, some Virtual Inhabitants are blessed with an unusual Avatar (or Soul) that allows them to be aware of the true nature of their reality - effectively, they are considered as inhabitants of Main Corridor, and as a result are fully aware of the Virtuals and capable of travel to and from Nexus and Main Corridor. Such Avatars are known as **TEMPORAL AVATARS**, and are unique to the Virtuals.

It should be noted that Temporal Avatars become progressively less common as one travels downwards to Lower Order realities away from Main Corridor. The actual frequency in which they occur varies across even a given Layer of the Labyrinth, but they are generally not very uncommon in Order 1 realities.

Temporal Avatar: 1pt Merit (Virtual Inhabitant only)

The Avatar (or soul) of the Virtual character is unusual in that it is not specifically 'tuned' to his own Virtual. Effectively, he has an Avatar of Order 0, equivalent and identical to that of one from Main Corridor. Indeed, it **is** to all intents and purposes the Avatar/soul of an MC inhabitant. This means that the Virtual character is capable of perceiving and entering any Virtual, Nexus, and even Main Corridor, and interacting fully with the inhabitants therein. The character is essentially treated as if he was from Main Corridor.

There are several important things to note about Temporal Avatars. The only bonus that a Temporal Avatar provides is that the inhabitant is potentially able to travel to other Virtuals. If he is not Magickally Awakened, the only way he can travel to other realities is via artificial means (e.g. if he uses a Device, or is taken there by someone who is capable of doing so (see '**Accessing the Labyrinth**', page 44)).

Note however that although in all other respects the equivalent of an Order 0 Avatar, a Temporal Avatar does not allow the use of Quintessence as an MC Mage. If a character with a Temporal Avatar originates from a Level 2 Virtual, then MC (and Level 1 Virtual) Quintessence will still be twice as powerful as his indigenous Quintessence, with a corresponding chance of Burnout (see page 42).

Also, Magickal difficulties are increased for the Virtual Mage in Main Corridor, any of its Realms, or any higher level Virtuals. The increase in difficulty is equal to the difference between the Virtual Mage's Home Virtual Rating and the Rating of the Virtual (or MC) he is currently in. Treat MC (and MC's Realms and Near Umbra) and Nexus as having a Rating of 0. Thus, even an inhabitant of a Level 1 Virtual is going to be at a slight magickal disadvantage in MC.

Note that MC inhabitants do **NOT** require this Merit - they automatically possess Temporal Avatars and are therefore already potentially capable of interacting with a Virtual.

Virtual Cosmology

        The Law Of Continuity implies that Sauron will have its own Near Umbra and Realms which have a distinctly unique Saurian slant to them. These are different to the Realms and Near Umbra of Aegypt, which are based more on an Egyptian Mythos. The Cosmology of Reich is separate (and different) to both of these Virtuals, and so on....

        Making rules to cover and create all these alternate Cosmologies specifically is pointless. However, these basic guidelines should be observed when creating individual Virtual Cosmologies:

- Each Virtual has its own cosmology, which is designed according to the beliefs of the inhabitants of that Virtual. Each Cosmology is closed to all outsiders apart from those originating in Main Corridor, a directly-connected Higher Level Virtual, or those with Temporal Avatars.

- Magickally Awakened Inhabitants of a given Virtual **without Temporal Avatars** are completely incapable of entering a Higher Level Virtual - they are ONLY capable of entering those Lower Order Virtuals directly derived from their own. Thus they are completely incapable of entering Main Corridor and Nexus. However, within their Home Virtual, they can still interact with and perceive the inhabitants of Higher Level Realities in any way that would be normally possible.

- Mages originating from Main Corridor (and Virtual Mages with Temporal Avatars) ARE capable of entering and leaving any Virtual and interacting with its inhabitants. While in the Virtual, they can be perceived and affected by the inhabitants as normal. Magickal interaction is handled according to the rules below.

- The Deep Umbra is the same for all Virtuals (being the Darkness that surrounds Nexus and all the Virtuals). There is only ONE Deep Umbra.

- Nexus is the Shade Realm of Time for Main Corridor. Access to Nexus is impossible for any inhabitant of a Virtual unless (s)he possesses a Temporal Avatar and is Magickally Awakened. However, Virtuals *can* have access to their **own** Shade Realms of Time.

Dopplegangers, Indistinguishables, and Copies

When a Virtual forms, EVERYTHING within it is duplicated. One therefore might imagine that those able to travel to other Virtuals might eventually meet exact duplicates of themselves. In practise, however, this never occurs. The reason for this is that **ALL creatures (i.e. Mages, Vampires, Garou, Sleepers etc) are** *Specifically Unique* **throughout the entire Metaverse - they only exist** *specifically as themselves* **in their Home Reality**. Alternate versions *do* exist in other realities however, although these are always different in some way - these alternate versions are known as **Dopplegangers**, and can be extremely different in some Virtuals, depending on the environment. It is quite possible for an OoH Mage on Main Corridor to have a Doppleganger of himself studying under the Sons Of Ether on one Virtual, or the Verbena in another, or even to be non-Awakened in another! While they are (at first glance) essentially the same person, individual circumstances and environments are different across the Virtuals - socially, emotionally, magickally, experientially, psychologically, and in some cases even biologically, Dopplegangers are not the same as the Original, and are also different to the Original's *other* Dopplegangers on other Virtuals.

It should also be noted that Dopplegangers do not have to be remotely sympathetic to the existence of the Original - some may go insane upon meeting the Original, others may even want to *kill* the Original! Where the Original may fit into his Home society, it should be remembered that Dopplegangers are also likely to fit into their own - a Party-loving Doppleganger on Reich might for example seek to report his Original to the local Nazi HQ. Some may be peaceful, others may be psychotic murderers. Dopplegangers are after all only human, moulded by their Home environment, and so can react in *any* way to the appearance of the Original.

Because Dopplegangers are essentially different people, travellers through the Virtuals suffer **no magickal effect** (i.e. no Paradox) if and when they should meet their own Dopplegangers. However, they may be (and often are) mistaken for each other, which may lead to some interesting and confusing social situations. As a result of this and the possible differences in character described above, the Continuum usually advises its Agents to avoid contact with their Dopplegangers unless absolutely necessary.

While Dopplegangers do *generally* exist throughout the Virtuals, it should be noted that Dopplegangers of a specific individual do not have to exist in EVERY single Virtual. In some Virtuals, reality might be (and often is) so different that there was never a circumstance where the individual was born - his parents may have been killed in one Virtual, or themselves were never born in another, or the Doppleganger may have died as a child in yet another. Either way, the existence or non-existence of a Doppleganger does not affect the Original (or any other Dopplegangers of the Original) in any way. Some Dopplegangers may even have Temporal Avatars themselves, and so be able to travel through the Labyrinth with (or against!) their Original.

Indistinguishables and The Mirror Zone

So far, two types of reality have been defined that exist in the Labyrinth of Time. **Corridors** are the Root Realities of the Metaverse - known examples being Main Corridor, Arcadia, and The Periphery. **Virtuals** are those Alternate Realities that are derived from Main Corridor (or other Higher Order Virtuals) - these in turn can branch into Lower Order Virtuals (down to the 3rd Order). Many MC Mages are unaware of the existence of either of these types of reality.

One other type of reality exists however, that many MC Mages often unwittingly encounter - they incorrectly refer to this as the 'Mirror Zone'. The Mirror Zone is known among travellers of the Umbra to be very similar to Earth, but different in some small aspect - it is generally accepted that escape from the Mirror Zone to the 'real' Earth is very difficult.

One reason for the entrapping nature of the Mirror Zone is that it is actually not one single Realm - indeed, it is not even a Realm in the proper Cosmological definition of the word - it is actually a 'continuum' of separate alternate realities known as '**INDISTINGUISHABLES**'. Indistinguishables are a special type of Virtual where the difference between itself and its Main Corridor is minute - the event that creates such a reality is very minor. These realities are defined by factors such as the fall of a different leaf from a tree, the motion of an electron, and a different pattern of cracks forming on a bedroom ceiling. As a result, they are often indistinguishable from Main Corridor itself - hence the name.

Every Virtual and Corridor in the Metaverse is surrounded by Indistinguishables, with their numerical frequency decreasing as the Order of the Virtual increases. Indistinguishables evolve dynamically, forming as a result of a minor difference and merging back into their parent reality when the difference is rectified - for example, an Indistinguishable formed as a result of a ball thrown slightly higher than in Main Corridor merges back into MC when the ball is caught in both realities. Another reality formed by a leaf NOT falling in Main Corridor merges back into it when that leaf does finally fall. Equally, many Indistinguishables are created as a result of differences that are not so easily 'rectified', and so can exist as separate stable entities. Occasionally, the cumulative differences become so extreme that they constitute a significant change, and the Indistinguishable becomes a true Virtual. In these cases, a *continuum* of Indistinguishables exists across which a Virtual may eventually merge with another - of course, the realities at each end must be compatible with each other for such a continuum to exist between them. Indistinguishables therefore form a continuum of 'linked' realities that can connect Virtuals of different Order - on the diagram of the 'Layers of Time' shown above, each continuum of Indistinguishables is effectively represented by the lines connecting the named Virtuals together! Note that Indistinguishables NEVER connect realities that are of the *same* Order - in effect, Indistinguishables lie *between* the Integer (i.e. 0, 1, 2, and 3) Orders. Indistinguishables eventually disappear somewhere below Order 3 - here they are so weak that they are invariably destroyed by the Darkness when they form. It is not known whether Indistinguishables exist above Main Corridor - none have been definitely discovered yet.

Copies

Like Virtuals, *everything* is duplicated from the parent reality within an Indistinguishable. However, the situation regarding duplication of individuals is rather more complicated than with normal Virtuals. Duplicates of specific people exist in many Indistinguishables, especially in those 'nearest' the parent reality. These duplicates are to all intents and *identical* to the Original - in a reality created by the mere fall of a leaf, or a quantum-mechanical glitch, such factors make no difference to individuals at all. Such 'identical' duplicates are known as **Copies**, to differentiate them from the Dopplegangers found in true Virtuals. Indeed, the cumulative differences in more remote Indistinguishables, although individually small, eventually become sufficient for a Copy to be more accurately classed as a Doppleganger.

In those sufficiently 'close' Indistinguishables where Copies exist, all the Copies of an individual 'mirror' the actions of the Original - the effect is exactly like standing directly between two mirrors, and watching all your reflections perform exactly the same actions that you do [indeed, to all intents and purposes the reality you see in a mirror IS an Indistinguishable!]. It should be noted that the Original of an individual is that version originating from a reality that has an INTEGER Order - i.e. from an Order 0, 1, 2, or 3 Reality. All Copies originate in NON-integer Order realities (i.e. the Indistinguishables).

To illustrate, when a Mage gets into his car in Main Corridor, all his Copies in the Indistinguishables do the same. When he travels to the Near Umbra, all his Copies travel to their Indistinguishable's version of the Near Umbra too. When he dies, all his Copies also die. Similarly, and most importantly, when the Mage moves to another Virtual, **all his Copies move to the Indistinguishable of that Virtual**. Thus, it is usually impossible for a traveller to meet any of his Copies, as they leave their realities when he does.

In any almost infinite set of reflections, there is always the chance that a few do not *quite* mirror the actions of the original - however, this probability is extremely remote, and has never yet occurred in practice. Quite what would happen if one Copy met another (or the Original) is unknown, but it is believed that Paradox would come crashing down on those involved, possibly spreading to the other Copies that exist.

Flows and Vortices

When a Mage moves from one Virtual to another (or from a Corridor to a Virtual), the move is instantaneous and discontinuous - he disappears from one reality and appears in the other. However, travel through the Indistinguishables connecting two realities is possible, thus allowing for the possibility of *continuous* travel between the Layers of Time - this is known as '**Flowing**', and can have extremely dangerous consequences. While it is possible to initiate a Flow using magick, Continuum Agents never create them - they are well aware of the possible results. However, Nomads and some of the Darkness Manifest can *only* Flow across the Labyrinth, although Nomads (having only one Copy), can do so without the usual harmful side-effects.

While Copies can usually mirror the actions of an Original, it is very difficult for them to shift into an adjacent Indistinguishable. Many attempts at Flowing fail at the start, as an insufficient number of Copies translate themselves across to the next Indistinguishable in the continuum. However, in a few cases enough Copies become moveable at the same time, and a Flow is initiated. As one Copy leaves its Indistinguishable, another takes its place - slowly, a continuum of beings begins to flow down the Layers of Time (Flows can only move from Higher Order realities to Lower Order ones).

Very often, the Indistinguishables and Virtuals in the Labyrinth are separated by hairline fractures of Darkness - these cracks extend throughout the entire Labyrinth, but are usually fairly inconspicuous. However, when a Flow develops, these cracks can cause major problems. As the momentum of the Flow develops, the beings within them begin to drag parts of their own realities with them, creating unpredictable mixtures known as '**Vortices**' [*singular*: **Vortex**]. Alternate realities are brought into contact, and bystanders may be suddenly dragged into alternate realities without warning. In many cases, Copies of the vortex's victim are merely exchanged between Indistinguishables, but in some cases the hapless bystander is sucked into a completely new reality.

Paradox usually begins to strike against the Vortex, acting to increase the inertia of the Flow and so halt it, but this often only manages to delay the progression of the Vortex. The Darkness also follows the Flow through the Indistinguishables, gaining a foothold in all the realities it passes through. If the Flow is not stopped in time, it passes below Order 3 and eventually reaches the Darkness itself, which floods up the path of the Flow and directly attacks all the realties (and devours many) affected by it.

There are only two known ways to stop a Flow - the first is the destruction of a sufficient number of Copies such that the Inertia of the surrounding Indistinguishables prevents it from progressing further. In practise this is very difficult, as more often than not *thousands* of Copies are involved in the Flow. The other method is to kill the Original that initiated the Flow. This is also very difficult, as it is usually not at all obvious which version of an individual within the Flow is the Original. To maximise the chance of killing the correct version, a Continuum Agent must perfectly synchronise the actions of his Copies with his own and strike a killing blow to the target. This is usually extremely difficult, but Procedures do exist that simplify the task to some extent (see '*Cross Time Co-ordination*' and '*Detect Vortex*' in the **Rotes** section). Such synchronisation allows as many versions of the Agent as possible to strike against as many versions of the Flowing being as possible at exactly the same moment across the Labyrinth. Hopefully, at least one of the Agent's duplicates will strike and kill the Original version of the Flowing being, thus killing all the other Copies and stopping the Flow.

In practise, the task of stopping a Flow is very dangerous for the Agent to undertake - at the very least there is a significant chance that he will be thrown into a completely different reality if he succeeds. The Darkness is an additional threat, as it is known that certain types of Nephandi are attracted to Flows in order to strengthen them against destruction. More often than not, the Continuum Agent must deal not only with the Flowing being itself, but also the Nephandi along for the ride, adding yet more danger to the task.

When a Flow is discovered, whole realities are mobilised to destroy it since the threat of destruction by the Darkness in such situations is very real. While not all the realities affected by the Flow are destroyed should it reach the Darkness (Higher Order realities are naturally much more resistant to annihilation), those that are not suffer from a huge surge in destructive Nephandi activity at the very least. Fortunately, Flows are very rare in the Labyrinth.

Magick in the Virtuals

In the Virtuals, Magick generally works as it does on Main Corridor, but many Virtuals have variants on MC's Sphere Ratings, depending on the dominant Paradigm. As a result, Avatars (and Awakenings) can occur in the Virtuals, which means that Indigenous Mages can exist there. Other indigenous supernatural entities (Kindred, Garou, Mummies, and Wraiths) can exist in many of the Virtuals, as long as the local conditions (and in the case of Kindred and Mummies, local mythologies) allow it.

However, the actual magickal specifics for each Virtual can obviously be very different. The Saurids (inhabiting the Virtual where Dinosaurs never died out and remain the dominant species on the planet, with a flourishing civilization) have very different paradigms to the humans of the WoD. As a result, some Virtuals may even have completely different Spheres and Systems of Magick to our own, though Mages can still use their own Spheres - remember, Magick is the imposition of Will over Reality. By its very definition, one's own Paradigm is often at odds with the surrounding consensual reality anyway. However, since paradigms and consensual reality vary across the Virtuals, visiting Mages may find themselves accumulating Paradox for effects that would have passed as Coincidental elsewhere. The extent of these differences in paradigm is left completely up to the individual Storyteller. The '*Reality Check*' Procedure is very useful for determining the local paradigm of a new Virtual.

As a rule, the Paradigms and methods of human Magick should remain generally similar throughout the human Virtuals - differences occur due to the branching of human philosophical evolution in that Virtual after it sheared off. Thus, in modern Aegypt, Magick is based more on an Egyptian System [similar to that suggested in Mummy] rather than a system based on the Nine Spheres. However, this Aegyptian System is still similar to that of ancient MC Earth, as it has the same basic roots.

Virtual Quintessence

As discussed earlier, Mages from a Higher Order Reality can enter Lower Order Virtuals and can leave as they please. While their own Magicks operate in the same way there as described in the Mage Rulebook, when using Virtual Quintessence and Tass they may operate at a slight disadvantage to the local Mages. A Virtual can be viewed as a 'scaled down' or less potent version of the Higher Order reality from which they are derived - this applies even to its Nodes and Quintessence. Because Virtual Mages are scaled down with the rest of their Virtual, they use their Quintessence as if it were normal - i.e. for a Virtual Mage:

1 point of the Virtual Mage's local Quintessence = -1 Difficulty on his Magick rolls.

However, some Mages come from a more potent, Higher Order reality. To them, the local Quintessence is often weaker than their own reality's Quintessence, so more of it must be used to achieve the same effect.

The Order of a Virtual determines its **Energy Rating** - this determines the equivalence of Virtual Quintessence and MC Quintessence, and lies between 1 and 3. First Order Virtuals derived directly from Main Corridor have an Energy Rating of 1 - these Virtuals are relatively potent, so one point of local Quintessence is equivalent to one point of Main Corridor Quintessence. Second Order Virtuals have an Energy Rating of 2 - i.e. 2 points of Virtual Quintessence correspond to an equivalent of 1 point of MC Quintessence. The weakest (3rd Order Virtuals) have an Energy Rating of 3 - here, three points of local Quintessence are equivalent to one point of Main Corridor Quintessence. The Energy Rating of an Indistinguishable is found by rounding its Order to the nearest Integer (Indistinguishables below Order 3 are always rounded up to an Energy Rating of 3 - any below Order 3.5 are never survive dissolution by the Darkness).

The Energy Rating indicates the strength of the Virtual, and also how many points of Virtual Quintessence are equivalent to one point of Main Corridor Quintessence - i.e. how many points of Virtual Quintessence an MC Mage requires in order to reduce a magickal difficulty on the Virtual by -1. The difference in Energy Rating between that of a Mage's home reality and the reality he currently occupies indicates how many points of local Quintessence are equivalent to one of his own (Main Corridor is Order 0, and so has an Energy Rating of 0 on this scale). This is illustrated on the table below - the value in the main body of the table is the number of local Quintessence points (i.e. from the current reality) that the Mage must burn to have the same effect as one point of Quintessence from his Home reality:

Quintessence Equivalence table

Energy Rating of Current Reality	Energy Rating of Mage's Home Reality			
	0	**1**	**2**	**3**
0	1	1	1/2	1/3
1	1	1	1/2	1/3
2	2	2	1	1/2
3	3	3	2	1

It should be noted that Level 1 Virtuals are Quintessentially identical to Main Corridor. They are still less potent than MC however, as illustrated by the magickal difficulty modifiers below.

Thus, an MC Mage in a Second Order Virtual (Energy Rating 2) would find that he must absorb 2 points of Virtual Quintessence to gain the equivalent of 1 point in his Pattern - one point of local Quintessence is therefore equivalent to 1/2 point of Main Corridor Quintessence. He must burn two of these Virtual Quintessence points to reduce the difficulty of a spell by -1, *even if he leaves that Virtual before burning them*. These points are locked up in his Pattern, so are carried with him wherever he goes until he uses them up!

If an MC Mage enters a Virtual with MC Quint already in his Pattern, he can use these as normal, regardless of the Energy Rating. Of course, this means that MC Mages have to be careful that their Tass doesn't get into the wrong hands in a less potent Virtual, since it (to a Virtual Mage) is either 2 or 3 times as potent as their own Quintessence! However, use of MC Tass can be very dangerous to the Patterns of Virtual Mages, as its energy density is too high for them to use safely - this is described in 'Burnout' below.

While in a Virtual then, a Higher Order Mage appears to be working at a considerable disadvantage - Virtual Quintessence is not as useful to him as it is to an indigenous Virtual Mage. However, because the Higher Order Mage is used to exerting his Will against a more potent Reality, Magick comes much easier to him in a Virtual. Even in Level 1 Virtuals, MC Mages can cast magick more easily have it easier casting magick (although in real terms Quintessence in a Level 1 Virtual is identical to MC Quintessence). Similarly, Mages from a Lower Order Virtual find it harder to work their magicks in Higher Order realities - in practise, this only applies to those Mages who possess Temporal Avatars and are therefore capable of entering these realities to start with. In both cases, **the difficulties of all spellcasting rolls are affected by a modifier equal to the difference in Energy Ratings between the Mage's Home Reality and that of the current one**, as shown in the table below. The values in the body of the table are the modifiers that must be applied to ALL the Mage's spellcasting rolls in the current reality (positive modifiers are penalties to the roll, negative modifiers are bonuses to the roll):

<u>**Magickal Difficulty Modifiers table**</u>

Energy Rating of Current Reality	Energy Rating of Mage's Home Reality			
	0	**1**	**2**	**3**
0	0	+1	+2	+3
1	-1	0	+1	+2
2	-2	-1	0	+1
3	-3	-2	-1	0

BURNOUT (Virtual Mages only)

As described above, MC Quintessence is more potent than Virtual Quintessence. This also applies to any Virtual Quintessence from a higher Level Virtual (i.e. a Mage from a Level 3 Virtual is at risk from burnout if using Quintessence from Level 2, Level 1, or MC itself). If used by a Virtual Mage, it could result in damage to his Pattern as a result of the higher energy density - this is known as '**Burnout**' (note that using Lower Order Quintessence has no additional effect). This occurs despite the fact that in every other way the Temporal Avatar of a Virtual Mage in a higher order reality is equivalent to that of a Level 0 Avatar - he cannot use local Quintessence as if he was an Order 0 Mage.

Every time the Virtual Mage uses Quintessence more potent than he can handle (i.e. from a higher level Virtual or MC), he must first make a:

Stamina Roll at Difficulty (4 + difference in Energy Rating)

Thus, a Mage from a Level 3 Virtual must roll against a difficulty of:

5 when using Level 2 Quintessence.
6 when using Level 1 Quintessence.
7 when using Level 0 Quintessence (i.e. from Main Corridor).

This single roll covers the use of all the points of more potent Quintessence in a single effect - the actual number of Quintessence points used is irrelevant. Regardless of the result of the roll, all the points of more potent Quintessence are used up in the effect.

- If the Stamina Roll *succeeds*, the Quintessence is used as normal and provides the desired effect (usually the lowering of magickal difficulties). Note that the spellcasting roll must still be made after the Stamina Roll.

- If the Stamina Roll *fails*, the Mage cannot successfully contain and direct the energies of the Quintessence, and it flares off. All of the more potent Quintessence is used up, **but has no effect on the outcome of the effect** - it is simply discharged. It may do this spectacularly, with lots of visual effects, but this is at the Storyteller's discretion.

- If the Stamina Roll *Botches*, the Mage tries to channel the Quintessence into the effect, but it is too much to handle. However, instead of flaring off into the surroundings, the Mage is consumed by the excess energy. All of the more potent Quintessence is channelled directly into the Mage's Pattern, and a *BURNOUT* occurs.

   On a Stamina Botch, the effect automatically fails, regardless of the result of the spellcasting roll itself . Natural failures on the Stamina Roll are treated as normal (with the added effect of Burnout). Thus, magickal effects can only either fail or botch if Burnout occurs. The effects of a Botch on the spellcasting roll occur in conjunction with the effect of the Burnout.

Burnout can manifest in many ways. It often manifests in a similar way to Paradox Damage (i.e. the striated burns all over the Mage's body, causing aggravated damage). Damage is equal to the number of more potent Quintessence points used in the effect, and is *always* Aggravated.

Alternatively, it can manifest as damage inflicted directly onto the character's living Pattern as it is frayed by the energies unleashed. This may cause a variety of effects - his life expectancy may drop, or he may acquire a form of cancer or lesions. His mental faculties may be dulled for a while, or he may get permanent brain damage. The exact effect is up to the Storyteller, but should involve damage to bodily functions (malignant Life effects are good examples), and should be proportional to the amount of more potent Quintessence discharged in the Burnout.

ACCESSING THE LABYRINTH

Portals

Portals are natural access points to other realities, and are always located in Physical Reality (i.e. never in a reality's Near Umbra). Anything entering or leaving a reality does so via a Portal - in effect, all 'traffic' to and from a reality is routed through it. Portals are not linked to specific realities - a Portal in Aegypt can potentially be used to enter Nexus, Dominion, Armageddon, or any other reality; the destination is determined by whoever is using the Portal, though a traveller can only enter those realities that the Law of Continuity allows him to access.

Portals are invisible in Physical Reality, and can only be seen there using Time 1 (*Detect Portal*) - to those that can perceive them, the Portal appears as a shimmering, translucent brown-tinted window a few metres across. Portals are naturally visible in this form within Shade Realms of Time (including Nexus). It is usually only necessary to locate a Portal in order to be able to monitor those arriving through it from other realities.

The actual physical location of a Portal is not important for those leaving a reality through it. Rather, the Portal can be thought of as a 'net' that catches any traveller using the *Open Portal* Procedure regardless of where he is located in that reality when he casts it. The Portal 'catches' the traveller and automatically routes him through the Portal to his destination reality. This is true even if the traveller is in the reality's Near Umbra.

However, the location of the Portal (referred to as the **Portal Site**) is important to those *arriving* in a reality - **the traveller always arrives in his destination reality at the location of the Portal located therein**. If the traveller knows his physical destination within the reality, he can use Correspondence effects to travel to it from the Portal Site after he arrives (or use more conventional methods of travel).

The *Open Portal* Procedure is always used to travel through a Portal. However, the destination reality that a traveller can arrive in depends on whether or not he is indigenous to the reality that the Portal is located in:

- **If the traveller is indigenous to the Portal's reality**, *Open Portal* sends the traveller to the Gateway Site in that reality's Shade Realm of Time. The Gateway is the specific Portal in the Shade Realm of Time whose origin is the Physical Reality of a reality. The Portal cannot be used to transport an indigenous traveller directly to another Virtual - he must first enter the Labyrinth via his Shade Realm of Time to access it.

- **If the traveller is from a different reality**, *Open Portal* can be used to either travel to any other Virtual that he is allowed to access by the Law of Continuity (arriving at the Portal Site therein), *or* to leave the Labyrinth by returning the traveller directly to his home reality's Shade Realm of Time (arriving at the Gateway Site therein). Travelling to the local Shade Realm of Time first is not necessary if the traveller is not from that reality.

(Virtual) Shade Realms of Time

The Shade Realms of Time naturally have vast numbers of Portals scattered throughout them. Because it is not necessary to be at the physical location of a Portal to travel through it, any of these Portals can be used to travel to any other reality. However, it is important to remember that each one of these Portals represents the arrival point in the Shade Realm of Time from a specific reality. The most common Portals in a Shade Realm of Time are those from the next layer down the Labyrinth - those Virtuals whose Order is one Level lower than the current reality. However, it is generally possible to arrive at any Shade Realm of Time from any reality in the Labyrinth.

One Portal is always linked to the Physical Reality to which the Shade Realm of Time belongs - this specific Portal is referred to as the **Gateway**. The Gateway is the only point of entry into the Shade Realm of Time from the Physical Reality. It is not necessary to be at the physical location of the Gateway in order to leave the Shade Realm of Time (unless in Main Corridor - see below) - anyone leaving the Shade Realm of Time (by using the *Open Portal* Procedure) will arrive at the Portal site within the Physical Reality.

Depending on the reality's timeline, a Virtual Shade Realm of Time may or may not be occupied by the inhabitants of that Virtual. In some realities, access to the Virtual Shade Realm of Time may be prevented by some means (e.g. by the local Oracle of Time). If the inhabitants of a Virtual cannot access their Shade Realm of Time, it will be impossible for them to access the Labyrinth of Time and therefore any Virtuals within it. However, visitors to the Virtual from other realities can still use the local Portal to enter or leave that Virtual.

Entering and leaving the Labyrinth

A traveller is said to have entered the Labyrinth of Time when he first enters a Virtual from his Shade Realm of Time. He is said to have left the Labyrinth of Time when he leaves a Virtual and arrives back in his own Shade Realm of Time.

The Law of Continuity requires that the inhabitants of a reality (without Temporal Avatars) should remain unaware that they have become a Virtual. Thus the method of entering and leaving the Labyrinth of Time must remain consistent before and after a reality becomes a Virtual. The methods described below therefore apply to both Main Corridor and any Virtuals.

Thus, to enter the Labyrinth of Time, a traveller must first enter his own reality's Shade Realm of Time from its Physical Reality by using the *Open Portal* Procedure (or an equivalent Sprit 3, Time 3 rote) - this automatically sends the traveller through the local Portal to the Gateway Site within his reality's Shade Realm of Time. After he has arrived in his reality's Shade Realm of Time, the traveller can then travel to another reality. The *Labyrinth Map* Procedure is first used to locate the destination reality, then the *Open Portal* Procedure is used again to route the traveller through a nearby portal to that reality. The traveller will arrive in that Virtual's Physical Reality at the Portal Site therein - the traveller is now within the Labyrinth of Time.

A traveller leaves the Labyrinth of Time by returning to his own reality's Shade Realm of Time - the *Open Portal* Procedure can be used for this purpose from anywhere within a Virtual. Travelling to another reality's Shade Realm of Time serves little purpose - if the traveller is not indigenous to that reality then he still remains within the Labyrinth.

When returning to his own reality's Shade Realm of Time, the traveller always arrives there at that Virtual's Portal Site. He must then use the *Open Portal* Procedure again to travel through the local Gateway, which will return him to the Portal Site in his own Physical Reality. Note that only in Nexus must the traveller be physically present at the Gateway in order to pass through it - other Shade Realms of Time do not necessarily contain Correspondence Shields that require this (though they do if they contain Virtual equivalents of the Continuum).

Travelling within the Labyrinth

Once within the Labyrinth of Time, a traveller has two options - he can travel to other realities in the Labyrinth, or he can leave the Labyrinth and return to his home reality.

To continue to travel through the Labyrinth from within a Virtual, the traveller uses *Labyrinth Map* to locate a destination reality, and then uses *Open Portal* to route himself through the local Portal to the Portal Site in the Physical reality of the target Virtual.

If he chooses to leave the Labyrinth, the traveller may do so by using *Open Portal* to route himself through the local Portal to that Virtual's Portal Site in his reality's Shade Realm of Time, as described in the previous section.

Full details on the use of the *Open Portal* Procedure to travel through the Labyrinth of Time can be found in the 'Continuum Rotes' section on Page 26.

Main Corridor

Main Corridor is a special case since it is an Order 0 reality and not a Virtual. The Portal in Main Corridor always transports **anyone** (irrespective of the home reality of the traveller) who opens it using *Open Portal* to the MC Shade Realm of Time (i.e. Nexus). All travellers leaving Main Corridor are routed through this Portal and arrive at the Gateway site in Nexus, a heavily guarded location within the Correspondence Shield near Central Office. The MC Portal is often simply referred to as 'the Gateway', since it always behaves as one.

Because Main Corridor is not a Virtual, it is not possible to travel to it directly from another reality within the Labyrinth using the *Open Portal* Procedure - the only way to enter the Physical Reality of Main Corridor is to first leave the Labyrinth. The traveller must travel to Nexus (i.e. Main Corridor's Shade Realm of Time) using *Open Portal*, whereupon he will arrive at the Portal Site of that reality in Nexus. He must then travel to the site of the Gateway to Main Corridor there. To return to the Physical Reality of Main Corridor, he must then use the *Open Portal* Procedure again while physically at the Gateway Site - the Continuum's Correspondence Shield does not allow the usual remote access of the Gateway from remote locations elsewhere in Nexus (though a traveller may teleport to the outer boundary of the Shield and travel by conventional means through it to the Gateway within). Since the Nexus Gateway is heavily fortified and highly secure, it is therefore very difficult for intruders to invade Main Corridor.

To summarise - travellers from Main Corridor **always** arrive at the Gateway site on Nexus, and can only *leave* Nexus for MC Earth from the Gateway site there because of the Correspondence Shield set up by the Continuum as described above.

The Temporal Gauntlet around Nexus is continually monitored by Continuum Sentries. These are Agents or Constructs employed or designed to detain (or attack, if they prove hostile) any entities entering Nexus with hostile intent. Security is paramount to the Continuum, both to keep unwanted intruders out of the realm, and to prevent some of the more dangerous entities that live there from escaping...

On Earth, the Gateway is currently situated within what has come to be known as the Bermuda Triangle - there is evidence that it can and has changed locations in the past (this explains why Portals are not always located near Bermuda in Virtuals). In Nexus, the Gateway is located within the Correspondence Shield a few miles from Central Office.

In the past, the Gateway naturally opened at random intervals on Earth, whereupon anything within its vicinity was likely to be pulled through it. The reasons for this sporadic, spontaneous opening of the Gateway is unknown, but it was often triggered by the approach of vehicles and people. Entire vehicles - be they huge oil tankers or small aeroplanes - were pulled through the Gateway and arrived in Nexus.

The Gateway site in Nexus is situated in the dry plains surrounding Central Office, so ships were beached (and probably holed), while aeroplanes suddenly found themselves at ground level where they invariably crashed at flying speed - a usually fatal experience. Survivors of the rough landing in Nexus found themselves trapped there as Gateway usually slammed shut behind them. Since the vast majority of the survivors were not Magickally Awakened, the trip was a one-way affair because the Gateway can only be re-opened using Time/Sprit magick.

The Open Gateway created bizarre visual and environmental effects around it, including wildly varying magnetic fields (which affect compasses), negative imagery (i.e. black appears white, and white appears black), strange lights and flashes in the sky, sudden lightning flashes, disorientation, dizziness, hallucinations and other such effects, all of which combined to make the approach to the Open Gateway a rather terrifying experience. However, these 'special effects' around the Gateway were actually completely harmless in themselves. Most people caught in the unstable area did panic though, and landed up either accidentally flying or sailing through the invisible Gateway that lurked somewhere in the unstable zone itself, or losing control of their vessel and crashing it into the sea. Any survivors arriving in Nexus through the Gateway were usually adopted by the Continuum and often remained there to work as Acolytes. This explains the spate of disappearances so often associated with the Bermuda Triangle.

In recent years, however, the Continuum has largely succeeded in stabilising the Gateway so that it no longer opens on its own accord, essentially as a consequence of the wreckage that was accumulating on the Nexus side of the Gateway as the vessels crashed there, and also because the Continuum viewed the randomly opening Gateway as a weak spot in its defences.

The Continuum has made a tidy monetary profit from the cargoes of those vessels declared lost around the Gateway on Earth. However, much of the wreckage around the Gateway on Nexus has now been removed - no mean feat considering that some of the ships that have arrived weighed in at several tens of thousands of tons displacement! However, the wrecks of the five Navy Avenger bombers of Flight 19 (which disappeared from Earth in 1945) have been kept in their original sites as a memorial to those who lost their lives through the Gateway, and to those Continuum Agents who were killed in the Perpetual War.

The Gateway can still be freely and deliberately accessed from MC Earth using the *Open Gateway* procedure. Nowadays, however, since the Gateway no longer opens randomly the seas around the island of Bermuda are now much safer for terrestrial travellers not wishing to travel to other realities.

Special Notes: Indistinguishables, Restricted Virtuals and Timestone

Indistinguishables: It should be noted that Indistinguishables cannot be *deliberately* entered by Continuum Agents. Only Flowing beings and Nomads can purposefully enter and travel through Indistinguishables. However, should an *Open Portal* Procedure fail or botch, there is the option that the Agent lands up in an Indistinguishable instead of the desired (integer-Order) destination instead.

Quarantined Virtuals: The Temporal Gauntlet around Quarantined Virtuals (Danger Code Q) has been strengthened by Continuum Specialists. The Difficulties to enter or leave these Virtuals is set at 10, though the number of successes required to penetrate them remains the same as normal.

Sealed Virtuals: The Temporal Gauntlet around Sealed Virtuals (Danger Code Z) has been strengthened to such an extent that the Difficulty to enter or leave them is increased to 15! Additionally, a total of at least 5 successes on the Procedure roll must be gained to penetrate it - otherwise the Seal holds. Thus, only the most powerful magicks can penetrate the Seal, and even then a large amount of Quintessence must be burned to reduce the difficulty.

        Most Seals are heavily guarded, and all have magickal monitors built into them that can detect attempts to penetrate it and alert the guards if a penetration attempt is made (even if it fails). Note that the Seal is not broken, even if it is penetrated - those leaving the Virtual must again roll 5 successes against difficulty 15 to leave.

Timestone Exposures: Timestone is a rare glassy, shimmering translucent brown rock usually found in the depths of some mountain ranges in Nexus. It appears to be the fundamental material from which Nexus is constructed, but occasionally it is exposed on the surface. Timestone exposures are unusual in that Virtuals can be seen within them; however, the Virtuals 'behind' the exposure shift randomly over time. Nevertheless, these Virtuals can be entered if a *Open Portal* Procedure is enacted before the exposure. Effectively the Timestone exposure becomes a Portal to the Virtual it shows. In many cases, the Virtuals shown by the exposures are previously undiscovered - thus, the Agent may have to survive unknown dangers within the Virtual.

Virtual Travel Bracelets

        As a matter of course, all Continuum Field Ops are equipped with a Device - **Virtual Travel Bracelet** - that allows them to use the Procedures necessary for travel through the Labyrinth - ordinarily, even the basic ones may be beyond the natural capabilities of the Agents to cast. Moreover, there are those among the Continuum who are not Magickally Awakened who are required to travel through the Labyrinth - this device allows them to do so. All such Devices have a Timepiece [the Continuum's focus for Time] of some sort incorporated into them, giving them the appearance of complicated wrist-watches or pocket clocks. Indeed, in almost all cases the Bracelet is disguised as a normal watch or other easily portable timepiece. This not only (usually) makes it less conspicuous to Virtual natives, but also provides a free Timepiece focus for the Agent. However, it should be remembered that Timepieces are Unique Foci, so Agents should look after their Travel Bracelets! To use an in-built Procedure, the Agent takes a few seconds to adjust the Bracelet while Observing the desired effect [Observation (meditation) is the focus for Correspondence, Mind and Spirit]. Remember that all Continuum Agents require these foci when attempting this Procedure, since as Technomages they cannot ignore their foci until they reach Arete 6.

        Note that a Travel Bracelet is not essential to use these Procedures. The Agent does *not* specifically need one in order to cross the Temporal Gauntlet - the effects can be performed using normal spontaneous Sphere magicks. However, he must have the necessary Spheres required for the Procedures, and must still use the relevant foci.

        Bracelets can be used by any being with a Temporal Avatar - however, if the user is not also Magickally Awakened then it requires more extensive training to learn how to use the Devices. They are only given to Field Ops who are required to travel through the Labyrinth. Bracelets cannot be used at all by any Virtual Inhabitant who does not possess a Temporal Avatar.

        Most of the Field Ops of the Continuum are both Magickally Awakened and possess Temporal Avatars - they can use the Bracelets without much training. Nonetheless, many Virtual Inhabitants with Temporal Avatars and MC Sleepers do plumb the depths of the Labyrinth alongside their Awakened counterparts. In some Virtuals they are even at an advantage over their Awakened brethren who are restricted by the local paradigm.

THE VIRTUAL TRAVEL BRACELET
***** Arete 5, Quintessence 30

Inbuilt Effects
Open Portal (Time 3, Spirit 3)
Labyrinth Map (Spirit 1, Time 1)
Sense Timestone (Matter 1, Time 1)
Translator (Mind 3)

Virtual Travel Bracelets are primarily in production to allow Continuum Agents to travel freely through the Labyrinth (and enter or leave it) using the *Open Portal* Procedure.

When dealing with the inhabitants of Virtuals, the Bracelet also serves as a *Translator*, translating conversation in any language into something understandable to every individual within earshot. Unfortunately, written language is not translatable in this way, but any visual language is - the Bracelet creates as complete a visual illusion around its wearer as necessary in order to translate the language properly (so long as the wearer is physically capable to perform the necessary actions anyway). This is especially useful on Sauron, where body language and tail movements are essential parts of the local languages.

Every Bracelet also contains a small piece of Timestone. If another setting on the bracelet is activated, the direction/distance indicator shows the location of the nearest piece of Timestone - this is most useful when tracking down other Agents missing in the Virtuals.

To navigate across the Labyrinth, the Bracelet's inbuilt computer holds a graphical display of the explored regions of the Labyrinth (i.e. a *Labyrinth Map*). On this Map is shown all the known (named) Virtuals, as well as any catalogued but unexplored Virtuals. Unexplored Branches known to exist are also indicated on the Map. To locate a specific Virtual, the Agent must make a successful **Intelligence + Virtual Cosmology** roll at difficulty 7. However, if the Agent only has normal (Spirit) Cosmology, the Difficulty goes up to 9. Either way, if at least one success is rolled, the Agent has successfully targeted the Virtual and can attempt to enter it using *Open Portal*. In addition, each bracelet can hold up to 5 *Virtual Settings*. Each setting stored in the Bracelet is a 'shortcut' showing the location of the Virtual - a bookmark in the Labyrinth of Time. By using Settings, the Agent can instantly target that Virtual and does not need to roll to locate it first. Thus, an Agent may have a Bracelet which has memorised the settings for Sauron, Aegypt, Lemuria, Neverland, and Lucifer - all he has to do is to select one and make a Virtual Travel Procedure roll. If he wishes to store another Virtual's Setting, he must first erase a previous setting and replace it with the new one. The settings for new Virtuals are programmed in either after it has been located on the Labyrinth Map, from within the Virtual itself, or by directly downloading it from a database in Central Office. Note that the setting for Nexus itself need not be recorded - however, *Open Portal* must still be used to return to Nexus from a Virtual.

Each effect uses a number of Quintessence Points equal to the highest level Sphere involved in the Procedure each time it is case. Thus, *Open Portal* (Spirit 3 Time 3) would use 3 quintessence points if cast from the Bracelet. The Bracelet's Quintessence can be recharged at any time using Prime 3, or from a recharging station in Central Office.

[*Author's Note*: Virtual Bracelets are powerful Talismans - however, their use is limited at best outside a Chronicle involving the Continuum and the Labyrinth of Time. The intention is that they should be provided *free* to Continuum Agents at the start of the Chronicle - i.e. no background points should be spent on these items. They are provided primarily as a Storyteller tool to allow the characters to travel across the Labyrinth effectively - without them many characters would simply not be capable of casting the necessary Rotes. Other Talismans should however be paid for with background points as usual.]

NEXUS - THE SHADE REALM OF TIME

An Introduction to Nexus

Nexus is Main Corridor's Shade Realm of Time. It is a truly incredible Realm, and is home to Central Office, the Main Chantry of the Continuum - it is from here that the Continuum coordinates its defence of the Corridor. Aside from its bizarre inhabitants and environment, Nexus opens whole new vistas of opportunity and adventure for Mages, through the Virtuals that can be accessed from it.

Nexus is a generally Earth-like environment in that the atmosphere is breathable, liquid water is present, and the flora and fauna are generally compatible with those of Earth, though the scenery is more spectacular. Nexus apparently has no Sun. However, it is continually illuminated by the light from many stars - night is effectively non-existent on Nexus. In addition, five large moons circle Nexus, equally spaced along the same orbit. The moons go through phases, which is odd considering there is no Sun. Their day sides are reddish, implying that the source of the light is red in colour. At any given point, all the phases are accounted for - one moon is New, another is Crescent, another is Half, another is Gibbous, and the last one is Full. A day is defined as the time it takes between moonrise and moonset - 32 hours. A month is defined as the time it takes for a given moon to pass through all its phases - this takes 50 days. If the Garou were aware of this place, no doubt they would attach some cosmological significance to the fact that all their auspices are represented in the sky. A search for the light source in the sky using telescopes has as yet revealed nothing, which baffles Continuum Scientists.

The atmosphere on Nexus is thick and humid, but pleasantly warm. It rains a lot, and occasionally great thunderstorms sweep across the land. There appears to be no seasonal variation. Gravity is Earthlike.

The landscape is very extreme - there are vast oceans, huge perfectly flat plains, and towering mountains and crags that dwarf the largest on Earth. An unusual rock in some areas is known as 'Timestone' - from a distance it appears solid, but on closer inspection other realities can be seen through the shimmering translucent rock. Nexus is largely unexplored by the Continuum, but it appears to be vast - much larger than Earth.

Like all of the Shade Realms of Time in the Labyrinth, Nexus contains thousands of Portals from the Virtuals. Many of these mark the arrival point in Nexus from Order 1 Virtuals derived directly from Main Corridor, but it is believed that Portals from all the realities in the Labyrinth can be found in Nexus. The origin realities of only a handful of Portals have been determined so far, and many more lie waiting to be discovered.

There is indigenous plant and animal life on Nexus, but there is no direct evidence for any intelligent life on Nexus, but there are ancient/future artifacts on the plane. A lighthouse, paradoxically dated as being built 3000 years from now, stands at the edge of the Shifting Sea. This is not a sea at all, but is rather a plain, where reality itself ebbs and flows with some cosmic tide. Elsewhere ancient ruins depicting the entire histories of realities lie, untouched by time, below the Sands of Time.

Central Office

Central Office (CO) is the Base Chantry of the Continuum, located in Nexus itself. Central Office is a complex of interconnected utilitarian red-brick buildings situated on an large flat prairie in Nexus, located in one of the few known stable Class 1 Time Zones. The buildings include several towers and fortifications, a holdover of the days when the Technocracy sought to actively invade Nexus and wrest control of it from the Continuum. Central Office is still heavily defended, and regularly patrolled by experienced and well-armed guards.

Central Office is also magickally shielded so that it is impossible to enter it from outside using Correspondence magicks, largely as a protective measure against the local fauna but also as a general security measure. The Correspondence Shield extends around the entire complex for a radius of 10 miles - **no Correspondence effects are possible within this area**. Beyond it, Correspondence can be used as normal, and this is often used to rapidly travel to the Shield boundary from distant Portal Sites. The Gateway to Nexus from Main Corridor is located within the Correspondence Shield a few miles from Central Office. The Gateway represents the only location from which travel between the Physical Reality of Main Corridor and Nexus is possible - as such it is constantly monitored and heavily protected by checkpoints and guard posts.

Inside, Central Office is a network of laboratories, ready rooms and offices. It is powered by its own generators in the basement, and has several backups in case of a power failure. An artificial Portal is also located in the basement of the complex, from which Agents can travel to Virtuals in emergency cases. Central Office also has a computer network that is always directly connected in realtime to Control (the main Intelligence Acquisition Station in London, England) on Earth. It has extensive research facilities (though more specialised than in other Home Chantries) and a huge catalogue of data on the known Agents and Manifestations of the Darkness.

While the level of security can sometimes be oppressive, those working in Nexus acknowledge that it is essential to prevent the Realm from falling into the wrong hands. The security is not invasive however, and many Mages often forget they are working inside a fortress.

Flora and Fauna

The flora and fauna on Nexus are generally Earth-like, although the vegetation varies in colour from greens and blues to reds and purples. The plant life is striking in its variety - there are towering Needletrees that reach up to 200' tall that do not sway in even the strongest hurricanes, and others (Lowtrees) that are about 2' high but spread over and area of about 100 square feet!

Fauna is varied too - some animals are dangerous, many are not. Predators can be difficult to deal with, since they often have some precognitive ability to know where their prey is. Some prey species also have this ability, but in many cases they allow themselves to be killed by the predators anyway. Some of the more commonly encountered (and more unusual) creatures are described overleaf:

Creatures of Nexus

Scattered throughout Nexus are numerous forms of life unique to the dimension. Some forms of life use the fluctuations of time to accelerate themselves, or slow their prey. Others look to the future to see where their next meal lies. Yet more dangerous species feed on Time itself, and some are known to age their prey or create a Time Loop in which their victims repeat the same actions. Somehow they derive sustenance from these shifts in Time. Continuum researchers have discovered many strange plants and animals, and even a few even more exotic life forms, manipulating time to aid in their survival. Below are just a few of the more commonly encountered creatures native to Nexus.

Lance Grass

The plant known as Lance Grass appears as a patch of very thick grass of irregular size, with some blades no more than a few inches tall and other blades several feet in height. Whenever a creature passes by, advanced thermal sensory cilia in the grass triggers a growth reaction in the smaller blades, causing them to shoot up from the ground and impale themselves in the passing animal. After the blades strike their prey a set of secondary cilia along the blade begins to siphon fluids from the slain creature. Once the plant grows out to its fullest length, it can no longer accelerate its growth and will soon sprout thousands of baby seedlings around itself. Lance Grass has been known to stay in the seedling stage for decades, waiting for a passing animal to start its growth cycle.

Some species of Lance Grass are known to grow *fractally* - these are identical in behaviour to the normal species, but as they grow in the body the blades split into smaller and smaller fractal branches. Also, the structure of the fractal plant constantly appears to shift depending on which angle it is viewed from.

[*Lance Grass can be treated as having 0 STA and 0 STR. For every square meter of grass present the plant can take three wounds, and attacks with a damage of 2 and an automatic hit. Once a patch makes an attack, it can strike repeatedly due to its numerous seedlings.*]

Fungal Wind

The Fungal Wind is a horrible parasitic fungus which gives its Virtual of origin its name, and has occasionally been accidentally brought back to Nexus where it has thrived (see "Fungal Wind" in Virtuals). The Fungal Wind is an airborne spore that takes root in any mammal's lungs and throat. Once in place the spores begin to grow throughout the creature, increasing his adrenaline and endorphins while destroying his nervous system and body. Once a creature is infected he becomes a transmitter, spreading the spores to all who come within ten feet of him (three feet in Nexus due to the speed of growth the fungus experiences). While the Fungal Wind typically took five to six weeks to kill its host in its home Virtual, it grows more rapidly in the more humid environment of Nexus - this gives its host only three to four weeks of life. On Nexus, however, the Fungal Wind does not completely destroy the host's mind, turning him into a fully rational creature of death and disease.

[*Whenever a mammal is exposed to a carrier (or group of carriers), have him make a stamina roll (Difficulty of 10, three successes needed). If he succeeds he is immune to all attacks of Fungal Wind; if he fails he becomes a carrier. In Nexus the Fungal Wind changes a character's attributes as follows: STR +2, STA +4, all Social scores at -5. In the original Virtual, the Fungal Wind caused the following changes: DEX -1, STR +3, STA +5, INT -3, WIT -2, and all Social Attributes at -5. Life magic can be used to affect the Fungal Wind, but all attempts are at +2 difficulty.*]

Tran

The Tran are a species of carrion-eaters with the ability to foresee the deaths of other creatures. The wolf-like tran are usually very peaceful creatures, especially since they know where their next meal is coming from. But, if food is scarce, tran have been known to attack.

Despite this, most animals are calm in the presence of a pack of tran who are just waiting. Continuum members in Nexus often look for tran as a warning of impending danger. Sometimes fate will not be denied, and the presence of tran causes enough fear and excitement that the very act of fleeing causes creatures to die.

[*Tran tend to travel in small packs of three to six members. Tran stats are as follows:*
STR 2, DEX 3, STA 2, PER 3, Dodge 1, Brawl 1, Alertness 3. Bite (Diff: 6, Dam: 3).]

Shimmer Waves

The debate continues among Continuum members as to whether or not this is even a form of life. The "no-lifers" say that the Shimmer Wave is merely attracted to the bio-electrical fields of living creatures, much as dust in space is attracted to planets by gravity. The "lifers" disagree, stating instances of Shimmer Waves using tactics to stalk its prey and other Waves seemingly trying to protect Continuum researchers.

Either way, Shimmer Waves appear as bizarre, two-dimensional clouds of golden light up to a dozen meters in diameter. Shimmer Waves wash over plants and animals, either accelerating or reversing the age of a creature. Inanimate objects are also affected, but the Shimmer Waves are drawn towards living creatures. There appears to be no known reason for Shimmer Wave behaviour, or any way to predict which path a Wave will age those it passes over; some will be aged and some will be made young again. In fact some Waves have been known to immediately return to those it has passed over, reversing its own changes.

[*Generally, Shimmer Waves have unpredictable effects. For those the Wave ages, subtract one from all Physical attributes and add one to all Mental attributes. For those the Wave rejuvenates, subtract one from INT and STR, and add one to DEX and STA. Inanimate items are also affected so that an old car may become new again, or a new watch may turn rusted and stop working.*]

Keevar

The Keevar are a breed of dinosaur-like carnivores originating from Sauron that are able to "jump" through their evolutionary path. The first, most primitive, form of the Keevar is that of an giant amphibious shark-like creature with legs to swim and walk on land. The second form is a very fast tyrannosaur creature that uses it arms to grab prey, and the third is a large winged harpy-like beast. The Keevar will shape-shift throughout combat in order to frighten and confuse its prey. Keevar always travel alone, except during the mating season when huge flocks will gather for an orgy of breeding.

Many among the Continuum fear that the Keevar will soon develop another form, and with it intelligence that will give the Keevar the power to prove a serious threat to the Continuum in Nexus. Given the growing intellect of the Keevar, and their increasing numbers, this view is rapidly gaining followers...

[*The Keevar have three forms, and are able to change from any form into any of the other three once per turn. Keevar health levels are shared between forms so that if a Keevar take five wounds in its shark form, all forms have five wounds less. Keevar health levels are: OK (x5), -1 (x5), -2 (x3), -3, Incapacitated, Dead.*

Shark Form: STR 10, DEX 3, STA 12, PER 4, Dodge 3, Brawl 3, Alertness 3. 4 Soak Dice of armour. Bite (Diff: 6, Dam: 12), Trample (Diff: 8, Dam: 14). Running Speed: 15 yards, Swimming Speed: 35 yards.
Tyranno Form: STR 11, DEX 5, STA 10, PER 3, Dodge 2, Brawl 5, Alertness 2. 1 Soak Die of armour. Bite (Diff: 6, Dam: 14). Running Speed: 35 yards.
Harpy Form: STR 6, DEX 9, STA 8, PER 6, Dodge 3, Brawl 1, Alertness 5. Claw rake (Diff: 6, Dam: 6), Bite (Diff: 8, Dam: 8). Flying Speed: 45 yards, Running Speed: 9 yards.]

Ecosystem

The following creatures are provided to give examples of the sorts of creatures one might expect to find propping up Nexus' complex Ecosystem. No Stats are given for them, as they are rarely a threat to humans.

Time Mosquitoes

These insects are the Nexus version of the common mosquito, but suck time instead of blood. They usually suck out a few seconds, which will vanish while the insect is biting - the victim will just notice that everything seems to jump a little bit, nothing more (the bite is however rather itchy). However, a swarm of time mosquitoes can be quite irritating or even fatal, as they suck out large quantities of time and so may age the victim considerably. These swarms are very confusing, since the mosquitoes phase in and out of the local timeframe, suddenly appearing out of nowhere or vanishing when struck.

Jumping Plants

Another relatively harmless kind of being. Many plants are able to move through time, and use this both to get as much sunlight as possible and to avoid herbivores. When the sun is clouded, the weather is going to become too dry or the plant is in shadow, it will move forward into time until conditions are good again, and it will vanish when someone tries to eat it or hurt it. Sometimes whole fields or groves just vanish, only to reappear later.

Waiting Rabbits

These small creatures look somewhat like very small rabbits although they spend most of their time sitting around waiting. They are able to snatch beings out of the timestream, especially Jumping Plants, and spend most of their time waiting for something to pass. They can make long jumps in time and space, and when scared they just vanish. They also have the irritating habit of snatching passing things regardless of what they are and hiding them in their burrows.

Timespiders

These large spiders build elaborate four-dimensional nets, catching small animals moving through space-time into their region. They look like a Picasso rendition of a spider, constantly shifting in perspective and surrounding by a strange net which seems to grow from nothing, expand to a size of a few meters and then shrink and vanish as 'now' moves past it. Time mosquitoes, young waiting rabbits and birds suddenly find themselves trapped in the net and eaten by the spider.

Eating Balls

A spherical creature, when young not unlike a tribble, but its adult form is a big, shaggy ball which rolls, jumps and teleports so that something moving through time will get trapped inside their specially adapted digestive systems (they don't need any mouth). They are omnivorous, and eat time mosquitoes, jumping plants, waiting rabbits and careless chrononauts...

Snatchers

Snatchers look like wolves with strangely iridescent fur (actually, the effect is quite similar to Timestone) and unusually big mouths filled with fangs which reflect light in a distinctly odd way. Snatcher packs roam Nexus, and find places close to Virtuals where they gather together, chew a hole through reality into the Virtual, and snatch away their food. From inside the Virtual the event looks just like the victim vanishes into thin air, possibly leaving a bloodstain. These beings are behind many unexpected disappearances, and their ability to chew through the walls of reality is very worrying...

Time and the Environment

The Passage of Time: Time is a strange and highly localized phenomenon in Nexus. It appears that individual, aware beings (i.e. animals and sapients) have their own Internal Time Field in which they operate, regardless of the environmental External Time Field - for example, a human Mage from MC Earth caught in an External Field where Time apparently passes 10 times slower will still be able to move at his normal rate. However, everything around him (that is not another animal or sapient being) will be moving much slower - plants will sway lazily in the wind, bullets will take longer to reach their targets etc.

However, it is still possible for Mages studying Time to contract or dilate their own Time Fields - thus in a part of Nexus where Time passes twice as fast as normal, the Mage can speed up his own Internal Field (using Time Magic) to match the External Field. If this is done, the External and Internal Fields are synchronised, and to the Mage's perspective, Time passes at a normal rate for him.

Temporal Waves: Being the Shade Realm of Time, Nexus is subject to unusual temporal environmental effects. The most important of these are the Temporal Waves that sweep across the Realm. These appear as immense transparent linear waves that travel across the land, moving at varying speeds. Some travel extremely rapidly, others can be escaped simply by walking. These Waves have the property of altering the flow of Time by their passage. The exact effect of the Temporal Wave can be deduced by looking through the Wavefront as it approaches. The image of the environment on the other side is sped up or slowed down depending on the effect of the wave. Thus, if a Wave will speed up the flow of Time three times relative to the present rate, images seen through the Wavefront will appear to move three times faster than those nearer the observer.

This results in a form of 'Temporal Weather Prediction', as sensors in the Field detect the incoming wave and transmit data to Central Office. This is then processed and transmitted to Field Agents operating in Nexus so they can prepare for the approaching Temporal Wave.
Studies of the geometry of these Temporal Waves has shown a slight curvature to them, which indicates that they emanate (like ripples) from a very distant central point somewhere to the south of Central Office (CO). This is certainly in the unexplored regions of Nexus. Quite what could be causing the Waves is another matter - some believe that the Waves emanate from a portal to the *Shard* Realm of Time itself - and an expedition to what has been dubbed 'The Origin' is being considered by the Research Section of CO.

Time Zones: The actual rate of passage of a being's Internal Time Field depends on the External Time Field of the universe it was born in. The External Field of Main Corridor is the one that we as humans are most familiar with - it is what we consider the 'normal' passage of time. Most of the Virtuals, being derived directly from MC, have this same External Field. However, in Nexus itself there are zones in which the basic External Field is different to that of MC's. These stable zones are known as Time Zones, and can be thought of as Islands of stability in the temporal storm - the passage of time within these Time Zones is unaffected by the passage of a Temporal Wave. Central Office itself is built in one of the very rare Time Zones where the passage of time is equal to that of MC. However, there are many others in which the External Field is slower or faster. Note that Time Zones can have any physical size and shape. The largest known is a square whose sides are 25 km long - this is where Central Office is located.

Time Zones are frequently inhabited by indigenous creatures, which either evolved there from scratch or migrated there from other Time Zones and temporally adapted to the new External Field. This means their Internal Fields are synchronised to the External Field of the Time Zone they live in, even if they move outside it. Animals indigenous to the slower Time Zones to Central Office are rarely a threat to humans since they therefore move at an inherently slower rate, but those originating in the faster Time Zones are often quite dangerous, since they can naturally operate at much faster speeds. Agents are frequently advised to be on their guard in the field in Nexus [Time 1 actually has some use here, since Mages will be able to sense when they have entered a Time Zone].

Some Zones have even been discovered where there is no External Time Field - in these places, there is no apparent passage of Time. Past, Present, and Future have no meaning in these Zones - indigenous creatures are effectively immortal (since their Internal Time Fields are synchronised with the External Field - Time does not pass for them). However, humans entering these Fields can still grow old since their Internal Time Fields operate as normal - the External Field will still be present though, so they will not be aware of the passage of time at all. [Think of the Nexus in 'Star Trek: Generations' if you've seen it.]

Time Fields are quantified as follows: a Time Field where the flow of passage of time is equal to that within Main Corridor is known as a Class 1 Time Field. The number indicates the rate of passage of time relative to Main Corridor. Thus, faster fields are known as Class 2, 3, 4, 5, etc fields (non-integer flow rates are possible, so there are Class 2.5 Fields, for example). Slower fields are defined by numbers less than one, usually written as a fractional number - a field where time passes at half the rate of MC is known as a Class 1/2 Field for example. Time Zones in which there is no External field are known as Class 0 Fields.

Weather: The Weather in Nexus is generally earth-like, but the temporal effects of the environment can produce several unusual phenomena - the most striking of these are the *SlowStorms*. These are thunderstorms that accumulate and disperse very slowly, almost as if they were in a much slower Time Zone. When they do accumulate, the lightning bolts they throw travel to the ground extremely slowly - slow enough for beings to see them coming and dodge!!!

Other unusual and dangerous meteorological conditions also exist - most are temporally-accelerated phenomena. *FastStorms* are highly destructive (but fortunately rare) storms that accumulate and disperse within minutes. They appear very similar to electrical storms viewed in fast motion, with thousands of lightning bolts raining down on a small area in a few minutes and powerful accelerated winds scouring the region. *Hard Hail* is that which falls in an accelerated External Field - as such, they fall much faster and often cause serious physical damage when they strike.

Geology: In many places in Nexus, the geology is generally Earthlike - however, the rate of geological evolution is quite varied, and confusingly seems to have no connection with the External Time Field. Mountain Ranges have been known to appear overnight, and erosion can occur extremely rapidly (usually depending on the Entropy rating of the area). Glaciers have been observed travelling very quickly, while volcanic eruptions have occurred at very slow rates. Fortunately, CO appears to be situated in a reasonably stable region of Nexus.

Timestone: Timestone is nothing less than Solid Space-Time. It is the base from which all reality is constructed from, and is extremely rare in the MetaVerse - indeed, it has so far been found only on Nexus. *In situ*, it is a brownish-tinged translucent rock through which other realities can dimly be perceived. Many of its properties are as yet largely unknown, but it is known that if one concentrates and tries to 'walk through' a Timestone exposure one can enter the Virtual that lies on the other side. However, it is often much easier (and more reliable) to enter a Virtual using magick than via Timestone, since the same Virtual rarely remains behind a Timestone exposure for long.

It has been discovered that Timestone has the property of being detectable within other Virtuals through the use of Time 1. Being a part of Nexus, it is only perceptible to MC Mages and those with Temporal Avatars. Thus it can be used by Continuum Agents as a kind of homing beacon to others of their kind in other realities.

In Nexus, Timestone has a most useful property - a kilogram (2.2 lbs) of Timestone is roughly equivalent to a single pawn (1 point) of Level 0 (MC-quality) Time or Correspondence (Space) Tass. Thus, it can only be used to fuel either Time or Correspondence effects. The mass required precludes it from being carried around by individuals in huge quantities. Unfortunately, outside of Nexus, Timestone is simply another lump of glassy brown rock, which has no effect on magick - presumably, it is too unique to Nexus to be of any use anywhere else.

Magick in Nexus

Sphere Ratings in Nexus

[For those who do not possess a copy of 1st Edition Mage, Sphere Ratings were a system that attempted to define paradigms within other Realms of the Tellurian. Each Sphere of Magick had a positive or negative rating, which generally told you how easy or difficult it was to use that Sphere in that realm. A negative rating for the Sphere meant it was harder to use there, while positive ratings meant that a number of Sphere levels equal to its rating were 'natural' on that realm - creatures could evolve to use it, and all Magicks cast with that Sphere were automatically Coincidental. The Sphere Rating system was for some reason dropped from Mage 2nd Edition, but I think it's a very handy system for defining foreign realities, and have retained it here.]

The Rating system below uses actual Sphere Levels as well as 'pluses' and 'minuses'. As it stands, *Correspondence +3* implies that Immediate Spatial Perception (Corr. 1), Colocality perception (Corr. 2), and Teleportation (Corr. 3) are naturally possible in a realm. But what if Teleportation *alone* is natural but the Perception effects are not? This can be done by setting the Rating at *Correspondence 3* - with *no* pluses or minuses - this will imply that only Correspondence 3 effects are natural in this realm and do not require a spell-casting roll (or at most just require a coincidental roll). All other Correspondence effects involving other levels would be treated here as normal magickal effects.

Correspondence	3
Entropy	Special
Forces	0
Life	0
Matter	0
Mind	2
Prime	+3
Spirit	3 (Virtuals only)
Time	+5

Correspondence 3: Indigenous creatures on Nexus are capable of teleporting themselves - the natural laws here just allow for that. Colocating or spatial perception is not naturally allowed though. This makes a jaunt in the local jungles *very* dangerous indeed! Central Office is however magickally shielded to prevent invasion by teleporting predators.

Entropy: This is variable since Entropy is so closely linked to Time. In faster time fields, patterns can decay and break down faster. This means that eroding matter/withering life/intellectual entropy is easier to do in the background of the faster time flow. All difficulties for Entropy 3, 4, and 5 effects are at a bonus of -2.
Conversely, in slower time fields (where things decay/break down slower), destructive Entropy magick is harder to accomplish. All difficulties to level 3, 4, and 5 Entropy effects are at a penalty of +2 difficulty.

Pattern Magick: +/- 0. Forces, Life and Matter are the same here as anywhere else. Granted, the forces of nature here are much more dramatic than on Earth, but this does not itself warrant an increase in the Forces rating. Storms are just more violent and spectacular (lots of electrical discharge), while winds are quite strong.

Mind 2: Many creatures on Nexus are telepathic, or more precisely, telempathic- they are capable of transmitting emotional commands. Sirens (native creatures that lure prey to their doom in their maws) use telepathic impulses to dupe their prey.

Prime +3: The sheer number of Nodes that supply Nexus make the place fairly glow with Quintessence. As a result, it is very easy to see Nodes or transfer Quintessence from one place to another within Nexus. The +3 Sphere Rating indicates that all Prime effects equal to or lower than level 3 are automatically coincidental here.

Spirit (3): This is only in connection to Virtuals - it is comparatively easy to enter Virtuals from Nexus. Natural Portals exist through which Virtuals can be accessed - however, a conjunctional Time 3/Spirit 3 effect is required to enter them (see '*Virtual Travel*' in the Rotes section). All such Portal entry rolls are automatically considered Coincidental in Nexus. All rolls to enter other Spiritual Realms outside of Nexus within Gaia's Near Umbra are cast as normal, and are not automatically coincidental. Note that a separate Spirit 3/Time 3 effect is required to enter or leave Nexus from Gaia itself or its Near Umbra (see '*Nexus Entry*' in the Rotes section). Direct access to the Deep Umbra from here is however completely impossible - all Portals to the Darkness have been long since sealed by the Continuum for security.

Time +5: Any Time effect is naturally possible here. This includes the creation of Time Loops, the ebb and flow of Time, complete cessation of Time, and contraction and dilation. This *is* after all the Shade Realm of Time...

Paradox

Nexus is so much a part of the Continuum's Paradigm (and vice versa) that magick in it is considerably harder for those who live outside this paradigm. The situation is rather similar to that which must exist in Autocthonia, the Home Realm of Iteration X - Tradition Magick must be impossible (or at least very difficult) there since it is so contrary to the paradigm of that Convention.

All magicks cast by members of the Continuum are coincidental in Nexus - in addition, Paradox does not affect Continuum Agents within Nexus - a botched roll simply fails spectacularly, and no Paradox points are ever gained by the Agent. Paradox strikes as it would on Earth for any other Mage whose Paradigm is different to the Continuum's. In addition, all magicks cast by an invading Mage *require* a spellcasting roll, even if they are usually considered 'free' as a result of the sphere ratings. This is one important explanation as to how the Continuum has managed to hold off the Technocracy since they seceded from them in the early 20th century. It is rumoured that this may be the result of a change in the nature of the Realm performed by the Continuum's Oracles after they seceded from the Technocracy.

Fortunately for the Continuum's allies, there is a way around this. Through training, the outsider can be acclimatised to the paradigm within Nexus such that he does not gain Paradox for casting magicks there. In addition, every outsider entering Nexus is given an ID badge which contains a tiny piece of modified Timestone. This acts as a kind of bar-code which is used to identify the outsider. This must be worn at all times in the Realm, and must be returned when leaving Nexus. Since Timestone acts as a beacon outside Nexus for those with Time 1, it can be used to unerringly follow those who try to smuggle their ID badge out of the Realm (for attempted duplication), and can be used to keep track of visitors within the Realm as well. Since Timestone is unique to the realm, it is very hard to duplicate outside it. This provides yet another security measure to protect the Realm.

Nodes and Virtuals

Nexus is fuelled by many Nodes from a wide variety of (largely unpopulated) Virtuals, as well as Earth itself. A few of the more interesting ones are described below:

The Orb of Lucifer: An extremely powerful Node, this is located on the major continent of Lucifer, a Level 1 Virtual. In this timeline, Life never evolved on Earth. Lucifer is a Hothouse world, similar to present-day Venus but a little more clement. Its thick insulating steam and carbon dioxide atmosphere keeps surface temperatures at a generally uniform 120°C (~ 250°F), which means there is no free-standing water on the surface. Extensive volcanic and seismic activity pumps more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Of course, the lack of life means that there is no Oxygen content in the air at all. The planet's rotational axis is tipped at an angle of 40 degrees, and a day is a mere 8 hours in length! As a result, winds and storms on Lucifer can be extremely powerful. Interestingly enough, Lucifer has no Moon, leading many Continuum scientists to believe that the formation of the Moon played a critical role in the formation of life on Earth.

 In this hostile environment however lies one of the most powerful Nodes in the Metaverse. The Node itself is a 10' diameter globe known as the *Orb of Lucifer*, hovering a few feet above the ground on the planet's major continent. It is constructed of a black material that defies all analysis (even Magickal). It rotates around its axis, tipped at 40 degrees, once every 8 hours - exactly like the planet it is located on. And its power is immense - no ley lines or other Nodes exist on Lucifer; it is almost as if all the planet's Quintessence is channelled to and concentrated at the Orb.

 The Orb's origin is unknown - its connection (if any) with the present state of Lucifer is also unknown, as is its purpose. Whether its builders (if it was even 'built' at all - some believe it is a natural representation of the planet beneath) will return to claim it one day is a matter that most Continuum Agents would rather not think about...

 The Orb is heavily guarded by the Continuum's finest agents, and it is presently located in a sealed Guard Station that has been built around it. Humans require spacesuits or environmental protection to survive outside the Station. The Orb and Station has already been the focus of several concerted attacks by agents of the Darkness, all of which have been successfully repulsed so far.

Nada One: This is a mysterious city of glass, which appears (along with the small rocky island it is situated on) out of thin air in the southern Indian Ocean on Earth. It always appears at sunset, and is only visible while the Sun's disk touches the open sea, and even then it is only physically *real* if viewed or approached from certain angles. After the Sun sets, it disappears for the rest of the night and following day.

 Nada One itself is a beautiful, eerie and silent place. It is uninhabited, and completely unaffected by the environment; it is extremely clean, and the glass it is constructed on is perfectly unblemished. The glass itself appears to be indestructible; it cannot be broken.

 It is not known where the Island disappears to after sunset. It is believed that the city travels through the Corridor, appearing at random points in Time. If anyone or anything is left behind on the isle, they are never seen again - when Nada One returns, no trace of its accidental passengers are ever found. Indeed, anything moved in the Glass City resumes its normal place when Nada One returns.

Neverland: 'Neverland' is the name given to one of the most unusual Level 1 Virtuals known to the Continuum. Neverland is exactly identical to Earth until January 18th 1993. On this day, every higher life form on the planet (i.e. all human and animal life) suddenly vanished without a trace.

The only clue to this Vanishing is the continual signal emitted from the Aricebo Radio Dish in Puerto Rico, aimed exactly towards the Galactic centre. Further research by the Continuum through records at Neverland Aricebo and that Virtual's US Government archives has so far yielded no official documentation or explanation for the transmission, and no target for the signal has been described. However, the signal was activated on the 18th January 1993. Interestingly enough, there is no record of such a transmission in the Aricebo records on MC Earth at that time...

In addition to the radio signal it was transmitting, Aricebo was also found to be beaming out Quintessence towards its target point. Much to the Continuum's surprise and shock, shutting off the radio transmitter did not also stop the beam of Quintessence towards the Galactic Centre.

The Continuum has managed to at least tap some of the flow, but with this came the discovery that Neverland itself is actually unstable - its Quintessence is actually *disappearing* from the Virtual through the beam! The entire Virtual appears to be losing cohesion because of the Quintessence drain, and its Order is gradually decreasing as a result. The Continuum is trying to prevent this loss before Neverland becomes a Level 2 (or worse) Virtual, or completely loses cohesion - to this end it is also trying to decode the contents of the original Aricebo radio signal in the hopes that this might provide clues as to the original purpose of the transmission.

Another curiosity is that Aricebo itself is the only Node in this Virtual. Aricebo is the nexus of all of the Ley Lines on Neverland - this ley line network is almost certainly artificial, and all the evidence hints at some secret magickal experiment (probably set up by the Technocracy) that went horribly wrong...

Easter Island: Located on Earth itself, Easter Island is a collection of hundreds of smaller Nodes, each represented by one of the famous 'Heads' that gaze out to sea. It is quite powerful, and the Order of Hermes has been vying for access rights, but so far the Continuum is having none of it.

Book 3:
Virtuals

Virtual Classification Scheme

Introduction

In labelling Virtuals they encounter, the Continuum tries to use a standardized classification system - the **Virtual Profile** - for ease of recording basic features. Virtuals are regularly labelled as shown below, but as new Virtuals are discovered the system is revised and updated to better conform with increases in the knowledge of the Continuum.

The Continuum classes Virtuals as follows:

• Common Name
• Energy [Quintessence] Rating
• Human Factor
• Magick Factor
• Tech Factor
• Environmental Factor
• Control Factor
• Entity Factor
• Danger Factor
• Temporal Proximity
• Unique (ID) Code

Coding Explanations

Common Name

This is the name by which the Continuum commonly refers to the Virtual. Occasionally the name by which its inhabitants refer to it is used. In the Classification Scheme, it is placed either before or after the Profile itself, depending on the preferences of individual agents.

Energy [Quintessence] Rating

Perhaps one of the most important codes for a Virtual, this represents the **Order** of the Virtual, which in turn effectively indicates the strength of its existence. Since Virtuals are invariably weaker copies of Main Corridor, they contain less inherent Energy [the Continuum term for Quintessence] than MC. The Energy Rating indicates how many points of Virtual Quintessence are equivalent to one point of MC Quintessence. 1st Order Virtuals (those derived directly from Main Corridor) have an Energy Rating of 1 - i.e. one point of Virtual Quintessence is equivalent to one MC Quintessence Point. Level 2 Virtuals have Energy Rating 2 - here, two points of local quintessence are equivalent to one point of MC Quintessence. The weakest (Order 3) Virtuals have Energy Rating 3, so three points of local quintessence correspond to one point of MC Quintessence. See 'Virtual Quintessence' for more details. Note that there are no Virtuals weaker than level 3.

0	**True Corridor (Order 0 Reality)**. Main Corridor, Arcadia, and The Periphery are the only known realities that have this rating. This means that the Corridor is a Root Reality in a Labyrinth, and so is not a Virtual.
1	**Level 1 Virtual**. The Virtual is derived directly from MC, and is strong enough that one point of Virtual Quint is equivalent to one point of MC Quint. The difference between Codes 1 and 0 is subtle - while a 1st Order Virtual is Quintessentially as strong as Main Corridor, MC Mages do find it easier to cast magicks there.
2	**Level 2 Virtual**. Second Order Virtuals are derived from Level 1 Virtuals - two points of Virtual Quint are equivalent to one point of MC Quintessence.
3	**Level 3 Virtual**. The weakest known Virtuals, these are particularly susceptible to destruction by the Darkness. Three points of Virtual Quintessence are equivalent to one point of MC Quintessence here.
I	**Indistinguishable**. In the very rare situations where the Continuum can classify an Indistinguishable as a distinct reality, it is given this code.
U	**Unstable Virtual**. Very few Virtuals receive this classification, which indicates that the Virtual is losing cohesion either through invasion by the Darkness or some other unknown means. Collapse may or may not be imminent, but it is inevitable unless the process can be halted somehow (e.g. Neverland).

The Human Factor

The Human Factor indicates the presence and strength of humanity in a given Virtual.

1	Humanity is the only dominant race to be found (e.g. our own Earth).
2	Humanity is the dominant sentient race, but others exist in hiding (e.g. the World of Darkness (MC Earth)).
3	Humanity and one other race share/fight over dominance of the Virtual.
4	Humanity and more than one other race share/fight over dominance of the Virtual.
5	Humanity exists, but another race holds dominance over the Virtual, keeping humanity subjugated or in hiding (e.g. DarkSphere).
6	Humanity does not exist in the Virtual, and may never have (e.g. Sauron).
7	No native sentient races exist in the Virtual (e.g. Lucifer).
S	The dominant species is sentient, whether human or not.
N	The dominant species, while most likely intelligent, is not sentient.
X	The dominant species no longer exists. This naturally implies that one did exist at an earlier time, but has since disappeared though catastrophic war, disease, natural extinction, or other means (e.g. Neverland).

The Magick Factor

This factor indicates the strength of one or more paradigms of magic within the Virtual. This factor is also given a letter designation as well, to better define it.

0	Magick does not exist in any form, and never has. Vulgar magicks are impossible, and Coincidental magick causes Paradox as Vulgar does normally. Escape from the Virtual is usually only possible by some special way (e.g. real Earth's Bermuda Triangle). Note however that Quintessence always exists, even on magick-free Virtuals. An example of this is our own Earth.
1	Quintessence exists, as does Paradox. Thus, only Mages and Awakened beings can perform magick. However, there is no dominant paradigm, which allows the Mage to perform all Vulgar Magick as if it was Coincidental. An example of this is the MC Umbra. This is frequently the case in uninhabited Virtuals (e.g. Lucifer).
2	One paradigm of magick holds sway, and is commonly accepted as truth. All others are subject to Paradox (e.g. the Order of Hermes during the Mythic Era).
3	A gathering of paradigms are merged and hold power, while all other magicks are subject to Paradox (e.g. the Technocracy in the World of Darkness, and the Cabal on Southron).
4	All collective paradigms are empowered, but the threat of Paradox still exists due to mages still being few in number and the majority of individuals unaccepting of magick. For example, mages are capable of many feats expected of them, but Paradox would hinder other effects (e.g. Eldritch).
5	All individual paradigms are supported, and Paradox is non-existent. Individual thoughts (even of non-Awakened beings) can alter vast amounts of reality. The Continuum has yet to encounter such a Virtual and believes them to be merely theoretical. However, the Darkness itself seems to support this kind of 'non-paradigm'.
C	One or more non-human species may have magical abilities, and only these creatures possess magickal abilities.
R	Regional paradigm variation. More than one paradigm exists in the Virtual, in separate geographical regions. Moving from one Paradigm to another requires a change in magickal style to avoid Paradox (e.g. Aegypt).
T	Indicates the dominance of a technomagickal paradigm.
N	Indicates the dominance of a non-technomagickal paradigm.
M	Indicates the dominance of a mixed technomagickal/non-technomagickal paradigm.
I	Indicates the existence of identical or similar paradigms to MC Earth in the Virtual.
U	Indicates the existence of unique and unknown paradigms in the Virtual.

Technology Factor

This factor represents how similar the technology of a Virtual is to that of the mainstream (non-Paradoxical) technology of Main Corridor.

0	No technology exists at all (not even the Wheel). This code is commonly used Virtuals with no intelligent life.
1	The technology of the Virtual is identical to that of Main Corridor in every way.
2	Certain minor differences exist between the Virtual and Main Corridor. For example one world may have interactive television in every home, and/or Xerox machines are unknown.
3	Major differences exist between the two. Citizens of one Virtual may all have handheld lasers and sentient robots while another still has yet to forge a suit of plate mail.
A	Technology as it is known in the Main Corridor is non-existent, but an alien technology is highly commonplace. For example, a Virtual may utilize life energy to power its technology (which is organically-based as well).
F	Futuristic Technology. The technology within the Virtual has advanced to a level greater than that in MC.
P	Primitive Technology. The technology in the Virtual is less advanced than in MC.

Environmental Factor

This indicates how similar the physical environment is to MC Earth. It is useful for determining the need for physical protection before entering.

E	Earthlike environment. No special environmental protection measures are needed.
I	Inconvenient environment. Generally Earthlike, but surface conditions require special needs. e.g. Breathable but tainted air, planet covered entirely by water, desert or glacial planets.
D	Dangerous environment. Air is still breathable, but physical environment is dangerous to life - e.g. highly volcanic worlds, high radiation levels etc.
X	Extreme environment. Conditions are not remotely Earthlike, and highly dangerous without substantial protection. E.g. no/toxic/corrosive atmosphere, unusual physical laws, very high or low surface temperature (e.g. Lucifer).

Control Factor

An important factor to explorers among the Continuum, the control factor indicates the level of freedom and oppression (and also chaos and stability) present in a Virtual as compared to that of Main Corridor as well as how the existence of the Continuum, Nexus and magick would be viewed by natives.

0	No control. The Virtual is uninhabited. Code 0 alone implicitly assumes that no Continuum Base has been established on the Virtual. However, Code 0B (see below) indicates that while the Virtual itself is uninhabited, the Continuum has established a base there.
1	The existence of freedom is omnipresent and individual rights are held by whoever has the most power. The concepts of justice and law are practically unknown, such as in packs of animals.
2	The amount of an individual's freedom is based on his or her social status, religion, or economic worth. For example, in ancient Egypt, the Pharaohs held much more freedom and power than the slave workers.
3	An individual's freedom is subject to his geographic position and government much as current politics dictate in the Main Corridor.
4	Only one governmental system can be found in the Virtual, containing limited amounts of control; a one world democracy/republic.
5	Only one governmental system can be found in the Virtual, containing intensive amounts of control; a totalitarian one world state.
B	The Continuum has established a Base on this Virtual. If already inhabited, this base is kept extremely secret. Usually, Bases are established only on uninhabited Virtuals.
S	The Continuum has agents actively (and often secretly) operating within the Virtual, providing assistance to at least some of its inhabitants, usually in the form of logistical support or medical aid. This is usually the case in Virtuals that have oppressive regimes, or in which major disasters have occurred.

Entity Factor

The existence of entities with vast power is often encoded into the labelling as well, but only if the existence of such beings is known as an indisputable fact.

E	Within this Virtual exist one or more beings of immense power equal to that attributed to gods of legend. Such entities include Oracles, Antediluvians, Gods, and Incarna.
W	This Virtual definitely does not possess powerful entities such as Oracles, Incarna, or Antediluvians. However, worship of similar such entities may still be present despite the lack of "deities". Such Virtuals usually have low Magick Factors.
U	The existence or non-existence of Powerful Entities in this Virtual is unknown.

Danger Factor

The single most important label to many members of the Continuum, the Danger Factor indicates the nature of especially dangerous Virtuals. Only the most deadly of Virtuals can expect a special notation.

0	A literal paradise. Threats to life are practically unknown and non-existent. Only three Virtuals have ever received this code, and one later had it revoked.
1	The dangers within this Virtual are roughly equal to those found within the Main Corridor. This is the most common classification to be found for the Danger Factor.
A	The animal life found on this world is much more dangerous than normally expected. Extremely so. Usually, such creatures are the dominant life of the Virtual.
E	There are one or more powerful entities in this Virtual that would threaten those who would explore the Virtual. More often than not, these Virtuals are given a Z rating instead and are Sealed.
M	There are multiple factors that have combined to make the world a very deadly and dangerous place.
P	The plant life found on this world is much more dangerous than normally expected. Extremely so. Occasionally, such creatures are the dominant life of the Virtual and animal life may be unknown.
R	A sentient race present in the Virtual has been evaluated as too much of a hazard, and contact with members of this race is to be as limited as possible.
V	There are one or more illnesses present in the Virtual which are highly hazardous. Many such Virtuals receive the Z rating if they are found to be great a threat to Nexus.
Q	Quarantined. No contact is allowed from Nexus, except by specially trained teams and exceptional circumstances. The Portal to the Virtual is constantly guarded, and any inhabitants who escape (by having a Temporal Avatar) are hunted down and 'contained' (see 'Rotes'). This Code is usually applied to those Virtuals whose inhabitants are highly xenophobic, though there are other reasons. However, the Continuum usually has many reasons why it wishes to continue accessing the Virtual, which would make Sealing it undesirable.
Z	The danger of this Virtual is so extreme and threatening to Nexus and the Main Corridor, that the Continuum has decreed that the Virtual is to be permanently Sealed for eternity. Anyone breaking a Seal is usually subjected to Gilgul, if they are lucky. Only a few Virtuals have ever received this rating.

Temporal Proximity

       This indicates how similar the history of the Virtual is to MC Earth's. High Proximity ratings are indicative of those Virtuals whose history diverged from Earth's a long time ago - these usually have many natural and environmental differences to MC. Remember that each Virtual is chronologically synchronised with MC Earth - in all Virtuals, it is now the Present Day (the year 1996 (even if the natives have a different dating system)). However, the rate of technological/biological/social evolution may be different to MC Earth's, so civilisations on the Virtual may be more or less advanced than our own even though it is the same time.

       Note that Virtuals with Proximity rating above Code 4 are increasingly likely to differ from MC Earth, as tiny changes in the Virtual's history this far back are likely to have very large knock on effects further down the line (Chaos Theory is alive and well in evolution...). As a real-life example, the Cambrian Explosion, the huge proliferation of life that took place 650 million years ago, produced many bizarre forms of primitive life, including spherically symmetric forms, and even a form with seven pairs of legs and five eyes. If one of these forms had survived instead of the one that later evolved into our most primitive ancestors, then it is likely that the life that evolved from that initial 'progenitor organism' would not be bilaterally symmetric, possessing 4 limbs and a sensory appendage (the head).

1	Recent Divergence. Branching from MC history occurred within the last century (i.e. after 1900 AD, MC time).
2	Millennial Divergence. Branching from MC history occurred within the last millennium (after 1000 AD, MC time).
3	Bimillennial Divergence. Branching from MC history occurred within the past 2000 years (i.e. after 1 AD, MC time)
4	Ice Age Divergence. Branching from MC history occurred within the past 18000 years, since the last Ice Age. This span of time encompasses all of recorded human history.
5	Prehistoric Divergence. Branching from MC history occurred within the past 650 million years (the dawn of the Cambrian Era). This encompasses the history of multi-celled life on the planet.
6	Archaean (ancient) Divergence. Branching from MC history occurred within the past 4600 million years - up to the formation of the Earth (and Solar System) itself.
7	Universal Divergence. Branching from MC history took place before the Earth ever existed, up to 15000 million years ago - the birth of the Universe. Code 7 Virtuals are usually highly dangerous places, since the Earth either does not exist, or the physical laws (set at the start of the Universe) are different there.

Unique Factor (ID Code)

To distinguish one Virtual from another that has an identical label, the Continuum uses a four letter/number code. Also, Virtuals are typically given a "common name", used in the field and in less formal matters. Many inhabited Virtuals are usually given distinctive ID Codes - these Virtuals are the more commonly explored or better known ones, such as Sauron, Aegypt and DarkSphere. In these cases the ID Code is similar in appearance to the common name of the Virtual (e.g. Sauron is SAU1, DarkSphere is DRK5)

Known Virtual Codes

With this classification system in mind, the Profiles for the known Virtuals are shown below:

KEY

Name	-	Common name for Virtual
Energy	-	Energy [Quint] rating
Hum	-	Human Factor
Mag	-	Magickal Factor
Tech	-	Technological Factor
Env	-	Environmental Factor
Ctrl	-	Control Factor
Ent	-	Entity Factor
Dngr	-	Danger Factor
Prox	-	Temporal Proximity
ID	-	ID Code

Name	Energy	Hum	Mag	Tech	Env	Ctrl	Ent	Dngr	Prox	ID
Main Corridor	0	2S	3TI	1	E	3B	E	1	(0)	MCE0
Aegypt	1	3S	2RMU	3A	E	3S	E	MQ	4	AEG8
Armageddon	1	1S	1	1P	D	1S	W	M	1	GB12
DarkSphere	1	5S	2CI	1	I	5S	E	M	1	DRK5
Dominion	1	2S	3RMI	2F	E	4	U	1	2	DMN3
Fungal Wind	2	1S	1	2P	X	1S	W	VZ	1	YF73
Lemuria	1	4S	2CNI	3P	E	4SB	E	1	3	PT06
Lucifer	1	7	0	0	X	0B	U	M	6	LCF6
Neverland	1U	7X	0	1	E	0B	U	1	1	NVR0
Reich	1	2S	2CMU	2F	E	5S	U	RMQ	1	RCH1
Sauron	1	6S	4CNU	3A	E	3SB	U	1	5	SAU1
Southron	1	2S	3I(U)	2	E	3S	E	1	2	STH1
Terra Prime	1	1S	1TI	3F	E	5S	E	RMQ	1	TER1
Wotan	1	2S	2CNU	1	E	5B	E	1	3	WOT1
Dyson	1	1S	4M	3F	E	4	U	1	3	DYS0

When writing these profiles in text, each rating should be separated by a dash '-'. Thus, Aegypt would be written as:

Aegypt   1-3S-2RMU-3A-E-3S-E-MQ-4-AEG8

Southron Republic: 1-2S-3I(U)-2-E-3S-E-1-2-STH1
by Arthur-Trevor D. M. Lasher

Author's Note: A similar idea was presented by S.M. Stirling in his "Draka" series of books. Mine, I believe, has a much 'happier' ending and the details of the society - indeed, how it started - are quite different. Don't think of it as derivative, but as a parallel proposal.

Prelude

August 15, 1870: New Orleans... in flames...

General Robert E. Lee, late of the Army of Northern Virginia, wept silently as the CSS Charleston floated out to sea. Beyond the horizon, bright orange flames licked at the French Quarter as Major-General Butler took his revenge out on the poor souls still left in the city. Acrid smoke wafted up into the air for as far as the eye could see and at high-noon, the sun was obscured and the water as black as pitch...

He'd held out as long as he could, knowing full well that all was lost, that there would be no more reinforcements, that a denouement to guerrilla warfare would be met with even more brutality than he'd witnessed thus far. The last boat had left the harbour and the HMS Defiant was within sight of Lee's blurred vision, there to escort the Charleston to her final destination, the port of Cape Town at the tip of Africa. A fitting end, he thought darkly. It's a whole continent's revenge against us, against the same policies which brought her sons and daughters to this land laid low now by the conqueror's sword. We are being swallowed by Destiny...

A Short and Secret History of the Southron Republic
By Andrew de Wit,
Nephilim, 10th Generation from Lilith
Archivist-Historian Nth Class,
Imperial Academy of History
Cape Town, Southron Republic

"Who would create a future for himself, may not lose sight of the past."
- Pres. Paul Kruger, the last president of the Transvaal Republic

5 July, 1867: The Sacking of Richmond. After six long and bitter years of warfare, the Union Army, under U.S. Grant, finally crashes through the valiant defenders of the Confederate capital. Enraged at the defiance of the Southern troops, he orders the city put to torch... but not before the victorious Northern forces loot and plunder it.

Thus begins the collapse of Southern resistance after a closely fought and barely lost war. After the loss of President Lincoln to General McClellan in the 1864 election, many had expected the North to sue for peace. In fact, President McClellan's first speech seemed to indicate that he could live with a continent divided between the two nations. That thought, however, was stillborn as an assassin's bullet laid low McClellan on 3 March, 1865. The perpetrator, the Copperhead Democrat and actor John Wilkes Boothe, immediately caused an electrifying sensation across the mourning nation. The North offered peace and the South (or so it was thought; Boothe's ties to Richmond were tenuous at best) gave them war.

And so, the newly ascended President Douglas gave the people what they sought: a Jihad.

City after Southern city fell, all burned to the ground and looted, the vengeful Yankees seeking to seemingly drive the Southerners into the sea. Millions were displaced and untold atrocities occurred. By late '69, the Confederate Army was relegated to a swiftly tightening corridor of land from Galveston to New Orleans.

The world powers, particularly the British, who'd passed the opportunity to recognise the Confederacy when Richmond seemed to be winning, were horrified. The Royal Navy was ordered to help evacuate any Southern family that could reach port. Officials - Confederate and British - scrambled to organise this unprecedented evacuation. With the Yanks apparently desiring nothing to do with their erstwhile countrymen, something needed to be done to save what could be saved of Dixie's children.

3 November, 1870: The British Parliament, mirroring the public outrage (fuelled by at least two Clans; the Ventrue and the Lasombra [the latter in hiding]) at the Union's Carthage-like conquest of the Confederacy, passes the "Confederate Refuge and Settlement Act" at the urging of Prime Minister Gladstone and opposition leader Disraeli.

Rumour is that Disraeli suggested the Act to Gladstone after reading in the Times of the Siege of New Orleans, the final bastion of the South, in which nearly seventeen thousand men, women and children were alleged to have been slain. The reality is only slightly divergent. Viscount Manning, Lasombra Archbishop of Greater London, successfully implanted the suggestion into Benjamin's mind, where it found fertile ground and flowered into something quite larger than even Manning anticipated.

13 January, 1872: The "Cape Colony Self-Government Act of 1872" passes the British Parliament, amending a similar law passed barely a year earlier. This act expands the authority of the Cape Colony Parliament and further loosens the ties between London and Cape Town, bestowing Dominion status on the region on par with Canada.

Once more, the hand of Archbishop Manning is behind this act, particularly amongst the House of Lords, where he maintains at least two in Ghouldom. Manning's ultimate goal, the unification of all British colonies in southern Africa for use as a base of operations for the Sabbat, begins to gel.

By this juncture, the refugee crisis spawned by the influx of nearly 17 million settlers over the course of the last few years is beginning to abate as the Cape Colony and Natal economies take off.

14 April, 1895: Bowing to the inevitable - and after a series of blistering raids out of the Cape Colony and Natal which devastated the Boers' major settlements - the Orange Free State and the Transvaal agree to a federation with the British colonies. At 12:00 on that day, Cecil John Rhodes becomes the first Prime Minister of the Southron Republic.

It wasn't as easy as it sounded. The Afrikaaners were by no means militarily defeated, even though the British Army and the colonial militias held most of their cities in thrall. Guerrilla warfare was an option, but Pres. Krueger of the Transvaal recognised that the overwhelming demographic superiority of the Cape and Natal would inevitably overwhelm the Boers shortly. They extracted a price, however. Afrikaans was elevated to official language status on par with English in the federation and the Witwatersraand (an area of vast gold and diamond reserves) was allocated to the Boers for exploitation, something which Rhodes had long coveted for his own use.

Behind the scenes, Archbishop Manning had already set in motion wheels that would lead to eventual Southron domination of the subcontinent and, ultimately, the entirety of Africa. He pressed for subsidised immigration packages to the Southron Republic, Dominating a slew of MPs from the Unionist (later, Tory) slate - angering not a few Ventrue and Toreador, who considered Parliament *their* fiefdom. Unable to openly act against the Sabbat mastermind and unaware of the sect's major areas of control, the Camarilla conspirators - already engaged in fratricidal warfare amongst themselves - were rendered impotent.

Additionally, all tariffs between Britain and the Republic were eventually phased out or lessened, thus allowing an even greater expansion of the Southron economy over the next decade. In Britain, Cape wines became all the rage, dominating the market.

2 April, 1903 - 13 March, 1905: Matabele War. The Matabele tribe in Southern Rhodesia, allied with several other minor tribes on both sides of the border of the Southron Republic, rebels against British rule, very nearly causing the collapse of the settler regime in Salisbury. After watching - with increasing horror - the rebellion for more than a year, Cape Town (up until then only interested in keeping the Venda and the Gazankulu tribes pacified in the northern Transvaal area) orders in the untested Praetorian Guard, the nascent army of the Southron Republic. A series of bush wars ensues, and the rebellion collapses. Cape Town is then left with a great amount of influence over Salisbury.

      Manning watched with interest the sequence of events which led to the war in Matabeleland. There was indirect evidence of werebeast activity and not a few instances of outright Camarilla involvement (particularly when the Guard entered the conflict). In the end, however, everything went according to plan and this conflict set the stage for the coming referendum.

19 November, 1905: A grateful Southern Rhodesia, still reeling from the after-effects of the Matabele War, votes in a referendum to join the Southron Republic, becoming the nation's fifth province.

      The first Sabbat pack enters Salisbury on this night, originally hailing from the northern Transvaal. Archbishop Manning prepares to evacuate most of the Sabbat presence from southern England and Wales, leaving only the scattered country packs of Scotland and northern England to make a mess of the already convoluted Kindred politics in the nation. His plan is to set up Sabbat strongholds, called 'Garrison Houses' in the major cities of the Southron Republic, from which the sect could extend their control over the region. Houses in Cape Town, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Durban, New Richmond, New Atlanta and Salisbury are set up.

4 August, 1914: The Great War begins in Europe. After nearly twenty years as a self-governing state, the Southron Republic is forced to make a difficult choice. As a member of the British Empire, Cape Town would nominally have been expected to join in the hostilities. However, a sizeable portion of both the Confederate and Afrikaaner population were leery of getting too deeply involved in 'their (the Europeans') war'. A delicate three-way ethnic balance ensued. With the population as a whole numerically in favour of the Confederates, the mining economy dominated by the Afrikaaners, and the bureaucracy by those of British descent, no mistakes could be made that wouldn't risk intercommunal strife. Prime Minister Anderson, a Confederate himself and the first to hold such a post, made the most important decision in the nation's history.

      He declared the Republic's policy to be that of 'self-defence at the expense of all' and set about prosecuting his *own* war, *his* way, independent of London or the Allies. Laying claim to Rhodes' old dream of a community from 'Cape to Cairo', Anderson presented a programme to Parliament outlining a vast and breathtaking vision. The Republic would immediately annex the British protectorates of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland as areas 'integral to the stability of the Southron nation'. Following this up would be the London-requested land invasion of German South-West Afrika... with an added goal of seizing Portuguese Angola and Mozambique. At the conclusion of hostilities, Cape Town would offer province-hood to Nyassaland and Northern Rhodesia (though with the strong implication that there really wasn't all that much of a choice in the matter). Eventually, the Republic would buy, barter or seize any and all land she possibly could, making her way through the Belgian Congo, German East Afrika, and British Kenya.

      Behind the scenes, the Sabbat were fast at work, mustering up the needed industrial output to sustain such grandiose visions, softening the local populace to the measures and dealing with the increasing interference from Camarilla operatives, particularly in Northern Rhodesia and British Kenya.

15 December, 1914 - 22 October, 1922: The Great Northern War. Acting upon Anderson's vision and spurred on by an increasingly confident and growing number of Sabbat operatives, the Southron Republic marches to war. The Praetorian Guard, long the fiefdom of the Confederate majority, finally gets a chance to stretch her wings as they conquer one region after another in a lightning set of raids across vast swathes of land from the Orange river to the Sahel in the southern reaches of north Africa. Colony after colony collapses as one of the largest armies the world has ever seen - some four million strong - drives inexorably northward.

Behind the lines, preternatural warfare ensues. Caught almost completely unawares by the ferocious nature of the fighting, the Camarilla - weak in Africa as it is and fighting against the werebeasts and Mages in most areas - swings into action to fight a desperate rear-guard battle to prevent the entirety of the continent from coming under the dark sway of the Sabbat.

The first meetings between the Sabbat and the Technocracy are held in Salisbury on a combined effort to crush both the Camarilla and the Tradition Mages which plague both conspirators. After years of painful deliberation - and much mistrust - the Pact of Salisbury is signed and sealed on January 1, 1920, sealing the fate of many a valiant Kindred and Mage.

Technocratic Conventions will openly ally themselves with Sabbat Clans in support of joint operations to flush out and eliminate their competitors inside Southron-held territory. The Sabbat would allow the Progenitors tissue and blood samples in an effort to duplicate the success of Clan Tremere in creating a vampiric mage. New World Order and Virtual Adepts [*note: the Pact stemmed the secession of the Adepts to the Traditions*] were allowed to begin work on a massive bureaucracy to run the empire Cape Town was in the process of creating, one which would allow quick and efficient communication across vast distances, thus allowing greater control over far-flung regions.

In the end, though, it was Manning who'd achieved the most of what he wanted: the virtual elimination of Camarilla influence from the continent. Africa was now a base of operations from which to accomplish two things: make further forays into Camarilla-held land and to begin the search and eventual destruction of the Antediluvians before the latter arose from Torpor.

19 May, 1922: After careful consultation between Convention and Clan leaders alike, the Virtual Adepts are allowed to release a variation of Charles Babbage's Difference Engine to the Sleeper public. Using scientists at the University of the Witwatersraand at New Richmond under the ghouldom of a noted Tzimisce in the region, the Adepts begin the 'Difference Revolution', an era where computational machines - exclusively made in the Republic - will begin to ease the burden off the Sleepers (thus making them more susceptible to further influences of the Conventions and their allied Clans in the Sabbat). Day-to-day bureaucracies will grow ever larger and more powerful, bringing citizens closer together and maintaining a greater amount of control over the local paradigm.

22 May, 1923: Years of bitter and protracted diplomatic infighting between London and Cape Town lead to a final break. Parliament passes the "Act of Separation" by an overwhelming majority, officially ending ties with the British Empire.

This Act sets the stage for the final push to secure the northern reaches of Africa, under British and French suzerainty. Behind the scenes, the NWO and the Syndicate were undermining the local colonial administrations by undercutting the local hemp and opium markets with cheaply made (synthesised in Progenitor vats) Southron products, causing a region-wide epidemic of drug use and the concurrent crime and poverty problems normally associated with said habits. Additionally, select members of the colonial apparatus were replaced by Progenitor clones or ghouled by the Sabbat (mostly Tzimisce, though a few Lasombra were allowed to ensnarl select officials) in preparation for the final assault.

4 February, 1923: The Conventions task the Sabbat to hunt down and eliminate the renegade Sons of Ether, a Convention of Mages which had rebelled against the Technocracy and sought refuge within the Traditions. Eager to solidify the union of the two allies, the Sabbat pass the task down to the Sicariot for execution, beginning the decades-long and semi-successful "Mad Hunt" as the Sabbat's subsect of assassins swing into action.

14 March, 1923 - 23 May, 1923: The Maghreb War. Sufficiently rendered ungovernable by the undermining of the preternatural forces to the south of them, the north African colonial regimes in Egypt, Tripolitania, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco sustain a massive frontal assault by Southron troops as the final push to fulfil the late PM Anderson's vision is executed with cold efficiency. Ignoring threats of intervention from London, Rome, Paris and Madrid, Cape Town quickly seizes the colonies and begins mop-up operations in the hinterlands of the Sahara, the Atlas mountains and the Upper Nile area.

Cape Town quickly mollifies the frightened colonial populace by offering expanded infrastructure and economic opportunities in addition to a resumption of law and order (tacitly omitting the fact the current crime wave was of their manufacturing). Behind the scenes, key leaders in the expatriate communities are Dominated, cloned or otherwise enthralled to mobilise the population in support of the new regime. In the Berber and Arab-populated hinterlands, efforts are made to lure them into more urbanised (and easily controlled) settings as the campaign against the last remaining Tradition mages and werebeasts comes to a satisfactory close.

'The Golden Twenties'

With Africa under the Sabbat and the Conventions' co-dominium, the Southron Republic became a hotbed of economic, technological and social ferment as both forces found the area the perfect setting for all sorts of experiments on a grand scale. In an area of massive proportions, hermetically sealed off from preternatural influence outside of theirs', the allies allowed themselves free reign

Among the more noteworthy advances of the era, allowed to leak out from Convention laboratories are:

- Artificial rubber
- Advanced antibiotics (needed against the subtropical environments the Southron settlers met while consolidating their hold on the central girth of the continent).
- Television (in addition to advanced monitoring techniques through two-way televised transmissions...)
- Fuel efficient internal combustion engines (lessening the need for petroleum in the relatively oil-poor central and southern zones of the continent as exploration/exploitation was redirected in the northern reaches)

October 4, 1929: The Great Depression begins. However, effects in the Southron Republic were almost minimal as the nation had little contact with the outside world save in export trading (and no currency or stock trading ties with anyone). A surreal gloom descended over the rest of the planet while Africa bloomed as planters, industrialists, engineers and settlers spread out to the farthest reaches of their new lands, building a magnificent infrastructure... all the while directed by the silent puppet masters of the Technocracy and the Sabbat.

New immigrants, refugees from the Depression, pour into the Republic from all nations, though most of them hail from Britain, Germany and, ironically, America. This wave of new blood only increases the viability of the new borders and pushes the economy to feverish heights. During this era, the Southron Republic becomes the world's third largest economy, barely outstripped by the US and the UK.

October 11, 1930: After years of failure and disappointing results, the Progenitors and the Tzimisce finally end up creating a unique species of Revenant: the Manichaen. Springing from earlier attempts at duplicating Clan Tremere's feat, the Manichaen is a compromise between the full immortality of the Kindred and the need to keep the Awakened Avatar untainted to use True Magicks. The end result would be the final staple in the Pact, a true union between the two forces which had, heretofore, kept much of their autonomy in spite of their joint efforts.

1 September, 1939 - 22 July, 1944: The Second Great War. Spurred on in part by the activities of the German Camarilla factions, Europe is, once more, engulfed in flames as the Nazis stream across borders in a mad quest for a 1,000 year Reich. The West uniformly lines up to fight the barbaric regime in Berlin... but ends up getting much more than what they bargained for.

Convinced that the time for eliminating his enemies is now, Gustav, the Prince of Berlin, begins overt preternatural efforts to aid the German cause, in blatant violation of the Masquerade. He Embraces Hitler and Himmler and adds the full weight of his influence to the ongoing conflict. The world, already horrified by the lightning-fast advances, is even further terrified as stories leak out of high ranking Soviet officers on the Eastern Front being found totally drained of blood. Rumours run rampant and even the more incredulous of papers begin to print the rising toll of active vampires - or beings *believed* to be vampires - in the war.

The efforts are not in vain. Leningrad falls in late December of '42 and Moscow soon follows a month later, in January of '43. Astonished by the apparent meltdown of authority amongst the Camarilla in Europe - and knowing a good opportunity when it saw it - the Cabal (as the Technocracy and Sabbat have come to call themselves when referring to their united efforts) swings into action, moving the Southron Republic into position to wrest Europe from the Camarilla and out of Hitler and Gustav's mad dreams. The Republic officially declares war on 1 March, 1943.

Eager to keep Washington out of the war in Europe, the Cabal ups the ante in the Pacific, secretly assisting Berlin's ally, Japan, during key naval battles. They secure themselves fully when Tokyo successfully lands on Australia on December 11, 1943, thus tying up America for the remainder of the war, leaving Europe to the Republic.

With all preternatural factions at each other's throats in Europe, Lupines being the latest to covertly enter the fray, the Cabal play their trump card as Southron armies stream across the Mediterranean towards Italy, the Balkans and the south of France. From dark and secret complexes deep within the veld, Progenitor and Tzimisce technicians begin the mass production of a myriad of ghoul and recombinant variants for integration into the Praetorian Guard. The secrets of recombinant DNA are publically announced to the Sleepers within the Southron Republic, ostensibly stemming from government-sponsored research at the University of the Witwatersraand at New Richmond. Cape Town embraces the 'new' technology and the engines of war are given a deadly weapon with which to combat the menace of the Reich.

The entire political and social landscape of the Republic changes almost overnight as various companies rush to cash in on the limitless applications for the technologies stemming from the announcement. All of this carefully planned to mask the activities of both the Cabal in matters internal and the misadventures of Gustav to the north, which threaten to bring down the wrath of humanity on the once securely covert preternatural denizens of the planet. With that cover in place and the whole world now complacent with the notion that the 'vampires' in earlier reports were simply the Nazi's own covert recombinant experiments, the Cabal has very nearly secured for themselves total control over the planet's paradigm. Tradition Mages, world-wide, are finding it harder not to court Paradox as the repercussions of 'fake supernatural' drive the *real* supernatural even *further* from the Sleepers' dulled minds.

Finally, after brutal town-to-town fighting and untold devastation, the Second Great War is brought to an abrupt end with the surprise assassination of Adolf Hitler and Gustav Breidenstein - allegedly by the latter's own Childe, Wilhelm Waldburg - on 20 July, 1944 in a massive explosion that obliterated both completely. Two days later, the remnants of the Reich, with Gustav's other Nazi-Childe, Heinrich Himmler, in command, sued for peace against the odd-couple coalition of the British, Free French, Free Soviet and Southron forces. Two months following that, the war officially ended with forcing Germany to return much of her gains (though not all; Poland, as a state, was returned only in a truncated form and Austria and the Sudetenland remained with Berlin).

The settlement also set in motion the interlinking and massive set of anti-partisan and nationalist conflicts which sprang up with the Nazi's swift defeat of the Soviet government in Moscow. Called collectively the Bush Wars by Cape Town and, later, much of the world, they spread across most of the eastern portions of Eurasia, from the constant Polish-German shelling across the new and unstable border, the Transylvania War between Rumania and Hungary over the aforementioned region, the implosion of the Balkans following the collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and the myriad of nationalist and partisan wars over the carcass of the dying and decaying Soviet Union.

The Post-War World...

Since the Settlement, ending the Second Great War, three Great Powers have vied for control over the hearts and minds of humanity, though not all with equal success:

The Southron Republic is, arguably, the strongest of the three. She sits atop her primary powerbase on the continent of Africa, a paragon of high tech and advanced bioengineering. Her armies are staffed by a mixture of Sleepers and vat-grown Biorgs (the official term for the creations of the Progenitor/Tzimisce labs), her bureaucracy and political classes are more and more represented by ghouls and Manichaens and the everyday Southron has a chance at limited immortality...

Cape Town's reach extends over much of the Eastern Hemisphere. Her primary satrap is the vampire Himmler's Germany, still going strong after decades of power. In Berlin, the first Manichaens appeared in the late '70s and it probably won't be long before the Land of the Eternal Fuehrer sees a societal transformation along the Southron model.

Other satraps include Croatia, Rumania, Turkey, and the largest successor-state to rise out of Stalin's dystopia, the Grande Duchy of Rus.

The United Kingdom still actively contests the Republic's European dominance and stands as the primary counter-weight to Southron (and Cabal) domination of world affairs. Close alliances with France, the Benelux nations and Scandinavia have knit western Europe closer as they eschew much of what the Republic stands for. Though appreciative of the technological advances, much of the UK's sphere has little use for the bioengineering sciences and, indeed, it is at that point where the two nations disagree most vehemently on. The Bioecofundamentalist Movement began in Manchester when a group of so-called 'Beefers' (their name for themselves) rioted against engineered produce being shipped in from Liverpool in the late '60s. Since then, the Beefers have made major political gains and their party, which merged with Labour in '72, has been in charge of the British government for nearly twenty years. Other UK satraps include the remaining nations of her truncated Empire, the largest of which are the hypermassive Raj of British India, Canada and Australia.

The United States stands alone from the fray, an introverted and isolationist nation too large to be ignored and too dangerous and unpredictable to court by either the British or the Southrons. She's been something of an enigma since the end of the hard-fought Pacific War (the Asian phase of the Second Great War). After nearly a decade of fighting, from 1941 - 1950, the US finally defeated the Japanese and sought to make sure they never expanded their aggressive energies elsewhere. And so, for forty-five years, America has been digesting the Japanese home islands, annexing them officially after much heated political debate in '61. The ensuing merger of the two cultures created a synergy not seen since the cultural diffusion founded upon the ashes of the Confederacy and the Afrikaaner republics.

America's vast reach stretches across the Pacific, from the State of Chosun, adjacent to China and the Empire of Siberia, down to her satraps in the south Pacific: the American East Indies and New Zealand.

Curiously, the US has managed to eschew both the high tech and the bioengineering in the traditional, Southron-defined senses, and instead has become something of an anomaly. Her technologies are incompatible with Cape Town's. Television formats are encrypted and maser-directed beam communications make it difficult to keep tabs on her advancements.

Bioengineering, too, has advanced along nearly totally different paths from that which the Cabal has directed Cape Town to pursue. An emphasis on intercompatibility with the environment is valued, a Zen-derived philosophy of advancement. Industrial technologies are being phased out in favour of a bizarre nuclear recombinant tech called 'Splicing', a process which basically is controlled fusion and fission, allowing for molecular rearrangement on a vast scale. Though horrifically expensive, the political and societal will is there to keep it going, making the choices necessary to keep America apart from the rest of the world and unique.

Behind the Scenes...

The Cabal, for all its seemingly monolithic uniformity, is actually in the process of fission. As the line between Technocracy and the Sabbat continues to blur, some Conventions are beginning to feel that the Pact was perhaps not a good idea.

Such feelings began shortly after the end of the Second Great War and are now on the verge of boiling over. The Virtual Adepts and a portion of the Void Engineers, in particular, felt the union of the Technocracy with the Sabbat had harmed the quest for Ascension in general as the former's goals of a non-supernatural paradigm were being compromised by the presence of the supernatural at their dinner table, in the office and even their beds.

So began the Schism as the Adepts, those Engineers who agreed with them, a few Iteration Xers and a handful of Syndicates joined forces with the few remaining Sons of Ether left after the Sicarii hunted most of their kind down. They based their operations out of America and set about defining themselves - and American culture and society - in opposition to the corrupted paradigm of the Cabal, with their Biorg servants, Manichaen politicians and necrotek magicks. Since then they've slowly built up their dominance in society, waiting for the moment when they could openly challenge the Cabal. For now, though, they are far too weak. For the Cabal's part, they allowed the Schism to occur bloodlessly, hoping to divest themselves of elements not useful to the whole of their operations.

The Cabal is aware of the Schismatics' attempts at redefining the dominant paradigm as enforced by the authorities at Cape Town, but they know that the rebels have nearly no chance of succeeding. The best they can hope for is enforcing a local paradigm shift, one which will fall apart outside the borders of the Americans' reach. Even then, that works in the Cabal's favour for all the Schismatics are doing is tweaking the already accepted paradigm, not wholly replacing it. Relativity still rules and Thermodynamics is king. Nothing will change that.

Internally, the Cabal is further blurring the line between the preternatural and the Sleeper worlds. Southron (and, soon, German) citizens are being offered engineered bodies and the select elite are cashing in on Manichaen necrotek, girding themselves in the limited immortality of the serial cloned Revenant.

The Camarilla, at least in Eurasia and Africa, are all but extinct. Some feisty and decidedly mad Kindred can still be found in more out of the way areas, like the steppes of the Siberian Empire or the isle of Madagascar, but they are few and far between.

Even in North America, there is the looming danger of the Sabbat, though with the Schism and the importation of the Schismatics, that threat is a lot less than it was a few decades earlier. Now the areas encompassing the United States, Canada and much of Central America are free of Sabbat influence.

South America, however, is another story. Since the '50s, they've fallen under the sway of the Republic and are now prime breeding grounds for the Cabal. The real adventure for any Camarilla sect member in search of it is to be found on the streets of Rio or Sao Paulo, where Southron megacorps are tightening their grip on the South American economies and tying them ever-closer to Cape Town's orbit.

Extinction looms for the world's Lupines and other werebeasts not in league with the Cabal. Africa is, for all intents and purposes, denuded of lycanthropes, save for the Bastet, who surrendered *en masse* during the Maghreb War in return for eternal service to Cape Town's whims. It is from that stock, in fact, that the Progenitors and Tzimisce have created the Satrina Biorg, the pleasure model.

In Europe, the situation isn't much better, though vaster distances and lesser direct political control equates to a much larger lycanthropic population. Still, Cabal-orientated industries and governments are running a campaign to flush the shapeshifters out into the open, using whatever means they can to do it. In particular, the Bratovitch ghouls are being put to use, hunting down their ancient adversaries.

North America, however, seems to have become a haven for displaced lycanthropes from all continents. Even the few Bastet who managed to escape capitulation are welcomed with open arms here. As the Schismatics begin their 'deconstruction' of industrial-age technology, the lycanthropes' numbers and, more importantly, their ideology, has increased. If there be a last stand for the werebeasts' line, it will be here.

Nothing much can be said for South America except that, for the lycanthropes, it is a lost cause. As the Cabal continue to increase their influence on the local governments, more and more of them emigrate to North America... or die in the attempt. It is rumoured that the Sicarii (or at least a portion of them) are being prepared for an all-out assault on the few remaining werebeast fortresses deep in the Amazon.

Facts And Figures

The Southron Republic

Population:	305,784,988 (1993 Census)
Urban:	47%
Ethnic Groups:	Caucasian -- 47% Confederates - 52% Afrikaaners - 26% British - 10% Arab or Berber - 9% Other (Primarily German) - 3% Blacks -- 37% Bantu (Primarily Zulu And Xhosa) - 43% Hausa-Fulani/Yoruba/Ibo-Western Africa - 40% Oromo/Amhara/Tigrean-Eastern Africa - 12% Other - 5% Asians -- 9% Indians (Including Cape Malays) - 78% Chinese - 11% Japanese - 8% Other (Predominantly Chosunese [Korean]) - 2% Mixed Race -- 7% Cape Coloureds - 47% Alexandrians - 22% Maghrebs - 21% Others - 20%
Languages:	English and Afrikaans (Both Official)
Religions:	Episcopalianism, Dutch Reformed Church, Catholic, Islam, Indigenous Beliefs
Capital:	Cape Town (1,845,878)
Principal Cities:	Johannesburg (4,875,893), Alexandria (4,788,988), New Richmond (3,749,821), New Atlanta (3,700,877), Leesburg (3,659,812), Cairo (3,608,783), Algiers (2,984,783), Carthage (2,909,785), Leptis Magna (2,809,844), Nova Roma (2,008,877), Davisville (1,812,946), Durban (1,812,788), Pretoria (1,809,788), Salisbury (1,803,844)
Government:	Strong Democratic Confederation (Similar To Canada)
Head Of State:	Praetor Pretorius De Nant, In Office 1 Oct., 1990
Head Of Government:	Prime Minister Andrew Davis Ii, In Office 4 Nov., 1994
Major Political Parties:	**Ruling**: National Party (The Nats) Patriot Party Movement For Democratic Action Opposition: Labour Party National Front Liberal Party African National Union
Monetary Unit:	Solidus
Per Capita Income:	$12,349
Natural Increase:	1.2% Annual
Literacy:	97%

Notes on Race Relations and Population Demographics...

Initially, there were hardly any inhabitants in the Cape area. A few odd tribes who would eventually be moulded into the Zulu were there and a smattering of Bushmen but not much else. In our timeline, a massive influx of Bantu tribes came as they were alternately pushed down by more aggressive northern tribes in what is now Zaire and by the economic opportunity found in the Cape Colony and the Natal.

In this Virtual, however, the advent of such a vast number of settlers makes that scenario untenable. No mass migration of Bantus occurred here. Instead, the Cape remained (and still is, predominantly) a white enclave.

Race relations back then were, typically, appalling. No apartheid policy was ever instituted, however. With no Afrikaaner majority, there was no desire for it in society. Mind you, the ex-Confederates and the British didn't desire to separate the races (in fact, miscegenation rates were rather high), they simply felt (wrongly) that the Caucasian race was superior.

As the years and decades went by and the Southron Republic conquered the rest of Africa, the Cabal knew they needed *all* the citizens of the land if they wanted to secure domination over the planet's paradigm. So, the races were never officially segregated (though natural economic and social pressures did cause some segregation) and no stigma was ever attached to the 'natives' as the Afrikaaners did in our timeline in the 1940s.

Now, a prime reason for overpopulation is the need for large families to cultivate the land and do the day-to-day items to keep said families afloat. Industrialised nations do not have this problem and have smaller families as reproductive rights and lower infant mortality rates change the way society views having children. In the Southron Republic, such a thing happened early on so there isn't the burgeoning black population spinning out of control. Instead, there's a large black middle class fully integrated into society. The same is true of the Arabs in the Maghreb area. When you think of a Republic city, think not of *our* Cape Town, but of, say, Richmond of today. Integrated and no problems (none apparent, anyway) as far as race relations goes. It's simply *not* an issue here.

Demographically-speaking, then, the only reason for a larger white population than black is because the initial biotech advances went to the whites. When the blacks and the Arabs were brought into the system, in the late 1800s, they had very high infant mortality rates and low birth rates overall, while the whites were in that transition zone where fertility was high and infant mortality was going down but society *still* saw a need for large families. Hence, the odd (to us at least) notion of a white plurality in the continent of Africa.

NEW REVENANT FAMILIES

MANICHAENS

Nickname: Serials

Description: Fully processed Serials are identical to the original template, right down to the finger and retinal prints. In non-processed form, however, a Manichaen is a blank slate with nondescript, sexless features.

Manichaens are specially-designed Revenants, modified by Progenitor magicks and Tzimisce Vicissitude. They are born tabula rasa, with no personality engrams or even much dura matter, outside of a residual medulla and brain stem. An individual's brain is surgically placed inside the Manichaen body and moulded to a perfect fit and it is only then that the Revenant's true nature comes to fore.

The transplantee's brain triggers the Revenant body, causing its latent Vicissitude to shape itself to conform to the brain's self-image. This image may not necessarily be identical to the original template. Often it is an idealised image. The finger and retinal prints, however, remain the same as the template. The Manichaen now is a stirling near-carbon copy of the transplantee's original body...with a twist. For now the template can live to several centuries of age and benefits from the body's low-level Vicissitude (limited to Flesh and Bonecrafting of him or herself, only).

Mages who transplant their brains into Manichaen bodies find an additional benefit: the full use of True Magicks. Being alive and not undead, the Manichaen's Avatar is identical (or so they think...) to the template's. Whether this is accomplished through transplantation or some kind of 'soul cloning' is unknown, though it is certain that the Tzimisce hold the key to this process and it is the culmination of several centuries of experimentation along the Path of Death and the Soul.

Appearance: Whatever the template's original appearance was, though many Manichaens tend to have idealised features. All Manichaens, however, are identifiable by a single gene implanted in their genome by Progenitor technicians. Otherwise, they are indistinguishable from humanity as a whole.

Family Estates: Not applicable as a group, though many of the first numbers of Manichaens were high-level Cabal and Southron Republic dignitaries and members of society. Most of them had estates in the southern tip of Africa. Today's Manichaens have no real estate pattern.

Backgrounds: Most Manichaens are high-society; the upper classes of the Republic. As the price of a Manichaen transplant goes down, however, more and more of the middle classes -including the burgeoning and swiftly growing black middle class - are opting for the procedure.

Character Creation: Dilettantes, Fanatics, you name it. Any Nature/Demeanour combination is applicable these days, however many of the older generation tend to lean towards Director/Architect types.

Disciplines: Only one, a minor form of Vicissitude. Also, the use of True Magicks for those templates who're already versed in it.

Weaknesses: There's a hidden weakness in the Manichaen, though it hasn't yet been discovered and probably won't for another decade or so. Manichaens, like all Revenants, must breed within their community to keep their line together. However, fertility rates are low and not many Manichaens have yet been born since the process was introduced. Those that have been born, however, bear a striking resemblance to one of the parents. Soon it will be discovered that Manichaens produce only copies of themselves. There is no genetic mixing of gametes. They sire clones. And not just clones, but clones with the full range of memories of the sire. When this is discovered, much thought will need to be put into whether or not something need be done. Whilst a hundred Mozart-like Manichaens might be enjoyable, a hundred Hitlers is a frightening thought, even to the Cabal.

Preferred Paths: Varies from individual to individual.

Family Organisation: None, though there is an attempt among the younger Manichaens to organise politically, 'networking' with others of their kind. Since there are no real ties of kinship, however, this seems an odd proposition to some.

Gaining Family Prestige: Not applicable.

Sabbat Duties: None.

DE NANTS

Nickname: Baas (Afrikaans for 'Boss')

Description: When Archbishop Manning uprooted most of the British Sabbat and headed for southern Africa, he knew he needed local support, being singularly unfamiliar with much of the region. A short while after arriving, he approached a rich Boer burgher who lived in a vast wine-growing estate outside of Johannesburg and offered him and his own a chance at immortality. The burgher's name was Kyle de Nant.

Since then the de Nants have become the most trustworthy (and useful) of the ghoul families, surpassing even the Grimaldis, who remained ensconced in Europe. They number in the thousands now and are tightly knit by overlapping and incestuous bonds of kinship. Their loyalty to the Sabbat is unquestioned and total. In return, they have become the most powerful family in the Southron Republic and are represented at all levels of Southron politics and elite society. In fact, the Praetor, the ceremonial head of the nation, is a member of this Revenant clan.

Appearance: De Nants are uniformly beautiful. Even the males have an almost feminine beauty to them, though nothing so dramatic as the heart-stopping aura which surrounds the de Nant females. They are impeccable dressers and not a few of them dominate the fashion world of Cape Town (and, from there, the entire Republic and most of the Eastern Hemisphere).

Family Estates: There are well over a thousand de Nant estates, though most of them are clustered in the southern regions of the Republic (below the Dixie [Congo] river). Each estate tends to hold ten to fifteen members of the family. Most estates also include vast game and safari areas.

Backgrounds: All de Nants are members of high society, whether that be a dilettante or a member of Parliament. They all go to exclusive and ultra-secret private academies established for their personal use only. It is here that they usually find a spouse (or are assigned one by the family elders).

Character Creation: Director, Judge, Architect - these are the primary Natures of the de Nants, and their Demeanours are usually fairly similar, though more than a few Deviants are known to exist (and thrive). In fact, it is not too uncommon to have a dual Nature, one of which happens to be Deviant. Mental or Social Attributes are primary as are Knowledges or Skills.

Disciplines: Vicissitude, Presence and Protean

Weaknesses: The dirty little secret of the de Nants is their thinness of line. In order to keep the family together, breeding is carefully controlled and children are sired only one or two removals from the primary. It's not uncommon to find brother and sister marry or, likewise, close cousins. Strangely, no genetic defects have surfaced, save the need to continue the inbreeding. Many attribute this to Vicissitude, but others point out that no other ghoul family has been this closely inbred without obvious problems cropping up.

Family Organisation: Tightly knit. The family meets at a massive conclave once per annum at the old de Nant estate north of Jo'burg. There they frolic and engage in abject debauchery while the family elders plot further control of the nation and minister unto their Tzimisce lords, who always turn up to pay their respects to their trusted and loyal servants.

Gaining Family Recognition: Highly competitive, the Baas' only method of attaining recognition is to achieve worldly success. Since their place in the Sabbat is solely based upon their success in mortal affairs, it's obviously in the de Nants' best interests to do a decent job.

Sabbat Duties: Control. The de Nants are expected to exert control over all sectors of the nation. They're high-placed for this precise thing and they wield their power well. When the Cabal is set to release a certain technology to the world or roll out the latest Biorg, it is through de Nant companies or fronts that they do it. News is carefully filtered and controlled as every single major publishing house is owned wholly or in part by the de Nant clan. They clean up after the Cabal's more nastier disasters and reckless adventures and keep the nation running efficiently.

Dominion: 1-2S-3RMI-2F-E-4-U-1-2-DMN3
by Lee T. Herndon

One God, One Truth;
One Church, One World

"One God, one system of nature, one universe. That universe is composed of innumerable systems, which, in perfect concert, move forward in subordination to one supreme end. That one end of all things is the sovereign and infinite pleasure of Him who inhabits eternity and animates the universe with his presence...

"Now, as no one system is insular and independent, no system can be understood abstractly...the systems of the universe, and the sciences which treat of them, run into each other and mutually lend and borrow light, illustration, and development...

"One God, one moral system, one Bible. If nature be a system, religion is no less so. God is "a God of order", and that is the same as to say he is a God of system. Nature and religion, the offspring of the same supreme intelligence, bear the image of one father - twin-sisters of the same divine parentage. There is an intellectual and a moral universe as clearly bounded as the system of material nature. Man belongs to the whole three. He is an animal, intellectual, and moral being. Sense is his guide in nature, faith in religion, reason in both...

"No testimony, no faith: for faith is only the belief of testimony, or confidence in testimony as true. To believe without testimony is just as impossible as to see without light."
- ***The Christian System***, *Alexander Campbell*

As the beginning of the 19th century approached, the Order of Reason had fallen on hard times. Granted, its power had grown tremendously, but very recently the Traditions had begun to make significant gains, and the most notable of these had been the Great Awakenings. Aptly named, the Great Awakenings were American religious movements engineered by the Celestial Chorus and abetted to a certain degree by the Cult of Ecstasy, which benefited from the religious hysteria of the period. Scores of Sleepers were Awakened by their religious experiences, and even those who were not supported the Chorus with their new beliefs. The notion of movements to unify all of Christendom (though most such plans still included only Protestants in practice) had passed the talking stage; Choristers were already beginning such movements, and more were planned. The Order of Reason knew, of course, that such unification movements would not stop with Protestantism or Christianity; the Chorus was sure to push for the fusion of all monotheistic religions, at the least.

Several factions, led by the High Guild and the Artificers, began to push for an assault on major Chorister headquarters throughout the world in order to divert attention away from the infant movements. The Cabal of Pure Thought, however, put forth a very different plan: by placing one of their own in the movement's leadership, they could prevent the Chorus from controlling it fully. At worst, the divergence in ideals would reduce the movement to a schism or destroy it; at best, there was a possibility that the Cabal's idea would prevail, creating a rationalistic form of Christianity capable of displacing the Chorus' version and placing the Order of Reason even more solidly in control of the Western world. The plan was championed by Michael Faraday, who belonged to the Haldane movement in England - one similar to what the Cabal hoped to bring about. Faraday was chosen because, as an Electrodyne Engineer, it was thought that he would be better able to persuade the Artificers. His support did indeed sway them, and it was the Cabal's plan that was set in motion.

The new Christianity was to have the following characteristics: it would claim that miraculous events had been needed only to support the church in its infancy, and had ceased. It would argue that the reason behind their cessation was that they had been intended to support the word of prophets; now that the prophets had completed their message, the proper way to come to a knowledge of God was via empirical reason applied to the unchanging Scriptures. Therefore it would oppose all forms of Christianity that claimed supernatural contact with God in modern times. As a result, it would argue that all sects based on any kind of later works, whether simple creeds or supposed later revelations, were invalid and must be ended to prepare the way for the return of truth. That done, all Christians could unite on the one document they all agreed on. Thus, the new Christianity would lack formal clergy, inasmuch as members could claim neither an ordination bestowing divine authority nor a special calling from God (this led to a non-hierarchical structure that would later have drastic consequences on Dominion).

The various unification movements began in roughly the same area in various parts of the country; the Chorus believed that by this means they could give the appearance of a spontaneous uprising for unity among all churches. Most notable was the group led by a man named Barton Stone in Kentucky, a veteran of the Cane Ridge Revivals in which many people experienced ecstatic experiences not unlike those found among charismatic and pentecostal groups today, such as collapsing to the floor, spontaneous outbursts of singing and shouting, and uncontrollable shaking. Stone's "Christians" rapidly spread throughout the Middle South; others, such as Elias Smith's "Reformed Baptists", erupted through New England and the Southeast.

The Cabal of Pure Thought chose as their agents a pair of British immigrants, Thomas Campbell and his son Alexander. While still in Virginia, the two Campbells began writing and speaking about the Cabal's rationalistic plan for unification, based on what they called the Restoration of "New Testament Christianity" minus, of course, the miraculous elements that were supposed to have been for that time only. Alexander, who found he had a talent for vigorous debate, soon took over leadership of the movement, the centre of which was carried by evangelism further west into the Ohio Valley. Where Campbell's "Disciples" met Stone's "Christians", the two apparently similar groups generally merged into one.

In Main Corridor, the worst came to pass. At first the Restoration Movement seemed to be succeeding, usurping Stone's group and reducing the rest to helpless splinter groups. Then, however, the Cabal's man, Alexander Campbell, was recognized by the Chorus; his mind became a battlefield between their manipulation and the Cabal's conditioning, and he descended into premature senility. The movement, which had come to follow his ideas rather than the man himself, rapidly escaped the Cabal's control and fragmented; of its offshoots, none have contributed anything of great worth to the Ascension War as yet, despite their fairly large numbers of adherents. The Disciples of Christ, while committed to modern-style ecumenical unity, still carries too much rationalistic baggage to be of much use to the Chorus. The Churches of Christ hold tightly to the idea of Restoration, leading them to a separatism and anti-miraculism that keeps them from being attracted to the Chorus. The Christian Churches, more similar to evangelical fundamentalists, has provided about equal support to the Chorus and the hidden Knights Templar. The most recent faction, the cultic International Church of Christ, has been suspected by some to be a NWO experiment in mind control, but no proof is forthcoming. The Restoration debacle was one of the last straws in the discrediting of the Cabal's religious wing, and contributed to the drive for the Reorganization that took place at the turn of the century.

Even during the period following the Great Awakenings, the union of Christian sects was not the only basket the Chorus had eggs in, however; some Choristers believed it would be more productive for modern prophets to appear, calling for the return of miracles. One of Campbell's inner circle, Sidney Rigdon, defected to this different Chorister plan: he became a follower of Joseph Smith, founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (better known as the Mormons). In Main Corridor, Campbell published articles in his periodicals attacking the Mormons, but by the time of the political controversy that came to surround them later, his mind was greatly weakened and he took no part; ultimately, the incident with Rigdon proved to be a side issue of no importance.

Deseret

In the Virtual that has come to be known as Dominion, however, this seemingly meaningless chain of events took on ever-greater significance. In Dominion, Campbell's conditioning was stronger, and his mind held together long enough for him to appear before Congress over the issue of statehood for the Mormon colony in the west (named "Deseret", said to mean "Land of Honeybees"). Some years before, he had been a delegate to the Virginia Constitutional Convention, and his reputation had not been entirely tarnished by the label of 'schismatic'. His emphatic denunciations of the Latter Day Saints brought him to the government's attention, and he appeared to testify against Deseret's admission. But Campbell's vehement rhetoric and his own reputation as a dangerous heretic produced precisely the opposite effect: fearing to find themselves associated with such a man, Congress narrowly voted to approve Deseret's admission to the United States, albeit with a considerably reduced territory from that originally proposed.

The government had miscalculated, however, and the backlash was immediate. However badly the public disliked Campbell, they disliked Joseph Smith more. In the next election, every Congressman who had voted in favour of admission was removed from office; nearly a third of their replacements belonged to Campbell's movement, giving the Restorationists an enormous overrepresentation in the government. In fact, the admission debate had been a carefully laid-out plan of the Cabal of Pure Thought; where the Restorationists had been a small group with public opinion against them before, now they had enormous popular support. Over the next several decades, the Churches of Christ (Disciples) grew with incredible speed, spreading across America and sending missions to other nations. And though many of the Disciples themselves were uneasy about manipulating the government for their own purposes, the Cabal was always there to back them behind the scenes.

The Traditions, of course, did not remain idle in the face of such a threat. Nearly all of the Traditions were threatened by the radical growth of the new body. The Chorus in particular was hard-hit as the Disciples attacked the hierarchy and theology of the denominations they backed, draining away the Sleepers; gradually the Chorus came to rely primarily on separatist sects such as the Latter-Day Saints and non-Christian religions for support. But those religions also came under fire as missions eroded their membership as well, threatening not only the Chorus but most of the other Traditions. The Dreamspeakers, more than any others, began to lose out as Disciples demonstrated to followers of the old religions the advantages of belief in one God who had created a rational, understandable world that humans could manipulate to their advantage. Overall, the increasing climate of rationalism caused severe damage to non-rational paradigms; only the Order of Hermes and the Akashic Brotherhood (whose philosophical teachings and martial arts could be separated from religious trappings) survived mostly untouched.

The other supernaturals of the world felt mixed effects, primarily within the US but to lesser degrees elsewhere. Although their religious beliefs were under attack and the Gauntlet was growing in strength, the Garou and other Changing Breeds did benefit from an increased concern for the environment, brought about by the doctrine that humans had a responsibility to care for Creation and the belief in interconnection between the "systems of reality". The Kindred were almost totally untouched by the changes during this period; though the number of true believers was on the rise, the nature of the new faith made it much less effective against them. Wraiths suffered terribly during this period as the Shroud grew ever thicker and mortals who had expected to reach heaven but had never had any kind of transcendent experience that might have freed them from their ties to Earth flooded into the Shadowlands, only to quickly fall into Oblivion now believing they were destined for hell and thus having no hope (according to common belief among the Disciples, the lost waited for Judgement Day in a dark realm of misery and despair). The Kithain, however, experienced the worst troubles as the rising tide of empiricist rationalism forced Banality ever higher, within the US reaching levels unmatched in Main Corridor until the late 20th century.

The Order of Reason, however, did not escape untouched itself. Though few of its members actually converted, an increasing number of new initiates came from among the ranks of the Disciples. Many of these newcomers argued that Campbell's claims to have "restored the original church" were true, and that the Order was merely a tool in God's hands. Many older members, especially among the Artificers, the Hippocratic Circle, and the High Guild, attacked the Disciples' ideas as a corruption of the Order's aims, but the oldest members, who remembered the era before the Order began to turn against religion in earnest, and several factions of the Cabal and the Void Explorers, soon made their influence felt on the Disciples' side.

The War of Secession

The Disciples within the Order had their own position on the slavery issue, intending to end it gradually and peacefully; their position, however, was too weak to bring about such a reform in time. The War of Secession began in 1860 just as the Civil War in Main Corridor did, and for the most part proceeded in the same manner - with one exception.

Although the state of Deseret was not itself a slave state, the primarily white population decided to secede as well; this was partly due to racist attitudes, but primarily because they no longer believed they could prosper in a Disciple-controlled nation (the Chorus reluctantly encouraged the decision to join the Confederacy, not wanting to support slavery but fearing the danger posed by the Disciples). Because Deseret was so far away from the majority of the other states, the Union was unable to commit sufficient troops to overcome it until the southern states had surrendered, and by then public opinion no longer supported continuing the war. On the destruction of the Confederate government, Deseret proclaimed itself an independent nation, and the war-weary Union did nothing.

Over the next decades, Deseret proceeded to carve out more territory for itself, primarily by peaceful means, forming a series of colonies that eventually reached the Pacific north of California. The Order of Reason, mainly due to the internal problems caused by the influx of Disciples, was unable to prevent the United States from ceding territory to Deseret to gain money to rebuild the South. It did, however, manage to make sure the Southern restructuring bound the region ever more tightly to the Order's paradigm.

For a time, Deseret became a haven for mages of all Traditions, who worked vigorously to weaken the hold of the Order's paradigm on the minds of immigrants. But because the region was dominated by the Choristers, the local paradigm nonetheless became increasingly hostile to most forms of paganism. By the end of the century, Deseret's mages were primarily Choristers, with a small number of Hermetics and Batini and only a handful of other Tradition mages.

As the years passed, Deseret's influence prevented the United States from establishing many new states in the west, the boundary being drawn across the Great Plains area somewhat beyond the MC western edges of the Dakotas, Nebraska, and Kansas. The final outcome in 1894 was the secession of California and its establishment as a "Free State". California thus became the last North American refuge for pagan Traditions and Kithain.

Reorganization and Downsizing

"The best government on earth, call it English or American, has within it the seeds of its own destruction - carries in its constitution a millstone, which will sink it to the bottom of the sea. They acknowledge not that God has set his Christ upon his throne. They will not kiss the Son. Society under their economy is not blessed. The land mourns through the wickedness of those that sit in high places. Ignorance, poverty, and crime abound, because of the injustices and iniquities of those who guard the destinies of nations. Men that fear not God, and love not his Son, and that regard not the maxims of his government, yet wear the sword and sway the sceptre in all lands.

"This is wholly adverse to the peace and happiness of the world."

*- **The Christian System**, Alexander Campbell*

By 1904, the Order had become divided into two major factions, each of which began calling for a major reconstruction. The Conventionalists, as they were referred to, argued that the time had come to cut the Disciples loose. The Disciples, however, produced an enormous body of evidence that Sleeper support for the current regime depended heavily on themselves. Moreover, the Disciples' faction had grown so powerful that to excise them would have been merely to create a second, nearly equal Order that would oppose the first, a schism so foolish as to be totally unprecedented in the history of the Awakened. After nearly two years of strife, it was the hard core of the Conventionalists who were cut loose, and the Disciples re-created the Order of Reason in their own image, renaming it the Dominion.

The New Conventions

The Church of Reason

"The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge; only fools look down on wisdom and comprehension."
- **Wise Sayings**

Of all the conventions the Cabal of Pure Thought was, ironically, the most changed by the Reconstruction. The hard-line anti-religionists were cut loose to sink or swim, and most of them sank. From this point forward, God was the God of Reason as much as the God of Love, and Reason was the servant of Faith. The Cabal was rearranged around the decentralized lines of the Churches of Christ (Disciples), transformed into an organization of interconnected cells responsible for particular aspects of the world's political well-being. The new body was named the Church of Reason, 'church' being used in the general sense of 'assembly' but also in the intent that the Church of Reason would be an image of the church of Christ (some say that the name was given as a sign of subordination).

The Electrodyne Engineers

"Every house is constructed by someone, and the one who constructed all existence is God."
- **Letter to the Hebrews**

A certain number of both the Artificers and the Electrodyne Engineers deserted the Order when it became clear that the Disciples would have their way in the Reconstruction. The remaining groups decided that their paradigms were sufficiently similar to merge into one, and the name Electrodyne Engineers was taken for both on the grounds that it would represent the main thrust of the combined efforts of both of the old Conventions. Many of the old Electrodyne Engineers, specifically the group most similar to the Sons of Ether in Main Corridor, were blinded by the merging of the Artificers into their Convention instead of the other way around, failing to realize that the merger was partly intended to restrain the Engineers' own excesses. Disciples among the merged Convention generally saw God as the Great Artificer, though in a somewhat more personal, involved sense than the Deists. Those who left were attempted to form their own Craft, but the callous, mechanistic attitudes many of them held allowed them to commit various crimes of considerable severity. Though they survived through the next two decades, eventually all of them were apparently hunted down and executed for their actions.

The Star Force

"Isn't God in the highest heaven? See how high are the highest stars!"
- **The Tale of Job**

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Void Explorers had run out of major new frontiers on Earth. The path to the stars, however, had been located. Unfortunately, that path led through the Deep Umbra, which the Disciples had come to believe was the Outer Darkness spoken of in Scripture, into which demons and lost souls were cast (The Dominion, of course, was unaware that the wraiths believed the same of the Low Umbra or even that such a realm existed; in fact, they believed that the ghosts who sometimes appeared were from the Outer Darkness and were empowered to manifest by greater demons such as the fallen angels). Under the Reconstruction, the Explorers were reorganized into an outright military force meant to restrain any incursions from the Umbra, whether from the Infrastructure (as the Disciple Explorers had come to call it, fusing concepts of Dimensional Science and spiritual upholding of the physical world) or the Outer Darkness. This new military organization was called the Star Force, and in fact travel through the Deep Umbra was heavily restricted, allowing only point-to-point travel between known planets, stars, and realms. Pure Correspondence travel through space proper was of course permitted, but involved the great difficulty of going to a location about which little information could be gathered.

InterConnTrol

"Many people will run from one place to another, and knowledge will increase."
- **The Prophecies of Daniel**

Within the United States, a new Convention had been emerging from within the old Electrodyne Engineers. The Engineers had invented a device called the telephone, and its use for connecting the independent congregations that made up the Churches of Christ (Disciples) had caused it to spread rapidly wherever the Order of Reason ruled. The spreading phone lines came to be known as the Interconnection, or Interconn, after the company that controlled many of them. A second, more recent invention known as the calculating machine had been constructed by Babbage and duplicates were now in use in many Order Constructs, though it would be many years before it was introduced into static reality. Little by little, the Engineers who used these devices had been coalescing into a new group, many of whom were newcomers and belonged to the Disciple faction.

The Reconstruction gave that group its own name, and Convention status, despite its small size, perhaps foreseeing that the Interconn would be invaluable to the success of the Dominion by unifying Disciple congregations. InterConnTrol was charged with the monitoring, transfer facilitation, and in certain cases censorship of information that passed along the connections.

Followers of the Physician

"John called two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask, "Are you the one we've been waiting for, or should we look for someone else?"...He replied, "Go tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind are given sight, the crippled enabled to walk, the lepers cleansed, the deaf given hearing, and the dead raised..."
- **The Good News as told by Luke**

Many older members of the Hippocratic Circle were at first highly offended by the efforts of the Disciples to rewrite the theory of biological evolution they had done so much to promote. After a time, however, the majority were convinced by the Disciples that some form of creation or directed evolution was immensely more orderly and thus more appropriate to the Technomantic paradigm than the essentially random process of natural selection. The work of the Hippocratic members, they argued, was to uphold and expand upon the original beginnings of life. Some of the Circle refused to accept this view and left the Order, but were unable to hold an organization together in the face of widespread disbelief in the paradigm of purely materialistic evolution. The remaining members agreed to work toward a more planned version of biological origin and to maintain the physical well-being of the Masses, taking the name "Followers of the Physician".

Ousted: The Coming of the Syndicate

"No one can serve two masters; either he will hate one and love the other, or he will cling to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."
- **The Good News as told by Matthew**

With one exception, the Reconstruction conference refused to entirely dispose of any Convention due to the threat a "loose cannon" organization might cause. That exception was the High Guild, whose encouragement of the pursuit of material gain had caused them to be the only Convention into which the Disciples failed to make significant inroads. In general, the Disciples supported a regulated form of capitalism, but were offended by the purely materialistic view of the world the Guild espoused and by their connections to organized crime. Arguing that if the market were properly controlled the Guild's influence would collapse, the Disciples finally brought about the Convention's expulsion. Those few members who belonged to the Disciples joined the Church of Reason as the nucleus for the branch in charge of financial matters.

The Guild protested vehemently, but to no avail. Realizing they might well come under attack by the Dominion, they contacted the Council of Nine and asked for admission. But while a few members of the Traditions believed they would be a worthy addition, most argued that the Guild's worldview had no place among them and would only further undermine the position of the spiritualistic Traditions. Some of these also believed that the Reconstruction would leave the Dominion in a state of temporary confusion which could be used to bring about their downfall. With a vote of two to six, the Council rejected the Guild's application.

The Guild, in desperation, met to establish terms for their own reorganization. For several years, all other activity ceased while the leaders built up a new, dramatically centralized organization which gave them tight control over all branches of the Convention. Conversely, the new Syndicate intended to champion free trade as against government control, though in fact they planned to run the supposedly free market themselves.

As a final failsafe, the Syndicate entered a contract with certain spiritual powers to aid them in bringing about the destruction of their mutual enemies, especially the Dominion. Most of the Syndicate was well aware of the corrupt nature of these powers, labelled the Wyrm by their old foes the Garou; they planned, however, to double-cross the forces of Darkness long before there was any real danger posed to Earth. The capstone of this bargain was the Syndicate's agreement to fund the emerging business organization called Pentex; Pentex would supply the Syndicate with invaluable technological support, while the Syndicate aided Pentex in the outworking of its plan. Until the 1950's, the Syndicate operated alone among mages, in the shadows, working to destabilize Dominion operations from the grassroots; while the Dominion suspected their existence, they were never able to prove it. The Traditions, likewise, supposed the Guild long dead. In the meantime, the Syndicate grew ever more closely tied to their spiritual supporters, dealing more and more heavily in criminal practices such as the drug trade.

Decline and Fall

Tradition optimism about the Reconstruction proved ill-founded. The Dominion was indeed temporarily weakened by the confusion surrounding Reconstruction and the loss of a section of its membership, but soon thereafter the end of the division between Disciple and Conventionalist factions produced a resurgence. The last major push by the Traditions temporarily destabilized Europe's alliance system, bringing about the Great War, but immediately thereafter the Dominion brought about its old dream of a public League of Nations. The League of Nations, heavily supported by both Europe and the United States as an alternative to further wars, and backed by the Church of Reason, arbitrated the final settlement of damages brought about by the war and provided for the independent development of all former colonies where the native peoples still had a strong presence in the land. Of course, with the Dreamspeakers and Euthanatos greatly weakened, most of them opted for technological aid.

The erosion of traditional religions took its toll on all the Traditions, but none so much as the Dreamspeakers. Rapidly decreasing in numbers, the Spirit Tradition lost its nominal head to a Dominion attack in 1923, and no new Council member was appointed. Individual Dreamspeakers aided other Tradition mages less and less frequently, and finally the last known Dreamspeakers, led by the Zuni shamaness Flying Star, disappeared into the Umbra to seek out Gaia for aid in 1931. To date, they have not returned.

Meanwhile a second Tradition, the Cult of Ecstasy, was also in trouble. In a world increasingly supportive of order and antagonistic to transcendental experience, Ecstatic magick was gradually failing. Though numbers remained high almost to the very end in 1947, fewer and fewer Ecstatics possessed any real skill in an Art that grew ever more difficult. With the final collapse of the Cult, the number of Traditions dropped to six, ominous both in terms of raw power and in Hermetic numerology. By the end of the 1940's, the final defeat of the Traditions seemed very close indeed.

Nor were the Traditions alone in their decline. Despite the general support for Technocratic environmental measures, the shapeshifters were nearly as hard-hit by the hardening of the Gauntlet as the Dreamspeakers. Most of the Changing Breed retreated from a world that hardly seemed to need them any longer into the depths of the Umbra, leaving only a handful to carry on the fight against the Weaver. The Shroud, too, continued to thicken, while the increasing number of Spectres produced by a torrent of souls flooding Oblivion triggered massive paranoia among members of the Star Force. From their outset, the Disciples had agreed with Alexander Campbell that most demons were the souls of the damned; now, they believed, they had their proof, and site after site was sterilized of ghostly contamination, whether the occurrence truly involved Spectres or not. As for the Kithain, at the end of the Thirties the only Changelings still known to exist were a few Nockers and Boggans ensconced on tiny Freeholds in national park wildernesses. Though small resurgences occurred periodically, by 1960 the last of them were gone. The only supernatural beings to survive in large numbers were the Kindred, though the Masquerade grew ever more strict among the Camarilla and the Sabbat was finally exterminated by the Dominion in 1942. And among the Kindred, a strange disorder began to spread; the oldest active vampires began to find human blood too thin, and the younger that they needed to drink more often. The force of Unbelief had begun to take its toll.

The Age of Reason

"All the kingdoms of this world shall soon become the kingdoms of our Lord the King. He will hurl all the present potentates from their thrones. He will grind to powder the despotisms, civil and ecclesiastic; and, with the blast of his mouth, give them to the four winds of heaven. The antichristian power, whether it be called Papist, Mohammedan, Pagan, or Atheistic, will as certainly be destroyed, as Jesus reigns in heaven. No trace of them shall remain.
"...he will break them in pieces like a potter's vessel, and set up an order of society in which justice, inflexible justice, shall have uncontrolled dominion. Jesus will be universally acknowledged by all the race of living men, and all nations shall do him homage. This state of society will be the consummation of the Christian religion, in all its moral influences and tendencies upon mankind."
- ***The Christian System***, *Alexander Campbell*

By 1955, it was clear that the war for reality was over, and the Dominion had won. A few pockets of resistance remained, most notably Deseret, California Free State, and China, but the back of the Traditions had been broken. Deseret itself had slipped from the Chorus' grasp, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints no longer the official religion and the Choristers who had backed it scrabbling for ever-smaller scraps of power. Horizon's last remaining nodes were located in California Free State, and there Traditional magicks could still be used with some degree of safety, but with only six Traditions remaining little threat was foreseen. The most dangerous remaining threat was apparently the Wu Lung, who had made a few half-hearted overtures toward the Traditions, but whose spirit magicks were nearly useless outside their homeland.

The face of the world had been dramatically changed. The League of Nations, though still not as powerful as individual nations within their boundaries, dominated the international scene, brokering and negotiating peace; no war had broken out between major nations since the Great War of 1914 (world political maps, therefore, look roughly the same as they did at that time, except for the United States and neighbouring nations). Business had become dominated by freeform Associations, organizations similar to partnerships but without the disadvantage of having to be reorganized each time membership changed; each Association included all employees as members, with ownership/pay depending on the degree of work done (labour being more arduous, and thus higher on the pay scale than management) and governed by Boards of Directors elected by the whole company. The general health, education, and technological level of the global population was on the rise, and primitive bionics were beginning to appear for those whose problems could not be easily treated with pure medicine. Computers, though still fairly primitive, had begun to be widely connected with the Interconn, though there was no hint of the existence of a Digital Web like that of MC Earth. A permanent space station and moonbase had been built, and missions to Mars were underway.

Given the new situation, the Dominion began revising its approach. The last vestiges of the old Pogrom were ended, the Disciples feeling neither the desire nor the need to exterminate reality deviants directly. The Timetable was first stepped up, then totally reorganized. No longer having any significant magickal enemies to worry about, the Dominion could easily implement its own technological solution to nearly any problem. To illustrate: the call for reproductive freedom resulted not in abortion rights, but in the creation and widespread distribution of artificial womb and embryo-transplantation technology; in the eyes of the Disciples, the solution was perfect: no public outcry, no bloodshed, and a new technology tying the masses ever more closely. The year 2000 would be the beginning of a new era: The Millennium, conceived in postmillennial terms not as the personal rulership of Christ but as the consummation of the rule of his human representatives in preparation for His return at the end.

The Millennium, strictly speaking, was not anticipated to be a literal thousand years - merely a long period of time. During that period, the Dominion believed, it would be possible to solve all of humanity's problems with a combination of reason, technology, and moral indoctrination, totally free of opposition. All of Earth and the surrounding environs would be united, in action if not in a single government, and the Horizon pushed back possibly as far as the entire solar system. At the end of this period, Jesus would physically return to the cosmos and transform the entire universe into what He had constructed it to be originally. In essence, the Millennium constituted the Dominion's version of worldwide Ascension.

But all was not as it seemed...

The Power of the Seven

In the year 1952, the Council of the Traditions called an emergency meeting to discuss the crisis before them. Surely, they believed, there was some way to prevent the total collapse of the Traditions. A Hermetic proposal made in 1947, now gaining wide support, was that if a seventh Tradition could be found, the numerological significance of 7 could be the turning point, a chance to break the power of the Dominion at last. But the Wu Lung, the only real candidate, continued to dither, claiming they were not convinced the best option was not to disappear into their horizon realm K'un-L'un, with its well-protected nodes, and await a better time.

In the middle of the meeting, an uninvited delegate appeared. His name, he said, was Andrew Hopkins, and he represented a faction known as the Syndicate, descended from the High Guild. He claimed that his ability to appear in the Tradition stronghold was evidence of their precarious position, and offered his support. As proof of the Syndicate's power, he demonstrated their arcane technomagickal control over the vast Quintessence reserves represented by the world economy. All this, he said, could be theirs, if they were willing to retract their earlier refusal to accept the Guild as a Tradition and admit him as the Syndicate Primus to the Council.

The appearance of Hopkins threw the meeting into total confusion. At first the Council refused even to accept Hopkin's claims that the Syndicate was real, and the successor to the Guild. But as trust in his sincerity grew, the Batini Primus proposed that since the seat of Prime was filled, the materialistic Syndicate might take the long-vacant seat of Matter. The debate was furious but short, the outcome virtually predetermined. The Council was Seven, and little by little, the world began to change.

Brittle Foundations

The first crack in the Dominion's armour began to appear in 1963. Among the Followers of the Physician, division over the issue of the origin of life had long been buried in a mass of arguments and counterarguments. Now, at last, it began to come to a head: the Disciple and Conventionalist factions simply could not agree. And with that resurfaced argument, the cracks the Dominion had long papered over began to widen. Though the hard core of the Conventionalists was long gone, some partisans (primarily European) remained, and as the debate developed they began to harden their positions. Slowly, one individual disagreement after another began to spread the argument into the other Conventions. By 1970, even the Church of Reason, which had previously been almost totally stripped of Conventionalists, had gradually begun to divide.

Moreover, beginning in 1968, some unseen force began to sap the Dominion's supply of Quintessence. No nodes were openly sanitized, no ley lines destroyed; the Prime merely seemed to begin drying up. At first the most obvious solution seemed to be that the natural reserves of Earth had been overtapped, and the Dominion looked to the increasing number of fusion plants and to the solar system for solutions. But it soon became clear that these, too, seemed impoverished in some way. Evidence began to accumulate that an organization descended from the High Guild was responsible, and that it was tampering with the economy, but the Syndicate had so perfected the art of hiding that rooting them out was practically impossible.

Finally, in 1970, Tradition activity began to increase after long dormancy. The Traditions seemed to be benefitting from the lost Quintessence, but no clear connection between them and the Syndicate could be established. Nonetheless, public confidence in the Dominion paradigm remained high, and the Dominion continued to plan for the Millennium. There had been setbacks before, they reasoned, and this too would pass. Very cautiously, reluctantly, and quietly, they began reinstating the Pogrom, believing that Tradition numbers must still be low and that the uprising would soon come to an end.

Since then, however, the conflict seems to have reached a standoff. Tradition attacks have maintained a fairly steady frequency, and the Quintessence drain has continued at much the same rate. In 1955, the Kingdom of Stygia apparently fell to Oblivion, leaving only a Tempest full of spectres beating against the Shadowlands and a handful of terrified wraiths; whether the other Dark Kingdoms still exist is unknown. The Kithain apparently have ceased to exist, though presumably Arcadia is still present somewhere and Fae could conceivably return if not for Banality. The remaining shapeshifters seem to ignore the willworkers entirely, concentrating on whatever tasks they feel are important. The most problematic of the other supernaturals continue to be the Kindred; as the need for blood increases, warfare among them seems to be increasing as well, and if not for the total disbelief in their existence the Masquerade would certainly have begun to fail. The Dominion is thus forced to devote increasing numbers of operatives to containing their activities.

Discovery

The majority of Virtuals are discovered by the Continuum. Dominion reversed the sequence; in 1975, a Star Force strike pilot with a Temporal Avatar accidentally landed his vessel in Nexus following a battle with Nephandi forces who had breached the barrier from the Outer Darkness. The Continuum, of course, took immediate measures to render the apparent Technocracy agent harmless and brought him in for questioning.

The existence of Dominion was something of a surprise to the Continuum, who had come to regard most variants on the Technocracy as enemies. It was not until 1980 that the Continuum began actively seeking Dominion members to work for its organization, after careful study of the situation. It is now readily apparent that the Dominion is not the dangerously corrupt Technocracy that exists on most worlds, and that the Traditions are incapable of holding off the Darkness if they defeat the Dominion during its present weakness. Moreover, the Continuum has uncovered evidence that the Darkness is actively backing the Traditions by some means, though it has not ascertained how. Therefore the Continuum has been forced into the uncomfortable position of defending the Virtual counterpart of a dangerous enemy in its native Corridor. Often, Continuum forces have provided covert backup to Dominion operations against the Darkness. Recently (in 1993), Continuum agents helped to carry out a major operation against the Traditions themselves, resulting in the collapse of Doissestep; however, these agents' actions have come up for review due to uncertainties regarding the barrabi they reported detecting in the ancient Chantry.

The state of the World State

Mortal status: On Dominion, Sleepers have it fairly easy. Technology levels are somewhat higher than those on Main Corridor, though Dominion still has not begun the major technological outlays planned for the Millennium. With most of the supernaturals gone, Dominion is fairly safe; rarely, there are "slasher" attacks in the country by the remaining skinchangers or in the cities by the increasingly thirsty vampires, the occasional "poltergeist" outbreak involving Spectres, and sometimes magickal attacks on the part of the Traditions or the Wu Lung. Moreover, most Sleepers are still able to rely on the belief system of Christianity for moral support, and crime and poverty levels are low due to this and to efficient law enforcement and government-aided charities. In many ways, Dominion really is a paradise compared to Main Corridor (and even somewhat better than our own Earth in some respects).

Still, concerns have grown about the increasing spiritual vacuum in those areas where the Dominion rules unchallenged. The Gauntlet is typically obscenely high, and few Sleepers ever touch the Periphery. There is little to despair about, precisely, and many go through life without ever wondering what is missing, but some thinkers have begun asking whether the meaning of life is slipping away.

In China, and in California Free State, and to a much lesser extent in Deseret, the ruling magickal factions' paradigms are much less restricted. These nations are relatively backward in mainstream technology (slightly behind MC Earth), but psychic powers and hedge magic are much more common than even on MC Earth, and are accepted parts of everyday life. Life is sometimes more difficult, but few residents would trade their lives there for the supposedly meaningless life in other nations.

Paradigm Effects: The Dominion paradigm is a more flexible vision of technomancy than the Technocracy's. As noted, the mages who would have been the Etherites and the Virtual Adepts remained within the Dominion; though some of their wilder notions have been suppressed, others have gained acceptance. Furthermore, because the Traditions have not been effective in restraining the Dominion, the boundaries of coincidence reach further even where technology has not advanced beyond that in MC Earth, as the Sleepers accept many Dominion theories as possible "as soon as they work the bugs out". Finally, though, it should be noted that quantum mechanics and relativity are shaped in a totally different manner on Dominion; quantum effects (in the sense of particle/wave duality) that MC Traditions have exploited are totally restricted to microscopic levels, and special relativity, for all practical purposes, does not exist (Einstein died an obscure mathematician in Germany; the Star Force uses an abstruse theory known as spatial reconfiguration for Correspondence travel). The ultimate theoretical foundations are the same, but mathematical limitations have been worked out that forbid the theories from having any practical effect, and the Sleepers know it. Chaos theory, on the other hand, is alive and well, but is called "Interaction theory" and is not at all associated with randomness in the Masses' minds.

A second expanding factor on the Dominion paradigm is a limited belief in the effectiveness of faith in God. On the one hand, attempts to walk on water, heal by the laying-on of hands, or still storms miraculously will generally fail disastrously, because according to the dominant Churches of Christ (Disciples) these powers were specially granted by God for a limited time, and are not given today. On the other hand though, angels are accepted so long as they don't manifest in white robes and the like in full view (much as modern accounts on our own Earth are usually tales of a mysterious stranger who somehow left without being seen), and the casting out of demons by believers is fully paradigmatic to the point that anyone with a modicum of faith (not True Faith) can do it [just like the Spirit 4 effect "Exorcism", as if it were Sleeper technology]. Most dramatically, calling on God can produce results like those of Entropy 2, sometimes even for Sleepers with faith, without the Domino Effect. With prayer, a believer can (sometimes) escape a barrage of bullets, leap from a third-floor window to land unharmed in a bush, and jump into a bus just pulling away without the least danger of Paradox, because so long as the person is regarded as a faithful Christian it will all be chalked up to divine intervention. That same believer could not, however, speak in another language he does not know or heal even a cold, because "miracles" are not believed in (the definition of "miracle" in the Churches of Christ (Disciples) is strikingly similar to what constitutes vulgar magick, except for the absence of the Domino Effect as a factor. This definition is oddly consistent across all known virtuals where the Restoration Movement took place, even where the Order of Reason or a successor faction is not dominant).

In the relatively small areas where the Dominion is not in primary control, the local paradigm possesses a significant overlay of the ruling faction. In Deseret, where the Celestial Chorus still holds some power, miracles have been known to happen; in China, the Dragon Wizards still hold their corner of the world open to the spirit realms; and in California Free State, the paradigm is very much like that of Horizon, although effects are not as difficult for Dominion members and not as easy for Traditionalists:

Magickal Effect Difficulty Table

	Coincidental	Vulgar w/out witnesses	Vulgar w/witnesses
Dominion ruled areas	HS+1	HS+3	HS+4
Deseret:	HS+3	HS+3	HS+5
China:	HS+2	HS+3	HS+4
California Free State (CFS):	HS+2	HS+3	HS+3

(HS = Highest Sphere rating)

On True Faith: It should be pretty clear by now: nothing prevents Dominion technomancers from having True Faith. A significant portion of them do, even at moderately high levels, especially within the Church of Reason. However, it should be just as clear that that True Faith is somewhat different from that on MC Earth.

Because the nature of Churches of Christ (Disciples) belief is such that it postulates the non-occurrence of miracles, the range of effects even the Beatific can manage is fairly limited. Spontaneous recovery and the like do happen, so a healing, for instance, is not out of the question, but it must seem to occur by natural processes. It is possible to ward off supernatural beings with Faith, but all such effects are at -1, and the Faith in question is, ironically, a form of concentrated Unbelief in the being's existence.

Finally, the Churches of Christ (Disciples) do not believe in the concept of holy ground as explained in WW Sourcebooks. Holy ground is present only where God is specially present *and* while He is present. Therefore, there is no special power at, for instance, Mount Sinai. However, God is considered to be specially present where his church (considered as a body of believers) is present. A Disciple can thus be considered to be on holy ground when in the presence of (11-True Faith rating) other Disciples or more.

On Other Realms: The Dominion's view of the Deep Umbra is quite similar to that of the Continuum's, but looked at from a religious viewpoint. Members of the Dominion refer to it as "the Outer Darkness" and believe that it is the remainder of the nothingness that existed before creation. They also believe, however, that it is the place where lost souls go after death to await the Judgement, there to exist totally devoid of body or even, some say, mind - merely an undetectable point of consciousness/will. Because the soul inherently continues to will to be embodied and to act, but cannot do so, its helpless state is one of constant frustration and thus torment. The Dominion paradigm explicitly states that these lost souls are undetectable to all technology. In theory, all saved souls are immediately reclaimed by God; though they remain bodiless in the classical sense, they are given a sort of spirit form and permitted to exist in a sort of paradise state. However, many Star Force members fear that individuals who are lost to the Outer Darkness are trapped there until the Judgement, and that the same can happen in the Umbral Hells, including Malfeas. Most importantly, the Dominion expects that on Judgement Day, God will totally defeat the Outer Darkness and fill it with creation - precisely the opposite attitude from the Continuum! However, either the aimed-for Millennium or the terrifying prospect of total defeat for humanity must happen before Judgement Day will occur; no one looks forward to the latter even though it does eventually give way to Heaven for the saved. Many Continuum agents consider Dominion members to be irresponsibly optimistic on this point, though in practical terms the Dominion is heavily protected against invasion.

       The Digital Web does not exist on Dominion, despite the presence of the Interconn. The reason is not technological but conceptual: the Interconn is not thought of as a "place" where people can meet, but merely as a means of rapid communication between computers. It is possible to enter the concept-space within a single computer via Forces and Mind, just as one can enter a dream in the Maya, and the Interconn can be used to teleport the mind to another computer. (InterConnTrol focuses more on Forces and Mind than on Correspondence, though the latter is fairly widespread among them.) However, once one is beyond the original computer, the mind has effectively become an astral traveller and is subject to all the dangers of astral travel as well as any dangers that might be found within the computer, such as intrusion countermeasures, loss of electrical power, and InterConnTrol Censorscans (the Batini Web of Faith, and Mount Qaf, still exist but most of the Qutbs are in hiding, and locating either is difficult in the extreme).

       The Virtual Shade Realm of Time connected to Dominion is not used as a base by any mage faction; when it was first discovered by the Dominion, it was inhabited by an Oracle of Time who irritably drove the Star Force team out and sealed the realm. As such, Dominion inhabitants do not have access to the Labyrinth of Time (the Star Force pilot that accidentally landed in Nexus arrived there directly from the Deep Umbra).

       As noted, the Low Umbra is entirely unknown to the Dominion; the Continuum has been trying to remedy that lack but with little success, as the Dominion's theological views are already hardened.

On the Millennium: It is important to remember that the Millennium expected by the Dominion is not the same as the Millennium anticipated by some fundamentalists after the Rapture and Tribulation. Most modern fundamentalists hold to a view called premillennialism - that Christ will return at the beginning of the Millennium to set up his thousand-year kingdom. A second view (held by many Catholics and by our Earth's modern churches of Christ) is amillennialism, the view that the church is the kingdom of Christ as fully as it will ever be expressed on Earth, and that the Millennium is a figurative description of the church age. The view held on Dominion is postmillennialism, which states that the kingdom will be established on Earth by the church's efforts and will be ruled from Heaven by Christ (generally, by Biblical principle and not literally by Christ); the Dominion holds that the thousand years is not necessarily exact and literal, though other postmillennial groups may disagree. After the Millennium is over, Christ will return for Judgement Day [more detailed information about millennial views can be had from a variety of sources, on the internet and elsewhere].

       The Dominion expects to bring the Millennium by both moral and technological progress. Although the arbitrary date of January 1st, 2000, has been established as the planned beginning of the Millennium, it is generally accepted that in the view of God the Millennium may actually begin earlier or later - indeed, some suspect it may already have begun. In any case, the Dominion expects Judgement Day to occur even if the Millennium should never come, but this will only happen after humanity has set in motion its own destruction; naturally, such a possibility seems remote at present.

(All Biblical quotes are taken from *The Living Oracles*, 1990 edition - the official version of the Dominion; the first edition was edited by Campbell himself).

OTHER VIRTUALS

While not as fully developed as the 'Southron Republic' and 'Dominion' Virtuals, the selection of 'Virtual outlines' presented below can still serve as adventure seeds or sources of inspiration for Continuum Chronicles. The identification codes at the top of each description are explained fully in the Virtual Classification Scheme.

DarkSphere: An alternate Vampire setting where the Undead rule the world.
Fungal Wind: A world of plague and pestilence, reeling from a global biological war.
Lucifer: Life never formed on Earth.
Neverland: All higher lifeforms mysteriously disappeared from Earth in 1993...
Wotan :   A strange world ruled by the Norse god Odin.

DarkSphere: 1-5S-2CI-1-I-5S-E-M-1-DRK5
by DJ Babb

First came the warnings of "Varney the Vampire" and then "Dracula", but it wasn't until the year 1908 that the world came to realize the truth of vampiric existence when the Damned Legion made its first appearance in Germany. With the powers that the vampires' held they overwhelmed every enemy they encountered, adding fallen soldiers to their ranks as they swept across Europe. The First World War began as America, Russia, England, and African forces all united to contain and overwhelm the undead of Europe. Then the Second Wave began...

In 1945 the most powerful heads of the Lasombra, including the Antediluvian, united to create the Darksphere, a twilight cloak across the globe that let in a twisted form of light so that plants could still grow, while keeping the world dark enough to protect the undead from the rays of the sun. The plan would have succeeded completely if it hadn't been for the Tremere, who feared that amount of power belonging to any other clan. The Tremere interrupted the Lasombra in the middle of the Darksphere ritual, causing the Darksphere to suffer from fluctuations, some temporary and some permanent. Despite the lack of complete success with the Darksphere, the vampires initiated the Third (and final) Wave. From hidden lairs across the world, the vampires attacked the resisting nations. Some, such as England, were spared the cover of the Darksphere and were able to hold out better than others. Nearly a century later the vampires have conquered the world, and only scattered bands of freedom fighters and nations spared the touch of the Darksphere can hope to resist.

The Clans

Currently the various clans of vampires view each other in a number of different ways, all under the leadership of the Lasombra-led Camarilla against the Tremere-supported human forces of the Sabbat.

Camarilla

The Assamites were reluctant supporters of the Lasombra in their bid for dominance, eliminating VIPs among both human and Kindred. However, the Assamites still hold grudges against many among the Kindred for their part in the Tremere curse made during the dark ages.

The Brujah relish the conflict, leading huge armies of ghouls into battle against the free humans for the glory of combat. In fact, many Brujah allow humans to survive freely so as to provide challenging opponents to deal with, especially if said humans interfere with the other clans.

The Gangrel tend to follow one of two camps. The Warriors have joined the Camarilla as fighters and leaders, competing with the Brujah as warlords for either the Camarilla or the Sabbat. The Isolated seek only peaceful existence by themselves in the wilds, away from all other factions.

The Lasombra, after claiming leadership of the Camarilla during the Inquisition, led the vampires strongly and well. With the awakening of Lasombra himself in the late 1890's, the clan was acknowledged as the one true leader by all. Now, the Lasombra work to strengthen the Darksphere and continue rule of the others. And aid Lasombra in his other projects.

The Toreador tend to work as the "shepherds" of the Camarilla's herds of humanity. The Toreador are known for their experiments in flavouring of human vitae, as well as grotesque arts they make of human flesh and bone. They are perhaps the most despised of all the Camarilla clans, after the Lasombra.

The Ventrue have been relegated to a position of overseer of society, taking the roles of bureaucrats among the Camarilla. The Ventrue objected at first, but the power of the Lasombra kept their voices silent. But with Ventrue himself leaving torpor this may soon change.

The Sabbat

The Tremere are the most "human friendly" of all the clans. The Tremere have even gone so far as to teach the arts of hedge magic to those who will accept them. They lead the Sabbat not only to ensure their own survival, but also to give them the power they so greatly crave. With the awakening of Tremere, the clan as a whole is filled with a feeling of invincibility.

The Followers of Set have joined with the Tremere due to repeated attempts by the Camarilla to destroy them. With the protection of the Sabbat, the Setites have been able to increase their numbers greatly. Recent rumours also indicate that Set himself has been moved to Rome for reasons currently unknown.

The Ravnos have joined the Sabbat, seeing the birth of the Darksphere and the complete devastation of the world as a horrendous abomination. The Ravnos are also the only other clan to regularly deal with the Malkavians, who see them as worthy for survival.

The Others

The Giovanni were known to have existed at a time long ago in the past, but all members of the clan seem to have been destroyed two hundred years ago. Some rumour that a few, highly paranoid, individuals still exist in absolute fear for their unlives.

The Malkavians have united under the banner of a human claiming to be none other than Malkav. Currently, he directs his followers to overwhelm both factions in order to free humanity again. Many disagree with him, but this living mortal undeniably holds power unknown to even the Antediluvians.

The Nosferatu, like the Giovanni in the past, are being hunted to extinction. The Methuselahs and a few Elders are all that remains, but they have banded together in the islands of New Zealand and are preparing for the worst. No life is allowed to come near the islands save the herds of native pigs.

The Tzimisce are unknown to natives of this world. Other bloodlines are known to exist, but their power and numbers are limited at best.

Also of note is that Garou, Mages, Wraiths, and Faeries are unknown to exist save only as legends. Even the Antediluvians don't know the truths behind these legends.

Humans

Humanity consists of either food stock kept in breeding kennels by the Camarilla, or free humans siding with the vampires of the Sabbat. The Camarilla discourages the creation of ghouls, instead preferring the creation of blood bound kindred. The Sabbat however encourages the creation of ghouls, with humans using the Vinculum as a means to keep themselves free of the Blood Bond. But even Sabbat humans refuse to become vampires themselves except in the greatest of need. Whereas the Camarilla cares nothing for the humans they deal with, the Sabbat knows that their continued survival depends on their unity with mortals. As such, Sabbat vampires commonly only feed from animals, blood bags, or willing individuals. In return, free humans often give blood donations to keep their allies fed. While neither side enjoys the situation, both prefer this over enslavement and death.

The DarkSphere

With the creation of the Darksphere, the entire environment was altered. While plants can still grow, they tend to suffer more mutations than before, growing stunted and twisted, or enlarged and tumourous. Crops are still safe for consumption, but the plant life looks greatly changed from what we would recognize.

The structure of the Darksphere is flawed, allowing pure sunlight to creak through from time to time in various places. Some areas like England and the central United States are completely free of the Darksphere, but these areas are very rare. Despite the freedom the Darksphere gives vampires, it also has a cost; vampires have become vulnerable to the light of the stars at night as if it were an overcast day. Walking unprotected at night will burn the flesh of the Kindred! Currently England, the Bread Belt of America, Australia, and Rome are the only strongholds left of free humanity. Of these four, only the first two are free from the grasp of the Darksphere. Australians tend to be paranoid even by free human standards and it's the only thing keeping them alive. The power of faith shines in scattered areas, but nowhere does it shine stronger than in Rome, stronghold of the last free humans to not ally themselves with the Sabbat, the Inquisition.

Fungal Wind: 2-1S-1-2P-X-1S-W-VZ-1-YF73
by DJ Babb

The Cold War was a time period of weapons stockpiling, in preparation for a war no one really wanted. But despite the power of the atomic bomb, on this Virtual the weapon of choice wasn't nuclear, it was biological. Both NATO and the Warsaw Pact nations spared no costs to develop the ultimate weapons and cures, leading to highly advanced understandings of bio-chemistry, genetic engineering, and other "monster-creation" sciences.

During the reign of Kennedy and Khrushchev came the Cuban Missile Crisis, but with a decidedly different ending. Kennedy, receiving erroneous reports of a "germ-missile" launch from the USSR towards America ordered the launching of the US germ-missiles. Soon, all sides were launching all matter of horrendous microbes and organisms in what became known as the Fungal Wind (so named due to the heavy amount of Fungal Wind released in Cuba by the US during the first launch). When many of these creations were exposed to each other, the low background count left from the few atomic blasts, and the tailor-made antibodies created for protection, the germs mutated into even more bizarre life. Decades passed as human civilization disintegrated, forcing mankind to revert to bands of nomadic hunter-gatherers. Over 40% of the population of the planet was wiped out by the accumulated diseases; the death tolls would have been much higher if it weren't for the limited effectiveness of advanced antibiotics and medications. In the present day, hundreds of viruses still roam across the globe, most notable being the Fungal Wind.

The Fungal Wind is a horrible disease that takes root in a person's respiratory system where it incubates without any sign of symptoms. After a period of two weeks, the virus spreads to the host's nervous system and becomes air-transmittable. At this point, victims begin to experience slight headaches that grow in intensity and duration. After another two to three weeks the virus completely destroys the victim's higher reasoning powers, turning him into little more than an animalistic predator. During this stage the victim's eyes turn to a dark black, as the virus attacks the optic nerves. Finally, after another three weeks the victim dies, his nervous system completely eaten away.

Another problem often encountered is that of the Impregnator, also known as the 'Maggot Momma'. Genetically engineered from several predatory insects, such as wasps and mosquitoes, Impregnators are a race of hermaphroditic flying insects that are constantly breeding. The Impregnator injects its eggs, via its stinger, into any warm blooded mammals it can find. Once injected the eggs soon hatch and begin to eat the insides of their host, careful to avoid the vital organs of its host in a way similar to some wasp larvae. As the larvae grow, they begin to burrow their way to the surface of their host, where they "hatch" fully grown. Entire swarms of Impregnators have proven deadly to both humans and farm animals, decimating thousands of both.

Even the waters of Fungal Wind are a threat due to hundreds of new life forms, including the HEPs. Hallucinogenically Engineered Protozoa are microscopic algae that grows in fresh water. The HEPs are ingested by animals and people, causing the ingestor to experience a series of audio and visual hallucinations of a frightening nature, a "bad trip" that can last for days depending on the amount of HEPs a person has consumed. In addition, the HEPs have been designed with an additional feature; while boiling will kill the microbes, their hallucinogenic chemistry will still remain effective for days. Only the collection of steam for condensation back to liquid will be free of the HEPs. Hundreds of other life forms exist, along with hundreds of minor mutations among each species. So far, these three are the only life forms researched among the Continuum explorers of Fungal Wind. Other life forms, some not so microscopic, have eradicated those who have tried to study them.

Lucifer: 1-7-0-0-X-0B-U-M-6-LCF6
by Constantine Thomas

Lucifer is a Level 1 Virtual in which life never evolved on Earth. The planet is a Hothouse world, similar to present-day Venus but somewhat more clement. Its thick insulating steam and carbon dioxide atmosphere keeps surface temperatures at a generally uniform 120°C (~ 250°F), which means there is no free-standing water on the surface. Extensive volcanic and seismic activity pumps more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Of course, the lack of life means that there is no Oxygen content in the air at all. The planet's rotational axis is tipped at an angle of 40 degrees, and a day is a mere 8 hours in length! As a result, winds and storms on Lucifer can be extremely powerful. Interestingly enough, Lucifer has no Moon, leading many Continuum scientists to believe that the formation of the Moon played a critical role in the formation of life on Earth.

In this hostile environment however lies one of the most powerful Nodes in the Metaverse. The Node itself is a 10' diameter globe known as the *Orb of Lucifer*, hovering a few feet above the ground on the planet's major continent. It is constructed of a black material that defies all analysis (even Magickal). It rotates around its axis, tipped at 40 degrees, once every 8 hours - exactly like the planet it is located on. And its power is immense - no ley lines or other Nodes exist on Lucifer; it is almost as if all the planet's Quintessence is channelled to and concentrated at the Orb.

The Orb's origin is unknown - its connection (if any) with the present state of Lucifer is also unknown, as is its purpose. Whether its builders (if it was even 'built' at all - some believe it is a natural representation of the planet beneath) will return to claim it one day is a matter that most Continuum Agents would rather not think about...

The Orb is heavily guarded by the Continuum's finest agents, and it is presently located in a sealed Guard Station that has been built around it. Humans require spacesuits or environmental protection to survive outside the Station. The Orb and Station has already been the focus of several concerted attacks by agents of the Darkness, all of which have been successfully repulsed so far.

Neverland: 1U-7X-0-1-E-0B-U-1-1-NVR0

by Constantine Thomas

'Neverland' is the name given to one of the most unusual Level 1 Virtuals known to the Continuum. Neverland is exactly identical to Earth until January 18th 1993. On this day, every higher life form on the planet (i.e. all human and animal life) suddenly vanished without a trace.

The only clue to this Vanishing is the continual signal emitted from the Aricebo Radio Dish in Puerto Rico, aimed exactly towards the Galactic centre. Further research by the Continuum through records at Neverland Aricebo and that Virtual's US Government archives has so far yielded no official documentation or explanation for the transmission, and no target for the signal has been described. However, the signal was activated on the 18th January 1993. Interestingly enough, there is no record of such a transmission in the Aricebo records on MC Earth at that time...

In addition to the radio signal it was transmitting, Aricebo was also found to be beaming out Quintessence towards its target point. Much to the Continuum's surprise and shock, shutting off the radio transmitter did not also stop the beam of Quintessence towards the Galactic Centre.

The Continuum has managed to at least tap some of the flow, but with this came the discovery that Neverland itself is actually unstable - its Quintessence is actually *disappearing* from the Virtual through the beam! The entire Virtual appears to be losing cohesion because of the Quintessence drain, and its Order is gradually decreasing as a result. The Continuum is trying to prevent this loss before Neverland becomes a Level 2 (or worse) Virtual, or completely loses cohesion - to this end it is also trying to decode the contents of the original Aricebo radio signal in the hopes that this might provide clues as to the original purpose of the transmission.

Another curiosity is that Aricebo itself is the only Node in this Virtual. Aricebo is the nexus of all of the Ley Lines on Neverland - this ley line network is almost certainly artificial, and all the evidence hints at some secret magickal experiment (probably set up by the Technocracy) that went horribly wrong...

Wotan: 1-2S-2CNU-1-E-5B-E-1-3-WOT1
by DJ Babb

Wotan is so named due to the presence of a unique individual known as Wotan (called Odin from here on) in the Norse mythos. While almost identical to the Main Corridor, Wotan is different in a few significant ways due to the centuries long presence of Odin. The races of Kindred, Garou, Mages, Faeries, and Wraiths are completely unknown. Odin claims to have slain them all, singlehandedly, millennia ago. Also of note is the strong presence of the Church of Odin as the largest religion of Wotan. Other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism still exist, but most monotheistic beliefs were turned to the worship of Odin long ago.

Continuum explorers have long debated over the history of this Virtual, but have been able to determine a few facts. They have been able to prove that Odin is a being of power equalling that of an Incarna easily, but possessed of human emotions and mentality. Secondly, Odin desires nothing more than to lord over his Virtual, despite possessing a Temporal Avatar that theoretically allows him to leave and travel the Labyrinth. As such, the Continuum openly interacts with him and exchanges non-sensitive information. The presence of Odin dates back at least 1700 years, and some believe this could be extended another 500. The worship of Odin is done partially out of fear and partially from faith by the masses. The Continuum has also noted that some (Wotan's equivalency of Christians and Moslems) view Odin as a great deceiver, trying to lure them away from the worship of the "true Lord". They point to the meddling of Odin in human affairs as the work of a great evil being, but the Continuum disregards these statements as the words of envious religious minorities. Odin finds the entire situation quite humorous. The existence of other Norse gods in Wotan is denied by Odin, but they may exist elsewhere. The Continuum dreads the concept of God-like beings hopping around the multiverse, using Nexus as a launch pad. As if this weren't enough, many of Odin's children (of whom there are hundreds) possess limited versions of Odin's vast powers.

Dyson: 1-1S-4M-3F-E-4-U-1-3-DYS0

by David Barrett

In late 1999, the Continuum was continuing its exploration of Nexus, the shard realm of time. Much of the realm was still unexplored, as the discovery of virtuals and their exploration was generally regarded as more important work.

Late that year, a small expedition to a remote region of Nexus made a strange discovery: carved into a rock face was a doorway, or at least a representation of one. It was circular - about ten feet in diameter - with magickal symbols engraved around it. Following the instructions described by the symbols, a simple Correspondence rote was performed by the mages that apparently created a gateway to another place appear within the doorway.

The team contacted Central Office and received permission to proceed. They stepped through the strange gateway and found themselves in front of a similar rock face with an almost identical gateway carved into it, but where they emerged was beyond their wildest imaginings. They stood with the sun directly above them on the edge of a vast grass plain that stretched away from them until it eventually curved upwards and vanished beneath a layer of cloud. They were standing on the inside of a sphere that was as wide as the Earth's orbit, with the sun at its centre. It was something they had only read about in science fiction; it was a Dyson Sphere.

They returned, and more teams were quickly despatched to make a proper study of the sphere. The results were impressive: The Sphere was solid, and was kept stable by magickal technologies operating on a vast scale. 30% of the Sphere's inner surface - the north and south polar regions - was bare metal, and was covered with huge domes and structures (the radius of these domes was calculated be equal to one earth radius). 40% of the remaining surface area was covered by earth-scale continents, and the remaining 30% was covered by water – only a tiny fraction of the land contained flora and fauna, but this was still much more surface area than was present on Earth. Many human settlements were observed (one was only 50 km away from the gateway), but these were spread over a tiny fraction of the Sphere's surface area. The technology level of the inhabitants seemed far in advance of our own, with flying vehicles travelling between the settlements and also to and from the domed areas at the poles.

Closer to the sun, a huge hollow hemisphere slowly rotated around the star to create a night and day cycle which occurred every 24 hours. The Dyson sphere itself rotated around the sun once every 365 days. The atmosphere around the inside of the sphere extended to about the same height as the Earth's, and the gravity on the inner surface of the Sphere was approximately same as Earth's.

Two weeks into the exploratory expedition, first contact was made by the Sphere's inhabitants. They were human, and landed near the expedition site in what appeared to be a short range anti-gravity vehicle. They initially spoke to the team in a language similar to English - however, both sides soon discovered that the French language actually had more elements in common and worked better for communication. The locals were friendly and offered to take the expedition team back to their city to assist with their research. They seemed quite impressed that the Continuum Agents had managed to get the portal working.

What the Agents discovered about the history of the Sphere was even more astonishing:

Extracts taken from "*A Brief History of the Nephandus War and Creation of the Sphere*" by Unknown
As compiled by Continuum Expedition #57A3 to Virtual DYS0. Annotations made by the expedition
are Bold. The full document (some 1000 pages) has been copied and entered into the Continuum
Archives available upon request.

1st December 999

The Ritual is almost complete now - we have been told there are only 3 or 4 days left. We are afraid. Most of us are still young, with the elders being charged with keeping the Nephandi and their agents in check. My power has been spent on the Ritual, so I have been charged with documenting our history for posterity. Who knows, perhaps some mages may yet find the Portal and come here. I wish we could leave them the Ritual - no doubt they too would find it useful, however only The One understands it fully, and he is too busy performing it to transcribe it. Forgive me; I ramble, and time is short, I will start at the beginning.

Well we remember April 7th 500 as the day that they appeared from nowhere: Nephandi and other even more unspeakable abominations. It seemed as if they had appeared simultaneously all over the world (if what we postulate now is correct, some of these beings may have existed beyond our timestream) doing incredible damage as they arrived. We fought them wherever we found them, although many of us had died in the initial onslaught.

(this passage goes on to describe the initial battles in great depth, but the rest has been omitted from this summary but as most of it is not irrelevant to our studies)

2nd December 999

On 29 July 550 the Mage of the time came together. The battle was being lost, slowly but surely, and still the mages themselves came to blows with each other over their own troubles. Over the next month the Pact Of Rome was compiled, ratified and signed by every mage (full details of the Pact are found in Appendix A). In this Pact, the mages agreed that the threat from the Nephandi was greater than their own differences, and that they would work together to fight the Nephandi, forgetting all past disputes, and building a multi-paradigm world.

(From this point on, the technology level of the virtual advanced at a staggering rate as the mages crash-developed new technologies in an effort to stay ahead of the Nephandi. Surprisingly few were lost to Paradox at this time - we hypothesise that this was due to the new multi-paradigm environment. By 850 AD we estimate they had achieved Current Main Corridor Tech levels (MC 2000AD) – however, this is difficult to judge due to the wide divergence of technology spawned by the multi-paradigm. For example, biological, mechanical, electronic, and ritualistic technology existed side-by-side. We ourselves have witnessed our hosts starting small fires with a gesture, performing minor telepathy with the aid of a electronic headband or bio-gel skullcap, and other fairly simple magicks, all without paradox. The only exception is spirit magick, which from our experiences (and as described later) is now completely impossible. We have skipped much of the document at this point as it is largely irrelevant to the overall outcome, describing the battles, heroism, and sacrifices of the intervening years)

3rd December 999

May 1st 900 is now acknowledged as the turning point in the war. The One appeared before the Magus Council and told them that he could end the war and save mankind forever. His plans were rejected by the council as being too drastic, but the younger mages supported him and believed (correctly) that time for our world was running out. By this time, there were more younger mages than ever, as a long life was a luxury that we could no longer afford. The Council could only stand by helplessly as they were sidetracked by the younger mages who started the Ritual that very night. A combination of all the spheres, and all styles of Magick were required, but The One maintained control throughout.

The ritual had three stages, getting progressively shorter and more demanding. The first part was the creation of the Sphere itself - an enormous feat involving nearly all the mages of the world (the more powerful mages kept the Nephandi at bay), that still took almost 95 years to complete. We could hardly believe our eyes as it slowly came into being. Words could not describe the Sphere's size adequately - it was incredible. It then took us best part of the next year to transfer all life on Earth to it.

(There is much detail at this point regarding the transfer of plants, animals and humans to the Sphere, which again is largely irrelevant to our current studies. It is worth noting however that all "supernatural" creatures resident on Earth were not transferred, and indeed were prevented from transferring across. The Dyson Sphere was populated solely by human Sleepers, Mages, and the Earth's "natural" flora and fauna only)

4th December 999

The second stage - the one we found hardest to grasp - was the transferral of Earth's nodes to the sphere, which took another two years to complete. Unfortunately we all find it impossible to describe in words, I have never seen a piece of Magick so spectacular and so tragic as the Earth was drained of its magick and left as a barely habitable husk. Perhaps it is for the best that the ritual will be lost to us and you.

By the start of 999, the Earth itself was almost uninhabitable, and stripped of most of its life. As we have been preparing for the final part of the ritual over the last year, we have been fighting a running battle against the Nephandi and the majority of the vampires in order to prevent them fleeing to the sphere (our only remaining allies were the last of the shapeshifters who had heroically given their lives to ensure the safe transfer of Earth's nodes, and a handful of vampires).

The time has now come to complete the Ritual - I have been some four days in writing this discourse, and the others are now ready. The rest of this document must be brief: the final part of the ritual begins tonight, and it will end with the complete destruction of the Earth and all the remaining life on her, and also with the final sundering from the spirit realms. In this way we will finally and permanently save humanity from the Nephandi and the Darkness. One last transport leaves for the sphere this afternoon - a small rocket designed to carry nothing but this text. I must go now, and prepare for its launch.

The Continuum were stunned, but tests held up the claims – there had been no sign of any attacks or incursions by the Darkness since the Sphere's creation. Its inhabitants lived happy, unrestricted lives since there was no lack of resources, and semi-sentient robots seemed to do most of the work with humans only being involved to stave off boredom. Life seemed idyllic.

The nature of "The One" is of great interest to the Continuum, but he apparently vanished when the Ritual was completed. The Continuum believe that he may have been an Oracle, or possibly a very powerful Nomad, and that he created the "backdoor" to the Sphere that was found in the rock face in Nexus.

Currently the Continuum is negotiating with the Sphere Council (a highly informal, networked gathering of about 100,000 of the Sphere's inhabitants which makes decisions which affect the whole of the Sphere) over the possibility of settling refugees from other Virtuals in the Sphere, since there is ample space for billions of people there.

Book 4:
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 moulded 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 Metaphysicks 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 metaphysics. 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 indescribable. 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 (i.e. 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 quandaries 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 primeval 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 indefinable 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

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 millennia) 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 affected. While frozen, the Virtual is effectively defenceless 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 shrivelled, 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 defences. 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 travelling 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 by-product 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 Defences operative? Get them online! How long do we have until 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 funnelled 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 marvelled 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 unnameable 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.

Book 5: Appendices

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Presented below is a glossary of the specialised terms used by the Continuum.

A

Accepter: A Sleeper.

B

Branch (of a Labyrinth): A Labyrinth can be pictured as an inverted tree, with the root Order 0 reality at its top. When a Virtual forms, it branches off from its parent reality, and may itself branch off into more (lower Order) Virtuals. This traces out a 'family tree' for a set of Virtuals, which is referred to as a particular branch of the Labyrinth.

Branch Corridor: A spirit realm that lies within the Near Umbra around the physical reality of a Corridor. Horizon Realms are examples of Branch Corridors. Not to be confused with a (Labyrinth) Branch.

Burnout: The damage done to Mages from a Lower Order Reality who attempt to use Quintessence from a Higher Order Reality and cannot contain the energies released. It is similar in effect to physical Paradox Backlash.

C

Copy: A duplicate of an Original individual found in an Indistinguishable. Originals can never meet Copies, as they always do exactly what the Original does.

Continuity, The Law of: An inviolate metaphysickal Law that states that a reality can never detect that it has become a Virtual.

Corridor: A Corridor is any Order 0 Reality and all its Branches. There are three known Corridors - Main Corridor (our own), Arcadia, and The Periphery - but others certainly exist (for example, the Shard Realms are also Corridors in their own right). Each Corridor has its own Labyrinth associated with it, completely separate from those of other Corridors.

In Mage terms, a Corridor is a Realm floating in the Deep Umbra. A Corridor encompasses its physical reality, its Near Umbra, and all the Realms within up to and including its Horizon - Labyrinths are referred to separately. Note that Paradox Realms are **not** Corridors in the Continuum's paradigm - see 'Singularity' below.

D

The Darkness: The Deep Umbra. The Darkness always seeks to destroy Corridors wherever possible, since they are aberrations in its natural state of non-existence.

Note that The Darkness itself is not nothingness or Oblivion - even this is something (indeed, the Oblivion of the Wraiths and the Wyrm of the Garou are totally unrelated to the Darkness). Rather, it is the complete absence of all reality.

The Darkness Manifest: The entities created and/or used by the Darkness to invade Corridors and their Labyrinths. 'Manifestations' are bizarre non-Pattern entities that are very effective at destroying reality, while 'Agents of Darkness' are those inhabitants of Virtuals who actively (for whatever reason) aid the Darkness.

Doppleganger: An alternate version of an individual in a Virtual. Dopplegangers are often quite different to their Original, as they have grown up in totally different environments. Dopplegangers are only indigenous to Order 1, 2, or 3 realities.

E

Energy: Quintessence.

Energy Rating: The Order of a Virtual. This also indicates the strength of the Quintessence within the Virtual - as the Order of a Virtual increases, its Quintessence becomes less potent compared to that found in Main Corridor.

Event Horizon: Paradox Realm. If an Observation is extremely flawed (i.e. on a severe magickal Botch), a Naked Singularity may be created - this immediately results in the formation of an Event Horizon around the offending Observer, whose purpose is to protect the surrounding Universe from the Naked Singularity within. Effectively, reality within the Event Horizon becomes a Paradox Realm - a bubble of reality pinched off from the rest of the Corridor in which the offending Mage can be safely contained. Thus, Paradox Realms (to the Continuum) are not located in the Deep Umbra.

F

Flow: A Flow is created when an Original synchronises with his Copies and all move across the Labyrinth via a continuum of Indistinguishables. Not to be confused with '**the** Flow', which is the Prime energy that makes everything real in the Labyrinth.

The Flow: Prime energy. Not to be confused with 'Flow' in the context of Flows and Vortices, **The** Flow is a force that pushes everything forward in Time through the Corridor and also make everything within Real. The Flow acts on everything within a Corridor and Labyrinth.

G

Gateway: A doorway to and from Nexus specifically from Main Corridor. Only two stable Gateways are known to exist. A Gateway is also used to refer to equivalent doorways in other Corridors.

Generation: Another word for 'Order'. A 1st Order reality could therefore also be referred to as a 1st Generation reality. This usage derives from the fact that Virtuals are derived from Main Corridor, and could therefore be considered as its 'offspring' of a certain Generation.

I

Indistinguishable: An alternate reality that is VERY similar to the one it is derived from. These often form a continuum of realities (of non-integer Order) that lie between Virtuals of different (Integer) Order on the same branch of a Labyrinth.

L

Labyrinth: The network of Virtuals and Indistinguishables associated with a Corridor.

The Labyrinth of Time: The network of Virtuals and Indistinguishables associated specifically with Main Corridor.

The Layers Of Time: The Labyrinth, imagined graphically. The Layers of Time can be thought of as an inverted tree with infinite branches, with Main Corridor at its top. Each branch ends with a reality, and each Layer of the tree corresponds to an Order. Each reality in turn branches into millions of lower order realities, down to Order 3. This is illustrated in the diagram below:
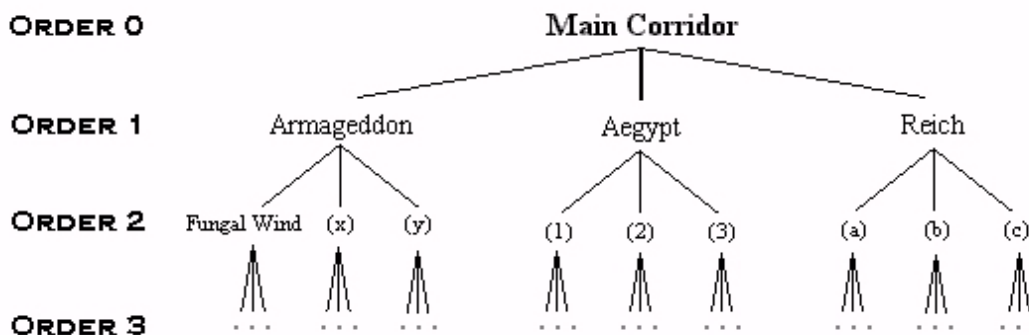
Level: Another word for 'Order'. A 2nd Order reality could therefore also be referred to as a Level 2 reality. This usage derives from the fact all realities of the same Order can be considered as being at the same 'Level' of the Layers of Time.

M

Main Corridor (MC): Our own Corridor, including everything up to the Horizon.

MC Earth: The physical reality of Main Corridor.

Magickal Avatar/Magickally Awakened: Magickally Awakened creatures can be found throughout the Labyrinth - this includes every Supernatural creature, or any creature capable of using True Magick. Vampires, shapeshifters, Mages, Wraiths, Changelings, Mummies, Nomads, and Immortals are all Magickally Awakened creatures. This definition is identical to that presented for Awakened beings in the Mage Rulebook.

Metaverse: The sum total of all reality. The Metaverse comprises every Corridor (and Labyrinth) in existence, and the Darkness itself.

N

Nexus: Main Corridor's Shade Realm Of Time, containing the Base Chantry of the Continuum - Central Office. Nexus is an immense realm, believed to contain Portals to every Virtual in the Labyrinth of Time.

Nomad: A race of beings who have the natural ability to move across the Labyrinth. Nomads are unusual in that each one is completely Unique in the Labyrinth - they have no Copies. Nomads also have several unique abilities that allow them to manipulate and navigate the Labyrinth, but they are always ultimately forced to move on through every reality they encounter. Dark Nomads also exist who willingly serve the Darkness - these are very dangerous individuals.

O

Observer: A Mage.

Observation: The Continuum term for Magick.

Order: The Order of a Virtual effectively indicates its 'distance' from Main Corridor in the Labyrinth of Time. A Corridor is an Order 0 reality - any Virtuals derived directly from Main Corridor are 1st Order realities. Virtuals derived from 1st Order realities themselves are 2nd Order realities, and so on.
This usage derives from the fact that differences between realities can be noticed to various orders of magnitude - for example, Armageddon is a 1st Order Virtual in which the Cuban Missile Crisis erupted into nuclear war. Fungal Wind is a 2nd Order Virtual derived from Armageddon, in which the Cuban Missile Crisis resulted in biological warfare. To the 0th Order, nuclear war because of Cuba was averted in Main Corridor. In Armageddon however, a nuclear war did result, so the difference is 1st Order. In Fungal Wind, a war occurred (1st Order) *and* it was carried out using biological weapons instead of nuclear ones (2nd Order).

As the Order of a Virtual increases in magnitude, it becomes 'less potent' and so more vulnerable to the invasion by the Darkness. The weakest known Virtuals are Order 3, while Indistinguishables exist around these Virtuals down to Order 3.5 - any weaker realities cannot survive dissolution by the Darkness. The Order of a reality is also referred to as its 'Generation' or 'Level' (q.v.).

Original: An individual from an Order 0 reality (i.e. a Corridor) from which all his Copies and Dopplegangers are derived.

P

Periphery: The Continuum's term for the Near Umbra (not to be confused with 'The Periphery', which is the specific name given to another Corridor in the Metaverse).

The Perpetual War: The ongoing defensive war against the intrusions of the Nephandi. The Perpetual War can only ultimately be won by the Darkness, culminating in the destruction of Main Corridor and all realities associated with it - the Darkness itself can never be destroyed, as its destruction would also result in the destruction of the Corridors which lie within it anyway. The purpose of the Perpetual War is therefore to delay the destruction of Main Corridor for as long as possible.

Physical Reality: The physical (non-spirit) part of a reality. Alternatively used to describe the rest of a reality that is not its Shade Realm of Time.

Portal: A doorway between realities in the Labyrinth of Time.

R

Reality: A reality is the general term used to indicate a Corridor, Virtual, or Indistinguishable.

S

Singularity: Paradox. Magickal disturbances caused by flawed Observations (i.e. Botched magicks) result in the creation of Singularities within the Corridor, which can manifest in several ways.

T

Temporal Avatar: Ordinarily, the inhabitants of the Virtuals are completely incapable of travelling through and even perceiving any realities of Higher Order than their own and on different branches of the Labyrinth. However, some Virtual Inhabitants possess Temporal Avatars, which allow them to access any Virtual as if they were from Main Corridor. Note that having a Temporal Avatar does not necessarily mean that the inhabitant can cast magick - he must be Magickally Awakened as well in order to do this. Similarly, a Magickally Awakened Virtual Inhabitant does not necessarily have a Temporal Avatar as well. *All* **creatures from Main Corridor (even Sleepers) are automatically Temporally Awakened.**

V

Virtual: An alternate reality derived from a Corridor. The sum total of all the Virtuals around a Corridor is known as a Labyrinth.

Vortex: A Vortex is the region around an established Flow in which slivers of Darkness and alternate realities dragged through by the Flow collide with the reality around them. The result is a chaotic mixture of realities that can drag others in and fling them across the Labyrinth. The plural form is 'Vortices'.

<u>APPENDIX B</u>

<u>NOMADS</u>

<u>by</u>

<u>DJ Babb</u>

INTRUSION

"My beloved, I write this intrusion into your life as you once wished of me and I once promised to do. While you never asked me to do such a thing, you did. You have never known me, save in dreams, and will never hear from, or of, me again.

Do you remember our walk along the gulf, on the night of the storm? I was sitting on the beach, watching the oncoming darkness of a mighty storm as a helicopter flew in the distance. Its red lights flashed in a pulsating beat in unison with the crashing of the waves below. The wind wrapped across my body, pressing my clothes against my body. Further along the beach a large group held a party. I choose to ignore them. A few more seconds and I would have been gone from this world forever.

But then I saw you. You were wearing a black, one-piece swimsuit, but what caught my attention even more was your hair. Radiant darkness flowed from your head and down your back. I was astounded at the beauty of your hair, and it pulled me to gaze upon the rest of you. All thoughts of leaving were gone; I felt I must speak to you.

You left the party and your friends, choosing to walk with me instead. I've long wondered if it was love on your part, or merely the workings of destiny. But either way, being with you for even a few brief moments gave me a refuge from my longing and loneliness.

We spent many years together, and we were happy. We were married, purchased a house along the gulf, and could think of nothing more to be had. I had almost forgotten my entire past before the attack. You need not know what happened, but know that they will never forget what they did. Never. Not even death shall release them; I've seen to that.

In those years together I often made you feel isolated from me. You wondered why, but I could never tell you. You made me promise to tell you someday, and so I will now tell you who I am. I am a Nomad.

I have lived for centuries, maybe millennia, exploring countless worlds. Some worlds strangely similar to the one you knew and others so different you'd never know it to be the same planet. I've walked across a Greek civilisation destroyed and enslaved by Egyptian armies. I've seen countless worlds where Hitler had won World War II, and as many where he lost. I have seen worlds where mankind lived in peace and harmony with all things. I have seen worlds where mankind lived in caves and was hunted by shapeshifting monsters without remorse.

I have seen all these things and an infinite number more. For I am a Nomad.

I know of others like me. Other Nomads who also explore the countless worlds that exist. Where we come from, why we exist, what our purpose is are all unknown to us. We simply are.

We are driven by our emotions I suppose. We hunger to explore, to discover, to feel. In the vastness of the Labyrinth we have found more, seen more, and experienced more than I can ever hope to describe. What would you do if you found a world where not a single person judged you, where you were accepted as a friend and could feel the love from an entire world of people? The beauty of the world combined with the knowing that I must leave it, eventually mixed in my head and drove me to tears.

We can never stay in any one place, any one time for long. Something inside our souls won't let us. Friends, homes, loved ones, all must be given up eventually. I knew this the moment I saw you, and accepted the price.

Perhaps it's this isolating nature of our souls that gives us our abilities, perhaps it's something else. It was only with the aid of my abilities that you never suspected anything too unusual within me. And yet, despite all my power, I could never hope to save you.

We call these abilities the Ways, and they take many forms in order to aid us in our travels. The Way of Forms helps us to hide and survive in the various places we travel. The Way of Time helps us navigate and explore the streams of Time itself. The Way of Space allows us to ignore the limits of spatial perceptions and frees us from them.

The Way of the Voice is a secret I am forbidden to speak of, and I apologise that I can't tell you everything as you wished. The Way of the Labyrinth allows us to travel in the Labyrinth itself, of which I will speak more of below. The Way of Copies is a dangerous, almost vile power, that we use to gain strength from the infinite number of individuals in existence.

The Way of the Dreams allows us to enter worlds created by the act of sleep. Finally, the greatest of our Ways is the Way of the Nomad; it too is not allowed to speak of. Our ways make us powerful, but power is of little concern to us; we seek grander things than power.

The Nomads are many, perhaps infinite, in number. I have met thousands of others like me, scattered randomly within the Labyrinth. Many of us don't even know who we are, but eventually we find out. Others of our kind discover us, or us them, and the lore of out nature is passed. And we begin our wanderings within the Labyrinth.

But what is this Labyrinth I continually speak of? Why does it form a more important part of me than you ever could, isolating me from all? The Labyrinth of Time is everywhere. It is everywhen. It is everything. And it is my destiny to endlessly roam within it.

Imagine your reality and everything it contains. Now, what if a single event had occurred differently. You would have a reality for every variation of that event, and a reality for every variation that occurred in each separate reality. Eventually you form an... upside down tree, as a Dee Hota liked to call it, with the top of the tree being the original, true reality, and all of its "branches" along the trunk mere divergent timelines. The original reality is known as a Main Corridor, and the branches are called Virtuals.

Within these Virtuals exist all kinds of changes. In one virtual the only difference is a single leaf fell one second earlier than it did in another. A second virtual may never have had any life in it. The possibilities are limitless, as are the number of Virtuals from the Main Corridor and the number of Virtuals from Virtuals and Virtuals from Virtuals from Virtuals from Main Corridor. Maybe it is the ability to conceive of infinity that isolates Nomads so.

But, if you can accept these thoughts, then try another. Just as there are an infinite number of realities, so too do you exist in them. Across an infinite number of worlds you never existed. Across another stretch of infinity you did exist, another infinity of you existing, another infinity where you rule all. Infinite Virtuals populated with an infinite number of duplicates, or Copies, of you.

But I am a Nomad. I have no copies. Our love existed only once, in a small pinpoint within eternity. Normally, what one Copy does, an infinite number do as well while another infinity do otherwise. A Nomad affects and exists in only one Virtual, unable to create or alter Virtuals in any form. Are you confused? I am sorry, but I know of no way to give you my understanding of the Labyrinth. But I digress....

From the moment I entered your reality to the moment I left, your reality created no Virtuals. No alternate timelines were created by any means, due to my very presence. As I said before, our love existed only once. Why my presence, and the presence of other Nomads should hold such great, uncontrollable power is beyond my knowledge and the knowledge of all others I've asked.

If you feel like you can handle that thought, than try another. There are an infinite number of Main Corridors, each a reflection of another. In short, the very concept of Main Corridors is useless, as only Virtuals truly exist. Wizards in the Nexus of the Gaia-sphere tried to persuade me otherwise, but I feel that they merely cannot accept the idea of being next to insignificant. They refuse to be nothing.

The Nexus wizards also told me of a Darkness, a force that eats weak Virtuals, too improbable to exist. I laugh at them, for I have seen realities that were so utterly improbable as to be comical. Their fear of the Darkness is nothing more than an attempt to escape their fears of meaninglessness in a multiverse abandoned by its creator.

But again I find myself avoiding the question: who am I? I am a Nomad. I am such a rare find that I may be considered unique, and yet the infinite number of Virtuals is believed to each birth a Nomad, meaning we exist in uncountable numbers. I choose to ignore such thoughts as wishful thinking by my peers.

I am a Nomad. I could find you a million times over, knowing your fondest wishes, your hidden dreams. But you are no more to me, and now I let you go.

<u>BACKGROUND</u>

The Nomads are an unknown force in the Labyrinth of Time. They travel from one Virtual to another, considering the concept of "Main Corridors" as little more than another kind of Virtual.

The Nomads are wanderers, cast out into the vastness of eternity and the emptiness of infinity. The Nomads have the power to make great changes for good or ill, but seldom seek to do any more than explore and experience. The reason for the Nomads' hedonistic disregard of everything is, simply put, the Nomads changes have no real effect.

When a Nomad enters a Virtual, the entire reality seals itself away from all other realities. For the entire duration of the Nomad's stay, all actions and events are limited to the single Virtual in which they occur. No other Virtuals can be created from the Nomad's (or anyone else's) actions. Others, with the power to travel between Virtuals, can enter or leave a Virtual with a Nomad in it, but even their actions will not form a Virtual.

The one exception to this is the Ways of a Nomad. The Ways (described below) were discovered by Nomads as a means of manipulating the Labyrinth. The methods they use are kept secret, and believed to be tied into the unique nature of the Nomads themselves. What is known is that whenever a Way affects multiple Virtuals, it's effects also can NOT create Virtuals in the same way that a Nomad's presence disallows the creation of Virtuals.

But what is a Nomad? Nomads come in all shapes, genders, races, species, etc. The only requirements to be a Nomad is that the being must be sentient, and have only one Copy (which the Nomads call their self). They hunger, they bleed, they grow ill just as others of their species do, and a Nomad continues to age. Nomads can have children, a fact that many see as another part of their curse due to their uncontrollable wanderlust.

Nomads are born to normal families, but those who investigate will find that the Nomad-to-be has no copies in adjacent Virtuals. Also, as they grow nearer and nearer to becoming adults, their Ways begin to manifest, acting as a beacon to Nomads from throughout the Labyrinth. This is a period of time known as the Calling, and as the young Nomad-to-be grows closer to awareness of himself, fully fledged Nomads will speed throughout the Labyrinth to aid the young one as he becomes aware of what he truly is.

As the Nomad comes to grip with his new nature, he begins to try to alter his home. He soon abandons this notion, after realising how limited his efforts are in influencing the Labyrinth at large, and when he first feels the pulling of his soul to leave and go elsewhere. Some cynics and corrupted Nomads say that these aren't feelings from outside "pulling" them out, but that it is the Virtual they are in itself "pushing" them out.

Nomads refer to these feelings as the Siren. The Siren causes them to feel alienated in their current home, and a great longing for anything new. Should the Nomad try to stay, he can hold the Siren at bay only to have it return stronger than before. Many Nomads who try to stay and resist the Siren fall into deep depressions, even leading to suicide in some cases.

The Siren varies from Nomad to Nomad; in some it is an occasional hindrance, appearing once a century at most, in it others it is an insatiable force that demands the Nomad to constantly be on the move. Those Nomads who have it the worst are the ones who's Siren acts up every decade or so; after giving the Nomad a chance to settle and develop a circle of friends, the Siren forces him to leave them all forever. As if that wasn't bad enough, the Siren also affects the Nomad in everything; its call forces him to give up and abandon everything and everyone sooner or later.

To offset the Siren, Nomads have developed the Muse. The Muse is typically a desire, cause or belief that inspires the Nomad to keep on living, keep trying to find a permanent happiness, in the face of the futility of his existence. A part of themselves that the Siren can never take away, and gives them the heart to continue.

What many Nomads like to think, is that the Labyrinth in which they are forced to wander forever, is nothing more than a dangerous park to stroll through and look at the scenery. They are wrong. The Nomads are hunted by the Darkness, an always threatening force that seeks to rend all of the Labyrinth into nothingness. The Nomads are hunted because of all the beings in Labyrinth, only they have the power to stop the creation of new Virtuals.

Many Nomads have sided with the Darkness, just to escape the call of the Siren and put themselves (and the other Nomads, who they feel are cursed as they) to rest. Radicals claim that the Darkness is their sire, and the destruction of the Labyrinth is their true reason to exist. They use their Ways to punch holes within the Labyrinth in Virtuals to allow the Darkness in, while they stay safe in other Virtuals, far removed from those that are destroyed.

This has led to somewhat of a schism between the Nomads, and so many have chosen to join the Darkness or else fight it. While some do so out of a sense of duty to all of creation, others do join in the hopes of finding a purpose in existence. Or freedom from it.

CHARACTER CREATION

Step 1 - Character Concept: At first glance, one may ask "what's the point of this? All characters are wanderers who can't hold on to anything." And that's true, but a player should ask themselves "all right, he's a wanderer. What else can I make him into?" What motivates the character to keep on living when he knows that everything he ever has or wants will be taken away? Also, a player should select a Nature and Demeanour for his character at this point (or else before ending Character Creation).

Each Nomad has a Muse, a driving part of his personality that keeps him going. Often times the Muse may seem trivial or pointless, but to the Nomads it is the only way they know to find happiness. For one Nomad it may be nothing more than a desire for sex. Another may live to fight evil, another to convert as many as she can to Christianity, and a fourth may live only to wander through all the woods in existence.

While at times the Muse may seem like an obsession, and it has some elements in common, it is not. It is merely a tool the Nomad uses to keep himself sane, and it can be almost anything not too specific.

Another, important question to ask, "how does the Nomad feel about the Darkness?" Does he believe in it? Does he have friends in opposing camps? Does he want to join a side? Does he want to stay neutral? And so forth.

Step 2 - Choosing Attributes: Just like in Mage: the Ascension. (7/5/3)

Step 3 - Choosing Abilities: Again, same as in Mage (13/9/7), but with some new Abilities added (see below).

Step 4 - Special powers: All Nomads get to pick a total of 5 dots in the Ways, and 10 points to spend on Background traits.

Step 5 - Finishing Touches: All Nomads start with 5 dots of Willpower and 5 dots of Muse. Also, all Nomads start with one dot of Siren.

NEW ABILITIES

Knowledges - Neither of these Knowledges are available to beginning characters. Also, Virtual Lore (but NOT Virtual Cosmology) is possessed by not only Nomads, but also Continuum members, individuals with Virtual Avatars, and other creatures with the ability to travel between Virtuals.

Virtual Cosmology: This Knowledge covers a Virtual traveller's knowledge of specific Virtuals. It allows him to recognize where one Virtual diverges from a second, how strong the Virtual is, and if it is already under the "Virtual Stop" effect of another Nomad.

However, this Knowledge is limited to Nomads ONLY, as it relies in part on their ability to control the Ways. It also requires the Nomad to spend at least some time doing research to determine any specific causes for variation. The Nomad would have to research how the Nazis came to victory in a Nazi dominated world, for example.

*	You can tell if the Virtual is based on a variation of World War 2 where the Nazis won.
**	You can determine exactly how this version of a Nazi world, differs from other versions of Nazi worlds.
***	You can determine if this Virtual was formed by a minor difference, such as the birth of a single, non-important individual.
****	You can tell if the Virtual was formed by a single leaf falling differently.
*****	You can tell how a Virtual differs and was formed almost immediately upon arrival.

Possessed by: Nomads ONLY
Specialities: Virtuals formed by World War 2, different amounts of magickal energy, different levels of technology, different religions.

Virtual Lore: This Knowledge deals with the understanding and recognizing of Virtuals. It also covers the Darkness, the Main Corridors, the various versions of the Continuum, and various other factors of the Labyrinth. However, since the Labyrinth of Time is so vast and diverse, only the most general information is ever available.

*	You've heard about the Labyrinth.
**	You've travelled through the Labyrinth a bit.
***	The secrets of the Darkness and the Continuum are still kept from you, but you know a lot.
****	You understand the mechanics behind the creation of Portals, Gateways, and even Virtuals.
*****	You could unravel an entire Main Corridor with your knowledge.

Possessed by: Nomads, Continuum members, beings with Virtual Avatars.
Specialities: Darkness, Continuum, Gates, Portals, Copies.

BACKGROUNDS FOR NOMADS

Backgrounds: Nomads may only take the following Backgrounds - Adapt, Arcane, Beacon, Destiny, Dream, Mentor.

The following are two new Backgrounds available for Nomads only.

Beacon: The Nomad may call out to other Nomads scattered across the Labyrinth, in times of need. Most Nomads will answer, but the Nomad who utters a Beacon better have a good reason. Also, Dark Nomads will hear the Beacon as well and may try to disrupt the actions of the Nomad who uttered the Beacon to begin with. Also, from time to time the character may hear a Beacon (whether he goes or not, may be noticed and remembered by other Nomads though).

*	Plea - 2 Nomads show up within a week.
**	Call - 4 Nomads arrive in 5 days.
***	Beckoning - 6 Nomads arrive in 3 days.
****	Summons - 8 Nomads arrive in 1 day.
*****	Grand Unison - 2 Nomads arrive immediately, with another 8 arriving the next day.

Adapt: The Nomad understands the culture and society of those he encounters, and is able to instantly adapt himself to better interact with them. For every dot in Adapt the Nomad has, he adds an additional die to all Social interactions, and (by rolling Intelligence + Adapt) may intuitively determine various facets of the culture he is in.

*	Fits in.
**	Well adjusted.
***	Seasoned traveller.
****	Culturally well-learned.
*****	Master of Cultures.

THE WAYS

Way of the Copies: Many Nomads consider this to be at best a necessary evil, at worst they see it as a horrible crime. The Way of Copies allows the Nomad to consume an individual sentient in one Virtual, as well as Copies of the target in nearby Virtuals. By consuming the essence of these individuals, the Nomad grows in power for a short while, feeling invigorated and revitalised. The act of draining can become quite addictive to Nomads, and many who seek to further Darkness are quite skilled in the Way of Copies.

This Way is often used by Dark Nomads, Nomads who follow the Darkness, as proof of the destructive origins and purpose of them and their brethren. When given the impersonal behaviour of Nomads, combined with their detached emotions towards killing hundreds of Copies in one action, many Nomads must admit a bit of truth in this belief.

What's truly frightening, is that many kind and compassionate Nomads see no problem in using this Way. They feel that since an infinite number of Copies will continue to thrive even after the Nomad has killed hundreds of the same individual, that they do no harm. And perhaps, they are right.

[System: For ANY use of this power, the Nomad must first slay a person. The Nomad makes any kind of skin to skin contact with a sentient creature, and rolls 7 dice of damage. The target may soak the damage and try to break free of the contact, but the Nomad continues to cause damage as long as the contact is maintained. Once the target is dead, the Nomad may activate any of the following powers below, but for each level of power used, 100 Copies of the slain individual will suddenly die for one reason or another.]

*	**Heal Self**: The Nomad may completely restore all wound levels, by successfully killing a target. This will also cure a Nomad of any illness, regenerate lost limbs, and any other repair the Nomad needs as well as returning him.
**	**Strengthen Self**: The Nomad may add 2 dots to any single physical attribute of his choice. The addition will last for 24 hours before fading away. Also, Strengthen self can be used only once per 24 hours, but it may be used in conjunction with the powers listed below.
***	**Invigorate Self**: As Strengthen Self above, but the bonus is given to two attributes instead of one. However, a separate killing must be used. A murder to use Strengthen Self can NOT be used to also power Invigorate Self.
****	**Grand Drain**: As Strengthen Self above, but the bonus is given to three attributes instead of one. Also, as with Invigorate Self above, to activate Grand Drain requires a killing of its own.
*****	**Reach Others**: The Nomad can, instead of using any of the above spheres on himself, transfer the stolen energy to another.

Way of Dreams: No place is safe from the wanderings of the Nomads, and dreams are as accessible as any other place. However, before the Nomad can begin to effect the dreams of others, he must fulfil two conditions. First, the Nomad must have seen the individual in person, at least once; no contact is needed, just simply being able to see the target in person, from afar will work (television, photographs, etc. will NOT work). Second, both the Nomad and the target must be asleep at the same time.

[System: Each level of this Way has its own mechanics.]

*	**Enter Dreams**: The Nomad and the target both roll their Willpower, with a difficulty of 6. If the Nomad rolls more successes, he enters the dream, if the subject rolls more successes, the Nomad cannot enter for the duration of the target's sleep. However, once the Nomad enters the dream, he cannot take control, and cannot use any of his other Ways, nor can he alter the dream. He is just along for the ride, so to speak.
**	**Use Other Ways**: The Nomad can use any of his other Ways in the dream environment of another. No roll is needed to activate this power, but the other Ways must still be "powered-up" as usual.
***	**Merge Dreams**: At this level, the Nomad may add or remove elements from the dream. The Nomad rolls his Willpower, with a difficulty assigned by the Storyteller. Creating a hat in a hat store would be a difficulty of 2, with only 1 success needed. Removing a castle and everything in it would be a difficulty of 8 with five successes needed.
****	**Control Dream**: At this level, the Nomad may completely alter the dream in ANY way he desires. The Nomad rolls his Willpower, with a difficulty assigned by the Storyteller. Causing everyone to turn into monsters that attack the dreamer (but not the Nomad) would be a difficulty of 9, with four successes needed.
*****	**Free Dreams**: The greatest power of this Way, Free Dreams allows the Nomad to let dream creations loose into the world. Once again, the Nomad rolls his Willpower, with a difficulty assigned by the Storyteller. To unleash a few dozen, mindless zombies from a dream would be a difficulty of 10, with five successes needed. All dream creations evaporate into nothingness once the Nomad, or the affected Dreamer awake however, and ALL creations can be assumed to take 1 level of damage before disintegrating but mobile dreams can defend themselves (Attributes and Abilities as assigned by the ST). Also, the Nomad can NOT control the creations and neither can the dreamer from which they were pulled.

Way of Forms: The Nomad with this ability can change the structure of himself and others. However, all changes made by a Nomad are permanent until another force (plastic surgeon, Life magicks, etc.) undoes the changes. Many Nomads combine the use of this Way with the Way of Copies and the Way of the Nomad to kill a person and take his place in society, making them the ultimate in assassins (in one Virtual, a Nomad was found to have replaced the president of the United States in just this manner).

[System: The Nomad rolls just his score in the Way of Forms for all uses of this power. In order to make any change, the Nomad must roll his Way against a difficulty based on the difference between his old form and his new. Going from a fat, short guy to a tall, attractive woman would be a difficulty of 9, for instance. An important note, Nomads can NOT add or remove mass from the "source object" they change, and must consider that into their changes.

Also, the Nomad can NOT use this to turn non-living into living objects, but he CAN use it to turn living objects into non-living objects (but the target will be killed by the change). Turning a living target into another living creature will NOT kill the target, unless the change would be fatal (turning a man into a guppy while in a desert, for example).]

*	**Alter Appearance**: The Nomad may alter his physical appearance in any manner he chooses, but he must contain these alterations to within his species. He cannot turn from a human into a lizard-man, for instance.
**	**Alter Self**: The Nomad may alter his physical functions in any way he desires. He may give himself wings, gills, claws, etc. However, the Nomad can NOT remove the need to eat, breath or sleep and is still vulnerable to damage. Some Darkness-supporting Nomads have tried to use this power to survive a Virtual's destruction. They have never been heard of since.
***	**Alter Minor Items**: The Nomad may alter up to (successes x 100 pounds) of inorganic material. The Nomad can make these changes very complex, turning boulders into televisions for instance. However, a device created like that will only be functional if the Nomad understands the workings of every piece (which often leads to this Way being used in conjunction with the Way of the Nomad).
****	**Alter Major Items**: Identical to Alter Minor Items above, but now the Nomad may alter (successes x 1000 pounds) of matter. Stories are told of Nomads using this Way to change temples into atomic bombs, and rockets into sand.
*****	**Alter Others**: The Nomad can now change other living beings into any form he desires, as stated above. Some suspect that a Nomad may have been the basis for legends of the Medusa, but others merely scoff at the idea.

Way of the Labyrinth: The Way of the Labyrinth is the trademark of Nomads. In fact, many scholars of the Nomads view all Nomads as having this power, a belief that is far from true. In fact, many Nomads are stuck to only one Virtual, making their Siren grow all the stronger. Many Nomads, unable to leave the Virtual they are currently in and escape the Siren, go mad or commit suicide.

[System: All uses of this Way are based on a roll equal to the number of dots that the Nomad has in the Way of the Labyrinth.]

*	**Sense Energy**: The Nomad can sense the relative power of a Virtual's quintessence. He can also use this to sense Gateways, beings with Virtual Avatars and other Nomads that are within his line of sight. The difficulty for this roll is a 6, with only one success needed, and the character must actively be looking in order to roll.
**	**Follow Copies**: The Nomad can locate the Copy of any individual he has ever seen in person, while in another Virtual. Difficulty is set by the ST. A wife or child would be easy (difficulty of 4), while a nameless face on a bus would be harder (difficulty of 9). This Way functions much as a compass does, giving the general direction but no clues as to distance or barriers.
***	**Enter Virtual**: A bit of a misnomer, this Way allows the Nomad to not only enter a Virtual, but to also enter alternate dimensions. However, the Nomad can ONLY use this power on directly connected realities. What this means is that a Nomad can NOT go straight from a utopian Virtual to a virtual where Nazism and hatred rule, but must go through dozens (if not hundreds) of Virtuals in between. The difficulty is 6, usually, and for every success the Nomad may transport 500 pounds (himself, others, or other items).
****	**Seal Gate**: The Nomad may seal any gate he can touch, by rolling against a difficulty of 8 and scoring two successes. Note that the Nomad can use this Way to seal ANY kind of cross-dimensional gateway, and not just Gateways to other Virtuals.
*****	**Create Gate**: The Nomad can create a permanent gate to ANY alternate reality he has visited. In order to do so, the Nomad must make an extended roll against a difficulty of 10, with a variable number of successes needed. If the connected realities are similar, only five successes are needed. If they are greatly different then the number of successes needed raises. It is believed that a failed (or successful, depending on your view) attempt to use this Way results in destruction of both realities by the Darkness.

Way of the Nomad: One of the Greatest powers among Nomads, this Way is a jealously guarded secret among all. The Nomad, by not having any Copies of his own, is able to touch ALL Copies in existence for a brief moment. The process gives enormous insight into ALL manners of knowledge, but it also risks the destruction of the Nomad; the unity is so powerful, that the mind of the Nomad may become unhinged by the experience.

While this Way does grant any kind of knowledge the Nomad desires, it can only answer a single specific question at a time. Also, while the answer is useful to the Nomad, it does not give the power needed to act out the answer. For example, if a Nomad asked "how do I stop this man from bleeding," the answer would not involve Life magicks, as Nomads do not have the ability to use Life.

[System: For every dot in the Way of the Nomads the character has, he may roll one dice. He may roll less than his total if he prefers, but he can NOT spend Willpower on this roll. The difficulty is always a 10, no matter how trivial the information desired seems, but only 1 success is ever needed. Should the character fail the roll, no information is gained and nothing else happens. A botch means the character's mind is damaged and the Nomad loses one dot from a Mental Attribute of his choice. While the Attribute can be increased as normal, if any of the character's Attributes reach 0, the Nomad is permanently brain dead. Any information gained lasts until the Nomad uses this Way again, and then (once the Way is used again) for as long as the PLAYER can remember the information.

The character may ask a question on ANY topic, but the question has to be specific and applicable to one target. If players try to abuse this power, ST creativity is encouraged ("you may gain total power by becoming a god.", "You become a god by attaining total power" sort of answers). If a player is trying to use this power as a downloading of Ability, for every success scored the character can apply one additional dot to ANY single Ability of his choice. But just remember, the person using this Way is just as likely to lose his mind as gain any wisdom.]

Way of Space: Nomads have an almost intuitive understanding of three-dimensional space, as well as the four - and five-dimensional space of the Labyrinth. Advanced masters of this Way have even developed uses that border on the creation of Copies. Many Nomads view this Way as the ultimate in freedom, ignoring all other Ways almost entirely. Other Nomads view this as an extension of the knowledge granted by the Way of the Nomads.

[System: All uses of this Way are based on a roll equal to the number of dots that the Nomad has in the Way of Space.]

*	**Internal Map**: The Nomad can, by beating a difficulty of 6, always know where he is in regards to areas he has previously been to or seen maps of, and plot distances to know locations. Also, the Nomad can determine his compass directions. This works even if the Nomad was knocked unconscious and dragged to a location he could not see.
**	**Sense Far Away**: By beating a difficulty of 6, the Nomad can perceive ANY area. His perceptions start from his body and began expanding outwards, taking in all sensory data (but immune to effects such as Vampiric Dominate, etc.). The Nomad can expand his senses at the rate of a thousand miles per ten minutes, but he must re-beat the difficulty every 10 minutes this Way is used.
***	**Move Self**: The Nomad can teleport himself to anywhere he has ever been or seen, by beating a difficulty of 7. The transport is instantaneous.
****	**Move Others**: The Nomad can teleport anything he has perceived by beating a difficulty of 8. For every success rolled, the character can transport 100 pounds, in an "all-or-nothing" situation. Either the Nomad can transport all of the item, or none of it.
*****	**Duplicate Self**: The Nomad can warp space in such a manner as to have duplicate, fully independent copies of himself. For every success rolled against a difficulty of 8, a duplicate appears. Duplicates exist for one hour or until destroyed, but damage done to one duplicate is taken by all. However, again, duplicates can act totally independent of one another but need not talk to co-ordinate their actions.

Way of Time: Just as Space and the Labyrinth of Time are open for the Nomads to roam, so too are the layers of Time. Masters of this Way are known for their ability to enter the past and the future, doing things undreamed of by even the mightiest of mages.

[System: All uses of this Way are based on a roll equal to the number of dots that the Nomad has in the Way of Space. Also, any alterations the Nomad makes have NO effect. The Nomad was always destined to fulfil the past or future that occurs. Of course, a Nomad may stop another from altering the course of events by time travel.]

*	**Sense Temporal Distortion**: The Nomad can sense when Time is being messed with and distorted. Also, the Nomad can further tell when some force is trying to alter the course of events, altering the Virtual the Nomad is in. The Nomad need not make a roll to tell when any of the above occurs.
**	**Sense Past**: By "following" an object through the Labyrinth, the Nomad can see into the past of an object by beating a difficulty of 5. The more successes rolled, the more information a Nomad gains.
***	**Know Future**: By following an object through the Labyrinth, and beating a difficulty of 6, the Nomad will know what will happen to the object in the future. The more successes rolled, the more information the Nomad gains. However, any events that occur after the Nomad leaves the Virtual may or may not happen, while all events that occur while the Nomad is in the Virtual WILL happen, as no divergent Virtuals can be formed while a Nomad is in a Virtual. Also, any events regarding actions the Nomad will take MUST happen. Storytellers - be vague and allow for many interpretations when telling Nomads what they discover when using this power.
****	**Alter Timeflow**: For reasons unknown to even the Nomads, they are able to affect the rate at which time flows for them or others. For every success the Nomad makes against a difficulty of 8, they may double or halve the rate at which time flows in an area equal to 100 feet. This power may be used selectively, speeding some while slowing others.
*****	**Escape Through Time**: Another power largely misunderstood by the Nomads, this Way allows the Nomad to do the impossible. It allows him to travel into the past or the future. For every success the Nomad scores against a difficulty of 9, the Nomad may jump a century into the past or future. While multiple jumps are possible, the Nomad can take NOTHING along with him during these jumps, just his naked body.

Way of the Voice: Perhaps the Nomads are able to go anywhere they wish. This power tends to reinforce that belief, as it allows Nomads to enter the most private of areas: the minds of others. Many consider this a dark, manipulative power and refuse to use it. Others, however, see it as an easy means to power.

[System: All uses of this Way are based on a roll equal to the number of dots that the Nomad has in the Way of the Voice. All uses of this Way (except Shield Thoughts) can be resisted by the target by rolling his Willpower with a target number of 8. Each success the target rolls subtracts one success from the Nomad's attempt.]

*	**Shield Thoughts**: For every dot the Nomad has in this Way, he automatically gains one success to any attempts to resist Mind magicks, Dominate, etc. provided the Nomad would normally be allowed a chance to resist. This Way also protects against "truth serums", seduction, and other mundane attempts to influence and control the Nomad.
**	**Read Thoughts**: By beating a difficulty of 5, the Nomad may glance through a target's mind, learning dark secrets, emotional states, etc. However, the Nomad can only focus on one specific fact (like "what is your darkest secret"), before having to re-roll.
***	**Remove Thoughts**: By beating a difficulty of 6, the Nomad may remove memories, emotions, etc. from a target permanently. Only the use of Add Thoughts can restore any mental states affected by the use of this Way. By beating a difficulty of 8, the Nomad may remove a dot of temporary Willpower with each success of the Nomad removing one dot of Willpower.
****	**Add Thoughts**: By beating a difficulty of 7, the Nomad may add false memories, useless knowledge, and even emotional states. Also, the Nomad may bury these implants so that even the target cannot recall the information the Nomad put inside his head.
*****	**Control Thoughts**: By beating a difficulty of 8, the Nomad may dictate ANY action that the target takes. The target may be forced to change his religious beliefs, commit suicide, or any other act the Nomad tells him to, and the target will do so WILLINGLY. Nomads also use this Way to turn people into walking "time- bombs", who will carry out a certain action when a required signal is given, without any knowledge of their being programmed.

SYSTEMS

Experience: Nomads gain experience just as other characters do. However, while Nomads can benefit from others training in regards to improving and learning Abilities, they cannot receive ANY aid in regards to their Ways. The Nomad must figure out for himself as to how to use the Ways, by relying on his own feelings and instincts.

Trait	XP Cost
Attribute	Current Rating x 4
New Ability	3
Old Ability	Current Rating x 2
New Way	15
Old Way	Current Rating x 10
Willpower	Current Rating
Muse	Special (see below)

Muse: The Muse of a Nomad represents his ability to withstand the call of the Siren, and is rated on a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being a strong Muse, and 1 a weak one). The Muse is selected upon character creation and cannot be changed until the Nomad succumbs to the effects of the Siren. All Nomads begin gameplay with 10 dots of Muse.

The selection of the Muse is up to the player, but it must be fairly specific. A desire to protect one's love in all Virtuals is acceptable, while a desire to protect all women is too general. Also, the Muse must not be limited to one Virtual. "I must protect my parents in this single Virtual," is not acceptable, but "I must protect my parents in all the Virtuals where they exist" is.

Upon falling victim to the Siren, the Nomad may choose to take upon a new Muse, but in so doing he must abandon his old Muse and lose all benefits it once gave him.

Nomads may increase their Muse by fulfilling actions to promote it. A Nomad who sought to create art may gain a dot of Muse by creating a masterpiece, or gaining positive recognition for his work. A Nomad may also lose dots of Muse for failing in such actions (the artist receives negative criticism or can't paint anything). Such gains and losses are up to the ST, and should be in proportion to how powerful the results from the Nomad's actions are.

Siren: The bane of all Nomads, the Siren is part realisation of meaninglessness in the Nomad's existence, and part longing to explore as much of the Labyrinth as the Nomad can. The Siren tears away at the use of the Nomad, weakening his resolve to continue on with existence. In the end, the Nomad must flee or face his own destruction.

All Nomads begin with a single dot of Siren. Every week of game time, the ST rolls a number of dice equal to the current number of dots the Nomad has against a target number equal to the Nomad's Muse. For every success the Siren gains, the ST may either add a dot to the Siren of the Nomad (maximum of 10) or remove a dot of Muse from the Nomad. The Siren roll cannot be botched.

The Siren roll continues until the Nomad loses all dots of Muse he once possessed. Once the Nomad has no dots of Muse left, the Nomad MUST leave everything behind except what he can carry on him. The Nomad may enter a different era, enter a different aspect of the same Virtual he is in (leave Gaia and go to Malfeas for example), but the most common reaction is for the Nomad to leave the old Virtual and enter a new one. Should the Nomad not leave within one 24 hours of losing his last dot of Muse, his mind will be destroyed forever by the Siren.

While the Nomad can return to those places he has been forced to abandon, the Nomad will never be able to view it in the same way, and can loses a point of Muse for every hour he stays there. Nomads tend to leave an area for good however, choosing never to return.

Upon entering a new Virtual, era, etc. the Nomad's Muse returns to 10 dots, as the Siren releases its grip upon the Muse (and the Siren of the Nomad drops back to 1 dot). However, this change only applies when the Nomad enters a new place for the specific purpose of escaping the Siren, and abandons everything he once had.

WORLD OF DARKNESS

The most important things to keep in mind are that Nomads are typically known of only in rare Virtuals, and only by a rare few. Perhaps some Oracles know many things about them, but they're not talking.

No Garou, Mage, or Changeling has ever manifested the traits of the Nomad. Also, no Nomad has ever been able to be Embraced as a Kindred or existed as a Wraith. This is believed to be due to the nature of the Nomads' Avatars.

They cannot use Sphere magicks (or hedge magic either), they are not part of the shared Avatar of Garou, and have no particular ties to the Fae. The attempt to impose the Vampiric Avatar upon a Nomad always proves fatal to the Nomad (much to the rage of the few Kindred who have tried). Also, once the Nomad dies, his Avatar is instantly lost (whether to Oblivion or rebirth, not even the Way of the Nomad can answer).

Nomads tend to view Vampires as self-pitying, cry babies, who whine about their eternally damned state instead of trying to do something with themselves. Many Dark Nomads know quite a bit about the Sabbat and Antediluvians, and plot for some way to use them both as a means to unravel the fabric of various Virtuals. Vampires who know of Nomads tend to see them as useful pawns, until the Siren calls the Nomad away or the Vampire tries to Embrace them.

The Nomads want to respect Garou, and truly understand the Garou's howls of Harano. Many Nomads could teach Garou about the Umbra and the various realms contained within. Garou who discover Nomads either see them as kindred spirits, or the darkest abominations to exist. Sometimes Garou see Nomads as both.

Mages are the greatest threat known to Nomads. They alone have the power to try to oppose the actions of the Nomads, but the Nomads don't fear them as Paradox limits the power that a Mage can call upon. Besides, if a Nomad runs far enough away, even the greatest of mages have a problem following eventually.

Nomads tend to either pity Wraiths as souls trapped in an eternal hell and try to help them towards a heaven, or see them as fodder to be fed to the Darkness. Those Wraiths who know of Nomads tend to distrust them, hearing as many tales of them aiding as destroying the Restless Dead. Nomads who travel to the Shadowlands often find their Sirens growing in strength, becoming almost personalised powers.

Changelings amuse Nomads to no end. They view all other beings as reflections of themselves, whining about a "lost home". Nomads laugh at them, seeing Changelings as at least having a home to stay in and people they can hold onto. Many Nomads, Dark or not, try to show the Changeling what true alienation and abandonment mean. Those Changelings who do come to see things as the Nomads often go insane.

FINAL NOTES by DJ Babb

Nothing good game-wise here, just a glimpse into me noggin' as regards the Continuum project.

Continuum: I'd like to thank Anders Sandberg and Constantine Thomas for putting up with all my incessant mailing, odd questions out of the blue, and other "eccentricities." I'd also like to add how much fun it's been getting to blow up each others' minds trying to conceive of infinity, eternity, and endless duplicates of both.

Creatures: By golly, the idea of a critter that teleported its food into it was my idea! (Rolling Balls) I asked about it, but Anders beat me to the typing (But I got to type this so there! (grin)). Still, the Fractal grass of Anders was a prettier version of Lance Grass, and watching Consty's head blow apart over the Fallers was REALLY neat! By the way, kudos to Anders for actually giving the Shard Realm of Time some "normal" creatures to base the beginnings of an ecosystem around.

Nomads: Recognize anything Leilani? Still, this was my first attempt to really convey isolation, alienation, and unexplainable urges within writing (beyond my usual "REALLY mean guy goes out and messed up people" stories).

Other RPGs: My hat's off to Torg (THE BEST!). Also, "Champions in 3-D" for inspiring me to get Consty inspired on the whole Virtual thing. And Traveller for the classification system of the Virtuals (and Consty again, for revising it). Oh yeah, and the Mage/WoD for providing all the numbers (of course, Torg waaaas doing the same stuff as Mage, loooooong ago).

DJ (finished at last)   22/11/95

NOMADS

Name: **Alliance:**   **Storyteller:**

Player: **Nature:**   **Concept:**

Chronicle: **Demeanour:**   **Home Virtual:**

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength _____ ○○○○○	Charisma _____ ○○○○○	Perception _____ ○○○○○
Dexterity _____ ○○○○○	Manipulation _____ ○○○○○	Intelligence _____ ○○○○○
Stamina _____ ○○○○○	Appearance _____ ○○○○○	Wits _____ ○○○○○

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness _____ ○○○○○	Drive _____ ○○○○○	Computer _____ ○○○○○
Athletics _____ ○○○○○	Etiquette _____ ○○○○○	Cosmology _____ ○○○○○
Awareness _____ ○○○○○	Firearms _____ ○○○○○	Culture _____ ○○○○○
Brawl _____ ○○○○○	Leadership _____ ○○○○○	Enigmas _____ ○○○○○
Dodge _____ ○○○○○	Meditation _____ ○○○○○	Investigation _____ ○○○○○
Expression _____ ○○○○○	Melee _____ ○○○○○	Law _____ ○○○○○
Intuition _____ ○○○○○	Research _____ ○○○○○	Linguistics _____ ○○○○○
Instruction _____ ○○○○○	Stealth _____ ○○○○○	Lore _____ ○○○○○
Intimidation _____ ○○○○○	Survival _____ ○○○○○	Medicine _____ ○○○○○
Streetwise _____ ○○○○○	Technology _____ ○○○○○	Occult _____ ○○○○○
Subterfuge _____ ○○○○○	_____ ○○○○○	Science _____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○	_____ ○○○○○	Virtual Cosmology _ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○	_____ ○○○○○	Virtual Lore _____ ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds	Willpower	Ways
Adapt _____ ○○○○○	**Permanent:** ○○○○○○○○○○	Copies _____ ○○○○○
Arcane _____ ○○○○○	Temporary: ○○○○○○○○○○	Dreams _____ ○○○○○
Beacon _____ ○○○○○		Forms _____ ○○○○○
Destiny _____ ○○○○○	**Muse** _____	Labyrinth _____ ○○○○○
Dream _____ ○○○○○	○○○○○○○○○○	Nomads _____ ○○○○○
Mentor _____ ○○○○○		Space _____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○	**Siren**	Time _____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○	●○○○○○○○○○	Voice _____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○		_____ ○○○○○

Health

Healthy		
Bruised	-0	○
Hurt	-1	○
Injured	-2	○
Wounded	-3	○
Mauled	-4	○
Crippled	-5	○
Incapacitated		○

Combat

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage
_____		
_____		
_____		
_____		
_____		
_____		

EXPERIENCE:

STUDY POINTS:

Attributes: 7/5/3   Abilities: 13/9/5   Backgrounds: 10   Muse: 10   Ways: 5   Willpower: 5   Freebie Points: 15 (10/5/2/1/1)

Appendix C: The Vanguard

By
David Barrett

The Vanguard

A Continuum Supplement for Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade
By David Barrett

Introduction

This document is a supplement for Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade. It details The Vanguard, a Craft that will one day become the Continuum. It is recommended that players have read both Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade by White Wolf and The Continuum by Constantine Thomas.

This document is split into five sections. First is the **Vanguard Tradition Page**, supplying the history and setting for the Vanguard. Second is the **Vanguard Paradigm Page**, giving a more complete description of the Vanguard's beliefs and Magick. Section Three is the **Toybox**, describing Devices employed by the Vanguard. Section Four (**Figures Of Note**) describes some of the more famous Vanguard members. Finally, the **Timeline** lists the major events that have occurred between the formation of the Vanguard and their evolution into the Continuum.

Dedication

To Jo, in the hope that someday she might consent to play it!
And to Consty for reminding me this existed, and helping me finish it.

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Section 1: The Vanguard Tradition Page

History and Overview

The Vanguard is something of a contradiction - while it is a newly formed Craft, the bulk of its membership is comprised of older mages who have worked together for many years. The nascent organisation was formed by these mages, some of whom state that it had always been present even before the formalised association came into being - whenever a group of mages banded together against Infernalists and other "Forces of Darkness", they laid the foundations for the Vanguard.

Mages of the Vanguard hold a common belief - usually held since before they join the Craft itself - that the biggest threat to the World comes from the outside in the form of entities referred to vaguely as the "Forces of Darkness" which seek to destroy reality through the removal of souls from the Endless Cycle of Time. They and their agents come in many forms - the main (and the most hated) targets of the Vanguard are Infernalists, those who have sold their own souls (and usually the souls of others as well) to the Forces of Darkness in exchange for power of one form or another. Regarded as traitors to humankind by the Vanguard, it will stop at nothing to destroy them; indeed, many members of the Craft have lost friends and family to Infernalists and their quest is often very personal. Demons are next; these entities, which some believe are physical manifestations of the Dark Forces, are summoned by Infernalists and are usually very difficult to destroy - many mages have lost their lives in battle with these creatures. Wraiths come last on the list; Souls who have removed themselves from the Cycle of Time by becoming tied to the world of life. The Vanguard attempts to set these souls back on the Cycle without causing them harm, if possible, although some violent spirits have had to be destroyed.

The Vanguard is a loose-knit organisation, and although there is no formal hierarchy, it is governed by a group known as the Council of Seven, composed simply of the seven oldest Mages in the organisation at that time. The number Seven was chosen for this group through tradition - the Vanguard (despite maintaining that any group of mages who fought the Forces of Darkness through history laid the foundations for the group) formally trace their origins to 1031 AD, when a group of seven mages banded together to despatch a particularly nasty Infernalist. Those seven mages gathered others who thought similarly to themselves together and kept them in contact with each other. Although they themselves did not live to see the foundation of the Vanguard proper, they are still regarded as the first Council of Seven, and that number has been kept for the governing group. The Council of Seven has little power over members themselves, though they take responsibility for all decisions that affect the Vanguard as a whole, and for keeping members in contact with each other - no mean feat considering many members are given to wandering where their feet, and the fight against the Forces of Darkness, take them. At this time the Vanguard remains unaffiliated to both the Council of Nine and The Order of Reason, and neither group is even aware of the Vanguard as an organisation at this time (both would probably be surprised to see the number of their ex-members that are present in the group).

Future Fates - The Continuum

Whoa! What's happened to the Continuum? Where are the alternate realities? Nexus? What's all this talk of Souls and Spirits? The future has a lot in store for the Vanguard, at this stage it bears very little resemblance to the Continuum of the present day. One hundred years from now, weakened by a major engagement, it will join the Order of Reason. In many ways this acts as a catalyst, changing the Vanguard so much that by the time it breaks away from the Technocracy it will have changed its name to reflect and encompass its new role. For those of you who are interested, a Timeline for the Vanguard is provided at the end of this supplement, but remember it all lies in the future at this point - and as any member of the Vanguard will tell you, the Future is changing all the time…

Philosophy

The Traditions and Order of Reason are too wrapped up in their petty struggles and political manoeuvring - they see the Forces of Darkness, but are unable to comprehend the full extent of the problem. Although we are few, we are the front line against this Evil and we will fight it where ever - and in whatever form - it appears. We will follow the battle where it takes us, to the four corners of this world and beyond.

Organisation

Highly informal - there is no formal hierarchy within the Vanguard. Although the eldest seven members form a council that makes any strategic decisions that will affect the group as a whole, they do not issue direct orders to members. They are known to debrief members from time to time, compiling information to pass on to other members, although it is not a formal process and is never required of members. The majority of members work alone; the Vanguard is a disparate group and almost all of its members are wanderers, most of them driven by their quest to hunt down the Forces of Darkness. However, members do keep in contact with each other, offering help and support often to the extent of moving mountains to get to each other in times of dire need.

Meetings

Meetings between members are actually quite common, if fairly informal. Despite what seems like quite a lonely existence for most members, they tend to keep in very regular contact with each other, grouping together to battle powerful enemies, coming to the aid of a hurt comrade, and even just meeting socially as they pass through the same town. More formal meetings are held on a yearly basis. The Council sends word to members on where and when the meeting will occur, and almost all members attend. It is a low key affair usually lasting for only a day or two, with stories swapped, information passed on and new members formally introduced.

Initiation

The majority of Vanguard members joined from other Crafts, most of the Traditions and Conventions have ex-members in this group (The Coisans, Craftmasons, Solificati, and *especially* the Kisefri are not represented at all). Initiates therefore tend to primarily have a magickal background already. Other initiates are those who have experienced the Forces of Darkness and survived. There is no formal initiation into the group - anyone who wishes to join is eligible - although as very few have heard of the group, most prospective new members are introduced by current members at the yearly meetings.

Chantry

The Vanguard has no chantry at this time. There are so few of them none could be spared and none would wish to devote time to the upkeep and defence of a chantry.

Acolytes

Rangers, Watchmen, Soldiers. Anyone who has seen more than they wished they had…

Daemon

Saints or Explorers are the most common Daemon amongst Vanguard members. Other religious figures are not uncommon - however, the Vanguard distrusts the spiritual, so Angels are rare. Most Daemons would once have been mortal figures.

Affinities

Time, Connection, Spirit, Air.

Concepts

Knight Errant, Dispossessed Noble, Vengeance seeker, Ranger.

Quote

"I am afraid, Sir, that I know what you are and who you serve - and for that, I cannot allow you to live one moment longer"

Stereotypes

Council of Nine, Order of Reason: Alas! Our brothers in arms cannot see what lies before their noses, and spend all of their time engaged in petty quarrels. The Ascension War is nothing compared to the threat the Forces of Darkness pose. At least some of our ex-comrades come to recognise this Evil for what it is, and these we welcome with open arms.
"The Vanguard, you say? I am afraid, sir, that I have never heard of them. However that does explain why Lord James has dropped out of circulation recently, he was muttering about Forces of Darkness. One has to wonder…"

Infernalists: Do not suffer them to live. They are traitors to humankind and would gladly see us all dead. Their unspeakable acts in service of the Dark Forces are anathema to us.
"Those ridiculous little men, do they really think they can oppose the power granted to me by my master? Bring them on, their souls will only strengthen me!"

Marauds: These poor fools are unwitting servants of the Dark Forces - spare them if possible, but eliminate then quickly if not.
"!"

Disparates: Some of these share our experiences, look out for them and recruit them if possible.
"Who? No, that name means nothing to me. Should it?"

__Section 2: The Vanguard Paradigm Page__

The Paradigm

"The Cycle of Time" - Time is an endless Cycle, circulating infinitely. We all traverse the Cycle, our souls passing though it forever. Infernalists, by bargaining their own souls and the souls of others, remove them from the Cycle and banish them to destruction at the hands of the Forces of Darkness. These are jealous of the true life of the Cycle, and wish to destroy it and end the cycle of time. Wraiths are souls removed from the Cycle by these Dark Forces in an attempt to corrupt the time flow.

Magick

Tapping the flow. By drawing Soul Energy out from the Endless Cycle and redirecting it back in, we can subtly alter the flow itself, creating major and minor effects. Soul Energy can never be removed from the cycle, except by the permanent removal of souls, which works towards the destruction of the cycle and should never be used [Note that Gilgul would fall into this definition for the Vanguard, they would never consider using this against anyone, death is preferred as it sets the soul back on the cycle].

Arete

Adeptness. Adept mages can feel the Flow of the cycle better, and can understand how to redirect its energy to the greatest effect.

Quintessence

Soul Energy. Power channelled from and redirected back into the Cycle.

The Scourge

Flaws in the Cycle. Mistakes in redirecting the flow lead to flaws. The Cycle itself will act to mend these, removing the cause to a point separate from the Cycle if necessary. Vanguard members should avoid this at all costs, as Flaws can leave the Cycle open to attacks from Evil Spirits.

Awakening

Empowerment of the Soul. The feeling when you first feel the Flow of the Cycle passing around and through you, and you realise how to manipulate it.

The Spheres

Connection: *Passing across the Cycle.* By passing across the Cycle while not progressing along it one effectively can travel anywhere instantly.

Entropy: *Pushing along the Cycle.* By forcing an object to move faster along the Cycle it can be caused to decay and age.

Mind: *Tapping the Soul.* The flow allows us to use *Soul-to-Soul Communication*, which often has more immediate effect than mundane communication between men.

Prime: *The Flow of Soul Energy.* Our souls travel endlessly on the Cycle - by manipulating the manner in which they flow we can alter their manifestation within the cycle.

Spirit: *Enter another Cycle.* There are many cycles of time, we can travel between them, sampling what they have to offer.

Time: *Stepping off the Cycle.* By stepping out of the cycle, one can pause time. Depending on the point at which you rejoin the cycle at it is possible to move forward in time. As time flows constantly around the Cycle, in theory it would be possible to travel back to the past simply by travelling far enough around the Cycle, although this has never been satisfactorily proven.

Pattern Magicks (Life, Matter, Forces). The Vanguard has no specific view of pattern magicks at this time. Most members, having come from other Crafts, retain their old views on patterns. The few members who have been initiated directly into the Vanguard after awakening mutter about conversion of soul energy to the other forms, but nothing has been set down yet.

Section 3: The Toybox

Devices

Wraithbow & WraithBolts
Arete: 3 Quintessence: 10

A re-designed crossbow that fire special bolts. The bolt tip holds a wire mesh-net that expands to about a metre in radius, and the other end has a thin wire line attached to a spool on the crossbow. With a maximum range of about 25 yards, the mesh-net envelops and closes around the target. It is not at all effective against physical creatures, but the net is impenetrable to Wraiths and they are trapped within it – they are then winched in and dealt with. The crossbow has a very short range, is prone to malfunction, and effectively has only one shot - it takes about 10 minutes to set up again. Only 5 have been built, each with a supply of only 3 bolts.

Infernal Compass
Arete: 4 Quintessence: 15

A hand held compass-like device that always points towards the nearest source of infernal power. These are highly prized by the Vanguard and have been the secret of their success, allowing them to track down infernal mages. The compass works by picking up on the effects on the cycle made by infernal magick, or weak points in the Cycle where the Forces of Darkness have come through. It will not actually point out an infernalist to the user, but it will point in the direction of a Demon summoning. One Infernal Compass on its own is only slightly useful, but several in use by separate groups of Vanguard agents can be used to triangulate an Infernalist's position and track down their exact location.

Section 4: Figures of Note

[All characters are current to 1462 AD]

Johannes Constantin, 1429 -

Born in 1429 to a moderately wealthy shipping family in Italy, it was obvious from an early age that Johannes was gifted. His natural talent for Languages, his good time sense and quick grasp of navigation soon meant that he was accompanying his father on trading journeys, by both land and sea.

He Awakened in 1444. He had had a dream in which he had seen his father's ship go down in a storm, and although he told his father about this, his father dismissed it as just a dream. On the very next journey they were shipwrecked off the coast of Spain during a ferocious storm. He saved himself and his father, and they were washed up on the coast. The two were found by a Void Seeker expedition as it passed by the next day. They quickly recognised the young lad's talent, and persuaded his father to allow him to join them for training.

Although noted as a reliable prophet, he never shone within the Void Seekers. However all that was to change after a mere five years. Whilst heading into Russia to explore the Siberian wastes, his party of explorers was waylaid and captured by an Infernalist. Most of the group was killed, however Constantin and two other Void Seekers were able to escape and engage the Infernalist in battle. It was going badly, with both his companions dead and Constantin close to failing, when the castle in they were fighting came under siege. Already hurt by the three Void Seekers, and now distracted by the attack from outside, the Infernalist made a fatal error - taking full advantage of the opening left by his enemy, Constantin spent the last of his energy in an all-out attack.

The rescue party, a small group of future Vanguard members, sensing their foe had been defeated entered the castle. They found Constantin passed out on the floor near a hollow humanoid shell that collapsed into dust before their eyes, which they realised must have been the remains of the Infernalist. Taking Constantin from the castle to a nearby inn, they watched over him until he recovered a day later. Offering their sympathies for the loss of his comrades, they introduced themselves, and invited him to join them. His foresight serving him again, Constantin accepted the offer, and travelled with the group for several months, until the next "Vanguard" meeting when he was introduced to the rest of the group.

He spent the next few years travelling alone, or in the company of other future Vanguard members, attending the Yearly meetings. He has prophesised the formation of the Council of Nine to oppose the Order of Reason, and also the escalation of the Ascension war. He is also aware that the group will formally become the Vanguard in the near future, although he has not prophesised this to his peers yet. He has other vague premonitions of the future, generally as it applies to the Vanguard, but knows few other details at this time.

William Black, 997-1233 (Presumed)

The last surviving member of the original Council of Seven, he was last seen travelling to the village of Wall to do battle with an unknown entity. Villagers reported that he had passed through the opening in the wall that runs along one side of the village (From which it takes its name) and that fire and bright lights were seen throughout the following night, accompanied by strange noises. As he never returned he was presumed dead by his friends, although since then some Vanguard members have reportedly met someone who they later thought resembled him.

Section 5: Timeline for The Vanguard

1031: A group of seven Mages stop at an inn in Germany. They had all travelled separately to face down a powerful Infernal magus, who they had defeated at the cost of two of their fellows. They introduce themselves and discover they have a common background - they have all fought against Infernalists and other creatures who had seemingly similar goals before, and have recognised a common driving force behind them. All seven of the Mages see the threat that these "Forces of Darkness" pose to the Earth, and regard fighting this menace as a more important mission than Ascension. They pledge to stay in contact, hoping that their union will strengthen their fight.

1031-1450: The group continues to meet, exchanging tales, tactics and introducing many new members of similar ilk. By 1450 the group has swelled from the original seven to almost fifty. During this time the original seven members serve as a driving force, keeping the group in contact with each other and starting a tradition of yearly meetings. As the seven die or are killed over the years, other members of the group pick up their roles, which start to be handed down to the next eldest member of the group.

1450: A young Void Seeker named Johannes Constantin is introduced to the group, and is regarded as a prodigy and seer. Later this year he foresees the forming of the Council of Nine, and the escalation of the Ascension War. Impressed by his ability, many members of the group begin to distance themselves from their original Crafts. The eldest seven members of the group are recognised as an advisory council at this time.

1470: As the Ascension War escalates to new heights, the group fulfils Constantin's Prophecy. Renouncing their former Crafts, the members swear allegiance to each other, they name themselves The Vanguard. The Council of Seven is formally given control of the group, and takes responsibility for all decisions that will affect the Vanguard as a whole.

1562: A battle with an Infernalist Tremere Vampire escalates into near all-out war between the Tremere and the Vanguard. Taking severe losses, the Vanguard goes into retreat. A group of Artificers and Gabrielites come to their aid, and they are invited to join the Order of Reason, Convention status being conferred for their knowledge of Time. Constantin, the most recent addition to the Council of Seven is the only one to vote against joining. Shortly before disappearing into the Umbra he prophecies that the Vanguard will come to regret the decision and that he will make provision for that day. His seat on the Council is held open, awaiting his return, however he is never to be seen on Earth again.

1833: Leon Louis, a French Spirit specialist, announces at a meeting that he has been shown a place the Vanguard can make their own - he calls it Nexus, the Shade realm of Time. He claims to have been led there by an Oracle and leads many members back to the realm, shortly after this the Council of Seven, still with only six members (Constantin's seat having never been filled) makes the unanimous decision to relocate the Vanguard to Nexus and to establish a base of operations there. Rumour starts that the Oracle was Constantin, and that he created the Shade Realm for the Vanguard, in fulfilment of his departing words *.

1834: Work begins on a chantry based on Nexus that will be a base for the Vanguard. First Virtuals discovered, Vanguard begin to revise their Paradigm in light of this.

1835: Central Office Established. Magicks set up so anyone trying to journey from Main Corridor Earth (as it is now called) to any virtual Earth, or vice versa, will pass into Nexus. The remaining six members of the Council of Seven make their last decision: the Council is finally disbanded as the Vanguard restructures itself into two sections. "Observation and Intelligence" (later to become Intelligence Acquisition) based in Nexus and "Frontline" (later to split into Repulsion Branch and Target Neutralisation) who report back to Nexus regularly, but a primarily based on Earth or in the Virtuals.

1905-1906: Shadow War of Secession. The Vanguard and Technocracy fall out over the release of the Theory of Relativity and ownership of Nexus. Vanguard secedes from the Technocracy and retreats to the now heavily fortified Central Office. The Technocracy briefly attempts to lay siege, however the Continuum is ready for them, and the dramatic failure of the first offensive forces the Technocracy to quickly withdraw. A few minor, indecisive skirmishes follow, but peace is soon declared, albeit somewhat unsteady. The Vanguard renames itself, becoming The Continuum.

* To this day this is still the cause of minor disagreements between Continuum members. There is a surprisingly large amount of circumstantial evidence supporting it (the feel of the place reflects Constantin's personality, the functioning of the spheres there resembles his own talents with them), though all of the hard evidence points against (the large numbers of Virtuals that attached themselves to Nexus before Constantin was born, let alone became a powerful mage, show that it must have been in existence before Constantin could possibly have "Created" it). Some observers point out that if Constantin was indeed an Oracle of Time, then he could have just gone back in time to create the entire realm in the first place, rendering the last argument moot. This remains the cause of much debate, and it is entirely possible that the Continuum will never know the truth.