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The Art of Magic
in the
Information Age

PLS

Patrick Dunn

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About the Author

Patrick Dunn has studied witchcraft, the cabala, chaos magic, and anything else he could get his hands on. After obtaining his master's degree in literature, he began studying linguistics and stylistics. Currently, he lives in the Midwest, where he teaches English literature, studies Latin, and works on his dissertation. This is his first book.

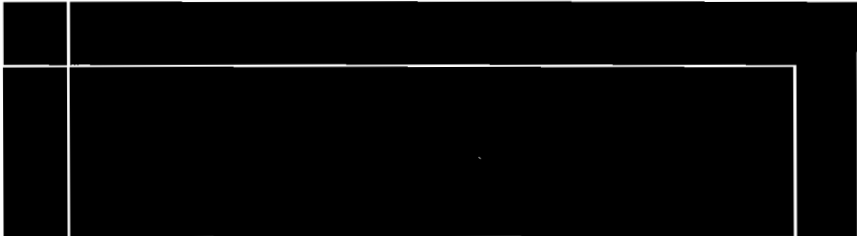
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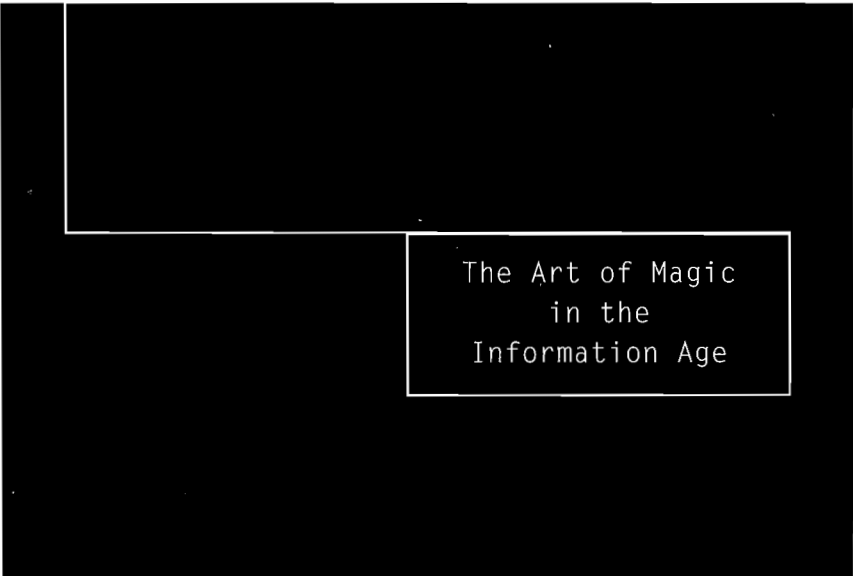
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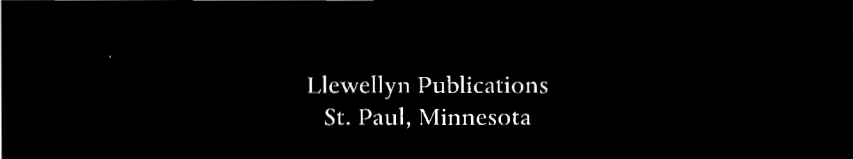
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INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, I made a deal with a friend. He would teach me how to fence, and I would teach him how to do magic. As a professional fencing instructor, my friend had little trouble getting me some gear and a practice room at the local gym. On the day of my first lesson, we warmed up, stretched, and talked. I was nervous. The whiplike foils looked harmless enough, but my friend regaled me with stories of spectacular injuries, including one about a broken foil a competitor had accidentally stuck through his wrist during a tournament. After such stories, I took his suggestions for safety seriously.

He taught me to stand in an extremely unnatural and painful crouch, which, he explained, is necessary for quick motion in any direction. Then he showed me how to move: one could “advance” or “retreat.” Both involve shuffling hops. He then showed me a “leap,” and I tried one. One could also do a “cross-step.” He showed me this, and though it looks more natural than the advance, it opens one up to attack. Finally, I learned how to “fleche.” This involves stomping, screaming, and running.

That, he said, is “footwork.”

Next he showed me the parries. There were five of them, with some variations. *Only five?* I wondered. After an hour of footwork and parries, he said, “Yes, only five. And that’s enough, ’cause you’re getting tired.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “but how about showing me an attack before we call it quits?” I may have felt tired, but I also felt alive and full of “energy,” eager to learn more. “How many attacks are there?”

“One,” he said. “Well, two if you count the extension as an attack.”

“Wait a minute. There are only four pieces of footwork, five parries, and a single attack? I thought fencing was complicated!”

“It is,” he answered. “It’s chess with swords. In chess you’ve only got six pieces, each with its own moves, yet how many openings are there?”

“I don’t know—hundreds, probably.”

“It’s the same with fencing. The basics are simple, it’s the variations that take a lifetime to learn.”

Like fencing, chess, or any number of other arts, the mastery of magic requires the mastery of only a small number of skills, and a new understanding of the way the world works—a new attitude toward reality. The combination of a small set of skills makes magic an art.

ATTITUDE, THREE SKILLS, AND FOUR PARADIGMS

The Attitude

For the past few centuries, Western culture has learned to perceive reality empirically—that is, fundamental beliefs rely on conclusions solely derived from observation. This approach is known as the scientific method. This systematic method is something of an anomaly in human history, though it has allowed us to make advancements far beyond the dreams of our ancestors. In the past hundred years alone we've split an atom, traveled to the moon, turned gold into lead, found treatments for countless diseases, and cracked the human genome. The scientific method is useful for understanding reality, and the mage would do well to understand and be able to employ it as necessary.

The scientific method assumes the laws of reality are more or less constant. The mage, on the other hand, follows Heraclitus' maxim: "One cannot step in the same river twice."¹ Scientists often recognize some truth in this maxim. But if reality is not more or less constant, the scientific method is a moot practice. Obviously, the world in many ways *does* remain constant over a period of time—the sun will probably come up tomorrow and

1. "You cannot step twice into the same river; for fresh waters are flowing in upon you."
<http://philoctetes.free.fr/heraclite.pdf>

we can safely assume that all the oxygen atoms in the atmosphere won't suddenly condense over London, causing the rest of the world to suffocate. The assumption of constancy is what leads scientists to expect they can make future predictions based on repetitive results. And for the most part they can.

Even science recognizes, however, that some things are not subject to this method. One cannot, for example, repeat a work of art in the same way one can repeat an experiment. The repetition of an experiment results in the accumulation of evidence, which either proves or disproves the validity of a hypothesis. The repetition of a work of art does not prove anything about the art—it's just a copy. Like art, magic is not subject to scientifically controlled repetition, because it deals with the subtle states of self, mind, and holistic reality at the moment of the act of magic. Sorcery is utterly untestable, which is fine. It doesn't have to be.

Unlike scientists, mages approach reality intuitively rather than empirically. A scientist observes a phenomenon, makes a hypothesis about it, and then gathers data to support or disprove that hypothesis. A mage, on the other hand, observes the *symbol systems* interacting to make up our world.² A mage may have many hypotheses, and feel no need to gather data to prove any of them. A mage perceives the world not as a constant interaction of immutable laws—although often and in many ways it is—but as an ever-changing interaction of arbitrary and constantly shifting symbols. Each symbol, each fundamental building block of reality, connects to some other symbol—or more likely a series of symbols—themselves connecting to others, and so on. The scientist tries to understand and systemize the world; the mage simply tries to experience it.

An astute and well-educated reader might insist that atoms, or perhaps energy—not symbols—are the fundamental substance of existence. I will discuss symbols more fully in the next chapter, but let me further clarify here. Energy makes up all the matter we perceive in the universe, but our reality does not merely consist of matter. In fact, if you list the things that most impact your reality, I suspect immaterial, even abstract, symbols—

2. Any collection of symbols that relate to each other in a consistent way.

love, money, health—appear most frequently. Even the significance of matter itself is often more symbolic than material. The little pewter wizard on top of my computer does not simply remind me of lead and tin; to me, it is a gift from a family member, a little joke on myself, and an object that manages to fall and bruise my toe every time I move my computer.

To be a successful mage, you must understand that symbols build the foundation of reality. These symbols are indeterminate. In other words, it is not necessary to find a one-to-one correspondence between symbols. A lot of mages will tell you that each symbol has a correct meaning, and all other meanings are incorrect. They'll tell you that green, for example, means love, not money. While it's true that in certain systems of magic green is better suited to love than money, the color maintains various associations depending on the system being used. A similar scenario is found in language studies. The letter *C* in English can represent the sound of the letter *S* or *K*, and can represent multiple meanings, which are all dependent on the system used.

This isn't to say any meaning can be given to any symbol. I cannot suddenly declare, "The English letter *C* sounds like the letter *F*." This brings us to the next point: symbols are internally consistent within their systems. If someone asks me what the letter *C* represents, I can say it represents the same sound as the letter *S* or *K* in English. But someone else could argue that *C* represents the sound "ts" (as in "cats"). Which is right? Neither. Without knowing the symbol system, both answers are meaningless! In English, of course, *C* represents *K* ("ka") or *S* ("sss"), but in Slovak, *C* always represents the sound "ts."

This same concept is relevant in magic. The color green in the cabala³ system represents the planet Venus, which in turn represents love. However, green in folk magic represents wealth—particularly in America, where money is green. To adhere to a single symbol system is to close doors of opportunity and enlightenment; it is for the stagnant and boring mage. To dance between and among symbol systems is for the art mage,

3. A system of Jewish and Christian magic and mysticism; also spelled "kabbalah" and "Qabalah" and other ways.

who will gain creativity and expand the mind by remaining open to all opportunities. Try this exercise to enhance your general awareness while in a mundane environment.

EXERCISE

The Magical Attitude: Symbol Surfing

Find a place with a comfortable but fairly high amount of sensory stimulus: a coffee shop, public mall, or rock concert. Don't overload your senses, but make sure there's enough variety in activity for some of the sensory streams—the stimuli from your sense of vision, taste, touch, and so forth—to collide, creating a sort of mental turbulence. Sit or stand comfortably, breathe regularly, and *listen* with all of your senses—eyes, ears, tongue, and skin. Listen to all the sensory input and convince yourself that it is speaking directly to you. This is a sort of controlled paranoia, but unlike the mental illness, you can turn it off, and it's not in the least harmful or dangerous. Just imagine that the present sensory stream somehow whispers to you. Allow associations to rise without willing them.

Perhaps you will sense yourself being either connected to a large conversation or being in a web of competing messages; or maybe you'll sense the place itself speaking to you—telling you what sorts of magical work you can use it for. During the first couple of times, you may not have any such experiences, ending the exercise with nothing more than a vague and undefined feeling of well-being. In any event, when you feel you have done this exercise enough—about ten or fifteen minutes, although you can go longer if you like—come back and “ground” your experience. Grounding allows you to objectify the experience. This can be done by writing the experience in a journal, painting a picture, singing, or doing some other activity that makes a physical object or event out of your symbolic experience.

I call the state of mind achieved in this exercise the “magical state of consciousness”: a hyperawareness of the conflicting and contributing symbols of the world. Just as in the scientific method, observation is the first step.

At this stage, we make our conclusions not from logical deduction, but from a hunch, feeling, or intuition. In all such exercises grounding is important. Without grounding, these experiences are empty and meaningless. We can ground ourselves by telling someone about our experiences, but we can also write them down, paint them, make music of them, or use some other creative, physical activity. It doesn't matter what is painted or produced; we're recording (grounding) the *impression* of an experience, not the experience itself. And this will help us develop the perspective of a mage. For more advanced exercises, in which we open ourselves up to otherworldly entities and energies, we will learn to cleanse and banish our working area. These acts, along with grounding, should become routine procedures of the conscientious mage.⁴

If you do this exercise with the proper sense of playfulness, you'll find a sort of communication existing among and between various sensory streams. For example, an overheard conversation might seem to reflect an interesting insight on an advertisement or magazine cover. Or, as often happens to me, you might hear a song or pick up on a specific sound that seems to comment on some problem in your life. Actually, this is an ancient Greek method of divination known as *kledon*. I'll talk about this more later (chapter 8, page 162).

This brings me to a very important aspect of a mage's attitude. In this book I speak a lot about fun and joy in magic. Simple magic systems open up opportunities for play, exploration, and experimentation that more complicated, strict systems do not allow. I do not, clearly, eschew complex systems of magic; in fact, most of this book is devoted to them. But even complex systems should rely upon the calm reality that magic is easy, fun, and joyful. For me, magic leaves a sense of euphoria in its wake. It's not unlike the euphoria I feel after writing a poem or having sex. In fact, I sometimes call it "post-magical euphoria." This sense of euphoria is the entire point of magic.

In fact, I don't think the goal or desire of magic is the reason for doing magic at all. If you want money, you could just work more or steal or invest wisely. Why do a spell? Even when there are no obvious mundane

4. If you have not done so yet, it is a good time to familiarize yourself with banishing. See Appendix A.

ways to manifest a desire, why enchant for it? Why not just give up the desire and find something more realistic? The result of a magical spell is not necessarily the fulfillment of your desire—the fulfillment of your desire is but a side-effect to the actual result. If you do a money spell, the result is feeling a euphoric satisfaction. If you do not feel satisfied, then the spell is a failure, whether or not money manifests. By the same token, if you do feel satisfied, then the spell is a success, even if the money manifests slowly or not at all. This is why I will focus on the aesthetic results of spells in this book, and the material results may follow as side-effects.

I've come to believe that this approach to magic paradoxically increases the chance of material success. When you focus on the fun of doing magic, your mind clears, and you relax and allow your unconscious to work without habitual stress, worry, or need. I once talked to a mage who complained of headaches and exhaustion after magic. I've never understood those who claim to experience such things—although I don't doubt them. Those who obsess about the results of their magic end up tying their magic to their sense of self-worth. As I told a student of mine, you might as well tie a brick to a duck and ask it to float. If you want to find a hundred-dollar bill, it's easier if the bill isn't tied to notions of how well you like yourself, or how powerful or successful you think you are. Ideally, it's tied to the notion of a fun lark. Deadly grim mages are rarely effective. At least that's my opinion. I'm aware that not everyone might like to agree with this philosophy. When working magic, feel free to engage in individual experimentation and—I'll say it again—play.⁵

We are now ready to move on to the next example. It allows us to use symbols in a more active way. Many mages keep long lists of correspondences between symbols, called "tables of correspondences." These tables simply list which symbols correspond to which other symbols. Once we have a defined goal or purpose for a ritual, we can refer to the table and choose the appropriate symbols to incorporate. For example, a magician trying to invoke some martial effect will surround him- or herself with the

5. By "play," I do not advocate an unserious or whimsical attitude, but an attitude of personal freedom and expansiveness. Magic is a serious endeavor, even simple magic. It is wise, therefore, to introspect and perform divinations before doing any magic, particularly simple magic.

appropriate symbols of Mars: tobacco, iron, drums, brass, swords, and/or the color red.

By far the most important book of correspondences, at least from a historical standpoint, is Aleister Crowley's *777*. No matter what you may think of the man himself, his tables are useful resources, although lately supplanted a bit by books like Bill Whitcomb's *Magician's Companion*. Crowley arranges a list of symbolic items by their association with parts of the cabalistic system. My own copy of this book is falling apart, but I'm hesitant to buy a new one, dreading the job of copying over all my marginal notes.

After considerable margin scribbling in such books, we might discover tables of correspondences are not really needed, or perhaps more accurately, we will be ready to create our own tables with much more efficacy. In fact, a table of correspondences is (like the symbols themselves) inherently meaningless. I do not mean to say they have no value, rather they have no inherent meaning. For example, nothing binds the symbol of fire to the symbol of tiger other than our own minds. Most mages, even if they ignore this fact, tend to recognize it implicitly. I've yet to meet a practicing mage who has not amended a personal table of correspondences considerably over time.

Element	Weapon	Color	Scent
Air	Dagger	Yellow	Sage
Water	Cup	Blue	Myrrh
Earth	Disk	Green	Dragon's Blood
Fire	Wand	Red	Frankincense

Figure 1.1: Table of Correspondences

EXERCISE

Table of Correspondences

Sit in a place with plenty of sensory stimulation and open yourself up to it, just as you did in the previous example. Write down items, images, sounds, etc., that come to mind. You may even organize the

words into a specific pattern, such as a grid or cluster, or you may simply make lists, like this:

coffee	sugar
cup	spoon
talk	laugh
dark	light
blue	pink

You may have multiple columns. The patterns and words do not need to make immediate sense. The place I drink coffee has blue cups and pink sugar packets. Why? I don't know. During this exercise I am simply recording the effect these symbols have on me.

Once you have a list, see if it fits some symbolic pattern. I might arrange the above list in two columns, masculine and feminine. Some items might need to be switched around—a spoon is more phallic than a cup, but coffee is more masculine than sugar, at least in my mind. Your table may be more or less complicated. Eventually, you will have a series of lists or a grid of symbols to refer to in the future.

For example, if you wish to contact your “masculine” side, you might perform a simple ritual using those things you identified as masculine. One simple but powerful ritual you can perform is the sacred marriage. Fill a cup (representing the feminine principle) with coffee. Add sugar and stir with a spoon (representing the masculine element). Imagine the masculine mixing with the feminine as you stir. Drink the coffee mindfully, feeling it work to bring you into balance. Traditionally, this ritual is performed with a special chalice (feminine) and wand or dagger (masculine), but once you create your own set of correspondences, you are not bound to tradition.

As you may have noticed, I do a lot of magic work in public places—namely, coffee shops and restaurants. I recommend this, because too often a mage is hidebound into a private symbolism when there is a huge world

out there to tap into. To limit yourself to the symbols on your altar—bell, book, and candle—is to limit yourself to an insular world. A mage who feels the need to cast a circle and wait for the right astrological aspects before doing a protection spell acts more like a prisoner than a powerful person. On the other hand, a mage who utterly eschews private, complicated ritual will never get much beyond the simplest sorts of magic. Both inside and outside work are necessary to make a whole.

Three Skills

Magic requires only three skills, all of which rely upon our understanding of the world as a symbolic web. Everyone has these skills already, sometimes in large quantities. Our geniuses—the people who bring down “the fire to earth” in poetry, art, and music—exhibit a larger number of them. Being a mage is, in some ways, just a technology for developing our own genius. I will now speak of each magical skill: imagination, introspection, and authority.

Imagination

If we use our imaginations at all during the day, there’s a good chance we construct scenes of some sort. These are often pleasant, but almost as commonly, unpleasant. This isn’t a bad use of imagination. Studies have shown that basketball players who imagine practicing improve their skills almost as much as those who actually practice. Obviously imagination has the power to affect reality.

Imagination is the vaunted sixth sense, the nonphysical sense linking body and soul.⁶ The imagination is a sensory organ, but it is also a manipulative organ: a metaphorical eye and spiritual hand. Often we believe the imagined is not the real. Sometimes “real” and “imagined” are even placed in opposition. In magic, though, the “real” is simply whatever we perceive with our senses. Even hallucinations are real. Sometimes we think reality is

6. The term “sixth sense” is often used to describe psychic phenomena such as ESP and clairvoyance. Most scientists now recognize that in addition to the five senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste, there is a kinesthetic sense that tells us where our body is, and perhaps other senses as well.

whatever other people can also perceive. Yet, no one denies someone else's dream experiences. No one says, "Did you really dream that?" Of course you really dreamed your dream. A dream, though experienced by one person, is acknowledged as an actual experience. By the same token, you really experience whatever you sense you experience. Imagination is no less real for not being shared. In fact, it's not even unique in not being shared—none of our senses are truly shared with other observers.

Take the sense of sight, for instance. Most people pin much of their sensory knowledge on sight. I have a print of van Gogh's "Night Stars" hanging above my computer, and every time I look at it I see something new. I've had guests point out things I did not see until they pointed them out. My guests and I do not share a perception of van Gogh; instead, we perceive a symbolic *area* that we label "van Gogh" and we feel comfortable if our perceptions are more or less the same. If someone wildly differs in their reading of the painting—if they see a dinosaur in the middle of the river—then the rest of us might suspect there's something wrong with him or her. Reality is just perceptions that we all seem to agree on, yet there is really no way to know if the majority perception of reality is the right one. In fact, there is no right or wrong when it comes to perception. Seeing a river filled with boats is useful for some purposes, while seeing a dinosaur is useful for other purposes. Multiple perceptions of the same symbolic space do exist.

Even words, which give us the ability to convey our perceptions of reality, rely on symbols that we all perceive differently. Those who study the meaning of words (semioticians) speak of words occupying a "semiotic space." Words are symbols that refer not to things, but to our ideas about things. No word refers simply to a single idea, but to a range of ideas conceptualized as a space. Within this space are a number of acceptable definitions of the word; on the edges of that space, less acceptable definitions lurk. So in the space for the word "bird," there are words like "sparrow" at the center, "chicken" closer to the edge, and "ostrich" even closer to the edge. "Dog" is not even in the space of bird—it has its own space. Space is neither constant nor completely universal. For me, "chicken" might be more like a bird, more near the center than a "sparrow." This concept is crucial to successful communication. The reason we can communicate

with someone who speaks our language is not because we share definitions, but because we share a mental space in which those definitions might fall.

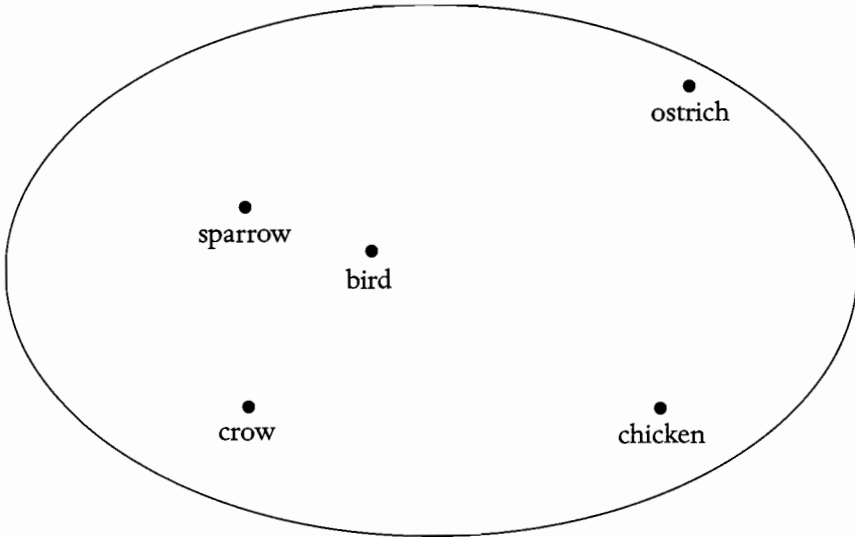


Figure 1.2: *Semiotic Space*

With this understanding, we can now redefine reality as a perception of the world that may or may not agree with other perceptions, but that nonetheless conforms to a general space or range of symbolic referents. In other words, imagination is real, and the use of imagination will conform to other's perceptions, but will also vary from them simply because no single symbol refers to only one thing.

When I was a child I used to play with a wide range of "imaginary" friends. I knew my friends were imaginary, but I also knew they were autonomous of me (although I didn't put it that way). I just knew my imaginary friends could and would surprise, amuse, and delight me without my

direct control. Once I imagined them into being (put them in a body), I could relax the control of my imagination and let them act as entities in their own right.

The adult mage simply develops this perceptual sense of imagination. It is with this sixth sense that a mage “sees” spirits, auras, and the like. As seen in the basketball example, imagination can perceive reality, but can be strong enough to also construct reality. Like many of our senses, we can use the imagination in a passive mode—to gather information—or in an active mode—to create. We can also deceive ourselves with our imaginations if we are not careful to differentiate the two modes. Many poorly trained mages or would-be witches unintentionally imagine their own fears into being—and what unpleasant beings to bring into the world!

There is a theory that imagination is not the tool for mages who perceive reality. Currently, there’s sort of a movement among mages to support this argument. To them, magic is reality and should therefore be perceived with our physical senses. They recommend practicing until magical energy is seen with the eyes. As far as my research can tell, such practice has three possible effects. First, the brain will actually translate imagined perceptions into the appropriate sense if trained to do so. So where I *imagine* an aura, a mage who has trained to see psychical responses may actually see an aura in the same location. There’s nothing wrong with this technique other than the time it wastes in training. At the same time, forced synaesthesia is not a requirement for magic. Another possibility is that these people really do see something odd with their physical eyes, but they’re not actually seeing what they believe they are seeing. Various types of nervous trauma can cause impulses to travel from the eyes to the brain without any actual stimulation of the retina. This is a purely physical phenomenon; you can press gently on your closed eyelids and experience flashes of light. The final possibility is that those who claim to physically see spirits or “energy” are simply lying; they cannot perceive anything at all, but wish people to believe they can for some reason. Without magical training, they may not even realize that “magical sight” does not refer to

the physical sense of sight, but to a mental phenomenon. Besides, imagination is more versatile than physical sight. Why a mage would want to reduce such a useful tool to something so rigid is a mystery to me.

I would like to spend some more time on the active mode of imagination. You can use imagination to create things in the so-called “astral plane” (plane of formation). In this (non) place, ideas take on substance and substance exists only as a reflection of ideas. People go here when they astral travel. The plane of formation contains things the physical world does not; symbols take on a dynamic solidity and interfere in one’s enjoyment of simple voyeurism or sightseeing. This is one reason why astral travel cannot be easily used to, say, spy on the locker room at the local health club.

Other more interesting uses for the plane of formation make visiting it worthwhile, despite the poor prospects of voyeurism. Perhaps the most significant reason to journey there is to do inner work—to focus on aspects of yourself that will help you grow as a successful mage in the outer, physical world. One such way to begin this work is to create an astral temple or palace. This is the place you can go to focus on yourself. Eventually, you can use the temple to perform rituals in your imagination. This technique is especially convenient if you have limited physical space. Design the space along symbolic lines—it is standard to have each room represent a part of the body, but hardly the only design available. I have two such inner places: one is a house designed partially according to traditional models and partially according to the instructions in *The Sacred Magic of Abramelin*.⁷ The other temple—where I go to do more simple, quiet work—is a black basalt pyramid rising in the middle of a desert. A friend of mine works on a disk of stone floating in space. Ultimately, you must suit your temple to your needs and tastes. I advise you to start with a simple temple or workroom containing the things you’ll need. For ideas on how to design such a room, you can comb Israel Regardie’s *The Golden Dawn* or you can integrate ideas found in fiction or fantasy.⁸

7. In this important grimoire, the author gives instructions for creating a sacred space to invite one’s “holy guardian angel” or divine spirit, which I will discuss in chapter 3.

8. Isreal Regardie’s *The Golden Dawn* contains illustrations and descriptions of a traditional hermetic temple.

EXERCISE

Making an Astral Temple

Relax, close your eyes, and softly count your inhales (or exhales) until you feel completely calm. Now, imagine yourself standing at the entrance of your temple. For some, this will be a front door or gate, or it might be a hole in the ground or a cave. Alternately, you might start in the middle of the temple, at an altar or sacred fire. Some people like a tunnel or set of stairs to travel along as a means to prepare for the work to come, while others like to begin right away. In any event, slowly connect each sense to the place you have created. What does it taste like? Smell like? What do you hear? How does it feel to be there? You can move back and forth from watching yourself standing there, to identifying directly as the *you* in the astral realm. You may find it helpful to talk aloud about what you sense. If something does not suit you, change it. The changes you make almost always remain solid, even if you're not concentrating on them. This is a sign that you're accessing a deeper level of imagination, that you're in a position to shape reality.

When you return from your journey, get some markers, paints, or crayons to make a drawing of the room—especially if you think you cannot draw. Likewise, you might want to write about the place if you think you cannot write. This helps ground the experience, but it also stretches your self-concept beyond your idea of what you can and cannot do. Alternately, you might try to symbolically create the room in your own living environment. A physical temple can be very useful, and doesn't have to be permanent. It's very easy to make a break-down temple. All you need is something to symbolically represent each of the things you have placed in your inner temple. If there is a sword hanging on the wall, for example, you may hang a picture of a sword or knife on the wall of your physical temple.

With this last exercise we find imagination to be less skill and more manipulative organ. Like a muscle, it gets stronger with practice. Go to your temple often, and begin to construct a more ambitious project, like an entire

garden around it. You could go so far as to construct a whole world, complete with animals, plants, and geological features. If the idea of such a large project appeals to you, go for it. Eventually the temple will take on a personality of its own and you may notice small changes that you didn't will. These changes are significant; they point to messages from your subconscious. If, for example, you find a hammer on your altar, it may indicate that you are concerned with the proper spiritual use of force. Also, do not be surprised if intelligence in your astral environment evolves or rival creators challenge your power. In one way, these entities are simply figments of your imagination, but this really means their reality differs from, but is not inferior to, that of matter. The "just imaginary" can hurt you if you are not careful. So be careful. If you are attacked in your astral temple, mentally deconstruct the temple and start over, paying careful attention to the production process and identifying those things that make you uneasy—they're probably the source of the infestations. Such attacks are rare, so do not let fear of them prevent you from creating a temple.

Perhaps I've given the impression that magic is nothing much special, that it's commonplace and anyone can do it. It may be wise to digress here, and clarify. Anyone can do magic, just as anyone with the proper will to put in the practice and receive the subsequent proper training can learn to do a fair bit of any trade or eventually exhibit some skill, from draftsmanship to artistic drawing. But magic is indeed something special. I happen to think magic is part of my purpose. It's part of what it means to be human: to truly perceive. This sense of true perspective is different than the billiard-ball, cause-effect sense of photons hitting my retinas. Magic is participation with the world. Magical skills may be commonplace, but this does not mean magic is commonplace. Magic, like any other art, is greater than the sum of its parts.

Introspection

In itself, the skill of introspection is not a very magical skill. With this skill, you cannot read people's minds or leave your body as you can with a properly developed imagination. All introspection does is reflect yourself back to yourself. Yet, this is much more valuable than it may seem. Introspection serves as a map to magic. A traveler might scorn the map in favor of the road, but when the traveler is lost, the map is precious!

Introspection assures that you do not deceive yourself. As I just explained, imagination has two modes, active (to construct) and passive (to perceive). Imagination can deceive you by creating the thing you want to perceive. It can tell you, for example, that someone's aura is welcoming when it's actually forbidding; or that you've conquered some Herculean task when actually you conquered nothing but a fantasy. To prevent this, you have to know how to examine yourself and your experiences, how to stand back and take a good hard look at yourself.

But not too hard. The error most people make when introspecting is being too hard on themselves. I advocate total honesty in introspection. In fact, without total honesty, it's not introspection. But I stress honesty not because people are too soft. More often people are too cruel with themselves. I know I am. After a particularly stressful day, I can spend an uncomfortable hour before bed reiterating the day's mistakes. I'm getting better, though. I no longer rehearse tomorrow's! Self-criticism is useful for our spiritual growth, but self-abuse is not.

I find the best way to introspect is on paper. If you try to analyze yourself in your head, your thoughts will fly away with you. But on paper, the words stand solid in front of you, and you can see them for what they are. Writing your thoughts down gives them the solidity needed to honor them, examine them, or banish them.⁹

I have learned some of the method in this next example from the art of psychology, which is slowly approaching magical theory without knowing it. I have added my own touches to it, though. If you wish to examine the original techniques, the bibliography contains several resources. A study of psychology, I always insist, is invaluable for a practicing mage.

9. "... simply writing down a goal can accomplish it." This concept will be discussed in chapter 5, on defixiones. Also, see bibliography entries for recommended reading, specifically, Gager's *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*; Luck's *Arcana Mundi*; and Klauser's *Write it Down, Make it Happen*.

EXERCISE

Introspection for Troubling Thoughts

Find a thought that troubles you. You can also do this with thoughts that please you, turn you on, or bore you—whatever issue you wish to work out. But for now, choose a troubling thought. Do not under any circumstances write down a feeling. Write the thought causing the feeling. For example, writing “I feel terrible” is useless, as is “I hate my job.” It just reinforces the feeling. Instead, write the thought—no matter how silly it makes you feel—promoting the bad mood: “My job is unrewarding,” for example.

Now, examine this thought for logical fallacies and weaknesses. “My job is unrewarding” discounts all available evidence. Your job may not pay very well, but even if it covers only your basic expenses, it still cannot be called “unrewarding.” Similarly, it may not spiritually fulfill you, but certainly there are some things about it that are pleasant, even if it is only the coffee break.¹⁰

Now, write down a logical response to the initial thought: “My job doesn’t pay as well as some jobs I could get, but I’m doing okay. I enjoy working downtown. It’s also a good experience. I can always apply for another job. I’ll send out a resume today.” Now, cross out the earlier thought by drawing a neat line through it. Reread the replacement thought three times.

This is an amazingly simple way to examine and control your thoughts. Although you can, if you like, discard these papers after you write on them, I’d recommend keeping them to chart the development of your thoughts over time. You may find certain issues arise often, while other issues fade in importance. Perhaps family will figure in regularly, but work never will. Or perhaps over time you’ll care more about your home than work.

You may wish to keep track of these issues. Make a list and assign a symbol to each issue you care about. The symbol can be a glyph, word, sound, or all of the above. Arrange these symbols in a pattern.

10. For a more in-depth treatment of this method of self-analysis, David D. Burns’ *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy* is thorough and easy to read.

Traditionally, glyphs would be arranged in a circle or semi-circle, creating a pentacle or magical “stele” standing in place of the magician’s entire universe. A stele is a monument given to a king or powerful person, listing that person’s accomplishments. Your stele does not have to be a physical monument, but more like an arrangement of recorded, symbolic accomplishments. Such a stele has a number of uses. For one, you’ll find that you change it over time to better reflect who you are. This is a demonstration of a fundamental yet vital magical fact: the self is not constant, and no part of it escapes change. This is good news! It means that every day is new and every opportunity is fresh.

Making a stele also illustrates another important magical fact, namely, that you are not separate from your environment. Your self consists of all the things you have seen, heard, felt, thought—even things you are unaware of. You cannot exist without the farmer in Iowa making your food or the rains in India or the star that exploded to make—in an act of creative destruction—the elements of your body from primal hydrogen. The awareness of your interconnectedness with the world is one of the great prizes of magic, and—I dare to state—the foundation of all great art and religion.

Charting your “self” also gives you what A. O. Spare called an “alphabet of desire”: a set of symbols especially tailored to your concerns and your personal sense of self. Such an alphabet can be the cornerstone of a uniquely personal magical system; it is, therefore, one that works better than any other magical system. It also points out, quite clearly, that we consist neither of a constant self, nor a single self. Our personae are not merely masks; they are, in a real sense, what we are. Just as the Christian God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so we are all of our personae at the same time—one does not preclude another. And understanding our personae, both positive and negative, allows us to separate the businessman, the pervert, and the scholar and turn them into the Businessman, the Pervert, and the Scholar. In other words, to make them into godforms for our own use. I will speak more on defining the self in chapter 7. For now, consider the roles you play and the people you are, and try to understand them as if they were characters in a book or movie. In a way, they are. You’re finding the archetypal characters that you play in the fiction of your life.

Authority

Having a sense of self and an imagination is fine, but your self has no place to stand and your imagination has nothing to lever against without authority. Magical authority is not the same as mundane authority. Magical authority is quite literally *authority*: the power to shape our lives, to be the artist of our own art. In mundane authority, we appoint people arbitrarily to handle certain matters with which we do not wish to be bothered. This arrangement of things often leads to a sort of pride, what Shakespeare called “the insolence of office.” Mundane authority becomes authority *over*, rather than authority *with*. Such mundane authority—the authority of politics and force—is ultimately destructive rather than creative. It is inherently unstable and creates a top-heavy hierarchy in which pride, indeed, goeth before its fall. Real mages do not have this kind of pride, because their authority is self-authority. A mage does not strive for authority over a system (although, being recognized as competent, mages might have it thrust on them). Instead, a mage aspires to authority over the self, or more accurately, authority *with* the self. Thus, mundane authority achieves control through threats and violence, whereas magical authority achieves power through strength of character and clarity of mind.

Building authority is not as simple as “now I understand why I dislike women/men.” Uncovering one’s psychological peccadilloes and dealing with them is certainly part of it. But authority is also a spiritual power. It’s also nothing as milquetoasty as “self-confidence.” It’s self-confidence to the power of ten. It’s absolute certainty that one is acting in a way consistent with necessity and aptitude. Aleister Crowley called it “the true will,” and in doing so, followed the hermetic idea that we are each born having, as an organ of our soul, a mission to accomplish. The “great work” is to accomplish that mission. Not believing in a constant and unchanging soul, I do not think we are born predestined to be dentists and lawyers. But we are born into a set of circumstances that gives us certain powers, abilities, strengths, and weaknesses, and we can use these to be more effective, happy people.

Once you examine yourself, you have the foundation for self-authority. Often, taking on the full mantle of magical authority occurs in an initiation. A true initiation symbolically reenacts the experience of birth, an experience

deeply engrained in all of our unconscious minds. This reenactment can occur in one of several ways: 1.) ritual 2.) trauma or 3.) religious experience.

Ritual

In an initiation ritual, the participants, usually initiates themselves, act out various elements of the birth experience. The *mystes* (person to be initiated) usually undergoes some transformation after being deprived of a sense (blindfolding is common), the ability to move (binding), human appearance (daubing with mud), and identity (not using or acknowledging birth name). The *mystes* is led on a journey around a circle, maze, or simply in a straight line, and stopped to be challenged along the way. Challenges may be physical, verbal, or simply rehearsed ritual. After overcoming the challenges, the *mystes* moves on to the final destination, where there may be one more task to accomplish. Then the *mystes* is “washed in blood,” which is usually done symbolically, by being sprinkled with water, for example. The blindfold is removed, and the *mystes* is renamed (often with a new name chosen for the occasion) and welcomed into the “land of the living” (the ordinary world) with new insight gained from the initiation.

Trauma

You can perform a ritual initiation yourself by imagining the various necessary participants. More commonly, solitary practitioners pay for their freedom by externalizing their initiation rituals as trauma. These traumatic initiations occur as part of life—a mental illness, a disease, the death of a loved one—but still retain elements of rebirth and attainment. In many cultures, shamans are called to their vocation by a mysterious disease from which they have recovered from, usually through the ministrations of another shaman who then acts as a *mystagogue*, or teacher. Traditionally, mages might even conspire to construct such traumas. To obtain the authority that deals with fire, for example, a mage may expose him- or herself to flames.

Not every life trauma, properly speaking, is an initiation—only those leading to a new beginning in one’s spiritual development. I use the word “spiritual” here in its broadest possible sense, as having anything whatsoever to do with the numinous. Art, by these lights, is as spiritual as God. Often, trauma signifies rejection of a spiritual realization or role. Accep-

tance of the role usually alleviates the trauma. In the example of shaman sickness given above, the cure is for the sick person to accept the role of a shaman. From this perspective, shaman sickness runs absolutely rampant in our culture. I believe many of our daily traumas—illnesses, disasters, and malaise—originate because we reject spiritual roles. For example, we refuse to admit that we love or hate some part of ourselves, and therefore we become sick to force the initiation.

I am firmly of the opinion that depression, an epidemic in our culture, comes ultimately from this root. Still, as I said before, not every illness or disaster is an initiation. I once knew a person who told a cancer victim that her cancer resulted from a lack of creative outlets. Maybe, but it also could have just been cancer. It would have been more compassionate (and more polite) not to make assumptions. Bad luck does just happen sometimes. This said, it is important to realize that the ill are not responsible for their diseases. Even if they are initiatory traumas, the sufferers must decide that for themselves.

There is one other comment I must make on this subject: to be proud of one's initiations is much like being proud of one's hepatitis or one's clinical depression. Although there is and ought to be no shame in being ill, there's also no reason to be proud of one's illness (except, of course, for having lived through it—but that may be less a matter of character than luck). The mystes should, by all means, remain silent regarding personal initiations or run the risk of undermining the real importance of initiations: the building of self-authority.

Religious Experience

The religious experience of being "slain in the spirit" is another example of initiation. In this religious experience, the worshipper suddenly feels overcome by the spirit of God, and often falls down. Sometimes, the worshipper will speak in a mysterious language, or prophesize. The experience of an ecstatic bridging of life and death—from dying to new life—is also common in shamanic cultures. A new shaman has a vision of first being slain and then put back together again by a guardian spirit. The full range of religious initiations is outside the scope of this book, but it is interesting to note parallels between religious experiences in different cultures and the

experiences of initiation undergone by magicians. Death, rebirth, ecstasy, and the sudden understanding of things formerly hidden are common to both religion and magic.

EXERCISE

Uncovering “True” Will

Get comfortable. If you have a tool of authority and a tool of imagination, use them to help you achieve the proper relaxed state of mind. (We will discuss these tools and other magical artifacts in chapter 3.) Otherwise, simply use your breath to relax into a calm state of mind. Visualize yourself from the outside, as if watching a movie. Write down all your impressions without thinking or censoring. Draw a line across the page. Visualize yourself from the inside, as if looking through your eyes. How does it feel to be you? Again, write your impressions for a while.

Now, with these insights, make a list of strengths and weaknesses. In your imagination, build up a scene in which you are fulfilling some role of one or more of these strengths or weaknesses. If one of your strengths is writing, imagine writing a book. If one of your weaknesses is a lack of physical coordination, imagine yourself teaching a martial arts class. After you put the scene together, let it play a couple of times—as if it’s a DVD—before putting yourself into the main character’s body, watching through his or her eyes, feeling through his or her skin.

How does it feel to do this thing you’ve imagined yourself doing? If you wanted to be more like this image, how could you go about it? Make a plan. You don’t have to carry it out, but you may want to.

In the above exercise, you’ll find that you’re doing things you didn’t think you could do. You’ll also find that people’s perceptions of you begin to change. Do you want to be a teacher? See yourself, feel yourself, and hear yourself as a teacher, and you will be one. Some people call this method

“fake it until you make it,” but I call it having authority to define the self. After all, only you have the authority to define yourself.

Other people will constantly try to define you, though. Therefore, the wise mage questions authority, especially occult authority. Even occult movements claiming to be free of dogma often make bald assertions. Sometimes they make such assertions for economic reasons. It is easier to sell a book that tells you what is right and what is wrong than one that gives you pointers to find out for yourself. Other times, dogma arises from lack of self-authority. Those mages uncertain about their experiences, unclear about their initiations, or just generally dubious about magic, might insist on points of dogma—e.g., “a spell must be forgotten before it can work” or “religion is for the weak”—to barricade against uncertainty. After all, if I can convince you that something is true, it must be true, and then I have the truth and knew it before you did.

Nonsense. I have a truth, but truth is, in the words of author Ursula Le Guin, “a matter of the imagination.”¹¹ I do not mean to imply any such wishy-washy claptrap as “you have your truth and I have my truth.” Truth, to be truth, must be absolute. It must exist, in other words, and not merely be a perspective on nothing. But there may be multiple absolutes. There are many ways to bake a cake. They all produce different cakes, but they’re all true ways to make cake. By the same token, there are many ways to do magic. They all produce subtly different magic, but they’re all magic. Mages who insist a spell must first be forgotten in order to work are focusing on removing desire from the mind. This approach is fine for some, but no one should conclude that if this “rule” is not followed, the magician is ignorant or lacks skill.

Magic is something as personal as love. Love exists. But there are many kinds of love, and none of them are wrong. So, ultimately what I’m saying is that you, as a mage, must be free of dogma. It’s hard work to be open to all outside advice and still avoid new dogmas. Strike a balance between blind belief and willing experimentation and you’ll find that just as love exists, so do the truths of magic. You can find them the way you find love, by going out into the world and seeing for yourself.

11. Le Guin, *Left Hand of Darkness*

EXERCISE

Being Your Own Authority

Make a list of statements made by your parents, teachers, and friends—stick to the ones you believe, or hold as truths. When finished, go through the list and actively visualize, first as an observer and then as a participant, what the world would look like if these “rules” (or “truths”) were wrong. For example, if your mother always told you “there ain’t no such thing as a free lunch,” visualize a scene in which everyone eats lunch for free. What would that world look like? Be literal. Be figurative. When you get through the list, write a list of new rules to describe the world you want to live in. They needn’t be true. In fact, make sure some of them are false. Pin it on your fridge or the bathroom mirror so you can see it every day, reminding yourself of the world you wish to live in; eventually, your rules become the truths of your own world or environment.

Four Paradigms

We should now be able to see that the scientific method does not offer truths about the world, but models that explain it. These models are called “theories.” If a model adequately explains and predicts phenomena, it is a good theory; if it fails to explain or predicts wrongly, then it must be changed. Magic’s version of a scientific theory is the paradigm. A paradigm is a way to look at the world, a fundamental set of assumptions rarely questioned. A mage must question them, though, because every mage has one or more paradigms that include, as a basic assumption, the possibility of magic. Most of the common paradigms of our culture do not include this assumption. I will call paradigms that do include this assumption “magical paradigms.” There is nothing inherently magical in a paradigm itself. One can believe in a magical paradigm and not be a mage. Late night educational television proves this with breathless inquiries about the “unexplained.”

Where a scientific theory must be changed if it is unable to explain something, magical paradigms are more flexible. A mage may hold multi-

ple, even contradictory, paradigms in mind at all times. This is a technique people have been using for centuries, perhaps millennia. While studying the magical effects of objects (what we might currently call physics), a medieval mage might have held the spirit paradigm, a religious paradigm, and a belief in “natural science,” but still kept in mind at all times the potential influence of magic. The possibility that natural science might contradict, in some instances, the spirit paradigm (for example), or seem superfluous to it, never bothered the medieval mage any more than it bothers the modern mage. Again, you simply choose a system that works best for you.

The holding of multiple paradigms is a *sine qua non* of magic, in my opinion, but I do believe for a paradigm to be useful it must offer some of the same benefits as a scientific theory. Certainly I don’t advocate the scientific exploration of magic, but a magical paradigm should at least tell us how we can become better mages.

Once we understand how we’ve learned our assumptions about the world, we can begin to question authority and change assumptions or paradigms that are less useful to us. By first questioning authority, we can change paradigms without fear or hesitation. We all have many ways to view reality, paradigms that help us explain and predict the behavior of others. Perhaps one of the most interesting approaches to paradigms is by Frater U.:D.:, who outlines a number of magical paradigms, each of which offers an explanation of magic from a different perspective. I like his classification system and therefore share his findings here.¹²

The Spirit Paradigm

In the Middle Ages and before, magic was thought to be performed by means of non-physical entities, particularly gods and spirits. In classical Greece, the difference between god and spirit (or *daemon*) was fuzzy and simply a matter of degree. In the Middle Ages, an emphasis was placed on moral quality: demons, as they were then called, were evil. God was good. Some spirits worked for God—these were angels and archangels—and a mage could use them to control the evil demons.

12. Frater U.:D.:, a mage working in the currently popular “chaos” magical current, outlines a number of paradigms in an online publication: <http://www.chaosmatrix.org/library/chaos/texts/model.html>

The spirit paradigm has its uses. By means of an outside agency (spirit or demon), mages can tackle goals that they might not have the confidence to do alone. Disadvantages can creep in, though—the autonomy of the spirits can be problematic. For the classical Greek or Roman mage, it may have been less of a problem if the spirit were generally considered benign, but there were malign demons, just as there were malign gods, that could interfere or masquerade as benign spirits. In the Middle Ages, even benign spirits were known to be potentially hard to handle—making difficult, embarrassing, or unethical requests of mages. Or, sometimes they simply chose not to help. One famous example from the Renaissance is that of Dr. John Dee, court astrologer to Queen Elizabeth. His partner, Edward Kelly, reported that an angel ordered the two men to swap wives; Dee, wisely, refused.¹³

Ethical issues also intrude with this paradigm. Does one command a spirit? Or, do spirits prefer the same sort of respect we would offer to an incarnate being? In the Middle Ages there was no question: spirits were commanded by the virtue of God. The mage spoke *in loco Dei* (in the place of God) and therefore ethics did not intrude. It may be that you do not consider the world to be so simple. If not, imperiously commanding spirits—spirits you might not even consider malign—might be rude at best, immoral at worst. At the very least, it's much less likely to provoke a friendly response.

A more appealing logic to apply to the spirit paradigm is animism. In this variation, all of creation is alive with intelligence and power. Powerful spirits move through everything and interact in myriad ways with reality. Moreover, a mage might make allies with some of these spirits for shared purposes. The ethical issues are different. These spirits are too powerful to command—one must *request*. Of course, then the question becomes, should we let these spirits command us? It seems as though animist cultures rarely have spirits firing back commands. Usually, the spirits are seen as partners in some variety of work or responsibility, often communal in nature. The animism paradigm has resurged in magic probably because of

13. Whether or not Kelly was really told to do this by an angel is questionable, for he was not of reputable character—he was a convict and was known to lie on other occasions. Still, the example remains, and in the context of history, his story changed the perception of benign spirits.

a strong anarchist (or anti-authority) strain in modern magical thought. Animism offers a way to work with the spirit paradigm without issues of hierarchy intruding.

The Energy Paradigm

Most mages have taken basic high school science; therefore, it always amazes me when they talk of magical “energy” as if such a thing exists. Of course, energy is a useful symbol, but it is absurd to say there’s some hitherto undiscovered energy that shares none of the characteristics of any other energy we know. Saying this energy is somehow responsible for magic is also absurd.

There is, however, a metaphorical “energy” in every person. It’s the same sort of energy that gets us out of bed in the morning, helps us complete our tasks during the day, and even makes us dream at night. This energy exists not as a literal energy but as a symbol of power, and we can use magic to move it, change it, and utilize it. The Chinese practice of Qi Gong recognizes the ability to change personal energy for health, martial arts, and miracles. Other cultures have ideas of *mana* (Maori for “prestige” and “power”), *tsog* (Mongolian for “psychic power of the shaman”),¹⁴ or *ashe* (Yoruban for “power”)¹⁵ that move through and behind all things. Manipulating this mana, tsog, or ashe lets the mage control the physical environment.

To claim that such energy could be converted into, say, electrical or kinetic energy requires us to point to an instance in which it has been done. Such instances are few and far between. Even carefully combing Fortean stories digs up nothing much.¹⁶ There are some rumors of Qi Gong masters punching things from a distance, which would qualify as evidence, but I would like to see a demonstration in a well-lit room before I believe it. This lack of proof is not to say the energy paradigm doesn’t have uses.

Energy is an important symbol in our culture. By that light alone, believing our minds can manipulate energy is a way of symbolizing the inherent power of the human mind to mold reality. And it’s an easy paradigm to

14. Sarangerel, *Riding Windhorses*. —

15. González-Whipple, *Santeria: The Religion*.

16. Charles Fort dedicated his life to collecting stories and anecdotes of unusual occurrences. Such stories are called “Fortean” in honor of his work, “The Fortean Times,” a journal that continues to report many such stories.

teach others. We all know the tingle of static electricity and the heat of a candle. We can easily imagine these sensations, giving them a reality beside and outside our own minds. Also, energy serves as a fine symbol of power (though, according to physics textbooks, the two are not synonymous). As such, it's the perfect medium of exchange between mages and spiritual beings.

I'll admit that Franz Mesmer was not entirely wrong in saying there is magnetic energy running through the human body. There is, but it's very small, and it doesn't affect the outside world.¹⁷ Scientific literacy and pseudoscientific explanations aside, mages should work with the concept of energy in an intuitive sense, understanding it not as literal truth but as a handy symbol for power. "Explanations" in terms of biological electricity, brain waves, vibrations, and so forth, often do more to obscure than illuminate.

The Psychological Paradigm

The psychological paradigm has the opposite shortcoming. Instead of misusing scientific terms to explain magic, it uses scientific terms to explain *away* magic. In the psychological paradigm, one performs ritual actions simply to control one's thoughts, and thus increase one's self-confidence in dealing with the world. This inevitably leads to success. The problem is, magic works beyond the mind. I can influence a person from across town. Surely the fact that my friend calls me when I will the action has nothing to do with my increased self-confidence.

Yet, the psychological paradigm has at least one use: convincing those who question your interest in magic that you are not, in fact, insane. If you can couch something in scientific or psychological terms, even something as strange as performing a ritual, people will be more likely to relegate you to the eccentric camp than the insane camp. You can point out that magic simply manipulates Jungian archetypes (although very few psychologists take Jung seriously these days) in order to produce a mental effect, leading

17. In the late eighteenth century, Franz Mesmer developed a theory of "animal magnetism" in which he suggested diseases could be cured by passing a mysterious energy from therapist to patient. His work eventually led to the development of hypnosis as a method of therapy. Few therapists now ascribe to his theories of subtle energies existing in our tissues.

to greater mastery of one's unconscious urges.¹⁸ It's all nonsense, of course, but it can keep you from being regarded as too strange. Sometimes it's just best to keep your interest in the occult a secret.

The Information Paradigm

The final paradigm views the world as a sort of computer program, a collection of information that mages reprogram with their minds.¹⁹ We are interested in the following qualities of information:

1. Theoretically, infinitely storable. A system with infinite states, such as fractal systems, can store infinite information.
2. Not bound by the laws of matter and energy. Not, in other words, tied to space-time.
3. Capable of existing independently of matter, as recent experiments with quantum theory seem to indicate.

What a wonderful candidate for magical "energy"! Information does everything we claim energy or spirits do: it is nonphysical yet interacts with matter; it is manipulated with the human mind and stored in symbols; it can be copied, transported, and transformed instantly; and science even studies it.

So, the information paradigm is a splendid model for what we're doing when we do magic. After all, the brain deals with information in quantities far greater than the miniscule electrical impulses passing between its neurons. If my mind can cause change on a symbolic level, perhaps it really can cause change. Perhaps the information passing through my mind also passes through the world at large—everything being connected to the same matrix.

For those so inclined, looking for a scientific explanation of magic seems more reasonable from an informational perspective than any other.

18. See Jung, Carl in glossary, and Jung, *The Essential Jung*, in bibliography.

19. To be more accurate, information is a measure of the signal needed to transmit some message. I will use the term "information" colloquially, to stand for both the signal and the meaning of the signal. Technically, this use is wrong, but it will occasion no confusion for the intelligent reader.

Still, looking for a scientific explanation for magic is like trying to find a scientific explanation for poetry. Science simply does not and cannot study magic any more than it can study the phenomenon of "art." But, perhaps there is something in the ways we think about information, even in the equations that measure it and describe its manifestations, that we can use to think in fresh, interesting ways about magic.

For example, the amount of information in a message consists of the inverse of that message's probability in a given setting ($i = 1/p$). Messages we expect to receive contain very little information: if I am serving drinks and I ask, "What size?" I expect to receive only one of three answers—small, medium, or large. Any one answer will contain only a small bit of information. Common words (like "the") carry very little information, because the probability of any utterance containing at least one common word is very high. Complex and unlikely combinations (like "kumquat monkey") carry considerable amounts of information. To illustrate this, imagine cutting words out of a sentence. You can cut out the most common words and still be comprehensible (e.g., can cut common words, still comprehensible), but if one cuts out the less common words, gibberish results (e.g., you out the most, and be).

At the same time, if a message contains too much information, it exceeds its "channel size" and fails to be properly transmitted. Channel size is determined by the means of communication—if I am speaking, the channel is my voice—plus the amount of extraneous "noise." Noise, of course, is simply information not germane to the salient message. If there is too much noise, it clogs the channel, and messages cannot get through. Similarly, if we try to do something too improbable or with too much mental noise, it fails because our channel is clogged. We are better off trying to accomplish probable tasks with a quiet mind.

So, the wider the channel, the more likely it is the message will be received clearly; similarly, the lower the noise level, the more likely the message will be received. If the noise level is too high, the message will be garbled or misunderstood. Similarly, if too much information is being passed through a very small channel, the message is likely to be lost.

Another reason I feel the information paradigm is so important is that it gives clear instructions for the development of a mage—instructions that energy or spirit paradigms do not offer. In the energy paradigm, for example, a mage's power is a function of how much energy he or she can hold or command; in other words, "power" in this paradigm is circular. A mage is as powerful as the mage is. The energy paradigm cannot offer instructions for improvement, because it cannot explain where energy comes from, how it can be manipulated, or how it interacts with matter. By the same token, the spirit paradigm argues that a mage's power is determined by the power of his or her helping spirits, which effectively removes power from the mage.

Ultimately, all of these paradigms are mental games. No one system can adequately explain all phenomena any more than the theory of Vorticism can explain all of poetry,²⁰ or Impressionism can explain all art. But just as one might write a Vorticist poem and then write a traditional sonnet and feel no particular conflict, so one might deal with spirits on Monday and energy on Tuesday without the least bit of dissonance. In fact, switching paradigms is handy. Doing so frees us to think about any given magical problem from multiple angles.

For example, say I wish to find a thief. I can send out a spirit to do the job for me. I can charge a talisman and send the resulting energy to do the job. I can convince myself the thief is caught, thus taking away the sting of the theft. I can link the thief's semiotic pattern to the semiotic pattern of justice and let the symbols play themselves out inevitably. All of these ways lead to the same end, though some are more useful than others. Some of them may have more aesthetic appeal than others. Those with the most aesthetic appeal, most likely have the best results. No one is bound to deal only with spirits, just as no one is bound to deal only with watercolors when painting a landscape.

It is important not to confuse an information paradigm with inactivity. Mastery of magic does not come from simply reading books. In two days of playing my drum, I learned more than in fifteen years of reading. You

20. Vorticism is a somewhat obscure literary school popularized by Ezra Pound in the early part of the twentieth century.

must go out and *do*! This isn't a personal imperative. Many mages throughout history command: *do*. Go out and try some or all of the exercises in this book. Make up new ones. Find others, online and in print.

• • •

In conclusion, I want you to remember: magic is not drudgery. It's fun. Don't be swept into the boot camp attitude of some magical orders. There is no need to spend an hour motionless every morning. Meditation is useful, but lying stiff and uncomfortable for an hour every morning may accomplish nothing but pain. By the same token, avoid Aleister Crowley's psychotic insistence on "discipline." Self-discipline is one thing—one good thing—but cutting yourself with a razor every time you say "I" is just self-loathing stupidity.

Let me add a command: *play*. Magic is all about playing: playing with symbols, playing with concepts of the self, and playing with reality itself; like a child playing with clay. At times a mage must take magic deadly serious. But even then, play is also a part of it. We do magic because it feels good. After a magical operation you'll notice a sense of euphoria. That's no accident. Our bodies, minds, and souls love to do magic. It is not work to us, and those who try to turn it into work pollute a beautiful, joyous, pleasurable experience with Puritan toil.

SYMBOLS, SIGNS, AND SIGILS

Every word you speak, every thought you have, every thing you see, and all you do in your day-to-day life is, in one way or another, a symbol. Words are symbols. The thoughts they express are symbols. And the reality to which they relate is a great cluster of symbols. Think of a huge web stretching across the black emptiness of space. In each nexus of lines rests a symbol connecting to an infinite number of other symbols. It is important to grasp this concept, because symbols are the underlying girders of the universe, the substance a mage manipulates to accomplish magic.

Symbols also underlie reality. By “symbol,” I do not mean merely graphic symbols like + and \$ but I mean any thing that is meant to represent some other thing. The word “cat” is a symbol. A drawing of a cat is a symbol. The use of a cat to represent cleverness is a symbol. The use of a cat to represent luck, good or bad, is also a symbol. What few people realize, however, is that even if I were to present a physical cat for you to see, this is yet another symbol, one referring to a constructed class of animals, a species differentiated from other species because of some arbitrarily selected qualities.

I call this complex of recursive symbols “the semiotic web.” When seeking meaning, the mind says “I can place any idea in my semiotic web, which I’ve built up from all the symbols of our culture, and have it make sense to me.” But really, meaning is never absolute. We can approach some certainty, but the details, even in the most elementary communications, will

differ. When I say “chair,” you imagine one kind of chair, another person imagines another, and so on.

The fascinating issue of meaning, as linguists and semioticians study it, is beyond the scope of this book. But I believe the semiotic web is the substance of ultimate reality. More than just an abstraction to explain the way the human mind works, I think it is the abstraction to explain how Mind works. Mind is not separate from reality, nor is reality separate from the semiotic spaces it inhabits. Perhaps this is needlessly obtuse, but if reality—at an even more fundamental level than the quantum level—is symbolic in nature, then manipulating symbol systems manipulates the semiotic web, and therefore manipulates reality. Scientific explanations stop before attempting to find meaning. Only art and magic can explore meaning, and I think the reason is that both art and magic manipulate, coerce, shape, and coax meaning out of the hopelessly tangled mishmash of Mind.¹

A symbol consists of three parts: the sign, the symbol itself as an object having meaning; a signifier, the actual manifestation of the sign; and the signified, what the sign means. So, for a simple example, let’s look at a stop sign. Its text, “Stop,” is the signifier, and it means one should come to a complete stop when in an automobile or other vehicle. The same signifier in another location will not have the same effect: you don’t screech to a halt every time someone on the radio says “stop,” nor do you stop when you see graffiti spelling out “stop.” The signifier must be part of the sign itself and be displayed in the appropriate context. If I hang a stop sign in my bedroom, for example, people will not perceive it with as much seriousness as they do if it is located at a busy intersection. Similarly, the sign without the signifier is no sign at all.

So, each sign needs two parts: a signifier and a signified. Without either of these elements, a sign (and therefore symbol) ceases to mean anything, or at least, ceases to mean what was intended. The word *flug* is a signifier without a signified—it cannot be said to mean anything, although I might have a meaning for it. If I tell people what I mean by it, then it begins to take on meaning, at least in regards to those who have a meaning to go with the word. If, in other words, you link any arbitrary signifier to any ar-

1. Here I argue that mind is a priori; rather than arising from the brain, the brain arises from the Mind, which pre-exists. This philosophy, called panpsychism, has been advocated by Joseph Campbell, and is currently one of the chief contenders against materialism.

bitrary signified, it begins to take on meaning. If my friends and I decided to make *flug* our code word for “6:13 PM,” then we could use it as a sign. Otherwise, it is nonsense.

The word “stop,” the shape of a stop sign, and its colors, are all signifiers pointing to the same signified and making up the same sign. But there is nothing that inherently means *stop* in the word “stop.” We could just as easily say any of a thousand other words for stop. We could say: *paragem*, *oprire*, *przystanek*, *youqif*, *ngojo*, *teishi*, or *berhenti*, all of which mean “stop” in some symbol system. Or, we could even call a grand council of English speakers and declare that from now on, the word for “stop” is *flug*. Similarly, there is no reason for an octagon to mean “stop” and a triangle to mean “yield,” other than that we have agreed upon this symbolism. Not all signs are this arbitrary. For example, the silhouette of a truck making a wide turn is arbitrary in that the artist chose to include and exclude certain details. However, it is iconic in that it represents a truck making a wide turn even without being explained. Iconic symbols are those bearing some relationship to the meaning they signify.

In magic, although a number of our symbols are completely arbitrary, a large number are iconic. “Like makes like,” which is known as the Doctrine of Signatures, is a law of magic that establishes the importance of the iconic. It states that every thing announces its true nature by means of some symbolic, iconic element. Herbs resembling the heart, therefore, might be used to heal the heart; likewise, objects resembling erect phal-luses might be used to heal impotence. An iconic symbol reveals an object’s true essence and its purpose for being. The shape or smell or some other quality of the thing itself—say, the lunar sheen of moonstone—points to its nature in traditional magic.

But some mages are questioning the practice of using predetermined definitions to define an object’s true purpose. Instead, one might argue that there is no real essence to point to, only other symbols. Let me explain . . .

Love is often signified by the paper heart in our culture—but love itself is simply a signifier in its own right. The concept of love is a collection of beliefs, some of them untrue and some of them true, about a wide collection of emotions. Everything from pity to sexual attraction can be construed as “love.” To the postmodernist, love exists no more concretely than any other symbol. It is, like the paper heart, arbitrary and meaningless

without some conventional agreement on its meaning. What our culture calls “love” would have been alien four hundred years ago. To some postmodernist philosophers, the concepts that symbols signify are also arbitrary cultural constructions, signifiers pointing to other meanings, which themselves are also signifiers pointing to countless other meanings, and so on, spreading out in a web of possible meanings and arbitrary significations.

The postmodernist philosopher usually stops here, with “Isn’t that cool?” But mages have permission to go further. If everything we believe about the world is an arbitrary, socially constructed symbol; if nothing inherently means anything; if reality itself—as many postmodernists claim—is just a collection of such arbitrary symbols, then magic becomes not only possible but inevitable. Nothing manipulates symbols with more facility than the human mind. If reality is symbolic, reality is mutable. The exact mechanism need not concern us, although I’ll speculate later on. This awareness should excite us. Most mages throughout history have been modern or even premodern mages. They thought symbols meant something outside themselves. They thought two areas existed: the area of the symbolic and the area of the real. The postmodernist mage believes the symbolic is the real.

In magic, what we learn from all this is that symbols must be given meaning—they do not inherently have it. Furthermore, the range of meanings spreads across an entire spectrum of possibility. Some symbols have cultural significance—the planets, for example, have a meaning in our culture separate from whatever personal meaning we might give them. Other symbols are idiosyncratic—a mage might design a symbol for a specific use and never share it with others. But all symbols must have some link to meaning. To a mage with no aesthetic interest or attraction to Hindu magic, the chakras will be utterly ineffective. Of course, the chakras have entered our culture as somewhat of a fad as of late, but most people in our culture do not use them in the same way Hindu yogis use them. In fact, several different techniques have developed to deal with the same set of symbols.² Therefore, mages can either borrow cultural symbols they

2. Chakras are supposed centers of “energy” running down the spine. They are often used in healing and meditation.

find aesthetically appealing, or they can attach aesthetic meaning to new symbols borrowed from other cultures or of their own creation. Just as *flug* can mean “6:15 PM” if we tell others the correlation, so a symbol can take on significance if we tell ourselves it has significance.

On the other hand, if you try to attach your own significance to a symbol with a pre-existing meaning, you may find yourself confounded. Just because meaning is arbitrary, doesn’t mean it isn’t real. If you take a commonly accepted symbol of fire and tell yourself it means water, you’ll have to do a lot of self-convincing. But neutral, artificial, and “found” (or invented) symbols can be used without concern for their previous cultural significance.

EXERCISE

Attaching Significance to a Symbol

Take a symbol meaning very little to you. It is better not to choose a cultural symbol—don’t take a *dorje* for example, because there are many, many people who have already attached meaning to it.³ Better yet, make a symbol randomly. Scribble, then select an area that looks like a symbol; or throw pebbles on the ground, and connect them by lines; or read tea leaves to get some graphical shape, meaning nothing to you or, as far as you know, anyone else.

Now, draw that symbol on an appropriately colored piece of paper. Tell yourself the symbol means “good morning,” and it represents happiness and excitement for the beginning day. You might use yellow or orange paper, whatever color reminds you of a good day. While you passively regard the symbol on its colored paper, have a daydream about waking up happy and refreshed, and therefore being more productive during the day.

Tape the symbol to your mirror, and every time you see it, try to force yourself to feel at least a bit of excitement and anticipation for the day ahead. Eventually, you will not need to force yourself to feel it, because you train yourself to recognize the symbol’s meaning.

3. A symbol in Tibetan Buddhism representing a thunderbolt or a diamond. It symbolizes enlightenment.

This is a frivolous example. Of course, you can expand this technique, creating symbols for a wide range of emotional states, desired goals, or even abstract ideas.

Symbols and Symbol Systems

In chapter 1, I discussed the symbolic attitude of a mage and gave an exercise to induce that state. You may have found the exercise somewhat difficult—especially if, like many people in American and European cultures, you lack a sense of grounding in some symbol system. Increasingly, many people have begun to feel bereft of meaning; the myths that once guided their lives and gave them shape have lost significance. And without those myths, those symbol systems, it's difficult to understand the world, let alone live in it effectively. At one time, the church provided much of the Western world with a ready-made symbol system to explain all of life's vagaries. With the weakening of organized religion in the past century, some have cast away the church, but replaced philosophies and morals with nothing. Abandoning all symbol systems because one has disappointed you is like abandoning all language because someone once insulted you. We need symbol systems. We have to know how meanings relate to each other and to ourselves.

A symbol system is an interrelated cluster of signifiers and their meanings. Since all symbols are arbitrary, a symbol system is usually valid only for a specific culture or set of cultures. Language is a pure example of a symbol system. Each word has some relation to other words, as a dictionary plainly shows. If I look up a word in an English dictionary, I find out what other signs in English relate to that word, because the dictionary charts the symbol system for English vocabulary. I wouldn't, unless it was a multilingual dictionary, find "symbols" (words) in any other language.

Although symbol systems are not isolated, the interplay between them is limited. One can look up the English word "heart" in an English-Spanish dictionary and find the corresponding Spanish entry *corazón*. Of course, the translation can never be perfect. What the dictionary cannot record are all the thousands of intermeshing symbols connected to the social con-

struction of “heart.” In English, “heart” means courage, love, a physical organ, and so forth. In other cultures, those same attributes may correspond to the liver instead of the heart.

Let’s stay a bit longer with the simple example of language as a symbol system. We need to be perfectly conversant in any given language in order for the symbols to be properly translated. Even if we have a few of the words wrong, our communication is imperfect. An old (and rather specialized) joke goes like this:

A man traveling in France with some friends finds his hostel extremely cold. So, on leaving in the morning, he asks the matron not to let the fire go out. The French word for “fire” is *feu* (pronounced something like “fuh”). Being an American not particularly good at French, he pronounces it “foo.” Pronounced this way, the man is actually using the French word *fou*, meaning “madman.” When he returns to the hostel, he finds his friend livid—the matron had refused to let him (the “madman”) leave, and blocked him in the room!

A more ribald joke turns the tables on the French. At a retirement dinner, a well-respected French woman is asked what she most looks forward to now that her husband has more free time. She calmly announces, “I look forward to a penis.” The entire table falls silent in shock until the husband leans over and says, “My dear, in America, they pronounce that word as *happiness*.”

Both jokes illustrate that we can be misunderstood if we don’t have mastery of the available symbols, but even if we do know all the words, we can use them incorrectly. We can translate our idioms directly into the language, not realizing they refer to cultural meanings in our symbol system but not in others. For example, if you say, “I could eat a horse,” in some cultures, they might serve you one!

Many magicians make the mistake of using a symbol system created in another culture, with referents completely alien to their own culture. Why, for example, would I call upon Adonai, the God of the Jews, when I’m not Jewish? Learning a magical system is not learning a formula; it’s more like learning a language. Of course, I can call on Adonai, but if I do, I either must be completely familiar with the culture from which the name comes, or give it my own meaning. Some people object to the latter process,

claiming it's cultural imperialism (whether it is or not, it's rarely effective, as we discussed earlier). Others object to the first, claiming it's disrespectful to study a culture you do not respect enough to join. I have no opinion on either view. What I do believe, however, is that magicians must take their magical systems, and the symbol systems that make them up, more seriously; must examine them more carefully; commit them to memory; and respect them enough to make intelligent, well-considered alterations.

I often see people work with Lilith. Now, Lilith is, traditionally, a demon who murders children. This is her principle characteristic, yet people use her as a symbol of female power. To me, this seems odd. Perhaps if they reworked the symbolic link, they might have a successful connection with the demon. Maybe they could consider "murdering children" a symbol for transgressing male power. But they don't. Instead, they ignore the symbolic link entirely, pretend it isn't there, or just remain completely ignorant of it. Everyone must understand both the original cultural source and his or her own culture in order to effectively incorporate any symbol into a useful system.

A Simple Symbol System

For those just beginning magic, it might seem a daunting task to memorize, understand, and operate within expansive symbol systems. Such tasks do not have to be completely terrifying. Tables of correspondences relate the symbolic associations of each item in a magical system, and only the parts of them that seem useful need to be studied and memorized at one's leisure. For example, there is no reason for me to memorize the relationships between Arabic hells and the cabalistic Tree of Life. I'm not Arabic or Muslim. Yet, if I do wish to work with the cabala system, I may choose to memorize more universal qualities within the system, or parts that personally speak to me. For example, I may decide to memorize the significance of colors based on the cabala system. After all, I live in a world of color.

The cabalistic Tree of Life is probably a bit complicated for the beginner, although it is tremendously useful and very flexible. More adaptable to

the beginning mage's symbolic needs is, perhaps, the five element model that comes down to us from ancient Greece.⁴

Aristotle argued that the combination of four qualities created four material elements. These four qualities were poles on two continuums: hot-cold and moist-dry. The four elements are fire (hot and dry), water (cold and moist), air (hot and moist), and earth (cold and dry). All matter, Aristotle believed, was composed of these four elements. Later, a fifth element, *aether* ("spirit" or "quintessence") was added to the system. Quintessence has all the qualities—it is simultaneously hot and cold, moist and dry. It mediates the other four elements and is the source from which they come.

Each element has a class of spirits, known as elemental spirits or elemental creatures, associated with it. These elemental creatures are not physical, but are composed of the pure spiritual expression of the element they represent. Each element is also associated with an elemental king—a title referring to a particularly powerful elemental spirit—and an angel. Generally, this angel has more moral sense than the elemental creatures, and is more familiar with humans. You can use the names of these angels and kings as "magic words" to help you call on the essence of a particular element. You can also summon elemental creatures and deal with them as spirits, as will be described in chapter 4 (see discussions on Evocation and Amicable Spirits).

The element associations making most sense to me come from several systems, mainly the Golden Dawn, which is the first system I learned.⁵ I particularly enjoy working with Tibetan *tattva* associations, so I have integrated them into my element associations as well. The *tattva* symbols consist of basic shapes colored in somewhat counterintuitive hues. Western mages have traditionally employed *tattvas* in magic for several reasons. One advantage to the *tattva* system is the ability to divide up the four elements into sixteen subelements—fire of air, for example, or water of

4. For more information on the Tree of Life, see Donald Michael Kraig's *Modern Magick*. For more information on the five element model, see Israel Regardie's *Complete Golden Dawn System of Magic*, which includes descriptions of the elements and ways to use them in ceremonial magic. Also consider researching the early philosophies of Empedocles and Aristotle.

5. In this book I refer often to the Golden Dawn. Although GD practices appear in present tense, they may have been slightly altered in the past few years. See glossary entry.

earth—simply by combining the symbols with the subelement inside the main element. Hence, a yellow square with a silver crescent inside it represents water of earth. Although I'm going to now share my elemental associations with you, keep in mind that many cultures and magic groups have different associations. I encourage you to look for the ones that resonate most personally with you.

Fire

Fire represents the energy inherent in any system. It is the most destructive of the elements, as well as the most creative. Anything with natural heat contains some fire—including life and sexuality. The color of fire tends to be red. The elementals of fire are the salamanders, and the king of fire is Djin. The angel is Seraph. The alchemical symbol of fire is an upward-pointing triangle. The tattva of fire is a red triangle. Its direction is south.

Water

Water represents the life-giving and fructifying forces of all liquids. Where fire represents passion, water rules the more subtle emotions, like love. Water also represents depth, spiritual or otherwise, and the keeping of secrets. The color of water is blue. The elementals of water are the undines, which are humanoid nymphs. Their king is Niksa. The water angel is Tharsis. The alchemical symbol of water is a downward-pointing triangle. Its tattva is a silver crescent. Its direction is west.

Air

Air represents all things light and swift, namely thought. All intellectual activities, observations, and goals fall under air, as does anything impermanent, changeable, or mutable. The color for this element is yellow. Air's elementals are the sylphs, angel-like humanoid beings. Their king is Paralda. The angel is Ariel. An upward-pointing triangle with a horizontal line bisecting it is the alchemical symbol of air. The tattva is a blue circle. Its direction is east.

Earth

Earth is anything solid, gross, heavy, or immobile. It represents all material comforts and benefits, such as money, stability, and land. Earth also repre-

sents the home. Its usual color is green, although sometimes people use other earth tones. The elements of earth are gnomes, which are small dwarf-like humanoids. Their king is Ghob. The earth angel is Kerub. Earth's alchemical symbol is a downward-pointing triangle with a horizontal line bisecting it. Its tattva is a yellow square. Its direction is north.

The Fifth Element

These four elements combine to form a fifth, but very little can be said about this element. It has the alchemical symbol of an eight-spoked wheel, but it has no color, elementals, king, or angel. It does have a tattva: a black egg. This element is rarely called upon in rituals or spells, but the other four can be used to create an entirely effective system of magic.

EXERCISE

Using Elemental Symbols in Magic

Choose a goal. A good place to start is to ask for a character trait you want to find in yourself. You can, of course, also do this same sort of operation for a new car, a new lover or friendship, or any other material benefit. But self-improvement is always a good way to start. Decide what you want to develop in yourself—perhaps a better memory, or more determination, or a better sense of humor. Decide, by analogy, what element best symbolizes your desire. Let's say you want a better memory. In this case, you want to work with the element most closely associated with thought, and this is obviously air.

Decide which symbols to use for air. Since air represents all things light and swift, a feather is appropriate. If you are not familiar with a particular language or simply do not like certain symbols (like tattvas), you may decide to leave them out of this exercise. On the other hand, the color yellow may make some sense to you, perhaps it reminds you of the color of the air during a beautiful sunset; therefore, it seems appropriate to incorporate the color yellow into your exercise. Likewise, if you like the name Paralda and the angel Ariel, try to incorporate their corresponding attributes into the ritual.

Memorize all the symbols you are going to use for this ritual, then make yourself comfortable. Devise a symbolic scene for your desire. For improved memory, you could imagine your mind expanding into a huge, well-organized library full of filing cabinets and rows of neatly-stacked books.

Now, acquire some objects associated with your element. Here are some appropriate examples:

- Yellow candle
- Alchemical symbol of air, perhaps carved onto the candle
- Feather
- Recording (instrumental or vocal) reminiscent of a sunny, gently breezy day

Also consider symbolic use of these objects. For example, you may decide to hold the feather in your left hand, because to you the left hand symbolizes receiving, and you're trying to receive a new character trait. Once you have all your symbolic elemental representatives and a general scene, you are ready to address the elementals directly.

As always, cleanse your work space—you are about to summon spirits. Now, face east (correspondent direction for air). Intone: "Paralda, I call you, king of the Sylphs, come and help me! Come, Ariel, and give me memory." As you repeat this (or your own similar statement) over and over, visualize your breath turning into yellow mist, which slowly begins to form a bright yellow cloud around you.

As you continue to chant, imagine the air congealing into the shape of books, all neatly labeled and ordered on shelves, stretching out as far as you can see. Then, stop suddenly. Clap your hands (or shout or ring a bell), and inhale the entire scene. Allow it all to shrink down and settle in your head—the part of your body most closely related to memory.

Finish the ritual with a heartfelt “thank you” to the powers of air. It is now an appropriate time to perform a banishing ritual (see Appendix A).

This is a simple example of how to construct a ritual around symbolic lines. Everything, from the position of the hands to the direction you face, should contribute somehow to the general goal of the magic. Developing a symbol system allows you to find meaning in every detail of a ritual, and to then cram as much symbolic significance as possible into that ritual. Would the ritual fail if, for example, you chose fire to represent memory, or if you chose to hold the feather in your right hand? Yes and no. If you chose fire because you didn’t know what fire meant, or if you chose to hold the feather in your right hand because you didn’t think about it, the ritual would be less successful. If you chose fire, on the other hand, because to you memory seems like a sort of focused energy (heat), or you held the feather in your right hand because you’re left-handed and think of the left hand as “more active” (the right less active and more associated with thought), then you’ve made no mistake at all. The point is to think about the significance of all your actions, not to find the “right” significance. After all, all signifiers are empty; they point only to other signifiers.

Constructing a Symbol System

Eventually, the advanced mage will become annoyed with premade symbol systems—finding inaccuracies or holes that leave out important parts of personal experience. When this happens, it is good to construct a personal symbol system: a language of magic peculiar and specific to you and no one else. Mages who construct their own symbol systems take the random disorder of an infinitely recursive web—wherein every symbol, if examined closely enough, leads eventually to every other symbol—and organize it into a neat, ordered universe. Mages then inhabit the designed universe, moving about its bits to make personal realities conform to will.

Mages can construct this system in several ways. Some self-constructed symbol systems are intricately and carefully planned, even mathematical. Others are more organic, arising like a language from the needs of the

moment. In fact, more than one mage has made a personal magical language, with its own grammar, vocabulary, and prosody (see chapter 5).

Whether a mage adopts an existent symbol system or makes an original and personal idiosyncratic system, the process of using such a symbol system remains the same. It acts in many ways like shorthand—or more accurately, a code. The desire is somehow encoded in the symbols, as shown in the four elements exercise above.

EXERCISE

Symbol Systems Revisited

Earlier, I gave an exercise for creating a table of correspondences (page 9). Let's revisit that exercise now. Hopefully you can add more details by applying your new knowledge of symbols.

Go to a place you consider holy and powerful with your notebook and a pen. Achieve a magical state of consciousness by allowing yourself to become hyperaware of your surroundings, yet remain deeply relaxed. Now, begin to list images that evoke a sense of power and energy. The best images are often from childhood, dreams, or fantasies. Your images may have something in common, or just be an organic outpouring of things you find beautiful and awe-inspiring. Note that by "beautiful" I don't necessarily mean physically attractive—there is beauty even in the most terrible images. Simply make sure to select images that provoke some aesthetic response, even if it's a response you don't completely understand.

My list might look like this: lightning, thunder, clouds, storm, fog, river, hail, snow, rain, ice. Tie each of these ideas to a symbolic concept.

- Lightning: power
- Thunder: fury
- Clouds: thought
- Storm: lust
- Fog: deception, concealment
- River: travel, mystery

- Hail: destruction
- Snow: silence, calm
- Rain: life, healing
- Ice: stasis, sleep, transformation

Now, if you like, doodle an image for each symbol (I will soon explain this “image” or “sigil” in more depth, but for now, the exercise is similar to the one you did at the beginning of the chapter, when you had to draw/design a symbol. See exercise: Attaching Significance to a Symbol, page 39). You may wish to go so far as to create a table of correspondences, giving a color, scent, and so forth, to each image. It doesn’t matter how you assign these things, as long as they are meaningful to you.

Using your new symbol system is as easy as using a premade system. You can even incorporate old systems into your new one. The advantage to a traditional system is that it already permeates our culture: one can find the four elements in games, fiction, and philosophy. But a brand new symbol system needs some work; it doesn’t necessarily have a cultural context. It will be more personally meaningful, and will eventually become an efficient means of self-exploration and magic.

Using any symbol system requires some dedication; not in the sense of a religion, but in the sense that you are dedicated to the language you use. Your symbol system, like language, should become second nature. A common exercise to achieve this familiarity is to associate everything possible in one’s environment to the symbol system.

EXERCISE

Training a Symbol System

Set out on a magical walk. Though it’s not necessary, you may wish to take some magical item to remind yourself that you are doing magic; you are not just on an entertaining outing. Mentally associate the first thing your eyes light upon with your symbol system. For example: “A car. It’s purple. That’s the color of Thunder in my

system. A car is a tool for traveling; therefore, it symbolizes River. Thunder over River means fury over mystery, or anger over travel—it could mean frustration.” Or, if you prefer a premade magical system, your analysis might go something like: “Purple is the color of Yesod, hence, sex and magic. A car is a type of chariot. The Chariot tarot card is related to the Hebrew letter Chet, which is number eight—a number of chaos as well as structure. So, a purple car could be a symbol of chaos magic, or of an intellectual sexual encounter, or a sexual encounter in which one person is dominant over the other, since the Chariot symbolizes dominance and over-coming.”

As you can see, you will have to walk fairly slow and stretch your symbol system to extreme ends. You may not get much beyond your front yard before you use every symbol!

Sigils

What happens if we cannot find a symbol for our desired goal, or all the symbols we do find seem to carry something extraneous that we don't want? When this happens in language, we coin a word or borrow one from another source. To describe the new machines that could do calculations faster and more reliably than any previous device, we coined the word “computer.” To describe the worldwide network connecting those computers, we coined the word “Internet.” In magic, we have a similar option available to us: we can coin a symbol. The only requirement is, we have to somehow connect the symbol, at least in our own minds, with our desire. We call this constructed symbol a “sigil.”

The sigil is an abstract graphic representation of a desire. It does not in any known or traditional way recall the desire, but is still symbolically linked in the mind of the mage who made it. It might come from iconic elements—a drawing of a new car to represent a desired car—or it might come from completely abstract images. There are three ways of making sigils (although I imagine a clever reader can come up with more).

The first and most common method is to abstract the sigil from the letter shapes found in a sentence of desire, or the shape of a word expressing the desired signification. Basically, this results in a complex monogram, but one cannot readily reconstruct the sentence of desire from the symbol itself. The process to create an abstract sigil from letter shapes is quite easy.

EXERCISE

Making a Sigil Out of a Desire

Write out a clear sentence of desire, or a collection of words associated with a desire. If you want a new car, for example, you can write: "I will have a new car." Then, eliminate repeated letters—it's not necessary to express a letter multiple times in the same sigil. This leaves us with "IWLHAVENCR." Combine the letters graphically—you may twist them around, use different fonts, draw them in disproportionate sizes, and so on. When you have the complex monogram, you can simplify it however you like. You needn't worry about keeping all the elements of the letters intact either. The letters just help you begin the designing process.

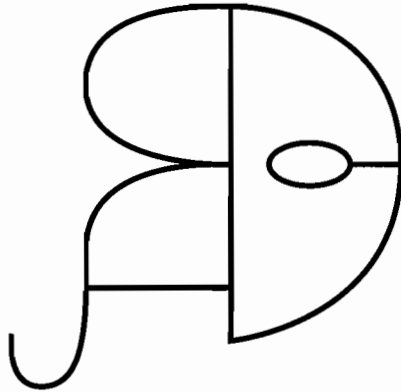


Fig 2.1: Monogram Sigil

The second method is to abstract the sigil from a symbolic, iconic drawing. The most important thing to remember when working with this method is to abstract the sigil sufficiently, so that no element of a noticeable symbolic link is visible. No one, least of all the mage, should be able to look at someone's personal sigil and say, on basis of shape alone, that it represents any given desire. Although I've heard of some people having success with a purely iconic symbol, such as a photograph of a new car, the detail of such an iconic image can interfere with our ability to connect symbolically with the desire. This abstraction is easy to do if, like me, you draw poorly in the first place.

EXERCISE

Making a Sigil Out of an Iconic Drawing

If you wish to encourage some virtue or strength in yourself, you might find it useful to meditate on a sigil representing your desire. Let's imagine you want to develop courage as a virtue. Consider what represents "courage" to you—something easily visualized. One can't draw a picture of courage, but one can draw a picture of a lion, or a mother protecting her children, or a soldier braving enemy fire. Without thinking about it too much, quickly draw the image. Draw it over and over again, until you can barely see the original illustration. This piece of abstract art is your sigil.



Fig. 2.2: *Iconic Sigil*

The third method requires the mage to build up desire in the imagination, and let it abstract itself ultimately into a sigil. This bears some relationship to the practice of glossalalia, in which a sentiment (usually religious) ex-

presses itself as “nonsense.”⁶ This sort of sigil can be very powerful and rarely has any obvious link to its desire. Moreover, these sigils can express infinitely detailed desires without being limited to art or word craft. It proves that one can make a sigil for anything one can imagine.

EXERCISE

Sigil in Abstract Art

To use this method, the mage must have a strong idea of the desired goal in mind while creating the sigil. The easiest way to do this is to use the surrealist method of automatic drawing, in which you let your hand quickly sketch the image while imagining the emotional situation you wish the sigil to symbolize. For example, if you want to heal a friend, you might visualize him or her in perfect health, while calling up feelings of love and compassion. Holding these thoughts, let your hand work on its own. The sigil will naturally be tied to the visualization without any more work on your part.

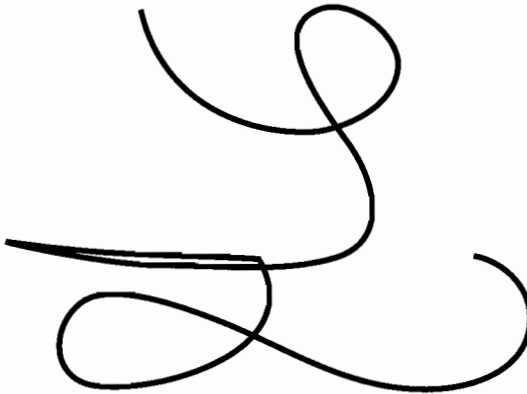


Fig. 2.3: Intuitive Sigil

6. This is most recognized as “speaking in tongues.” Glossalalia is an alternative to written sigils. It proves that sigils can form in the mind or exist on a verbal plane. The so-called “word of power” is a sigil containing some desire. I discuss the use of glossalalia, vocal sigils, and words of power more fully in chapter 5.

To those who use them often, making a sigil is only the beginning of a long process in which the sigil gains greater symbolic meaning in one's personal practice. A. O. Spare, the inventor of the sigil technique, advocated active contemplation of a sigil at the moment of "vacuity." This state of vacuity seems to correspond to the mind's silence at, for instance, the moment of orgasm or during intense meditation. Consequently, many mages masturbate with their sigils to "charge," "implant," "activate," or "fire" them. Or, they will inflict upon themselves some other altered state of consciousness—called "gnosis" by chaos mages—through pain, exertion, exhaustion, suffocation, or, much less commonly, meditation. I am suspicious of these techniques. I think the act of achieving this gnosis is most likely an aesthetic counterpoint to the sigil. One could, it seems, just as easily burn the sigil and have a cheeseburger if such actions provide an appropriate sense of drama and power. Gnosis techniques do work, but often simply making a sigil with the proper intent works just as well. Why this should be, I have only the faintest ideas. I tend to believe, as I've explained, that reality is fundamentally symbolic—every thing we perceive is actually a collaborative dance of several symbols, which are essentially meaningless in themselves. A symbol can be given any range of meaning, any semiotic space, and doing so tends to restructure reality.

• • •

Ultimately, it doesn't matter why magic works, because magic does work; it works with remarkable ease. Which brings me to another point: magic is in itself very, very easy. It simply consists of doing what the human brain does every day, that is perceive and manipulate symbols. Magic is only difficult because it requires us to perceive and manipulate symbols that most people don't even admit exist. Being a great mage has much more to do with being a competent human being than it has to do with mastering magic. More accurately, there is more magic in being a competent human being than in warping the fundamental, symbolic nature of reality. We will now move on to explore ways to generate personal symbols to enhance our understanding of reality and our magical practices.

MAGICAL ARTIFACTS

I like to play with modeling clay; make a mess with markers, crayons, and watercolor; and carve pieces of wood. This interest in craftsmanship isn't a hobby—I'd have to be better at it to call it a hobby. My sculptures look like lumps of poorly worked modeling clay, my watercolor art aspires to abstraction, and my pieces of wood look a lot like . . . pieces of wood. Still, I enjoy working with these materials and making objects that have magical significance, even if they do not have much practical use.

You can certainly get by without any magical artifacts at all—and sometimes you will have to—but having magical artifacts is a great asset when building power. It allows you to store ideas in an object, instead of having to reconstruct them at the moment of an operation. Just as making a macro on a computer program can save you a lot of typing, so making a mental "macro" with, say, your athame, can save you plenty of ritual effort. Another advantage to magical objects is that the mage does not have to be the one to use them. The mage can create a talisman or amulet to give to someone else, to leave in a specific place, or even to give as a gift.

Talismans

Talismans or amulets (I see no reason to make a distinction between them) are small objects meant to be carried in order to manifest a purpose.¹ Sometimes a talisman will be constructed to last for a long time, such as a “good luck” charm. Other times, a talisman will be made for a specific, one-time purpose, after which it is destroyed. The construction of the talisman itself is relatively simple: one simply makes the object to be used “special.” The word “consecrate,” commonly used to describe the making of talismans, means “to bring together with the sacred.” This quite succinctly describes the process of talisman-making. Although there are many ways to consecrate a talisman, all of them remove the object from the profane world and elevate it to the status of a sacred or special object. I will describe some methods of consecration later. Once you understand the basic principle, you will probably want to invent your own methods.

Before discussing methods of consecration, however, it’s a good idea to look at the physical characteristics of a typical talisman. The material used to make a talisman is called the “*telesma*.” The *telesma* is usually, though not always, modified with signs and symbols of one’s desire. One can order all sorts of talismans from catalogs, and find examples of predesigned talismans in grimoires. There’s usually a rack of printed talismans and magic rings for sale in every occult bookstore. Sadly, a prefabricated talisman isn’t worth the paper it’s written on, and a premade magic ring is just a piece of interesting jewelry. If you want something magical, it is most effective to design and construct your own talisman. As a mage, you dwell in the center of a semiotic or symbolic web of associations that are personally significant. The talisman is meant to interact with the web in which you stand. Although all these semiotic webs are linked, it is foolish to imagine you can exert leverage from someone else’s fulcrum. In other words, someone else’s symbols are not your own. Someone else’s private language of magic is not necessarily best for you, either. This is not to say you cannot use someone else’s talisman. You may use another’s talisman if they constructed it for you.

1. Some magicians prefer “*talisman*” to refer to a magical object designed to draw something toward the magician, such as wealth or health, while they use “*amulet*” to describe a magical object designed to push something away, such as harm or fear.

The simplest possible talisman is a circle of paper upon which you write, clearly, your desire in a spiral. When properly consecrated, these talismans are sufficient to achieve even complicated desires. If you have a lot of internal or external resistance to your desire (and we often do, as regular introspection can reveal), then it's better to further abstract your desire by using sigils, words of power (foreign or madeup), or associated symbols in various symbol systems. It is also aesthetically pleasing to use symbols in this way. Remember, magic is a fundamentally aesthetic act. If the act of magic does not aesthetically affect (please or otherwise) the mage, it's no more than a dead routine. So, I make my talismans as pretty and weird as I can.

Once the physical attributes are designed, you must consecrate the talisman, usually in ritual. This can be as complicated as the rituals of the Golden Dawn, which symbolize the talisman as an initiate being brought into a spiritual life; or it can be as simple as the Buryat ritual, in which a shaman allows his or her helper spirits to enliven the talisman. In this ritual, the shaman holds the talisman up, expresses the desire, and trusts the spirits to do the job. Your ritual may fall somewhere in between.²

I would like to provide two examples of rituals within this spectrum. I'll include footnotes to make the rituals easy to follow. Both of these rituals are my own. The first is a more complex ritual, based upon the five element model of magic discussed in the previous chapter (although, as usual, the fifth element is never overtly invoked). The second is simpler, involving a more nature-based approach to magic.

EXERCISE

Elemental Consecration

Construct a talisman for one of the elements. If you want money, for example, you might write symbols of earth and draw a sigil representing "money." You might do this on a rock or a piece of paper cut into a square (if a square feels "earthy" to you); you might also

2. The Buryat culture is a shamanic culture of Siberia. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Buryat have slowly begun to rebuild their shamanic traditions. I feel the Buryat—and other shamanic cultures—can teach Western magicians much.

use green ink or paper, not just because money is green in America, but because green is a color of earth. At this stage, you have a *telesma*. Here is a ritual illustrating how to consecrate your *telesma* so that it transforms into a full-fledged talisman.

1. Create sacred space by banishing or otherwise separating the world from the space of working.
2. Stand in front of the place of working with your *telesma*. This place can also contain magical tools (which will be discussed later in this section). The symbols on the *telesma* should be visible. If they are written on both sides, then the side with the most symbols or the most important and specific symbols should be upright. Take a few moments to center yourself.
3. Say something along the lines of: "Here I stand in the place of working, on the pyramid of matter, master of structure. Fire, water, air, and earth surround me and exalt me. I have passed through fire in my suffering. I have passed through water in my sorrow. I have passed through air in my study. I have passed through earth with my ancestors."³
4. Pick up a tool representing your authority (for now, you can use the index finger of your dominant hand). Pointing at the *telesma*, say: "Creature of talismans, you are dead stone. By my command, rise and live! I establish you in your work by the power of earth."
5. Holding the *telesma*, face north, and say: "Spirits and angels of the North, attend me and my work now. Spirits of talismans, this *telesma* does not live but that you live. Come, therefore, and hearken to me, that I may bring it to life by the name of your king, Ghob,⁴ and by the name of your angel, Auriel, and by your word of power, which is Aretz."⁵

3. This establishes the authority of the mage to work with the elements in question. Of course, if the mage has more specific examples of conquering the elements they should be used.

4. If you have discovered another name of power for the element of earth, you may use it instead of or in addition to Ghob.

5. In ceremonial magic, Hebrew words have power to control the things named.

6. With your finger or a tool, inscribe the first of the symbols in the air above the telesma. Say: "By this sign, which is called _____, I give you shape!" Repeat this for each of the signs, giving the sign's name when it has one, or leaving that part out when it does not.⁶
7. Carry the telesma to the north of the place of working. Now say: "You do not live, but as the sun passes through the year to rise from a cinder, so you shall pass to rise from this midnight into life."⁷
8. Walk slowly clockwise to the east, and say, "As the sun rises, giving spark to life, so you arise in the east, spirit of talismans, and begin to live."
9. Continue to the south. Say: "As the sun achieves his height in the south, so you achieve your height of power, standing aloft from the world and casting down rays of power from you, so that wealth comes to me, your bearer and creator!"
10. Continue on to the west. Say: "Lo! The sun descends, giving to the earth what was once the heaven's! Descend, creature of talismans, from the place of ideas to the place of manifestation."⁸
11. Return to the north. Say: "Behold, this talisman is now a living force, irresistible and unconquerable as the sun, whose road it has walked in my hand. Live, talisman, and proclaim your power to the whole world."
12. Return clockwise to the front of the altar, and put down the talisman, wrapping it in cloth so you can carry it safely with you later. Banish or otherwise clear the area. This helps integrate the talisman back into the mundane world; that is, after all, where

6. If you've invented a sigil, you may want to give it a name as well.

7. The movement from dark to light is symbolic. Midnight refers to non-life and light is life. Following the natural progress of the sun ties the talisman to the experience of every human being on the planet. The sun is a powerful archetype.

8. The advantages and disadvantages of using archaic or foreign languages in rituals will be discussed in chapter 5.

one wants the magic to work. When you achieve your goal, destroy the talisman.⁹

EXERCISE

The Nature Consecration

On the surface, this ritual bears little resemblance to the ritual just performed. While the preceding ritual prescribed speech and actions, this one takes a more free-form, creative approach and requires more involvement. Ideally, all magic is a mixture of ritual and organic will, but it is good to strike an appropriate aesthetic balance between the two.

For this ritual, you need a number of natural objects—stones, sticks, stalks of grass, seeds, or whatever strikes your eye. Searching for these objects is one of the basic elements of the ritual, so begin with an open mind, considering your desired result in a dreamy sort of mindset. Allow objects to “jump out” of their surroundings. Try not to take anything that might not recover from your use. For example, plucking a single flower is probably okay, but be responsible. It would be disrespectful and irresponsible to pluck every mandrake root in a grove.

When you have the objects, clean the work space (free the area from distraction and focus clearly on the goal at hand). You may create a circle of stones or sticks around you.¹⁰ Spread out the objects on the ground before you. Pick up the first one that attracts your eye and start to talk to it. For example: “You represent my desire because you are _____.” I cannot tell you what to say, but be extemporaneous! Use as many of the objects as you like, setting aside any you wish not to use.

Now, begin arranging these objects into a talisman or a pattern on the ground. Continue talking about their natural qualities (“signature”) and how those qualities will aid you in your task. If you

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9. To destroy a stone consider using a hammer; burying it, which is a more symbolic means of destroying it; or washing off the writing and putting it back in your collection. I’ve washed rocks when I didn’t want to throw out a nice piece of jade, for example.
 10. This acts as the separation between the astral and mundane realms without doing a banishing ritual. The act of arranging sticks or stones around one in a perfect circle is not only wonderful therapy. It works just as well, if not better, as a traditional banishing ritual.

sense a spiritual entity nearby (with your imagination), ask if it wants to help. If it does, verbally weave the spirit into the pattern you are creating.¹¹

When you have the pattern you're satisfied with, you can choose to take it with you—if you've turned it into a single object by weaving or gluing it together. Or, you can leave it behind, knowing that not only will it do its work, but it already has made your desired change. Dismantle the circle, thanking the stones out loud or mentally as you put them back in disarray—in the original places you found them.¹² These actions serve as part of your banishing. You may wish to add other specific actions to the banishing ritual.

As you can see, there is no one way to do a consecrating ritual, but every ritual has some similarities. In some way, you temporarily separate yourself from the world. You then give something structure. In the formal elemental ritual we called this structure “life.” In the less formal ritual, we just thought about “weaving” objects together based on their similarities to our perceived goal. In any event, this symbolic structure is what gives the talisman its power. It is not necessary to charge a talisman with energy, unless you like the symbol of energy and wish to do so. To be fair, I often do: energy is a powerful symbol in our society, and pumping it into a magical goal almost seems to say, “I am determined this goal will manifest quickly and with force.” But it's the structure, really, and the aesthetic operation of creating structure, that gives the talisman power—not some impalpable energy.

At the conclusion of all rituals, you reintegrate yourself back into the world at large by grounding your experience. In actuality, there is no separation between the magical and the mundane, but it helps to trick ourselves into believing, at least temporarily, that there is. Just as parentheses

11. This could also be done with objects you find around the house, or even with words on pieces of paper. I like this method because it gets me walking around in the woods, which I enjoy tremendously and rarely have time to do.

12. This acts as the reintegration. One might feel embarrassed or silly talking to rocks and sticks. Imagine how they feel! They've been talking to us nonstop for centuries, and we rarely answer. They're starting to doubt we're sentient, I think.

don't (really) separate a word from the rest of the sentence, but give the impression of such separation nevertheless, so does creating and then deconstructing a ritual area give the impression of magical importance to our unconscious minds.

The act of separation and reintegration accomplishes something more profound, I think, than most mages realize. Separating and reintegrating oneself in ritual says very powerfully: "I am aware that all the boundaries I construct, all the differences I make in the world, are just conventions making life easier for me. In reality, there is no self and no other and no line between them other than the one I draw by an act of will." The mage begins to regain the very truth we all possess: I am you in a real, even physical, way. I must draw the line because all of our conventions demand it. I must undraw the line, however, because I must learn to treat you not like my brother but like myself.

Magical Tools or "Weapons"

A magical tool is an object created and charged like a talisman, but with the intention of helping in a wide range of tasks over an extended period of time—even a lifetime. Excalibur is a magical tool: its goal being to establish the authority of Arthur, and its lifespan permanent.¹³ When its work was done, it had to be returned to its source, rather than be destroyed or used by the wrong person. By the same token, the mythological weapons of the gods are magical tools of a sort.¹⁴ They accomplish a number of goals and are meant to work forever, or as long as the god wields them or shares them with favored mortals.

Magical tools are made much like talismans, but more care and more art goes into them. Since they are meant to be used eternally, a specific charging ritual isn't strictly necessary, but is still advisable. A specific consecration ritual for your tool acts in the same way as an initiation does: it marks the beginning of a tool's new life as a thing of magic. Just as some-

13. Excalibur is the sword given to King Arthur by the Lady of the Lake. See Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*.

14. For example, Eros has his arrows that cause love and hate, and Hades has a helmet of invisibility. Stories of such objects are useful sources for meditation. Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* is a readable introduction to Greek and Norse mythology.

one might work magic without ever having a ritual initiation, a magical tool can become consecrated through use. Similarly, just as initiation acts as a catalyst for learning to work magic, consecration of a magical tool makes it powerful sooner rather than later. Magical tools naturally become linked to the relevant idea through use, gaining power the more they are used. Eventually, a magical tool can even develop its own personality, and become a spiritual as well as physical ally to the mage who made it.

Although one can buy traditional magical tools, many writers on magical subjects shun commercial magic products. One very famous author actually gives directions for cooking up a magical knife—out of a metal file—on the stove! Even discounting the fact that he knows much more about magic than he does about metalwork, such rigmarole isn't necessary. Yes, an item made by hand in a contemplative trance will be much more powerful, usually, than a store-bought one. But you can also modify store-bought tools to make them more personally connected to you. You can even perform a ritual symbolizing creation. For example, heating a blade in a candle and then plunging it into a cup of water reenacts the forges of its creation. This approach is much more practical for the average mage than turning one's kitchen stove into a foundry!

Three Important Things to Remember About Magical Tools

First, "purchase a perfectly black hen without haggling." This is a commonly quoted expression from the grimoire *The Black Pullet*.¹⁵ It is contained in the instructions for creating a magical chicken that seeks out gold. (Or perhaps the chicken lays gold? The book is not clear on this point.) The book contains other absurd experiments and a hilariously contrived story about an old man who teaches a French soldier how to make talismans when they meet inside a pyramid. The only useful thing in the book is this admonishment: if you value anything at all, do not count its value. If you need a double-edged knife, find one you like and buy it, whatever the cost. Do not shop around. Do not haggle over the price. If you

15. *The Black Pullet*. See Anonymous in bibliography.

symbolically devalue the object at the time of purchase, you will never be able to cut that mental link—the object will always scream “cheap.” This doesn’t mean your magical tools need to be expensive—the magical knife I use cost me seven dollars—but it does mean you must set aside monetary concerns. Magical tools should be precious to you beyond cost. No one appraised Excalibur.

Second, when modifying or constructing a magical tool, maintain a magical attitude and a clear, defined focus on the purpose of the tool. Ivan Pavlov, a Russian scientist in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, discovered he could condition a dog to respond with salivation to the sound of a bell by following each bell chime with an offering (or “treat”) of meat. Eventually, the dog associated the sound of the bell with the meat, until finally it would salivate at even the mere sound of the bell. Similarly, when you wish to train the universe to respond in a certain way to a stimulus—when you want it to recognize your intent by the presence of a magical tool—then you must devotedly follow the stimulus with the appropriate response until the symbolic link is firm. This is why it is crucial to concentrate on your goal while making a magical tool. This need not be an exercise in grit-toothed sweating. In fact, it can simply be the dreamy, half-conscious trance of your already-present intent for the craft. But by no means should you spend your time working on the tool while listening to a situation comedy, for example. Unless the purpose of the tool is to make you laugh at contrived dialogue.

Finally, only touch the tool when in the proper mindset. The “training” of the universe and yourself to respond to the presence of your magical tool does not end when the tool is constructed. For instance, if you use your athame to cut potatoes, it ceases being an athame and becomes a kitchen knife. I know some “kitchen witches” argue that using your magical tools in mundane settings breaks down the barrier between the mundane and the magical. I would agree with this except that, at least for me, the mundane consciousness of cutting potatoes is the default, and if I use a knife—a common enough object—in a mundane setting, I forget that it is an athame. It becomes nothing more than a potato-peeler. My mundane, day-to-day consciousness (worrying about bills, dreading meetings with the boss, and occasionally waking up grumpy) can easily swamp my wise and spiritual consciousness, who knows what an athame is and how to use it.

I don't mean to imply that breaking down the barrier between the mundane and the magical is a bad thing, nor that using magical tools in other than absolute full ritual garb is an error. On the contrary, my entire spiritual practice can be summed up in the expression "be here now." The use of magical objects requires only the appropriate mindset, not the appropriately colored tablet-of-union on the appropriately double-cubical altar. In fact, the use of some magical tools can actually bring magic into our day-to-day lives. For instance, one might place a talisman on one's desk or carry around a specially consecrated wand. What differentiates these magical tools from the potato-peeling athame is that they are salient—they stick out of their surroundings and require magical attention. An athame, no matter how fancily made, is simply a knife, and we deal with many of those every day.

Of course, if your tool is a sword as tall as you are with your magical name picked out in silver wire on the hilt and an engraved invocation to Ra on the blade—written in Coptic script—then carry it around in your day-to-day life all you like! In this sense, the sword can remind you that your life is magical because it sticks out. It's an odd bit of impedimenta in your life that you must account for mentally.

Note on Blades

Please be aware of the laws regarding bare blades in your state. Sounds like a very practical fact, but most books on magic leave it out. Even if you are a Wiccan, and an athame or sword is essential to your religion, you are not protected by the first amendment in the carrying of weapons. This is not to say all tools with blades are illegal; check with your local courthouse. Often, the legal length of a blade is specifically defined, as is the nature of the blade. Some states prohibit public possession of blades in excess of a certain length—five inches and three inches are common numbers in the US—or of a certain style—some states prohibit double-edged blades; while others frown on blood grooves. If you use tools with blades, you may wish to have one just for public work, making sure it is an appropriate legal length. The one you use for home work can be whatever size and style you like. Perhaps it is wiser to eschew blades entirely for any ritual you intend to do in public places. Police may confiscate even a legal blade in order to

measure it. And having a police officer handle your tools is symbolic and spiritual castration. Trust my personal experience.

Traditional Magical Tools

So what is this athame I've been talking about? It is one of many traditional magical tools, which I would like to talk about now. If we take a pan-cultural approach to magic—as opposed to the usual ethnocentric approach—we find that almost every household object ever invented has been, at one time or another, a traditional magical tool in some culture. Moreover, a number of mundane objects we use in our culture can be used as magical tools. To be fair, any object can be used as a magical tool. Traditionally, we have embraced those objects with symbolism that speaks most to us (often dependent on cultural influences).

There is something to be said for these ancient tools. If you have never spent an afternoon flaking flint—and an evening bandaging your cuts and thanking God for antiseptic—then you may not have a proper appreciation for our ancestors' survival. There is something, similarly, to be said for using our own, familiar tools. Why should a battery not be a symbol of vital energy and healing? My personal semiotic web is certainly larger for the object "battery" than it is for the object "burin." Ultimately, this is an aesthetic choice. You should certainly feel free to mix and match traditional methods with more contemporary ones. I can think of no compelling reason why a clothespin, candle, wand, and stuffed panda should not sit on the same altar. In potential, each item is just as effective as the others when consecrated to a specific task and personally symbolic to the owner.

Air Dagger

In Western ceremonial magic, the Air Dagger is a double-edged dagger with a T-shaped hilt. It symbolizes the element air and thus stands for our mental abilities, particularly those of analysis discrimination (in the sense of telling true from false, not in the sense of racism). In ritual, the Air Dagger can be used to pierce illusion. Traditionally, it is painted yellow, with purple symbols and names of air. A mage might be better off designing it according to a personal understanding of the analysis process. This in-

volves analyzing one's own mind, which then inevitably "charges" the dagger with the most dominant ideas.

Athame

Pronunciation: a'-tha-mey. The word "athame" comes from *The Greater Key of Solomon*, and is probably Greek. The athame is usually a double-edged knife, traditionally with a black handle. It is used for drawing magical symbols in the air, opposed to the more practical act of physically cutting objects. It is an integral part of Wiccan ritual and extremely common in other magical systems.

Bell

The bell, a percussion instrument for sounding a single tone, is omnicultural. In Western ceremonial magic, the sounding of a bell signifies different parts of a ritual. Sometimes, the number of times the bell is struck has significance. In Eastern practices, the use of bells tends to be more direct. For example, in some forms of Buddhist meditation a bell is used to indicate the beginning or end of a meditation period. In some Hindu practices, the sound of a bell itself is meditated upon as it fades into silence. Universally, the bell symbolizes a call for attention.

Candles

These instruments of illumination are common in many religions the world over. They represent light; life, because of the animate flickering of the flames; and sacrifice, since they recall various sacred flames burning on altars in everything from Christian churches to pagan temples. Since many mages prefer the "natural" light of candles to that of electric light, they use candles exclusively during ceremony. Others use the candles as the focus of the ritual itself. The practice of "candle magic" is fairly popular. It consists of lighting various colored candles, usually "dressed" with scented oils, to obtain objects of desire. In this case, the candle represents the enkindling of will.

Cord

Medieval sorcerers often claimed to hold the wind in knots, which they would then sell to seamen. A number of old spells also use knots in curses.

As enticing as this type of magic seems, I rarely meet anyone using cords in ritual to do anything but hold robes together or to indicate rank.

Cup

In ceremonial magic, the cup is one of the elemental weapons representing water (see also Fire Wand, Air Dagger, Pentacle). Cups are also used as symbols of purification, redemption (viz. King Arthur), inspiration (viz. Cerridwyn, if you consider a cauldron to be just a very large cup), hospitality, and oath-taking. The Greeks poured libations from double-handled cups. Today, inner city gang members still do this. Although they pour libations from beer bottles, they do so for entirely the same reasons: to honor the dead.

Drum

For some reason, Western magic makes little use of the drum. Drums are probably the most ubiquitous of magical tools, serving both as means of entertainment and empowerment in cultures as diverse and separate as the Buryats of the Siberian tundra, various Native American groups, and Gaelic cultures of Ireland and Scotland. It should not surprise us that the drum is so common an instrument.

Our own modern culture makes extensive use of drums to change moods and communicate emotion. It is impossible to turn on the television or the radio without hearing a drum within a few minutes. Drums have an amazing ability to induce trance states (as any young raver knows) and clear up mental “noise” (perhaps paradoxically). The rhythms of the drum are versatile and flexible, require comparatively little skill to manage (although mastering any drum could take a lifetime), and create a visceral reaction in listeners. Since they can be made to mimic, and even regulate, our biological cycles of breathing, heartbeat, and so on, they have connections with life and spirit. Some cultures refer to drums as “steeds,” since Shamans “ride” the drumbeat into the otherworld.¹⁶ Traditional drums were composed of organic materials. These drums have symbolic ties with skins, physical (animal) appearances, and wilderness.

16. The use of rhythm to achieve trance is cross-cultural. Michael Harner's *The Way of the Shaman* describes the basic technique in his practice of “core shamanism.” A more culturally specific source is Saragerel's *Chosen by the Spirits*.

Fire Wand

The Fire Wand is a specific wand used in ceremonial magic to represent the element of fire during ritual. It usually consists of a fairly short rod, approximately the length of two hands. It has a bulbous end and is often painted with various symbols of fire. It represents the creative force of the magician; therefore, a mage who wishes to work with the system of elemental tools might construct such a wand with symbols of personal desire, creative ability, and will.

Grimoire

Pronunciation: grim-war. The *grimoire* (French for “grammar book”) is a book of spirits, usually with cursory yet complex methods for summoning spirits, and occasionally absurd examples of spells. The most popular grimoires are the following, in rough order based on popularity and utility:

- *The Goetia* or *The Lesser Key of Solomon the King*. This book purports to be the method by which Solomon attained power, wisdom, etc. It consists of seventy-two spirits, at least some of whom seem to be recycled gods of other religions. These spirits can do anything from making women love you to causing trees to fall (why any mage would need to make trees fall is beyond me). The evocations consist of long strings of insults, threats, and bizarre, pseudo-Christian bragging.
- *The Greater Key of Solomon*. Much less popular, this book consists of seals, inaccurately called “pentacles,” evidently intended to invoke angelic help. Since the instructions for how to do so are unclear and the pentacles themselves—although visually attractive and interesting—are too complicated to easily reproduce, most people do not work much with this book. Reproductions of the pentacles are popular items at occult bookstores, especially in jewelry meant to be worn as talismans, which the pentacles clearly are not. (See Pentacle entry on page 73.) Unlike other types of pentacles, most notably the five-pointed star, the pentacles from *The Greater Key of Solomon* are specifically designed to control spirits. —

- *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*. Again, a long list of spirit names, along with odd magic squares composed of letters to be used as seals. The instructions for evocation are understandable, though not practical for those of us who cannot build a balcony on our houses just for visiting spirits. Of course, if one interprets its instructions in terms of building an internal or astral temple, the book becomes completely practical. This book recommends attaining “knowledge and conversation” of one’s holy guardian angel before even beginning the work of evocation. This recommendation became a central goal in the magic of Aleister Crowley and other early twentieth-century magicians. Many magicians still strive for it, though others consider it too rigid a goal. Still others, like myself, regard it as a metaphor for attaining contact with something greater than yourself.
- *The Necronomicon*. Several books purport to be the *Necronomicon*, but the most famous and easiest to find is Simon’s *Necronomicon*, which is an absolute fraud, but a fun read. This is also the most useful, since some of the rituals actually work. They should. They are stolen, usually verbatim from other sources, most of which are quite modern. The fifty names of Marduk, I understand, can be of some use, but I have never employed them. The *Necronomicon*, in its many incarnations, is not real—the book does not exist, nor did it ever exist. It was invented by H. P. Lovecraft, a fiction author who not only admitted that he invented the book, but denied the possibility of the supernatural. The fact that the book works for some people is testimony to the symbolic and aesthetic nature of magic.¹⁷

Incense

The use of incense in ritual is at least as old as ancient Egypt, wherein some anthropologists speculate it covered up the smell of animal sacrifice and, in funeral rites, decay. Eventually, incense itself began to take the place of sacrifice. We have records of pharaohs offering incense to patron deities. The sweet smell of incense, the fact that it rises upward, and the

17. Phil Hine’s *Prime Chaos*, especially the chapter “Liber Nasty.”

spiraling patterns it creates in the air, all contribute to associations with prayer, mystery, and sacrifice. Moreover, the particular scent of incense burned during a rite can be tailored to match the symbolic goal of the ritual; so, one might burn rose during a love spell or myrrh during a curse.

Incense usually comes in two varieties: powdered and formed. Powdered incense is extremely pure, but must be burned on a charcoal block, which is messy and inconvenient if you only want to burn a small amount. Formed incense is mixed with wood and—in varieties imported from India and similarly treeless areas—dung. It often contains extra perfumes in order to mask the scent of the base. It comes in cones, sticks, and blocks. I find cone incense the most convenient and least messy. However, stick incense is common in various Buddhist rituals; occasionally a worshipper will be instructed to burn, for example, three “sticks.”

If you find that incense interferes with your enjoyment of a ritual—if it makes your eyes water or you have an allergic reaction—consider the advantages of potpourri as a magical tool. Usually, the scent of potpourri can be just as effective as incense, it’s somewhat easier to mix your own, and it rarely causes unexpected reactions. Also consider the use of essential oils, heated or used in a humidifier. Some humidifiers even release a mist, which adds an aesthetic element similar to the curling smoke of incense. See Oil entry on next page.

Lamp

The lamp, a symbol of light, appears in a number of old grimoires, but I have never actually seen anyone use one in ritual. The lamp is a good symbol for wish fulfillment and the calling up of spirits. Some people keep a lamp as a symbol of enlightenment and dedication.

Medicine Bag

Cultural hegemony isn’t limited to the Western ceremonial tradition. The New Age movement of the last part of the twentieth century exhibited its own brand of exploitation by taking Native American traditions, using them outside their usual contexts, and commercializing them. All of this is offensive to many Native Americans. On the other hand, everyone is free

to adopt the practices of whatever culture they like, no matter how offensive. It is a sticky political issue, but if you choose to use something like a medicine bag or dreamcatcher, be aware that you are possibly offending people. Although, if you are careful to understand the inherent symbolism of indigenous practices, and treat them with respect, you probably won't offend too many people. Especially beware of claiming knowledge or power you don't have. Just because you wear a medicine bag does not make you a medicine man or woman. A medicine bag is a collection of objects representing the mage's power. Such items are usually collected during ritual periods of seclusion and purification. Often these collections of objects are worn about the mage's neck.

Oil

In European and Middle Eastern contexts, oil symbolizes consecration, exaltation, and authority. A king is anointed with oil before he is crowned, and the name Christ means "he who has been anointed." Even the word *anoint* has come to mean "establish as special." Many mages anoint their foreheads (in the "third eye" area), palms, and throat before ritual in order to symbolize authority and personal power. If you do this, make sure the oil you use has no irritating effects on your skin by testing a dab on your inner wrist (where the skin is tender). Many essential oils must be diluted in olive oil prior to applying to skin. As a general rule, go sparingly. Scented oil running into your eyes during ritual tends to ruin even the best planned ceremony.

Some people anoint magical objects as well, with candles being the most common, followed by talismans and other magical tools. This is a fine way to charge an artifact. Oils come in all sorts of scents, most artificial. Actual "essential oils" made from flower essences are prohibitively expensive. There is nothing wrong, in my opinion, with using the artificial brands. Again, the importance is the symbolic effect of the oil to you.

Pentacle

The word *pentacle* means "something upon which a pentagram is drawn." In ceremonial magic, the pentacle is a symbol of earth and the mage's map of reality. Traditionally, it is a disk divided into four quadrants, all spanned by a large five-pointed star. Any system that symbolically perceives reality

can be used to personalize a pentacle. Even the five-pointed star is optional. The Golden Dawn uses a six-pointed star. Wicca uses a different sort of pentacle, usually a flat disk of clay or stone inscribed with a pentagram. Where ceremonial magic uses the pentacle as a device for reasserting reality—often as a defensive weapon against attack—the Wiccan pentacle is used as a place to put objects to be consecrated, including talismans and ceremonial “cakes and ale,” among other things.

Pentagram or Lamman

A pentagram is a five-pointed star. With one point uppermost, most occultists consider it a sign of health (Pythagoras originally called it *hygieia*, which means “wholeness” or “harmony”). It also represents the five elements of fire, water, air, earth, and spirit. Furthermore, it contains interesting mathematical relationships within the proportions of its lines.¹⁸ Many occultists wear the pentagram as a symbol of protection and authority. Wiccans also use it as a holy symbol of their religion.

The pentagram turned upside down, so two points are on top, supposedly represents evil, but does not necessarily mean that to everyone. One can occasionally find this “inverted” pentagram in cemeteries, and engraved on tombstones of those who belonged to the women’s auxiliary of the order of Masons, where it is a degree marker. Some groups of traditional Wiccans also use both the inverted and upright pentagram in rituals. Some groups of ceremonial magicians also use inverted pentagrams in rituals, and do not consider them evil. Most people who wear a pentagram wear it on a necklace called a “lamman.” A lamman can technically consist of any symbol or seal that represents a person’s degree of illumination (or, in other words, authority.)

Robe

The use of robes in magic has gone somewhat out of fashion recently, probably because they really do look silly. The idea behind magical garments is, again, to represent a mage’s authority. The physical garment reminds a mage that he or she is about to engage in magic—it is a tool to signal the

18. For example, the line from any point to an adjacent point, when compared to the line connecting alternating points, produces the golden ratio. The golden ratio (1.618) occurs again and again in nature, everywhere spirals occur.

subconscious. Despite their silly appearance, many mundane institutions still use “magical” garments. If you have ever attended a formal university ceremony, such as a convocation or graduation, then you have seen professors dressed in absurdly complicated garments designed to represent institutional rank. To those who know the code, the combinations of velvet stripes, sleeve length, color of hood, etc., all convey a wealth of information about a professor’s rank.

Shewstone

Pronunciation: show-stone. The shewstone is also known as a magic mirror and crystal ball. The process of scrying—looking into a reflective or semi-reflective surface until visions appear—is an ancient method used to develop astral sight. If you wish to practice scrying, use a water-ink mix. This alternative is much more affordable than a crystal ball, which in my experience is not particularly effective. I find black coffee to be the most effective medium for scrying. For one thing, the pressure of playing around with my food is fairly low, so I am able to relax into a trance state and eliminate mental noise over breakfast quite easily. If you wish to make a more permanent object as a shewstone, I recommend the magic mirror, which can be made very easily with a can of flat (not glossy), black spray paint and an inexpensive, round picture frame. Remove the glass, spray one side black, turn it over so the painted side is inward, and refasten it to the frame. You now have a black, glossy mirror.

The best attitude for scrying is that of play. Relax and have fun. Do not expect to see pictures in the mirror itself. In fact, seers usually do not perceive objects in the magic mirror. The blank, reflective surface simply serves to cut down on visual stimulus and act as a symbolic trigger to perceive clairvoyantly. If I use a magic mirror, I often close my eyes after peering into it for a while, bringing my focus inward. This is the place in which visions truly emerge. Such imaginative images appear like daydreams. The images may be mentally projected into the shewstone, but do not be disappointed if this doesn’t happen right away. Truth is, visual impressions may not be received at all. For the longest time, I smelled visions. Some people who think they have failed at scrying simply receive visions kines-

thetically and do not recognize their “gut feelings” as impressions. Above all, play and trust yourself.

Staff

Most writers on magic relegate the staff to the same category as the wand, but they fail to realize the staff had, in the mundane world, a very different role than the wand. A staff is an instrument for travel, not for asserting authority (see Wand entry). Therefore, you may use a staff as an instrument for “going forth” or “journeying” into the astral world (to be discussed in chapter 5). The staff may also be used as a percussion instrument by tapping it on the ground. The Buryats will fasten bells and pieces of metal to the staff, so that it jingles when shaken. Just as you can use a wand to symbolically bolster your strength, you can use a magical staff to symbolically assert yourself more clearly in difficult situations. Literally, you might use a walking staff to help you up an incline when your feet are tired!

Sword

To some extent, the sword suffers the same kind of problem as the staff. Writers on magic often just consider it a big athame. But where the athame evolves from a dagger used for mundane purposes—eating, dressing meat, hunting—the sword was used specifically and only for fighting, for killing human beings. Therefore, it cannot be used in the same context as the athame. It must be respected as a device for attack and defense, and used when such action is necessary. Certainly the athame can also be used in similar circumstances, but the sword is a more focused and specialized tool of warfare.

Wand

Probably the one tool everyone considers to be necessary for magic is the wand. Everyone from Harry Potter to the Fairy Godmother uses one, and expressions like “I can’t fix your problem; I don’t have a magic wand!” prove that the wand has even become associated with magical powers in the otherwise mundane mind. The wand evolved from a scepter, a short rod representing power, which was carried by kings and other governmental office

holders. This rod is pan-cultural in a phallic, symbolic sense.¹⁹ We find similar tools of office all over the world. The wand, therefore, represents authority par excellence.

The Golden Dawn uses an all-purpose wand, divided into twelve bands (or stripes) of color for the twelve astrological signs. It also uses Wands of Office for almost every official position. Practically speaking, the wand should be different from the Fire Wand, as it represents a greater scope of ideas. I recommend keeping the wand simple and uncluttered. Avoid too many symbols and keep it a reasonable size. This is in great contrast to the Golden Dawn's Lotus Wand, with its yard-long rainbow band of colors. It is confusing and awkward to use. I've dropped it in the middle of a ritual or grabbed the wrong band many times. It's easily one of the most cumbersome tools ever invented by a magician.

To some extent, the wand should become the mage's double. Some people recommend sleeping with it. Others recommend carrying it with you for a specified period of time, often determined by an oath. I find both of these practices fairly useful in making the wand a "part" of you. If you cut the wand from a living tree, try to choose a branch in need of pruning. Make an offering to the tree afterward. I am not completely certain trees feel pain, but we might benefit from practicing humility in such a way.

Using Magical Objects

Have you ever had someone you love give you something, then leave you or die? That object, whatever it might be, takes on new meaning so much so that handling it can invoke moods and emotions, change your state of mind, even recall the past in such vivid detail that you relive it. This is a magical object.

A magical object stores a symbolic state. A wand "charged" with the idea of authority immediately increases your confidence and sense of power when you pick it up. Even more interesting, a properly charged magical object will be detectable to those who have some training in imagination. I can pick up someone else's magic tools (with permission) and

19. We can theorize that the rod of office represents the penis. This association identifies the wand with masculine principles.

recognize how they are used. I can also find where someone stores magical tools just by feeling where the greatest concentration of “power” is in the area. This isn’t a particularly impressive task. In fact, anyone can learn to do it and many people already have similar instinctive skills.

The use of magical tools involves simply handling the tool in the proper state of quiet mind. Picking up a wand is enough to encourage your confidence, but tracing an associated sigil in the air, with proper visualization and intent, charges that sigil and creates an even stronger sense of confidence. A special pen used to write affirmations begins, similarly, to take on the magical charge of those affirmations. If you don’t use that pen for writing your grocery list, your mind links its symbolic associations to the act of writing affirmations and statements of intent. I spoke briefly on charging a tool during my discussion on initial consecration rituals (see examples on pages 57 and 60). However, to build power in a tool—to the extent in which other people can even feel it—takes time.

The best way to charge magical tools is not in a single, one-shot ritual that’s over and forgotten. It’s in repeated use of that tool for its intended purpose. If I intend to use magical tools in a working, I lay out the ones I need beforehand and, before I begin, I speak to each of them, recharging them with their intended purpose:

“O Wand of Power, creature of authority and will, serve my purpose for which I crafted you. O Drum, steed of the soul and creature of imagination, serve the purpose for which I crafted you. O Shewstone, creature of imagination and bringer of visions, serve the purpose for which I crafted you.”

EXERCISE

Charging and Building Power

Devise three magical tools for the three major skills of magic: imagination, authority, and introspection. From the list of tools in this chapter, decide which tools call to you. Alternatively, you may create your own personal tools from everyday objects. You may decide to represent authority with a grimoire in which you’ve written your accomplishments, imagination with the pen you’ve used to write

them, and introspection with a clay model of your face, which you made and fired in your oven. Or, you may go the traditional route, using the following: wand for authority, a cup or scrying mirror for imagination, and a specially-consecrated pen for introspection. Create your tools, maintaining the appropriate mindset throughout the production process. Then consecrate the tools. When you finish, use your tools in ritual. After interacting with your tools in a couple rituals, note any changes, especially if your magic becomes more effective and moving. This is a sign that your tools are being properly charged with each use.

Magical tools can vastly increase your personal power in ritual and out. Although there are times when you may wish to work without tools, or with a bare minimum of tools, it is good to create a few for common purposes: a wand to boost authority, a mirror for divination, or a statue to represent the divine. See what works for you. I think you'll find they're well worth your investment both in time and money. But do not slavishly copy the tools of others. A mage's tools should be distinct in all aspects. Although many mages might have the four traditional tools of the elements (the Fire Wand, Cup, Air Dagger, and Pentacle), they should always be decorated according to personal creative aesthetics, and not according to anyone else's rules.

GODS, SPIRITS, SERVITORS, AND PESTS

We may be the only self-aware physical beings on Earth (although, I'm not certain octopi wouldn't give us a run for our money), but there are other places besides Earth. I'm not suggesting we discuss aliens, which may or may not exist and may or may not even visit Earth (although, I rather doubt it), but in a conversation on magic, it is crucial to discuss entities with non-physical bodies—beings composed of pure meaning, in other words, spirits. Spirits are collections of symbols with self-awareness. Some mages debate whether spirits exist separate from us, or merely as aspects of our psyche. I assert that they exist as aspects of our psyches, but so do our neighbors, parents, and friends. It's not productive to imagine spirits as being any less separate than the rest of the world in which we act. I have spoken with spirits who have told me things I did not want to hear. Spirits have also given me information I could not have otherwise known. They have lied and even broken promises. Spirits are real, whatever that means.

Taxonomy

Enough spirits are willing to interact with the mage to justify a system for classifying them. To this end, I've created a taxonomy—a system for the ordering and identifying of spirits. Many such systems exist, but most often they seem to exist for the express purpose of ranking spirits in a hierarchy. I

tend to be suspicious of hierarchy, so my system of classification will not draw upon any “chain of being.” Nor does my system work like a scientific classification for animals, because there is no genetic relationship between spirits of different classes (as far as I can see). I will simply list types of spirits as I have perceived them. Qualities will be the means for identification.

Incidental Spirits

These types of spiritual beings are often called “astral garbage.” I find this classification a bit aggressive. I prefer “incidental spirits.” Their existence is incidental to your will (and, reciprocally, your existence is incidental to *theirs*). No one needs to call anyone “garbage.” They usually want nothing to do with you. They don’t care if you exist, and will happily ignore you even as you go about their business. They may be drawn to you out of curiosity, but will have no interest in talking to you once they find out you’re human. They tend to cluster around large magical workings.

Inimical Spirits

These, on the other hand, are drawn to you for a specific purpose. They are angry—or just generally dislike humans—and therefore want to cause you pain. You can safely classify almost all “demons” and some hauntings in this category. I sometimes call these spirits *shedim*, a Hebrew word meaning “demon.” I avoid the word “demon” because it carries religious connotations I often wish to avoid. When talking to Christians, however, I will sometimes use the term just to ease communication. Sometimes inimical spirits are guided by a human agency.

Amicable Spirits

These helping spirits usually carry the same power level as inimical spirits, but in the other direction. Here rest angels and most of the spirits (or “demons,” according to some books, such as the *The Goetia* and *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*) you might wish to evoke. They tend to be fairly amoral, and will do what you like. Sometimes they request payment, but often they’ll be happy to help for the fun of it. One person’s amicable spirit can be another person’s inimical spirit.

The elemental spirits are usually amicable, though some may be inimical and incidental. They are usually helpful in work consistent with their element. So an elemental of water would be useful in emotional matters, while an elemental of earth might be willing to help with prosperity magic.

Larvae

Singular, “larva.” These are the pests of the spirit world. Physical and emotional traumas often attract larvae, just as wounds attract maggots. And, just like wounds, if one does not deal with the underlying problem, larvae will just come back again and again, even after being banished. Many people sense them feeding on the “energy” of those in pain, but I am uncertain about that explanation. It seems they could find easier sources of “energy.” Perhaps they enjoy the sensation of strong emotions. Like inimical spirits, these creatures take multiple shapes, but tend to be much less powerful. The succubus and incubus (sexual spirits who provoke sexual dreams) could be considered a specialized and relatively harmless type of larvae.

Powers

These are the archangels of various systems. They are often friendly and helpful, but usually represent a single kind of power. So, while you’d rarely have a spirit of Mars, for example, you do have several Powers of Mars. They represent a pure type of elemental or planetary energy. They have a specific and relatively unvarying vector, a “will” (desire) perpetually focused on their sphere of influence. Spirits, as we have seen, are sometimes amoral—they act out of no moral code at all, and with no moral justification. Powers are never amoral, but may be immoral—the Power of Hate, for example, is probably not pleasant. You can quite easily name a power after any abstract noun.

Nature Spirits

These are a kind of power (as just defined above), but are often more helpful. Frequently a person will attract one or more nature spirits as guides;

hence, the animal guide craze of New Age “shamanism.”¹ One could consider these a subtype of powers—the Power of Eagle, for example. These are not the spirits of individual animals. The Power of Cat is not the same as the discarnate form of your pet housecat.

Discarnate Entities

Speaking of which, discarnate entities are beings who were once alive, but now are not. Some part of their personality often lives on in a state of greater or lesser awareness. Necromancy is concerned with calling up and dealing with these beings, which can range anywhere from your Uncle Phil to Boo-Boo, your pet poodle. They usually have no greater knowledge than they did in life. And it’s not entirely clear, for example, if you call upon Uncle Phil that you will therefore *get* Uncle Phil. Masquerading as dead loved ones seems to be a favorite sport of some spirits, who can pick details out of your mind and weave them into a convincing fiction.

Gods

Unlike powers, gods have a full range of movement. Where a power is created from a single element or force, gods, like humans, are composed of multiple forces. Gods can act outside their spheres of influence, as is evident from a cursory glance at mythology, although they do not like to do so, and are often not very effective in so doing. Dealing with gods can be both dangerous and rewarding. They have their own agendas and goals, and their wills are much stronger than ours. Yet, they apparently need us to give them shape and form. It’s a common occult opinion that gods who are not worshipped die. In my experience, this isn’t even remotely true. I think our worship provides gods with form and structure, not with existence.

Otherworld Entities

Some beings, like dragons, are none of the above, but exist outside of our universe and visit it infrequently for arcane purposes. These are truly alien beings; sometimes they are not even spirits. Not much can be said of such

1. More accurately, “neo-shamanism,” for those who have not learned it in a shamanic culture, but from books and personal experimentation in the industrialized West. This fact does not invalidate experiences or practices, but it is respectful to differentiate contemporary shamanism from traditional shamanism as practiced in indigenous cultures.

beings, except they have their own purposes and little concern for humans. People who play with dragons may very well be playing with fire.

Multivalent Beings

Sometimes a discarnate entity and a spirit will join together, or a person's personality will be linked in some way to a power or to a god. These are complicated and fairly rare events. One example of a multivalent being is The Dalai Lama, who is both a mortal man and an incarnation of a power, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. One should not seek out such a joining. I have read and heard true horror stories of people seeking to become gods. Inevitably, such hubris leads to disaster.

Identification of Spirits

The first step in dealing with any spirit is identification. Once you identify a spirit, you can choose what action to take. Usually, the power level of a spirit is quickly sensed, and that—combined with observations of its behavior—can easily classify it. Some spirits take a perverse pleasure in masquerading as others, but even these lies are usually easy to uncover. A spirit, consisting of a “body” of symbolic associations, must inevitably be true to those associations. For example, a spirit of the sun can no more act like a spirit of Jupiter than you can pass your hand—made of matter—back through time. Just as matter obeys the logic of physics, so does information (symbols) obey the logic of metaphor.

When you encounter a seemingly duplicitous spirit, test it with appropriate symbols. If you meet a spirit of Mars, for example, test it against Martian symbols: how does it react to iron, to the god names of Mars, to the color red, and so forth? If it seems to grow in power, then it is truly a spirit of Mars. If it seems to wane in power, appear confused or annoyed, angry or pained, then it is probably a spirit of a different symbolic realm, attempting to pass itself off as something it is not. If a spirit fails a symbol test, there are complex methods involving numerology and other methods of symbol manipulation for finding a spirit's appropriate symbolic sphere.

Rarely do you need to go to such ends. If a spirit lies to you or pretends to be what it is not, then presumably that spirit would do you no practical good anyway. You can safely banish it without knowing anything else. Like a spirit, a person who attempts to lie about one thing will probably lie again. What do you do once you have identified a spirit's sphere and nature? There are several options.

Combat

An inimical spirit must be resisted. These spirits manifest in all sorts of ways: everything from mild possession (a friend obsessed with violent ideas seemingly outside regular demeanor/personality) to physical manifestations in an environment (the movement of furniture in a room). Dealing with inimical spirits is fairly simple.

First, determine the spirit's power level by examining it in the astral plane. Humans have a considerable amount of imaginative power. In fact, it is this imaginative power that often leads spirits to interact with humans, as I'll explain later. Examine the spirit with your imagination. As a general rule, if it is indeed an inimical spirit, it will manifest in a more or less disgusting shape, partly to intimidate you, but also as a reflection of its inner nature. Once you are certain of its malevolent shape, perform a banishing ritual. Often, this will be less than entirely effective. In one incident, I had a spirit laugh at me, a laugh that others in the room heard quite clearly. To my annoyance, the people fled the room! The banishing ritual is important because it sets up your authority to act. It gives you a place of leverage, a clean spot in the room from which to work.

When working with troublesome spirits, I have found that repetition is less useful than trying something else. So, if a spirit lingers, even after a banishing ritual, address it directly, commanding it to leave. Often a simple imperative will be sufficient. The previously-mentioned spirit moving furniture refused to leave at a simple command, but it was particularly powerful. In these situations, you can, if you like, borrow authority: "In the name of Jesus Christ, depart from this place and never return!" You can substitute the God of your choice for Jesus Christ, of course. Ultimately, the imperative said with the proper authority is where all the power is.

If the imperative command does not work, then you must directly attack the creature. Build up a charge of rage and cold anger in your solar plexus.² With a single exhalation, direct the force of your anger as a piercing stab at the spirit. This often will be enough to get rid of a creature. You may combine this with a physical gesture, if the action makes it feel more potent. A beam of such directed rage will cause almost all spirits to feel intense pain. If it does not feel such pain, a much more dangerous approach is called for.

Some very rare inimical spirits feed on rage, even rage directed at them. So what you need to do is encyst such a spirit in your own sense-of-self, where it can be digested and discarded. This is dangerous. If the magical cyst isn't strong enough, the spirit may break free and you will find yourself obsessing over alien thoughts or experiencing strange, unfamiliar emotions. I do not recommend this approach, unless nothing else works and you *cannot* withdraw. To proceed with this practice, you must also have advanced magical skills—for example, if you do not have established helper spirits, you should not be doing this work.

To continue with the magical cyst, visualize an aura surrounding you, roughly the size of the magic circle in which you stand. Expand the aura with each exhalation, letting it absorb everything in the room. When this expanded aura, sometimes called an “energy body,” gets to the spirit, it may flee; alternately, it may attack the sphere-of-self you have created. If it attacks, immediately open the sphere-of-self and *let it in*. Make absolutely certain you leave space between the spirit and the substance of the sphere in your imagination. Otherwise, you might begin to lose track of where you end and it begins, and that can lead to some serious problems. The sphere-of-self is basically a bubble the spirit cannot escape; it is composed of your self. Now, call in your helper spirits to help you “digest” the spirit. When the spirit is reduced to undifferentiated information, take it in (to your own sphere-of-self) and ground it out of your self by pushing it out your feet and into the earth, where it can be recycled in the ground. Overall, this is a tricky, dangerous operation, and I do not recommend it to any but complete adepts who have *nō* other recourse.

2. See solar plexus definition in glossary. One way to build up rage is to imagine the angriest you have ever been in your life; then think of the person who made you angry and replace that person in your mind with the spirit, directing your greatest anger toward the spirit.

Evocation

Evocation is the practice of calling a spirit into a magical triangle or mirror, or some other object meant to hold it while you speak to it. This technique is usually used to deal with spirits who may be dangerous or unknown, and to get information or new techniques for magic practice. Evocation, as it is practiced in the Western magical tradition—namely with circles of power, triangles of manifestation, and the like—is by and large immoral. The dangers are not excessively exaggerated, but those dangers are direct results of the way mages traditionally go about calling up a spirit. Most evocations in traditional texts are insulting, abusive, cruel, and rude. They tend to rip a spirit out of its home plane and drop it into this one, and then make no recompense. Is it any wonder these spirits are dangerous? My advice is to avoid this tyrannical method of evocation.

The other extreme to the magical tyrant is the sycophant, who is so amazed to be speaking to a non-physical entity that he or she acts like an utter lickspittle. Many spirits have no moral compunctions about playing with such people. Basically, I wager you wouldn't be excessively rude or servile to your car mechanic, so why be rude or servile to a potentially helpful spirit?

Approach spirits as you would any friendly business associate: as equals. I do not mean for you to propose contracts and pacts for your soul—this is utter fiction (and can attract larvae). Instead, ask spirits what they would like in return for doing a task. A spirit won't usually ask for anything absurd, and if it does, you can banish it and try again with a more cooperative spirit. As a rule, if a spirit comes at your request, it is willing to be cooperative. This said, you should still prepare yourself to be asked for odd things. I've drawn sigils in public places, written poems, and even poured out offerings of water on a specific rock. What they desire, I suspect, is purely symbolic: it is the act of repayment, not the payment itself, that the spirits treasure. In any event, feel free to refuse to perform a requested action, or propose your own payment. Spirits seem to gain something from interacting with humans, whether payment is requested or not. In fact, many spirits will happily act without payment.

The traditional structure of evocations is useful in the base sense that you can take the general concept and then create your own more effective and polite evocations. In doing so, you must remember three important parts of an evocation:

1. Establishment of authority

In traditional Western magical evocations, establishing authority involves calling upon one's God—what I like to call “borrowing” authority. The Eastern model of magical evocation, exemplified by Tibetan practices, involves establishing authority through rigorous asceticism—carefully drawing the magical circle with colored sand, for example, and painstakingly fasting, meditating, and chanting for many days. Both methods work, of course, or people would not have been doing them for thousands of years. I recommend a mixture of these two.

First, establish your authority the day before the operation by undertaking some task: pray for an hour in the morning and evening, give up smoking for the day, or don't eat processed sugar for a while. Choose something relatively difficult, but not overwhelming. We need not, like some Japanese shamans, sit under ice-cold waterfalls or mummify ourselves alive! Nor do I recommend the stupidest forms of self-mutilation practiced as “religion,” namely the practices of Christians flagellating themselves, and then pricking open the blisters with broken glass; Hindus remaining motionless until muscles atrophy; Buddhists setting themselves on fire. These usually accomplish very little in the way of establishing personal power.

After performing some minor asceticism to establish your authority, begin the practice with an oral declaration of your spiritual worth. Perform this oral declaration *ex tempore*. Extemporaneous speech is much easier than many people think, particularly if you know the subject. A mage should be able to spin out a stirring and interesting prayer without memorization. To make this easier, research the details of the spirit beforehand. You'll want to be able to call upon its superiors, if lore gives any, its elemental and planetary attributes, its sigil, its traditional shape, and so forth. Memorizing speeches beforehand is a waste of time, but memorizing possible elements of those speeches increases your authority exponentially.

2. Establishment of a magical link

Establishment of authority should naturally shade into an address to the spirit. The address encourages the spirit to arrive, while also describing the spirit's symbolic characteristics. Though this forms a verbal magical link to the spirit, this link is not enough. You also need to visualize the spirit, smell its traditional scent (grimoires often give this, but if they don't, you can usually figure it out by logic or by assigning a smell that seems right), imagine its abode, and so forth. This is like putting an address on your letter, or dialing the right phone number. To contact a specific friend, you wouldn't just pick up the phone and dial randomly. Similarly, you cannot just summon a spirit by words alone.

Also, spirits rarely manifest physically. Usually, they manifest on the so-called "astral plane," the cyberspace of mind underlying all physical reality. You can therefore only perceive spirits with your imaginative sense. Many mages like to have a seer handy, a person who will look in a magic mirror, a chalice of inky water, or a shewstone. Of course, these are techniques you, too, can practice (refer back to page 74).

3. License to depart

The license to depart traditionally gives the spirit permission to leave. More usefully, it thanks the spirit, reiterates any of the terms decided upon, restates the spirit's mission, and helps the seer come out of trance and back into ordinary consciousness. Every license to depart should be followed with a banishing, even if the spirit has seemingly departed and appeared to be friendly. Just as it is possible for your telephone lines to be crossed when calling someone, so it is possible for other spirits to listen in on your conversation, and even hang around after the license to depart. Do not succumb to paranoia, but similarly do not succumb to laziness.

EXERCISE

A Sample Evocation

Here is a short sample evocation. Do not follow it as a rote ritual to be memorized; use it as a crude guideline for constructing your own ritual.

1. **Banish:** Perform a banishing ritual to clear the area of incidental spirits and your mind of distracting thoughts. Establish a circle around yourself; strongly visualize the circle as a barrier between yourself and anything outside it. It may help to draw the circle on the ground with chalk or tape beforehand, so you have a visual guideline. Traditionally, the mage places a triangle or circle outside the circle. This provides a physical focus and serves as an altar, upon which you can put incense, the spirit's sigil, and perhaps a shewstone or some other scrying device.
2. **Borrow Authority:** Borrow authority by making a prayer to a power greater than yourself. This extemporaneous prayer should go on for some time.

“Janus, I pray to you! Give me your power, the power of doorways, so that I can perceive the spirits! You, two-faced god of ways, and the dwarf Kabiri, guardians of the roads, I call! Hasten the way to the spirits. . . .”

3. **Magical Link:** Create a magical link by focusing on the spirit's seal, chanting its name, and so forth.

“Buer. Buer. Buer. Buer. I call upon you, Buer, with the might and authority of Janus, guardian of doorways, Mercurius Psychopompos, and the goddess Hekate, and all those things which dwell at crossroads at midnight! Appear to me as I request, and I will speak with you. Come in a pleasant shape, and appear in the name of Pluton, in the name of Dis, in the name of Orcus, and all those shadows of the spirit realm. Appear in the form of a centaur, your preferred form according to lore. . . .”

4. **Communicate:** Communicate with the spirit, making your request known or receiving information.

“Hail Buer! I thank you for coming. I wish to be cured of all infirmities, as is your office.”³

3. The god names I use in the ritual are chosen specifically because they are pagan, rather than Judeo-Christian. I want to show the variety of possibilities in using god names. Janus is the god of doorways and therefore of the “outside,” both physically and spiritually. Kabiri guard roads. Hekate is the goddess of magic and the underworld. Pluton, Dis, and Orcus are names for the god of the underworld, from which Buer is to come.

5. License to Depart: When finished, give the license to depart.

“I thank all spirits who have attended this ceremony, and bid you go on your way to your abodes and habitations carrying no ill will toward me nor anything that I love. I ask that you be ready and eager to come when called in the future, in friendship and peace.”

6. Banish: Banish again, this time clearing away the circle and dismantling the area of manifestation.

This sample ritual can be infinitely ornamented according to your desire and aesthetic sense. Such a ritual can obviously take some time to complete. Occasionally, finishing it means a serious commitment and strong engagement to your words and the images you visualize. In many ways, evocation is the marathon of magic. But if evocation is the marathon, then invocation is the decathlon.

Invocation

One of the chief uses of an invocation is to provide the mage with skills or capacities he or she would not normally have. Invocation, in brief, consists of calling upon an entity—almost always a god or a power—so intently that the mage’s personality temporarily dissolves under the onslaught and the entity briefly takes over. As you can imagine, this could be somewhat dangerous, but done properly and with sufficient precaution it is quite safe. Unfortunately, many people do this without the safeguards, which is a reckless form of “channeling.” At best, this careless form of invocation results in New Age platitudes. At worst, it can result in practitioners literally losing their minds. This is a pity, because the safeguards are easy enough to master, and simply require careful attention to what is going on. We will cover precautions as we discuss the specifics of invocation.

Many religions employ invocation as a central ritual. In Voudoun, being “ridden” by the loa (gods) is an honor, and it is relatively commonplace at worship rituals. In various sects of charismatic Christianity, worshippers are similarly ridden by the Holy Spirit. In both cases, the possessed person may give information, prophesize, speak in tongues, dance

ecstatically, writhe about, or perform miracles. In other words, one becomes capable of things that would otherwise be beyond the pale.

Whether the entities invoked in these rituals exist outside the worshipper is difficult to answer. Honestly, the question doesn't particularly interest me anyway. Invoked entities behave as if they are separate, autonomous beings, and that ought to be sufficient. Also, results follow more readily when one perceives the object of invocation as existing outside the psyche of the mage. Whether they actually do exist separate from the mage first requires definitions for "self" and "other" in a convincing and non-arbitrary way. I've yet to see this done, so I withhold judgment on the question.

The worship of a being to be invoked requires the following:

1. Time: You must be willing to dedicate weeks, months, or even years to the cultivation of the deity. The process of invocation requires a dedication often lacking these days. It requires the mage to be dedicated to the cult of the deity being invoked. By "cult," I mean the cultivation—the constant and careful worship—of the being to be invoked. This acts as the primary safeguard. It prevents invocation of the wrong entity. An image, either imaginary or physical (ideally both), should be central to the adoration. This icon provides an object upon which the mage can focus.
2. Sacrifice: Both in the literal and psychological sense, you must be willing to give to the deity. For the record, most contemporary mages do not use blood or animals as sacrifice. It is more likely a mage will sacrifice personal time or money (perhaps give to those in need) or make fruit offerings on an altar. If a deity seems to demand something dangerous or immoral—human blood, say—find another deity to cultivate. Why would you want a blood-hungry god inside you anyway? This is putting yourself in grave danger.
3. Space: Again, both literally and psychologically, you must give the god a space in your life. First, it helps to create a *lararium* (sacred space) in your house, where you can pray and make offerings of incense or food. This can be a permanent table adorned with statues and sacred implements, or it can be a cabinet locked and hidden

under a piece of furniture. The physical space you create must include symbols of your desire as well as the god's will. The space should be conducive to a meditative/mental space, and prepare you to surrender to the will of the god, which will differ from your own will in one or more points.

It is very important to remember, even psychological archetypes dwelling in our minds are autonomous of our desires. Therefore, invocation should be a last resort for practical problems. In other words, do not invoke a god unless you're sure your "true will" is in accordance with your desire. Gods invariably work to accomplish your true will, but not your every wish of each fleeting moment. Often, a god you care about and believe in (i.e., trust) will be aware of your problems before you seek assistance. Sometimes these gods may have even created the problem. It's possible that the difficulty you face in, say, learning French is a difficulty encouraged by Hermes. Invoking him for help would therefore be pointless. Perhaps he wants to see you overcome the obstacle, making you a stronger person. Or maybe he would rather you study Spanish, which would be more useful to you in his vision. Divination can help clarify which areas are likely to yield to your efforts and which areas might be better to leave alone.

When creating sacred space it's also appropriate to research cultural and traditional details in accordance to the god you wish to call. You needn't follow traditional views slavishly, but you might want to give them nods as part of creating the appropriate mental space for the invocation. If you're invoking Apollo, for example, you may want to research how space in ancient Greece was, in fact, declared sacred. For this example, you would find one of the means of doing so was to walk around a temple or altar with a statue of the god or some other sacred item. Traditionally, a priest yelled for silence and ordered everything profane to leave the temple. You might feel more comfortable with a familiar banishing ritual, but it wouldn't hurt to carry a statue of Apollo around before or after the banishing, nor would it hurt to shout out *Hekas! Hekas! Este bebelloi!* (Go away! Go away! All you profane things!).

After you create sacred space—which could even be something as simple as drawing an imaginary line of fire—you should visualize the god with the utmost strength possible (watching the god in third person).

Then, begin the invocation (speak in third person). Have your dialogue flow extemporaneously, relying upon your knowledge of the god from earlier study. You needn't worry much about structure; just speak as the words occur to you. Maintain the visualization, nurturing a sense of rising energy and excitement. Here is an example:

EXERCISE

"Apollo Shoot-From-Afar, son of beautiful Leto, brother of Artemis who hunts with her silver bow, slew the serpent at Delphi claiming the shrine as his own. Born in darkness, the lord of light came forth in seven days. . . ."

Once you have a confident visualization of the god, speak directly (second person) to the visualized image. At this point it might help to have a physical image in which you've directed your devotions hitherto.

"You, slayer of Python, I call upon you and offer this incense in your name, that you look favorably upon me, Plaguebringer, and grant me my request, O Slayer, O Musician."

At some point, the mental image of the god will begin to behave outside of your control. It may open its eyes, look at you, or move in some way. At this point, you need to immediately imagine yourself from *inside* the image, looking out from its eyes. Your dialogue will switch to the first person. Begin by describing your characteristics (as if you yourself own the characteristics of the god). For example:

"I am Phoebus Apollo, divine physician, master of harmony and health, beautiful one, giver of truth, speaker of oracles. I am the son of Zeus, born in darkness because no light could bear me. When I came forth, Delos became fast to the ocean floor. I am the bringer of plague and the giver of health. It was I who slew Achilles on the field of battle with my arrow. . . ."⁴

4. The movement from third to first person reflects the movement of the deity, from a far away idea to a present reality. The names used here are all references to various myths about Apollo: in *Homer* he is often called Shoot-From-Afar; the island Delos is his place of birth; Leto is his mother; Zeus his father; and his twin sister, Artemis, was born a few moments before him so she could help Leto give birth (gods are remarkably precocious apparently).

You will eventually lose control of your mouth—it will speak without you. At this point, you have invoked the god. It is useful to have another person present in order to take notes, because it's very possible you may not remember this process very well. You may also have a recording device set up. Even if you don't have a record of the experience, to call upon a god must, inevitably, change your mind in a permanent and real way. So, even if you don't recall the words of the god (a waste, really) you'll be a different person. You may very well not be aware of the difference, but others will notice it—and it will be real.

Artificial Entities

So far we have looked at “naturally” occurring spirits, the sorts of things one might run into accidentally or summon deliberately. These days, mages more often deal with artificial spirits—creations of pure mind that exist solely to fulfill a single function. Unlike natural spirits, these artificial beings are often more manageable, and perhaps not even self-aware. The ethical issues in dealing with beings you create are somewhat simplified. Moreover, natural spirits exist for specific purposes, but there may be a time when you cannot locate an already extant spirit. In such a situation, an artificial spirit, engineered for your specific need, is preferable to calling up one of Solomon's spirits who cannot be absolutely depended on to accomplish your need.

Some argue that all spirits, even Solomon's, are actually artificial spirits, perhaps created long ago. Even if this is true, there are advantages to creating your own spirits rather than dealing with someone else's. Just as a computer programmer would rather create a function for a specific task than use a premade function that doesn't quite fit the need, so most post-modern mages prefer to use an artificial spirit, as opposed to some prefabricated entity who may or may not be well-disposed.

We can somewhat arbitrarily divide artificial spirits into two classes: those made by a single individual, and those empowered by an entire group. Those made by a group are frequently called “egregores.” Some mages refer to certain gods of particular religions as egregores. I find this a bit rude, at least within the hearing distance of someone who holds a god of a particular religion sacred as just that, a “god.” I do not know if Jesus

really exists or whether he is just an egregore constructed by group worship. I think it likely that there is an entity called Jesus Christ and an egregore with that name, and they interact to some greater or lesser degree.

To create a servitor, the mage treats an idea as an entity, accumulating a symbolic aggregation around it. This process is also the one used to create an egregore, but an egregore is created by a large group of people working together, usually over a longer period of time. These groups are often unaware of what they are doing. Servitors are made by a single person who is fully aware of what she or he is doing. Each spirit needs three things: a name, description, and graphic seal. Naming a spirit gives it a core, a symbolic center for accumulating ideas. Names, of course, have power. A name is the central location of a semantic space, an area of meaning and symbolic association. The spirit description includes both a physical, literal description of how you want the spirit to look and the esoteric description of what you want the spirit to do, its task. Finally, the graphic seal acts as a sort of address, a physical object that makes interaction with the spirit easier. A seal is simply a sigil that refers to a specific spirit, rather than to an idea like "money" or "love." It can be made by creating a sigil out of a spirit's name.

EXERCISE

Creating a Servitor

Before engaging in this exercise, you might want to acquire a blank book to start a grimoire. You can write the names, seals, and descriptions of spirits therein so you have them handy later. The act of writing is a profoundly magical one.

Create a spirit for a specific desire. Usually the more specific a goal is, the better. General-purpose spirits tend to be fairly ineffective. Imagine you want a spirit to help you find rare books. The name given to the spirit should in some way be consistent with the task you intend to set. Naming your book-finder Slayer or Brute would probably be counterproductive. Instead, consider finding a name by re-arranging words associated with the goal, making acronyms, choosing names from other languages, or any mixture of the above. Let's say by mixing these techniques you choose to call

the spirit Selib. This name comes from the first syllable of the Hebrew (*sefer*) and Latin (*liber*) words for “book,” and is followed by the first letter of the English word “book.” You may choose words simply because they appeal to you; in this example, there is no need to know Hebrew or Latin. Mixing up the letters of “book” would work just as well. But, for various reasons, it’s best to always come up with an original name. It is especially wise not to use the name of a person you know. Naming a spirit Peter is not a good idea, because the name could easily become connected, in your mind and therefore in reality, to any person named Peter.

You now have a name for the spirit, so you can create a description for Selib. Let’s say you decide, more or less on a whim, that Selib is a tall, bespectacled, toad-headed man. He carries a scroll and quill in his right hand and a magnifying glass in his left. He wears a bright purple cloak and tall black boots. He comes readily when called and takes faithful direction in finding whatever text you require, no matter how rare, and at a good price. As you may notice, the symbols chosen for Selib are consistent with his goal: the scroll, pen, and magnifying glass all represent finding books. The purple of the cloak represents the cover of night or secrecy in which the books are hidden. The boots represent the road he may have to travel. The fact that he has a toad’s head is a good example of incorporating intuition. After all, someone named Selib must have a toad’s head. This type of reaction is a good sign—it means the symbol has begun talking to you. In other words, you have incorporated feedback into a signal.

Finally, Selib needs a sigil. I prefer to enter a trance and quickly scribble out a sigil, but you may prefer to design a sigil from the letters of Selib’s name, or incorporate stylized drawings of books, scrolls, pens, and other such things.

The next step puts all of the pieces together. There are many ways to do this. I draw the sigil on a piece of paper or in my grimoire, and creating a magical space through the banishing ritual of my preference, I imagine all the symbols and rare books of the world swimming around me as I read aloud Selib’s name and de-

scription. I continue to contemplate, in trance, on the sigil. The random information comes together to form the pattern of Selib's body, which I visualize standing in front of me, awaiting his first orders. It is this easy. You may prefer to achieve some gnosis, and this may be more effective, but it is usually unnecessary. Mild trance is usually sufficient.

Many people claim it is vital to destroy your servitor when it has accomplished its goal. This can be done by burning the sigil and holding a symbolic funeral ritual. I'm not convinced of the dire dangers of letting servitors live, however. I suppose it's possible some of them could develop enough autonomy to cause problems, but in my experience, they don't. Moreover, artificial spirits seem to have a natural life span. I've had them "die" in the middle of an operation. Suddenly, they're just not there (to my imagination), and I have to either rebuild or do without them. To be on the safe side, deactivate your servitor when it has done its job, but don't worry if you forget. Some mages suffer more pain obsessing about such rules than an army of embittered servitors could ever cause.

As you can see, creating a servitor is relatively simple. It has become most mages' favorite method of operation for simple tasks. I use servitors more than any other technique. Egregores, on the other hand, are much more difficult to create and work with, as they require a group energy behind them. By "energy" I mean devotion, not literal energy. There must be a group focusing on the egregore, giving it attention and constructing a complex web of symbolic links, many of which are unconscious. An egregore has a considerable amount of power and autonomy. Therefore, as a general rule, they are not particularly useful for magic. They tend to become more trouble than they're worth as they demand more and more attention.

So why mention them? Some groups unconsciously create egregores. In fact, I would argue that almost any long-standing group will unconsciously begin to create a group entity. That entity usually has very little power, unless the group grows in size and influence. An egregore can simultaneously grow in power and eventually take charge of the group.

Even physical objects can have egregores if a large enough group gives them attention and worship.

Take, for example, guns. Have you ever held a gun in your hand and felt the seductive pull? In our culture, guns have achieved a sort of magical sentience—they want to be used and will encourage people to use them. The gun egregore is enormously powerful, partially because it demands and attains blood sacrifice, a symbolically potent way of creating strong, although dangerous, egregores. When a mage handles a gun, a sort of alien power is detected. As might be expected, most mages do not succumb to firearm accidents. But many laypeople do not realize that they are “not themselves” when handling a gun, particularly those with little experience with the objects.

Overall, creating an egregore is rarely worth the trouble. Dealing with egregores, however, is absolutely necessary. It is important when dealing with egregores to remember two things: first, the egregore has a limited number of desires, mostly consisting of symbolic associations, that it needs humans to fulfill; second, no egregore is as powerful as even the most mundane human being, although they may have been taught to think so. We have made guns such an authority in our culture that the gun egregore seems to think it actually is in charge. But of course it is not. It is our hand that holds the gun, and the human will, when healthy, can overcome any spirit’s will. When dealing with egregores, be polite but firm. By no means should you deal with an egregore when emotionally or spiritually unbalanced, especially dangerous egregores.

This brings up an important point. Not all egregores are dangerous. A large number are beneficial, and some are probably neutral to human welfare. There is a parking lot egregore, for example, that is completely harmless as far as I can tell. It may even be useful to build a relationship with him—he will help you find a parking place if you give him attention. He appears to me as a blond, ten-year-old boy in a blue windbreaker. He may appear differently to you. One way of using egregores is to treat them like gods, invoking them for special purposes.

Invoking Successful Mental Patterns

As I've already hinted, invoking gods is a bit like bringing out the heavy weapons. If you just want to learn French, for example, invoking Hermes might not be the best route, unless the language is essential to your concept of "great work." Otherwise, it'll be like swatting a fly with a howitzer. At best, it's inelegant. At worst, it's insulting to the deity in question. I don't mean to portray god like the old comedy-routine "god," who is annoyed by every prayer of grace that interrupts him while he works. But all gods are powerful and important, and "using" gods leads to the mental character flaw of hubris, the overwhelming pride that primes a fall.

Fortunately, we have other methods to work out our day-to-day issues. For one, we can invoke small parts of people. It's not only possible, but common to transfer mental habits from one person to another. Some people call these mental patterns *memes*. A theory has arisen around the idea of memes, arguing that they're a bit like viruses, because at times they maximize their own survival at the expense of the hosting mind. Some theorists go so far as to say we must learn to inoculate ourselves against them. But do not be deceived. So-called meme theory is often just a way to feel superior—a destructive meme in its own right! The idea of memes does not so much describe a reality as it presents a useful metaphor. Thinking of ideas themselves as autonomous "viruses" traveling from consciousness to consciousness, spreading, dying, being countered by vaccination, and so forth, gives us an imaginative handle on the illusive idea of "idea."

Incidentally, the concept of the meme is not a new one. Even the name isn't particularly new. Sumerian mythology speaks of the gods giving mankind *me*. In this tradition, *me* are a bit like computer programs; they are instructions for the universe. Their success is attributed to the fact that they are written down. The act of writing makes them come into being and function. There were *me* for making bread, similar to what we would call a recipe; *me* for making war; even *me* for things like making crops grow.

We can combine the meme idea and the *me* idea to come up with a useful metaphoric handle of our own. Let's revisit our French language example. Imagine you wish to learn French, but irregular verbs stump you. Even

memorization techniques don't help. So you need to imagine, and thus construct, *me* for irregular French verbs. You need to download this *me* into your own mind, so you can work out French verbs. One method for creating this *me* is to find someone who knows French irregular verbs. Ask the person to write the verbs on a piece of paper for you. Then, in an altered state of consciousness (intense meditation, orgasm, or some other similar extreme state), internalize the writing like a sigil, planting the *me* into your own mind.

Of course, you may not know anyone who is familiar with French irregular verbs. If this is the case, do some sleight of mind to convince yourself that you, indeed, have the *me*. First, invoke the idea itself, as opposed to invoking a god. For example, invoke the Power of French Teacher, just as you would a god. Once you become French Teacher, draw the *me* of irregular French verbs. When you come back to yourself, you will probably have an incoherent scribble. Use this scribble as a sigil, internalizing it by means of focused meditation. Stare at it until the lines seem to move and your mind goes blank. Once this happens, roll it up and keep it somewhere safe. You now possess the *me* of irregular French verbs. Although it is possible to gain new knowledge, it is more likely that the *me* will simply help you understand what was originally difficult to comprehend. You may suddenly see the logic of the conjugations of *vouloir* the next time you sit down to memorize them.

Strangely enough, there are considerable advantages to getting the *me* this second way rather than through someone who already knows it. For one thing, when you obtain *me* from another person, it may come with any number of neuroses (other memes), which you don't want to incorporate into your own mind. That person might unknowingly write down personal mental instabilities. You don't need those. Furthermore, invoking an imaginary French Teacher provides you with a handy nearby mentor. Even after you banish and return to normal consciousness, the French Teacher will still exist, ready to help you figure out the most obtuse points of French grammar, both directly (by explaining them to you in invocation) and magically (by making you receptive to learning them).

EXERCISE

Download a Me

Decide what it is you want to learn. Language? Astronomy? History? Perhaps you're reading a book that mentions a topic you'd like to know more about. In any event, you can surely find something you wish to learn. Through careful introspection, break down exactly what parts of the subject you need to learn (the headings in a textbook on the subject will probably help with this). Now, choose the first topic.

Begin to devote yourself to the chosen topic. You need to read a book on it, finding bits and pieces that make sense and others that don't. Let them cluster together in your mind. It doesn't matter if they make sense right now. You don't even need to understand the terms. You're just looking for the "radio frequency" of the appropriate Teacher, the symbolic vocabulary, the correspondences, and so on. Let's say you're learning chemistry. Read about double bonds, triple bonds, atomic weights, valance electrons, and so on. When you've got a head full of terminology, then you can begin the invocation.

Remember, invocations come in three parts. So, for our chemistry example, visualize the perfect Chemistry Teacher. See a man in a white jacket with spectacles (chemists don't wear contacts in the lab). He has some pens in his pocket, as well as a thermometer, which he stuck in there in an absent-minded moment. He has gray-black hair, but he's bald on top, a little like a monk. He is smiling, because he likes chemistry and is really eager to teach you about it. He's thrilled that you want to learn. Start to invoke him from the top of your head, speaking extemporaneously:

"The chemistry teacher is the master of the valance electron. He knows the quark and the gluon; he knows the mole and the measure. He mixes and weighs, using the newton and the gram, the function and the reagent. He adds acid to water, not water to acid. He wears goggles in the lab and a coat to protect his tie.

“O Chemistry Teacher, come and teach me the secrets of the atomic weights, Avagadro’s Number, and metric measures! I call to you, who can teach me of catalysts and crystals, of Bunsen burners and boiling points! Give me the *me* of the periodic table.

“I am he, the Chemistry Teacher, who knows and imparts the secrets of matter. I am the giver of the *me* of the periodic table and the Lord of noble gases. I mix and measure, heat and observe, note and reflect.”

You get the point. At the moment you fully embody the Teacher, write the *me* (without consciously thinking) on a piece of paper. Let the Teacher depart, banish with your favorite banishing ritual and take a break. (You may wish to ground yourself, but at the very least you should do something mundane to take your mind off the operation.) The next day, take the paper with the *me* on it and stare at it intently, focusing entirely on your breath. At some point, your mind will go blank—it need only be a moment. Then, put away the *me* somewhere safe, banish thoroughly, and do some mundane and distracting activity, such as watching TV or making supper.

After this invocation ritual, make sure you devote a certain amount of time to studying chemistry each day. When you master the first aspect you wish to learn, you can invoke again for further *me*. Over time, you’ll build a collection of *me*, which will allow you to master the topic completely. Further invocations are always easier than the previous one. Eventually you’ll be able to very quickly sketch out a *me*, or even ask the Chemistry Teacher a question directly. You will be able to invoke an entity you know well without a ritual at all. In time, a visualization and a short prayer will be sufficient.

If you happen to be a teacher yourself, you can use the idea of *me* to improve your own teaching. Keep in mind that a *me* need not be a glyph. It can also be a word, nonsense or otherwise, as long as it is written down in the proper state of mind. You need to be absolutely convinced of your authority, both magical and in the subject you are teaching, before you write. To build this authority, you can do a sort of invocation to yourself, listing your accomplishments and knowledge. While you do this, your state of consciousness will be altered. Once you feel yourself consumed in thoughts

of accomplishments, allow yourself to write the *me*. Take the *me* with you to the classroom and somehow expose your students to it. You can write the sigil on the board or design a classroom decoration in its shape; if it's a word, speak it during one of your lectures (even if it's not loud enough to be heard clearly).

Is this ethical? Some might very well say no, that working magic on anyone is unethical, whether they appreciate the results or not. I tend to disagree. Magic is simply another technique one can use to help people. If private conferences to help improve a poor writer are ethical, I fail to see how magic is not ethical. Of course, your school board or department head might not particularly agree with my analysis, so if you happen to be a teacher, be circumspect and careful. Or, better yet, do magic to make yourself a better teacher, and leave your students free to learn or not to learn in accordance with their own wills.

What Do They Get Out of It?

What do spirits get out of dealing with humans? Certainly the concept of payment, founded as it is on our relatively recent capitalistic models, cannot function among spirits and humans. After all, what object could we give to a being composed of pure information? Spirits can obtain anything we have to offer in some other way, without dealing with human aggravation. Yet spirits do deal with humans, often requesting strange, ritualistic actions. If I put out a plate of food or water for a spirit, surely the spirit does not physically consume the offering. So what is really happening?

I had wondered about this question for some time, until finally I realized the simplest solution was to ask a spirit. An egregore created as part of a magical group seemed the best source of information—the least likely to deceive—so I evoked a particular egregore and asked him what spirits received from their interaction with humans.

He explained that human beings have an unconscious mind, allowing them to make creative, unexpected leaps of irrational, symbolic thought. Spirits have a simpler mental structure. Since their minds are completely conscious at all times, they are unable to make the unconscious links and leaps humans make. As symbolic beings, making symbolic links is the only way they can grow. So in dealing with humans, they borrow our ability to

make such breakthroughs. For example, they find unexpected connections in the things we request of them. If we are unhappy and seek a lover, spirits look at our situation and link the idea of unhappiness and love together in a way they, perhaps, could not have otherwise seen.

I find this answer more useful than the concept of some sort of “energy” used as spiritual currency. Of course spirits will accept “energy” as payment, but they’re really just accepting the idea that we link the symbols of “energy” and “payment” at all! The spirits do not want our energy; they want to observe the way we think about the symbol “energy.” This explains why some spirits work “unpaid.” Actually, they are being paid in the chance to observe human desires, passions, and emotions.

• • •

In conclusion, I will leave you with a list of things to remember about gods, servitors, pests, and, of course, spirit creatures.

Banish after dealing with spirits, just as you wash your hands after handling large amounts of cash. You can pick up mental tics from even the most helpful spirits. Spirit guides of various types may be exempt from this warning. Mine indignantly insist they are, but I still banish.

Don’t become paranoid. Yes, the air is swarming with demons, but it always has been. There’s no reason to panic now that you can see them.

Also, don’t give in to awe. Dealing with non-physical intelligence is exciting, but most of what you will confront is no wiser than you. Don’t follow the orders of gods or angels unless they make perfect sense to you.

Finally, maintain some humility. You’re not a mighty necromancer. Neither am I. We’re just people dealing with other people—who happen to not be made of matter.

THE MAGIC OF LANGUAGE

One of the chief preoccupations of postmodern art and literature is language. Postmodern authors often use language as a character in its own right, allowing it to shape and determine scenes and plots, and sometimes take over, by design, an entire story. Some artists have created works relying less on the piece itself, and more on what people say about it. For example, one artist of my acquaintance worked on designing a gallery in which the aisles between the exhibits would be cramped and absurdly small. The actual art was the complaints of those visiting the gallery and the sight of everyone being contorted into uncomfortable shapes. Similarly, writers such as William Burroughs play with language by cutting up old text and rearranging it, or experimenting with the publication of their works in unusual forms. The interest in language stems, at least in part, from the realization that, in spite of our gains in science, we do not understand language. Even after a century of linguistics, we still cannot explain fundamental things about language: how it works in our minds, what it means to communicate, or even whether it has an underlying structure. Noam Chomsky, Stephen Pinker, and other linguists and psychologists have argued that language is a fundamental, inborn human ability. But they cannot explain how we came to have such an ability, or whether it is part of our physical brains or an emergent phenomenon of our consciousness. In fact, linguistics is a field full of mysteries. How do we communicate? Theoretically, it is impossible to communicate. How did we come to

communicate in the first place? We do not know whether language was invented once or many times. What role does language play in our consciousness? Nonverbal reasoning is possible, but children deprived of early exposure to language develop symptoms of mental illness. Language is a mystery.

Language may not seem particularly miraculous, since we all use it every day, but consider the bewildering array of information one must process in order to manage even a simple utterance. First, you have to know, even unconsciously, thousands of rules and tens of thousands of exceptions to those rules. Then, you have to know a huge vocabulary—a million words or more! Finally, you have to be capable of translating experiences into words and phrases and sentences that bear no actual genetic relationship to those experiences. Consider what this means: it is as if every time we order a hamburger, we paint a gorgeous oil painting of a burger. In fact, we can express more in language than we can in any other abstract medium. Language is more complex and flexible than oil painting. In language, not only can I order a hamburger, I can tell you all about hamburgers. I can make you imagine the taste and smell of burgers. I can even tell fantastic stories about burgers—stories of events that never happened and never could happen. In addition, I can talk about abstract philosophy. I can explain things in language that no one has ever seen or heard. Every utterance I speak has the potential of being something no one has ever heard before.

Fundamentally, language is a magical system. The ancients knew this—many religions have at least one legend about language. The Egyptians considered their writing system holy. In fact, *hieroglyphs* is Greek for “holy writing,” and Isis revives her dead husband Osiris partially by means of a secret word. Jewish legend teaches us that every letter of the alphabet came before the Lord, and the Lord created the universe by means of using words. For a long time, the name of that Lord, by the way, was considered to be a word so powerful that even uttering it was forbidden. Christians begin one of their gospels with a parallel between God and language: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). John uses the Greek word *logos*, which means both “word” and “reason.” According to Stoic philosophy, *logos* is

the system of order underlying the cosmos. In Genesis, when the Judeo-Christian God wants to take away human beings' power to challenge Him, he confuses their languages so they cannot talk to one another. Even the words "spell" and "enchantment" etymologically recall the link between magic and language: "spell" comes from the same root as *spiel* (a lengthy speech), and *enchant* literally means "sing to."

For thousands of years, the Roman pagans sent letters to the gods by tossing written concerns into deep wells. Often, these letters contained curses and complaints, and sometimes they contained what we might call "love spells." These *defixiones*, as they were called, seem to have been prepared with complex sacrifices and rituals, but they consisted fundamentally of a lead plate inscribed with a formulaic spell. Sometimes, these lead plates were folded or rolled with a nail driven through them. Excavations of wells have gleaned a large number of these *defixiones*. They yield a rare look at the day-to-day mind of a person from this time and culture. Exploring *defixiones* and their Greek counterparts, *katadesmoi*, finally led me to a startling realization about the nature of language and magic.

I realized language is a miracle. It ties so deeply into what I call the semiotic web, the underlying structure of complex and chaotic meaning, that it's a veritable technology for magic. I'm not just speaking of so-called magic languages like Enochian and Ouranian-Barbaric (which I will discuss later). Real, living languages are magical as well. The Greeks and Romans wrote their *defixiones* using everyday (even colloquial) language. There was no need for received wisdom, and *defixiones* required very little or no particular expertise. The creator simply wrote down what he or she wanted to accomplish, sacrificed an animal, prayed, and threw the *defixiones* in a well.¹

In this sense, magic is mind-numbingly easy. Relatively amazing things can be accomplished by simply writing down a desire on a piece of paper, folding it, and then disposing of it according to one's aesthetic preferences. The complicated rituals (sacrifice and so forth) involved in creating ancient *defixiones* are still to this day necessary, but only in the sense that aesthetic

1. John Gager's *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* is a scholarly treatment of *defixiones*, touching lightly on their method of creation, but focusing mostly on their content. For those who want to know what sorts of phrasing are used on these tablets, Gager's book is useful and interesting.

satisfaction is vital to magic. You may be aesthetically satisfied by burning it, burying it, saying a prayer over it every morning, or any number of other things. Remember, the act of magical authority is simply expressing the desire aesthetically.

EXERCISE

A Modern Defixio

Clear a space, both physically and mentally. Do not take defixio lightly—it may be simple, but it is an act of magic.

Take a small slip of paper, large enough to express your desire succinctly but small enough to easily manipulate. You may wish to use a special pen for this and a special writing style. I write defixiones in a modified Latin miniscule with a calligraphy pen, but what aesthetically pleases me, may not please you. You may write part or all of the message in a foreign language, or include a formulaic address to the divine personalities of your preference. In any event, it is best to decide how you will proceed before beginning.

Succinctly write your desire on the slip of paper. Use clear, simple, direct language. “I want to be loved” is less powerful, even in mundane prose, than “People will love me,” or even “People love me.” Be specific, as well. “People love me” is not as good as “Thin, tall people with goatees love me” or “Intelligent and interesting strangers like to talk to me.”

After you have written your desire, you need to dispose of it somehow. Traditionally, creators tossed defixiones down wells, because wells symbolized an opening to the underworld. Greeks and Romans imagined gods both above and below. Many of the gods of magic lived underground, as did the somewhat malignant Titans. Since most defixiones were curses (ours need not be), this symbolism also ties nicely in with graves and tombs, which are both subterranean. In any event, you are not constrained by the practices of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Perhaps you prefer burning your defixio, because you consider fire a symbol of power and will. Or, perhaps you will bury it in your garden, because your garden is a place of growth and structure. I keep my defixiones on my altar,

near my statue of Buddha. When I get too many of them, I read them aloud in a little ceremony of gratitude. Then I tear them up and scatter them outdoors.

You will find, I wager, that your experiences with defixiones stagger you. When I realized magic, even spectacularly successful magic, could be so simple, it changed my whole view on the topic. The result was a new attitude for myself as a mage.

Because defixio needs few tools and little set-up, its simplicity could lead one to blindly defix for a goal in a fit of pique, lust, or greed. Defixio often works more powerfully than one expects. For instance, someone may blithely defix for a sexual encounter and suffer a near-rape. Be carefully specific and, above all, *expect* the magic to work.

A simple method like defixio cannot work for very complicated goals. One cannot astral travel or invoke gods very effectively through defixio, although a careful preliminary defixio can certainly help. Many mages who don't use the defixio technique state their goal before the beginning of a ritual. I suggest going further by not just stating the goal, but writing it. Every word in English is, in itself, a little ritual, a sigil or symbol of an idea. Combining both the vocal sigil (the pronunciation of the word) and the visual sigil (the written word) simply adds to the power. Your native language is a magical language.²

Magical Languages

Magic words, arcane languages, and "barbarous" words of invocation all dwell in the popular imagination of magic. In this case, popular imagination does not stray too far from the truth. Although most mages conduct rituals and other acts of magic in their native language, they'll often incorporate foreign tongues, made-up words, and historic magical languages. We can

2. It is commonly thought that the pronunciation of a word determines its spelling. In no language is this completely true. In English we do not differentiate between the *T* in words like "tap" and "pat," but Hindu speakers hear those two sounds as distinctly and clearly different. So a written word is a sigil of its pronunciation, as surely as any pictogram. It is doubly true when a cluster of letters represent multiple sounds, such as "cough" and "through."

divide the use of “magic words” into three categories: foreign languages, barbarous words, and artificial jargons.

Foreign Languages

Foreign languages usually provide a set of special terms for any system of magic. Any practitioner of cabalistic ritual magic, for example, will know *atah givur la-olam adonai* literally means “thou art great forever, O Lord,” but in a ritual it means more. It means the mage aligns him- or herself with a system and tradition of magic—theistic, ancient, and complex—that strives to unite the individual with God. Verbalizing phrases in foreign languages requires us to consciously and unconsciously think of the meaning behind the message. No one ever masters a foreign language to the depths of a native language. Even those who become fluent and practically accent-free still hold a foreign language special and—for many people, though they rarely talk about it—sacred. After all, one must spend time and energy learning a foreign language. Your native language comes by instinct, mysterious and inexplicable as that instinct is.

I go so far as to suggest that every educated person should learn at least two foreign languages, one living and one dead. I realize, particularly in America, that we have a resistance to learning foreign languages. Perhaps from a purely practical perspective we have good reason. After all, almost every educated person the world over speaks some English or at least reads it. We can communicate even in rural areas of many countries. Yet, learning a language not only opens up other people’s affections and respect, but opens up our own minds to new ways of thinking. If you wish to heed my suggestion, choose a living language you can use in your mundane life. For your dead language, you might want to pick something with some magical history or purpose. I, by the way, am mildly synesthetic when it comes to languages; I feel them as if they each have their own personality. This type of synesthesia is not, apparently, uncommon. Some linguist friends of mine admitted to feeling the same way. My personal sense of the languages I know informs, to some extent, my descriptions that follow. You may develop a different sense or have a different experience associated with each language. I’ve also included a sample of the language, simply for fun.

Old English

A dry, modular language. Old English was spoken until roughly 1066, the date of the Norman Invasion. It differs from Modern English fundamentally and drastically.³ Nouns decline (change shape according to their role in the sentence) and verbs have two conjugations—a mostly regular, weak conjugation, which forms the past tense by affixing a [-d] or [-t] to the end of the verbal stem; and a sometimes irregular, strong conjugation, which changes key vowels within the verbal stem according to a preset pattern. The alphabet contains three extra letters, *thorn* and *eth* (both pronounced like modern “th”) and *aesh* (pronounced like the vowel in the word “ash”). In magic, Old English might be useful if you have an interest in early Christian magic or a fondness for Britain. Many ancient charms still exist in Old English. You might pair it with the living language of Gaelic (though they bear no resemblance) in order to form a system of British magic. Sample: “*Ʒæs ofereode, Pisses swa mæg*” (That went by, this may too).⁴

Latin

The classical language of the educated and scholarly from ancient Rome to the end of the Middle Ages and beyond, Latin by far wins all the popularity contests for dead languages. One of my personal favorites, Latin feels like strong but delicious wine on a warm day. Latin is almost completely regular; once you learn a declension or rule, you can be assured that it applies across at least part of the board. Some exceptions and confusions might trip beginners, but these are easily learned. Latin vocabulary can be absorbed rapidly. Many of our words come from Latin roots, so it’s easy, for example, to remember the meaning for *ducere* (to lead, to stretch out), because of our word “ductile.” The complexity of the grammar, despite its regularity, might throw a few people. Nouns decline for number and case, which means they change shape depending on their role in a sentence. “The farmer’s farmer loves the farmer” would be *agricolae agricola agricolam amat*, for example. After a short time, you’ll wonder how English gets

3. Traditional dialogue uses “thee” and “thou,” remnants of archaic Modern English (not Old English). “Thou” is used *only* as the subject of a sentence: “thou art great.” Whereas “thee” is the object of a sentence: “I give thee sacrifice.” Most verbs used with “thou” in the present tense end in [-st]: “thou givest, thou speakest, thou art, thou hast.”

4. Krapp, *The Exeter Book*.

by *without* such cases. Verbs also decline according to tense, mood, aspect, and person. This creates a lot of different forms, but fortunately they tend to be modular and regular. One can stick the ending for “future” on a verb, follow it with the ending for the first-person personal pronoun and be fairly certain you’re saying “I will.” Latin will help you read anything written in the Middle Ages and during the Roman Empire. Almost all scholarly books were written in Latin, and they have lost a lot in translation. A large number of grimoires were written in Latin, and some of them have yet to be translated adequately or at all. Latin sample: “Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior” (I don’t know, but I feel it happening, and it torments me).⁵

Hebrew

Technically, Hebrew is not a dead language. The nation of Israel uses it as the official language and many literary compositions are produced each year in it. But Biblical Hebrew, the language in which the Old Testament is written, differs considerably from modern, reconstructed Hebrew. For an English speaker, Hebrew is by far the most alien of all the languages listed here, but its use in magic is all the stronger. Cabalists use Hebrew not only as a ritual language, but as a kind of mystical code. To me, Hebrew evokes the smell of binding glue and paper in an old library. The grammar, as I said, is strange to those who speak Indo-European languages. The alphabet consists of twenty-two consonants. Vowels are written by points and lines around these consonants, or, more commonly, not at all. Nouns decline not for case, but for “state” (this fact will cause little problems for most). Verbs, on the other hand, conjugate for aspect and person, but also according to a complicated system of modified meanings. So, *qatal* means “he killed,” but *qittol* can mean “he utterly slaughtered.” As you see, conjugations are affected by suffixes, prefixes, and internal vowel changes. Used in ritual, Hebrew gives a sense of power and mystery that perhaps no other language can. Occasionally, I utter small spells in Hebrew into my hands, as if I am praying. They’re often remarkably effective. Hebrew sample: “breshit bara elohim et ha’arets vet hashamayim” (In the beginning, God created the earth and the heavens).⁶

5. Whyte, *Catullus*, “Odi et Amo.”

6. Genesis 1.1 from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

Greek

Greek bears considerable resemblance to Latin. For me, it feels much like Latin, but with shouting and happy dancing added in. You'll find a lot of the same declensions in Greek and Latin grammar. Verbs are slightly different, but not much. The Greek alphabet differs from ours, but cultural familiarity will help you learn it quickly. You'll soon enjoy its flexibility and precision. Greek vocabulary will come fairly easy—many of our words are from Greek origin, such as “strategy”—and they will help you remember, for example, *strategos* means “general of an army.” Greek magic was, for a time, the primary magical system of Europe. Greek philosophy and culture dominated Rome, and spread with Rome to the rest of Europe, taking with it Greek magical practices. In a ritual, Greek sounds more arcane and sonorous than Latin, and can give a sense of great drama. I'll often begin and end rituals with Greek phrases like *khairē* (rejoice) or *io* (lo). Greek sample: “*menin aeide thea Peleiaedeo Achileos oulomenen*” (Sing, O Goddess, of the wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus).⁷

Barbarous Words

A “barbarous word” in magic means any word or phrase with the literal meanings lost. It is quite possible that most barbarous words have no literal meanings at all. Greek magical texts, for example, often have long strings of nonsense words, corruptions of other languages, vowels, and so forth. These barbarous words exist in a text to provide atmosphere. Sometimes we can reconstruct a barbarous word's origin. For example, *Sabaoth* in a Greek text probably comes from the Hebrew word *tzava'oth* (armies), and a common suffix to names of God—*Elohim Tzava'oth* (God of Armies). It is unlikely the Greek using the word knew its meaning. More likely, he had just picked it out of a Hebrew utterance and calculated that its power would serve him universally.

7. *The Iliad* (Loeb Classical Library, No. 170), Harvard University Press, 1924. A large number of classical texts in both Latin and Greek, as well as English translations, are available online at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu>.

The use of barbarous words may seem silly, but they can add to the power and drama of a ritual. The line between barbarous words and glossalalia is a thin one. Usually, barbarous words are previously recorded and used according to tradition, while glossalalic utterance occurs spontaneously. It's easy to imagine someone recording a glossalalic utterance for use in a later ritual. In fact, the long strings of vowels in some magical texts might represent an attempt to record the groans and cries of ecstasy.

It stands to reason, actually. If one makes certain sounds while in a certain state of mind, then making those sounds will help recall that state of mind. Like the old cure for insomnia—practice yawning—word sounds work by reminding our mind of what we want it to do. You might try this yourself. Record yourself making spontaneous noises in a state of consciousness you wish to replicate later, transcribe those noises into barbarous words, and then use those barbarous words in ritual when you wish to recall the altered state.

Artificial Jargons

I call other magical languages “jargons” because most of them do not qualify as full languages in their own right. Usually, they consist of a series of words with no grammar of their own, and the words are strung together according to the rules of English (the underlying grammar is almost always English). The vocabulary of jargons tends to be small, even insufficient for most magical purposes.

The two largest magical jargons are Enochian and Ouranian-Barbaric. Dr. John Dee discovered (or invented) Enochian in the middle of the sixteenth century. He worked through a shewstone with his partner, Edward Kelly. Enochian consists of a series of complicated tablets covered with letters, from which the names of angels and demons can be gleaned, and a series of nineteen “calls,” or ritual poems. Linguistic analysis shows that the vocabulary is fairly consistent, but with a corpus of only nineteen texts, it is insufficient for any tasks but those for which the calls are created. One cannot, for example, discuss the planets in Enochian. Even discussions of basic magical tasks like banishing fail due to lack of vocabulary. Further analysis shows that Enochian is a simple relexification (a one-to-one word substitution cipher) for English. The grammar is Elizabethan English with

occasional random letters added to some words to simulate case endings, such as those in Latin or Greek.

The Golden Dawn uses a heavily modified version of Dee's Enochian system in their magic. Some mages find it useful. I have never enjoyed it, though I must confess, I find the English version of the keys (poems) rather stirring, if incomprehensible.⁸ In general, my linguistic training runs up against Enochian a bit hard. I split my energy worrying about the dire warnings inherent in the system and the dire silliness of the system itself. For example, many books on Enochian warn that one should never say certain names aloud, and Dee himself transcribed some names backwards to avoid inadvertently evoking demons.

Ouranian-Barbaric, on the other hand, saves itself from inutility in two ways. First, its vocabulary is entirely open. Anyone can "channel" new words directly and add them to the dictionary. Second, it refuses to take itself seriously. There are words that mean things like "the morning is not the magician's friend," for example. Springing out of the chaos magic work of Peter Carroll and his order, the IOT, it consists of a list of words and no grammar.⁹ Words are to be strung together according to whatever grammar the mage likes best. One can add case endings or otherwise modify words according to whim. The authors merely propose some possible grammatical rules. For example, one should avoid the words "to be." I've seen many more people use Ouranian-Barbaric than Enochian, but I personally find the words clumsy and unpleasant. I also disagree with some of the underlying assumptions of the language's structure.

Making Your Own Magical Language

Ideally, each mage would make his or her own perfect language. This is not as daunting a task as it might seem. One only needs a simple grammar and a vocabulary of common terms. A magical language's vocabulary can

8. "Stronger are your feet than the barren stone and mightier are your voices than the manifold winds." (Regardie, *The Golden Dawn*, p. 674.)

9. Ouranian-Barbaric is not in the public domain, so I cannot include the dictionary here. However, it is legally uncertain whether one can copyright an artificial language, particularly one designed to be infinitely flexible and idiosyncratic. Several more complete discussions of Ouranian-Barbaric are available on the Internet for those interested in the language.

grow as an individual mage needs it. Furthermore, a magical language's writing system could be truly pictorial, with each word being a proper sigil in its own right. (It may be helpful to refer back to the symbol system exercises starting on page 51.) Attempts to make such magical languages of my own have proven fairly successful, but reactions to languages differ so widely—some people find French beautiful, for example, but I think it's ugly—that publishing them here would be pointless. It's more useful to create your own.

EXERCISE

Making a Magical Language

Start with a list of possible magical goals. What sorts of things do you want to say in your language? Do you want it for ritual purposes, defixiones, or communication with other members of your magical order? The purpose of the language will, to a large extent, determine its form. A language meant for ritual will only need to be large enough to translate, at first, a few phrases. A language meant for communication will need to have around four thousand words to start. Of course, one can start a ritual language and work it into a communicative language over time.

Once you have a few ideas about how you want to use your language, you need to determine basic grammar and vocabulary. You can translate words one-for-one, but you may want some sort of system of derivation. For example, in English we can add [-er] to verbs to make them agents of the actions they describe. A system of word derivation can save you lots of time. If you have, for example, three verb → noun derivations, then you might make words for "eat, eater, thing-eaten, eating-instrument" all at the same time. This is something Ouranian-Barbaric lacks, requiring separate words for each concept. You do not need to have similar grammatical rules to English, but you can if you wish. You may even create a code in which each word stands for exactly one English word. In a real language, of course, each word stands for a concept that may or may not correspond to one or more English words.

Another basic grammatical rule you might consider is how you'll mark tense (time) on a verb, or if you even want to concern your language with this issue. Many languages get by without marking tense at all. In Chinese, tense is indicated by adverbs like "yesterday" or "tomorrow," and Indonesian verb tense is indicated by adverbs meaning "already" and "soon." If you want a useable language, you may wish to mark as few grammatical rules as you can. Yet you might consider what sorts of things you could usefully mark in a magical language. Can you indicate whether a person is a mage or not by using a special suffix? Or whether you will an action or an action happens accidentally?

Once you have these ideas in mind, devise a short text (remember, you can always edit). I recommend no more than a hundred words to start. It might be a summary of your current philosophy of magic, for example, or a passage from a holy book. I recommend staying away from poems at first, simply because their grammatical structure in the original language is not always transparent.

Finally, write up an alphabetical dictionary of the words in your sample text. You need to devise words, or at least roots from which you can derive the words, for the words in the text you wish to translate. You can do this in several ways:

- Enter a trance state and allow the words to arise in your mind. Tinker with their sound until they please you aesthetically.
- Devise a system of sound-symbolism. In other words, build up words according to what they mean. If *L* means "pleasure," *O* means "man," and *U* means "woman," then *LOU* could mean "heterosexual sex," and *LOO* could mean "homosexual sex." Remain flexible; you will not be able to easily analyze some words.
- Borrow from real languages. My language (Agsem) borrows from Hebrew, Latin, and Enochian to make a unique polyglot that seems both foreign and interestingly familiar to me.
- Use anagrams. This is similar to borrowing from real languages, but in this system you mix up the sounds of a word, add vowels if you like, and make new words. So you might decide that the word for

“power” in your language will be *opru*. Changing the *W* to a *U* and dropping the *E* produces a new word that still, in your unconscious, is connected to the original. Or, you can make words by substitution code. Taking the next letter in the alphabet and substituting it for the original is one such example. With this method, “power” yields *qpxfs*. With some vowels and pruning, this word can become *qopfsa* or *paq* or any combination you like. Hebrew Cabalists use a similar system (called *temurah*) to find hidden meanings of words.

- Build up words through compounding or some other method of derivation. In compounding, you combine two or more roots to make a new word, like in English “cat house” and “house cat.” The order in which you combine the words obviously matters, but that order need not be the same as in English. Simply be consistent.

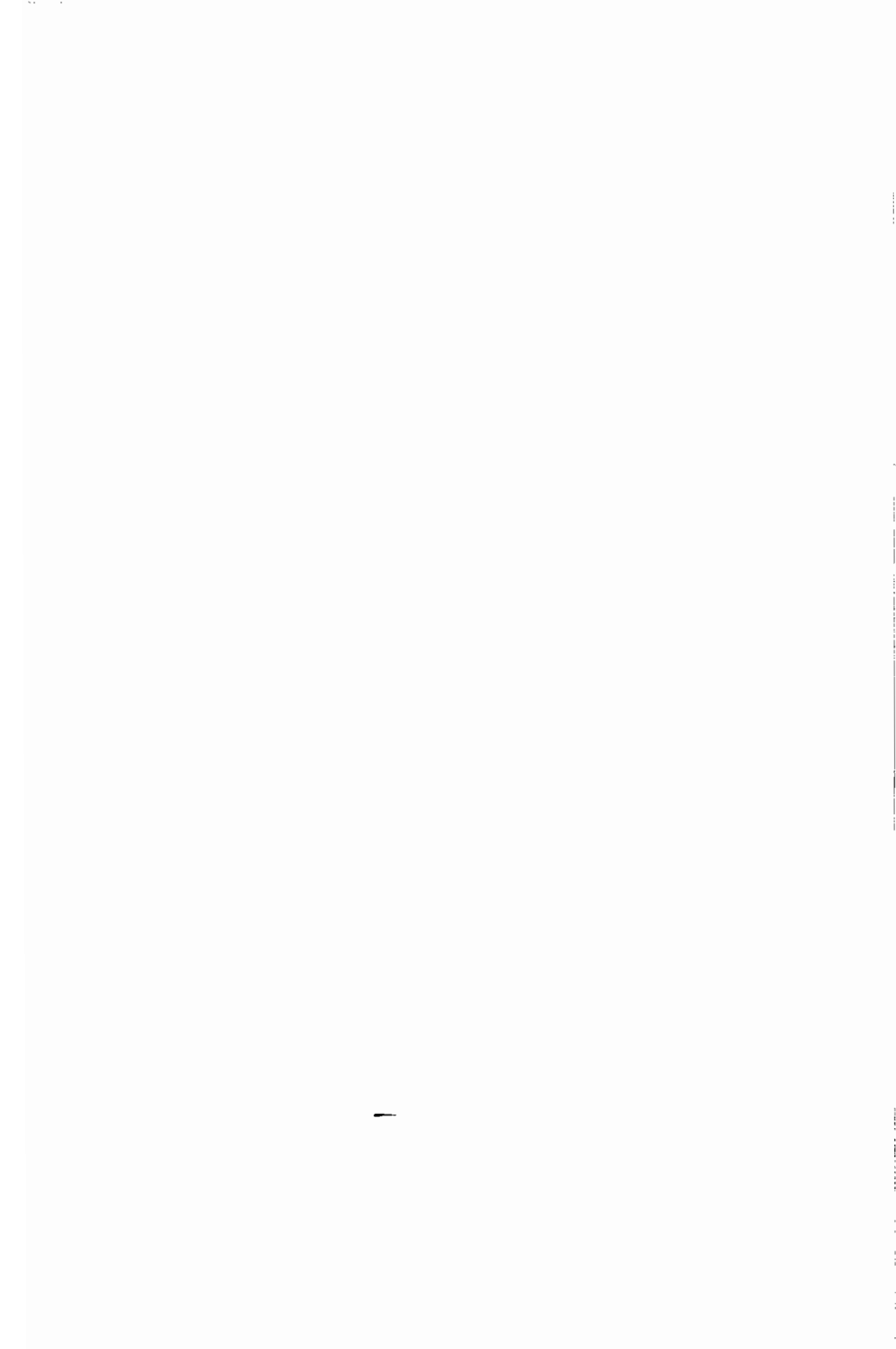
Creating a magical language is complicated but fun. Although many people create languages, only a few do so for a purpose other than self-satisfaction. A magical language can be seen as a map toward enlightenment. And creating a language will inevitably increase your understanding of reality. This doesn’t have to all be accomplished in a single sitting. You can eventually make a whole language just by regularly translating your most current desires. You needn’t learn your language like you would a foreign language, either. In fact, I’d recommend against trying to memorize your whole language unless you really want to or you intend to use the language for human communication. You can always look up whatever you need to find.

What if you don’t want to make a magical language? As a mage, you are not obligated to finish a language, but it is extremely useful to create a few words of power. Maybe you just want secret, private names for the four elements, your power animals, or your magical tools. In this case, you’re creating barbarous words, and that’s fine.

• • •

Language is about self-expression. And we need language in order to express ourselves! Language mediates even non-linguistic models of expression; when you come out of a concert or a dance, you probably talk about

it with others. Imagine coming out of a concert with a friend and driving home in complete silence. When that happens, we sense something is wrong. We need language. Prisoners memorize or write stories on whatever materials are available—cell walls or toilet paper. This testifies to how deeply we need language, and how language helps us manipulate the world in more fundamental ways than most people suppose.



JOURNEYS OUT AND IN

The first time a large number of computers were connected to a network, a strange thing happened. Users of the network found themselves thinking of this shared networking power as a “space” in which they could “dwell.” This idea of *cyberspace*, as it was called, is now so dominant that there are sites on the Internet designed like neighborhoods, with streets, shops, buildings, and so forth. People who use the Internet refer to it with words of location: they *go online*, the places they visit have *addresses* and *domains*, they spend time chatting in *rooms*, and computers *host sites*. One might argue that the idea of space is so essential to the human mind that we just naturally adopt it as a metaphor to describe anything we don’t completely understand or cannot easily visualize. After all, the concept of location was vitally important to our genetic ancestors. If they misjudged distance, the spear might not hit its target and the family might go hungry; or, if they lost track of direction, they might find themselves lost in a hostile land. Strangely, however, we do not use the metaphor of space to describe other shared media—conference calls, for instance, are never perceived as taking place in a telephone “space,” nor does one speak of a telephone “address.”

Why then do computer users employ a metaphor of space to describe the activity of shared computers? I am sure I have no idea, but I do know that the metaphor of a shared mental space is much older than the idea of

cyberspace. In fact, mages have been talking about the astral plane for centuries. Even before then, shamans and other magical practitioners of various cultures have spoken, sometimes quite casually, about different worlds into which they could fly and return with information. Most occultists refer to this method as “astral travel.” There are several reasons why I am not fond of the description “astral travel.” First, it is imprecise; second, it is inaccurate; and third, it assumes a cosmology the speaker may not have critically examined.

The use of “astral travel” seems to conflate at least three different ideas. To be more precise, I will give these ideas arbitrary labels and explain each one.

Remote Viewing

People assume that if you can “leave your body” (as astral travel is often described), then you can visit different areas on Earth while never physically leaving the comfort of your own home. Although casting your senses outside the normal sphere of sensation is possible, it is not astral travel. Remote viewing, as this magical sightseeing is called, consists of the mage moving his or her center of perception outside the sphere of sensation. In other words, becoming aware of the world outside of one’s usual range of perception.

Our center of perception is the spark of awareness that creates a sense of self; it usually dwells within the network of nerves in a person’s body, occasionally darting out into loved ones and precious things for brief times—in other words, within the sphere of sensation. This sphere of sensation is the full circle of things a person considers self: the body, beloved physical objects, other people, favorite ideas, and so forth. If you imagine the semiotic web as a two-dimensional spiderweb, the sphere of sensation is the spiral in the center where the spider sits. But the boundaries of the sphere of sensation are completely arbitrary—you can assign them where you like.

EXERCISE

Simple Remote Viewing

If you wish to develop the talent of remote viewing, this is the easiest way. In a ritual space, holding your tool of perception (if you

have one), devise a sigil to represent “remote viewing” to you. Inscribe it in the air in front of your face and breathe on it, visualizing your breath coming up from your solar plexus like yellow light. See it charge the symbol in bright, golden-yellow light, then visualize the symbol darting to the place you wish to (remote) view. In a few minutes, calm your mind and draw the sigil again in front of you, this time inhaling it into your solar plexus. Images will arise over the next few hours from the place you “visited.”¹

This simple remote viewing method, sometimes called the Formula of the Watcher, obviously has its limitations. In my experience, the images are never very clear or precise, and sometimes the sigil goes its own way, ending up in a place you did not intend to send it. Also, you cannot direct what you see. You can’t look left, for example, if your view is to the right. Like throwing a video camera down a well, your view is constrained by whatever direction the camera happens to be facing.

You may wish for a more precise method of remote viewing. Be warned: remote viewing is one of the hardest techniques of magic; it takes considerable practice to achieve precision. On top of this, I’ve never found it particularly useful. As far as tourism goes, it’s more fun to go places you wish to visit in person, and far easier to enchant for the money to do so. As far as voyeurism goes, I’m not particularly tempted. If I were a spy or seek out missing people or find lost treasure, remote viewing might be more appealing.² If you’re interested in such things, you might try this next exercise.

EXERCISE

Advanced Far Seeing

Situate yourself in a ritual space, perhaps with a tool of perception. You will want to create a magical circle around the area (see Appendix A) in order to have a concrete mental symbol of your sphere of sensation.

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1. I’ve drastically modified this method from one described by Melita Denning and Osborne Phillips in their *Mysteria Magica*.
 2. For those intrigued by this idea, I recommend W. Adam Mandelbaum’s *The Psychic Battlefield*.

Breathing in, imagine your sphere of sensation increasing slightly. Stabilize it on your exhale. Repeat, letting each inhale increase the sphere of sensation exponentially, until you've increased its size to cover the whole world. Simultaneously allow your awareness to slowly include your immediate environment, increasing to your larger environment, and so forth until you are aware of the whole world in your imagination.

Now, move your attention around your physical body, from your head to your heart to your foot and so on. When you can do this, begin moving your attention "outside," into the sphere of sensation itself. Start with something dear to you, perhaps a magical tool. Then increase your attention to familiar places. Finally, end with unfamiliar places. Record your results and compare them with what is known.

This entire operation could take many, many years to complete.

In recording your travel results and comparing them to what is known, you are likely to discover anomalies. There could be three reasons for anomalies:

- You failed to expand your sphere of sensation and ended up in the astral or symbolic version of the desired place. I'll discuss this more later, but every symbolic system, even the symbolic system of "place," has an astral realm or realms. Visiting such a realm when you mean to remote view is technically "wrong." In some cases, visiting the astral versions of places can actually glean more information than visiting the physical place itself, assuming you know how to interpret the experience.
- You couldn't integrate your perception with your senses. This could result in perceiving a color as a sound, or a sound as an image, or some other similar "crossed wire." You may have even perceived an emotion as a thing. My favorite example of this is checking the refrigerator from the couch and seeing my "hunger" manifested as a fierce dragon lurking on the top shelf!

- You were right, and the sources were wrong. I visited a friend by remote viewing and later called her. I said, “What’s the big red thing on the porch?” She insisted there was no big red thing on the porch, but later realized she had put a red blanket on a chair. She had become so used to it, she didn’t even notice it.

Remote viewing is fun and rewarding, certainly, but I’m leery of recommending it to beginners. Not having immediate success, the beginning mage may just give up the whole practice of magic. One author, who shall remain nameless, suggests beginning mages practice remote viewing (insisting it’s the same thing as astral travel) until they can actually manipulate physical objects while outside their bodies. This is a *beginning* exercise? One might as well drag a couch-potato out to run a marathon!

Plane of Formation

Those who do a lot of astral travel describe the destinations as wildly symbolic yet concrete realms where their “souls” take on the shape of a person or an animal and interact with the environment to achieve insight and power. This place is sometimes called the astral plane, but I prefer the term “plane of formation.” The plane of formation is the magical cyberspace, composed of all the dreams and symbols of trillions of sentient beings all living and interacting in the same cosmos. It is not difficult to achieve this kind of astral travel. In fact, it’s almost disappointingly easy.

Every symbol has a location in this plane of formation, like a node on a network. You can visit any of these locations in order to elucidate the meaning of any symbol you find. If you follow a symbol of fire, for example, you will not see visions of water unless you go astray. If you follow a harmful symbol, a symbol of chaotic self-destruction, you will find yourself developing mental illnesses. Let that serve as a warning. These places are abundantly real and can cause real changes in your mind and your life.

If you created an astral temple in the first chapter, then you have a base of operations for your journeys. It is best to start each journey in this place, to prevent confusion or misdirection. After you establish this place, create a “body of light” in which to travel. You are most familiar with the human form, having lived in it your whole life, and are less likely to suffer disorientation or confusion at discovering different sense ranges in this form.

Therefore, it is best to make this body human rather than animal, at least at first.

EXERCISE

Journey to the Astral Plane

Attain a light trance or hypnotic state. As if you are watching a movie (third person), imagine building up this body in your astral temple. Make it look as much like you as you wish; although, if you prefer, you can idealize it. It will likely take on idealized characteristics when your sense of self transfers to it anyway. When you feel it is sufficient, allow it to open its eyes and imagine seeing out of its eyes (first person). Your environment should be at least as rich and real as life—you should be able, for example, to see every blade of grass. When you can maintain the first-person sight, you are ready to move on to hearing. When you can do that, move to taste/smell, and, finally, kinesthetic senses. I find the best way to establish the kinesthetic awareness is to do some simple physical movement—a simple *kata* (a martial arts exercise), or a ritual action. It may take several days working with each of the senses in turn in order to fully merge your sense-of-self with the body of light. When you do, this body can be used to go on journeys.

The easiest way to start a journey is to visualize a door with the symbol of your destination on it, then open the door and step into the realm of that symbol. If you have some trouble with this, you may find it easier to physically inscribe the symbol on a piece of card, then hold it on your forehead (some people claim to get headaches from this method). If at any time the area in which you travel seems to differ from the qualities of the symbol you are using, draw it in the air in front of you—use appropriate colors of light. This should strengthen the scene if you're in the right place. If you are not in the right place, it will return you to your body.

Take careful note of everyone and everything that you see and speak to. A journey can be quite surprising. In fact, that's how one knows that a journey is real! You will not write the script for the people and things you meet. They will behave according to their

own agendas. And furthermore, they may be hostile to you! You will find that any magical tools you bring into the ritual space with your body will be with you in the body of light as well. They can be used as defensive weapons against attack.³

People learning how to journey sometimes ask me, how do I know I'm not just fantasizing? My answer is, you are fantasizing, but that doesn't mean the world in which you travel isn't real. To be fair, it is possible to deceive oneself while journeying and to be deceived by others. Here are some hints about journeying to let you know you're on a "real" journey and not just a wish-fulfillment fantasy:

- The venue of a journey is at least as real as the venue of physical life. In other words, all your senses should be able to perceive all sorts of things. There should be bugs in the grass, sand on your shoes, birds crying in the distance, all without you having to *make* them consciously (although, it may take some practice to perceive them).
 - Surprises are possible. You are not writing a script. Unlike a dream, you are in control of your own actions, but like a dream you are not in control of anyone else's, unless you exert your authority.
 - You are unaware of your body. At first it is not uncommon for you to bounce back and forth between the physical body and the body of light, but in time you will be able to control this bouncing. This can be invaluable if you need to take notes, for instance, but mostly you will stay in the body of light. Your autonomic nervous system will continue to function, but slower. When you return, your body may be somewhat stiff and a little cold. This is nothing to worry about. Simply do some gentle stretches and you will be back to normal in a few seconds.
 - You will return with useful knowledge you did not already have—knowledge you had no way of obtaining by ordinary means.
-

3. Eventually, you'll be able to summon your magical tools from storage while in the body of light, but at the beginning it is best to bring your weapons with you.

Out of Body Experience

The experience of hovering over one's body, looking down on it, is a fairly common one. People with no occult training whatsoever have it in moments of extremity, and even skeptics have experienced it. It often precedes a near-death experience, in which a person experiences swift travel through a tunnel toward a bright light, followed by an experience of great joy and love. Scientists explain near-death experiences fairly readily, although I suspect there is some confusion about the nature of causation in their explanations. They explain that the perception of lights and tunnel vision are caused by oxygen starvation, and the sense of well-being that people report is due to endorphins released in the brain as death approaches. Certainly endorphin production is tied to feelings of well-being, but it does not necessarily mean one causes the other. One could, for example, explain the experience of beautiful music in terms of brain chemistry, but no one would argue that brain chemistry causes beautiful music.

In any event, the out-of-body experience (and the near-death experience) differs from journeying and remote viewing, although it exhibits qualities of each. The place to which a near-death subject goes somewhat resembles the plane of formation, but one would expect that plane to be somewhat more idiosyncratic. Yet near-death subjects almost always describe a tunnel, relatives, a bright light, and usually a religious figure from their personal religion. Moreover, although seeing the body below one can be explained as remote viewing (albeit not very remote), the fact that this experience leads to otherworldly visions argues for something other than remote viewing.

I suspect, although I certainly don't know, the experience of death is different from either the physical world or the plane of formation. It may be that the dead go to a third place. Some occult literature supports this possibility: the cabala argues that there are four worlds (not just two) and various shamanic traditions describe three otherworlds—one below, one above, and one in the middle.

Subtle Geography and Journey Use

Since most mages use journeying into the astral or formative plane as a research tool, it behooves them to understand both the general layout of the

plane of formation as well as the sorts of things one might gain from interaction with denizens of the otherworld.

Shamans describe the otherworld as consisting of three levels: the middle level is much like an idealized earth. It has similar geography, but can often be skewed by expectation or symbolism. Here symbols take on reality. Awaiting the mage are power animal guides and fears made manifest. If you've made an astral temple, then you've built it here. Somewhere in this realm is a hole, or several holes, leading down to an underground world (underworld or lowerworld). This world is sometimes considered the abode of the dead. Here, anything that has ever been lost can be found, including lost knowledge. But one must beware, because the denizens of this realm take great delight in deceiving and teasing those who descend to their abodes. If careful, one can search the genetic record of humanity, including any thought that anyone has ever had.

Above the middleworld, perhaps high in the branches of a huge tree, is the entrance to the upperworld. This is the abode of godlike beings, who jealously guard their prerogatives. You may find it difficult to journey here without good cause, or even with good cause. Here is the source of all inspiration and new knowledge. It is the abode of the "fire from heaven." This upperworld generates creativity and passion, power and authority. Going anywhere near it can be vastly more dangerous than going to the underworld.⁴

All three realms are peopled by various creatures, the spirits discussed in chapter 4. These spirits are willing to help or eager to hinder or completely indifferent. For the most part, they will not interfere if you seem to know where you're going and what you're doing, but show any sort of indecision whatsoever, and you become vulnerable to their ministrations. So, authority is doubly important in journeying—it keeps you out of trouble. Be aware that in a way you are in your own mind as well as the realm of mind itself. You are both inside and outside yourself. If you exhibit confusion, depression, anger, or even lust, these things will manifest in the astral environment. That can be both good and bad. Once manifested, these things are sometimes easier to deal with. On the other hand, they can also deal with *you* more directly. —

4. Some shamans argue the opposite: the lowerworld is much more dangerous than the upperworld. It is best to experiment carefully and form your own opinion.

The fridge monster I mentioned earlier is a perfect example of an idea turned into spirit. In this case, the form represents hunger, but in other cases it may represent other, less easily dealt with, emotions. If you find your anger forming into a demon on a journey, you have several options. The easiest is to pull back immediately. Once, in exploring a symbol with which I was unfamiliar, I encountered a toothy crocodile that snapped at me. I immediately withdrew, because I wasn't sure what kind of disposition the crocodile had, or how I was to deal with it. You can also try to fight, if you think you know what the spirit represents. In another instance, I found myself surrounded by a band of black guilt and hatred, which—with the help of a friend—I tried to dissolve by directing love at it. Although it worked to a degree, I did not completely win the combat; the demon persisted. Sometimes the ideas that arise from our own minds have more power than we might guess.

Interestingly, the astral plane has a type of weather. Storms in the astral plane can be whipped up by a large number of people suffering considerable anger, rage, pain, or hate. After a large natural or manmade disaster, for example, the astral plane often suffers wild (and bizarrely beautiful) storms in all three realms. These reflect not only the pain and suffering of the mage, but the pain and suffering of all those harmed by the disaster. It is best to avoid these storms by not venturing into the astral planes until the issues causing them are resolved.

These three realms are not the only locations available to the mage. Every symbol also creates a subrealm in the middleworld that the mage can visit. This subrealm is just as large as the middleworld itself (though space is meaningless, as is time to some extent, in the plane of formation). The richer and more evocative the symbol is, the richer and more detailed is its world. For example, the worlds of the four elements are inexhaustibly rich. But even minor symbols have their own worlds and spirits—even the letters of the alphabet act as gateways to otherworlds ready for exploration.

I've already talked a bit about how to explore these symbolic realms. One might go to the realm of a symbol to understand its power and uses, or even to identify it. One might also go there to increase one's authority over a symbol. It is common to visit the four elemental realms for this very purpose.

Not much more can be said about astral travel or journeying. It is a technique so intensely personal that each person's visions will be true and meaningful only to him or her. It occurs to me, however, that it might be useful to fearful novices if I provide an example of an astral journey I have taken. This is a journey to Yesod, the ninth cabalistic sphere, associated with the moon, psychic powers, and sexuality.⁵

EXERCISE

Astral Travel

I begin by banishing completely and preparing my ritual tools. I ceremonially cover the Earth Pentacle to represent my desire to focus inwardly rather than outwardly. Then I lay in a comfortable position with my athame in my right hand, in case of danger. I visualize The World tarot card as a symbol leading me to Yesod. I stand in the center of a ring of planets. The Kerubic Bull on the card flies toward me, then disappears. Black clouds swirl around me; I cast about for a path, but can't find one.

I see another wheel on the horizon and move toward it. It looks like plants. . . . As I approach, I realize it isn't a large wheel of plants, but a wreath of human flesh—limbs, torsos, hair, faces, and bones. I pass through the wreath into a field of crucified bodies. At the other end of the field, small men guard a door. I use the name of Gabriel, the archangel of Yesod, as a password. They let me in.

The only thing in Yesod is an altar, which becomes clear as I focus on it.⁶ Behind it is a man, who I recognize as fitting the characteristics of Gabriel. I ask him for his name, and he answers "Romiel."⁷ In Hebrew Gematria, or numerology, RVMEL means "Rising one of God." RVM has the numerical value of 246, the

5. For clear instructions on this type of journey, see chapter 11 of Donald Michael Kraig's *Modern Magick*.

6. During a journey the scenery may fade out, become fuzzy or unclear, or change utterly. If this happens, simply wait. If that is not entirely effective, use a symbol of your destination to reaffirm the milieu.

7. Spirits, of course, have multiple names, just as we do. Asking the name of a spirit, however, goes beyond simple introductions. It's similar to asking "what is your symbolic role in this universe?" Of course, the name will fit a familiar symbol system.

same as the name Gabriel. So I know—actually, I knew in retrospect after I looked all this up—that I was actually speaking to Gabriel.

I ask about the wheel of flesh, and he says that it is a reflection of the realm of Saturn, a symbol of the cycle of rebirth and suffering. When I ask to see the symbolic image of Yesod, a beautiful naked man appears. I become him, and the stone altar becomes clear crystal with a heart beating inside it.

I break the block open and take the heart. The man—now apart from me—shows me his hand. It is full of violet sand. He blows on it vigorously, until it turns into fish that swim through the air.

I return with the heart over the same path. This time, however, the path is more visible. It is bone white and leads across a stream bridged by a rotten log. When the log begins to settle under my weight, I command it to bear me up, and it does. I return to my astral temple, connect my senses back to those of my body, and wake up. I stretch lightly, perform a banishing ritual, and give thanks to those who aided me on my journey.

The symbolism of this journey might seem bizarre. It is important to keep in mind that, to a large extent, fish are not fish, sand is not sand, and so forth. Each thing symbolizes something else, and understanding the content of any journey is like translating a dream in which everything, every detail, is somehow significant. Of course, if a symbol's meaning is not immediately apparent, you can return and ask it what it means, and it will tell you. Symbols are the benefit of astral traveling—they're the reward. When you return with them, your sense of self expands drastically, as does your personal power.

EXERCISE

Journey to Find a Spiritual Teacher

Almost every beginning mage wishes they had a teacher to confide in. This exercise will simultaneously provide such a teacher and give you practice in astral travel. It may be used by beginners as well as

advanced mages. At first, it may seem as though you are imagining or “making up” your teacher. You are. That does not invalidate the wisdom you receive. Eventually you will find your teacher taking on a life of his or her own, as if a personality has flowed into a guru-shaped container.

Begin this exercise by asking yourself what qualities you’d like a teacher to have, then list them on a piece of paper. You may choose physical traits if you like, but keep in mind that they may change. Actually, you’re probably better off focusing on more personality-based characteristics, like “patient” and “wise.” Then create a symbol based on those ideas, something relatively easy to visualize. You could make a monogram out of the initial letters of the descriptions on your list. You’re going to use the symbol as a sort of address. Your first mission will be to find a “word of power” from your teacher, some syllable or word to contact him or her.

Now, cast a circle or other type of ward and ground and center yourself. Lie in a comfortable position. Hold your tool of will in your right hand, and rest your hands lightly on your chest. You want to make sure you are not wearing constrictive clothing.

Begin to relax by your preferred method. One easy way to relax is to feel a ball of relaxing light floating over your body, unknotting tension. Once you are deeply relaxed and calm, imagine you are standing in a temple. This may be easier in third-person, as if you are watching yourself standing in a room. Build up the image of yourself very carefully, but do not spend too much time on this step.

Once the astral body is well-formed, begin linking your senses to it. In other words, begin to shift from a third-person perspective (like that of a movie) to a first-person perspective, so you are looking out of your astral body’s eyes. You’ll need to link up each sense, and this will probably require a bit of time. Begin with the easiest sense for you. For many people, this is sight; for others it may be hearing or physical posture. If you choose sight first, imagine your astral body opening its eyes and you seeing what it must see. Look around. Things may be blurry and imprecise, but as you relax into

the vision and concentrate, they will solidify and take on characteristics of reality. They should have dimension, color, and weight.

Now, for hearing: imagine you can hear the sounds in your temple area. These may be the crackling of sacred fire or the sound of birds or a mysterious and subtle music. Slowly and patiently build up the experience until it becomes as real as you can make it. Now, imagine your body moving, and feel it doing so. It helps to have a series of habitual physical movements, such as a kata, dance, or ritual to perform. Feel your muscles respond, not in your physical body, but in your astral body. If they don't respond, focus on them until they do. Touch a few objects and feel their texture. You may find that you're holding your tool of will. Sometimes, tools will veto your selection and come along for the ride without you consciously planning for it. Go with whatever happens at this stage.

You'll link up the last two senses at the same time. Smelling and tasting are practically the same sense, so you'll focus on smelling the incense of your ritual area, the smells of nature, or whatever scents happen to be present in this other realm. You can also provide something to taste, like a goblet of wine to pour a libation.

By the time you get to the end of the sequence, you'll probably find you've lost one of the earlier senses. Likewise, you may taste and feel what the astral body does, but suddenly realize you're experiencing it in third-person again. Don't be discouraged or frustrated—even advanced magicians often find this stage difficult. One way to get past it, paradoxically, is to increase the amount of detail in the astral temple. If you're in a sparse black room, you're going to have a hard time hooking up the sense of sight, because there simply isn't that much to see! Instead, make the room complicated and brightly colored. Or make it some place in nature, where change is constant.

Once I'm satisfied that I can see each individual blade of grass and identify the exact shade of green—and smell the lilacs and hear the bugs buzzing—I know that I'm ready to set out. It may take multiple tries over several sessions to reach this state.

As you feel comfortable with your newly attuned senses, imagine a doorway or some other opening in front of you. It may be a hole in the ground, a dark arch of trees, or a curtain between pillars. It may even be a doorway. Imagine it in as much detail as you possibly can—don't be satisfied until the wood has grain and the brass of the knob is properly worn from being touched. At that point, draw the symbol of your teacher on the door.

Of course, you could draw any symbol. You may modify this exercise however you like, using it to visit elemental realms, cabalistic spheres, or planets as your whim dictates. All you need is an appropriate symbol to draw on the door, and sometimes you don't even need that.

While I'm digressing, it is not uncommon at this point to realize you are being watched. If this happens, ask the watcher to show him- or herself. At this point, either the feeling of being watched will go away, or you'll see a figure, often of an animal. Introduce yourself. This animal is a guide and helper. Most, if not all, people seem to have them. The ancient Greeks called them *paredoi*, but I call them allies. Don't feel bad if you don't meet one right away. When just beginning astral travel, meeting your allies is not the goal.

Once the symbol is as perfect as you can make it, reach out and open the door and step through it. Feel your astral body move its muscles. Be aware of the change in landscape as you step through the door. Once you do, you are no longer in the realm of your astral temple, nor are you actively constructing everything you see. This is imagination, granted, but it's passive imagination—imagination as a sense that perceives reality. Look around. If things don't seem clear, wait until they do. Then begin to move in the environment. Often there will be a road or a path. Follow this path to your destination: the place where you'll find your teacher. Interview the teacher as if she or he were a person you might meet in the physical world. Find out the teacher's philosophies on magic, teaching, and so forth. Before you leave, make sure to ask for a word of power

that will help you contact the teacher in the future. This may or may not be given to you. If you do get such a word, write it down as soon as you get back.

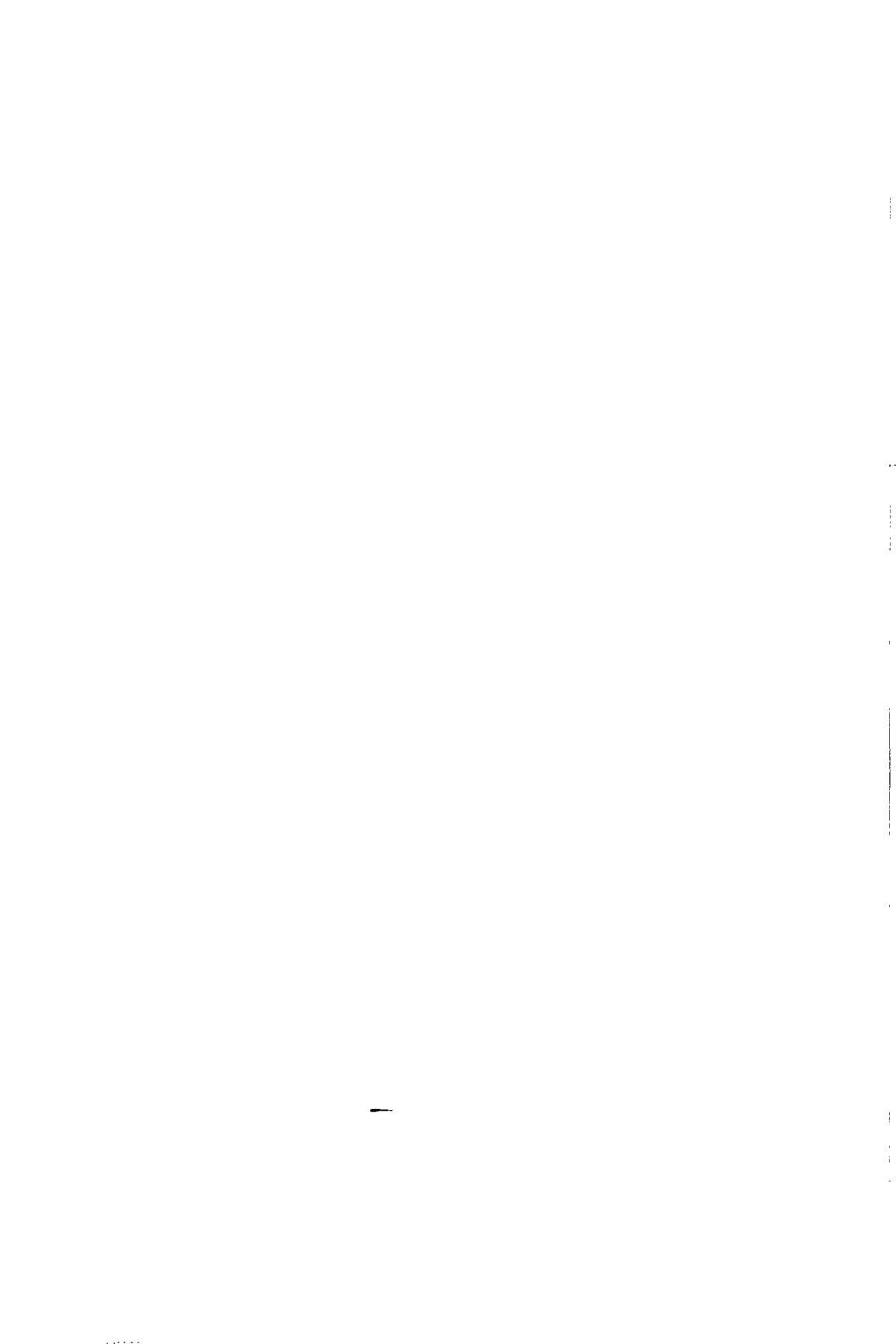
Not all spirits are beneficial. Even when you have taken all sorts of precautions to call upon a benevolent being, it is wise to test and make sure. There are many ways to do this. The easiest is to confront a being with symbols that should be harmonious with it. If you bathe a supposed fire spirit in flames, the spirit will just become stronger. If it burns the spirit, you know it's not really a fire spirit. Similarly, a spirit designed to teach you will not flinch if you invoke a teacher god, such as Ganesha or Hermes. Finally, the ancient and arcane technique of common sense should be foundational in testing spirits: if a teaching spirit tells you to sacrifice a goat to him, common sense should tell you that you've reached the wrong spirit for your purposes. Also, any spirit that tells you to hurt someone, or offers to do so for you, probably is not an ally or teacher.

When you are ready to return, simply retrace your steps. Many people prefer to imagine their physical body absorbing the astral body. Do so, and open your physical eyes. Stretch, then quickly record your experiences for later exploration. Your journal writing will also help you introspect about your experience, and ground you back into conventional reality.

• • •

Attaining skill with astral travel is not particularly difficult. A lot of authors, particularly those connected with various New Age groups in the earlier part of the twentieth century, want to complicate the issue and make astral travel seem an impossible, confusing, and rare art. It is neither impossible, confusing, nor rare. I think children, who take uncommonly vivid mental journeys, are astral travelers par excellence. Moreover, I suspect most adults astral travel from time to time—from an uncommonly vivid lucid dream to a daymare that provokes a reflexive action (ever react

to an imaginary accident while driving?). Of course, these unconscious—or at least undirected—journeys are not particularly useful. It is the mage who makes deliberate journeys outside this plane of existence, seeking and returning with the fire from heaven.



MAGIC IN THE STREET

I am not particularly fond of armchairs. If magic works, then it should work as well on the street as it does in the temple. If it works on the street, then we should use it there, just as we use it in the temple. Failure to integrate magic into our lives leads to masturbatory exercises—like channeled books and new revelations that ultimately parrot old revelations, sometimes in the same exact words. I know mages who have never performed a practical spell, despite their constant immersion in long “workings” involving angels, demons, gods, and so forth. Despite all their work, despite their richly decorated temples and carefully constructed tools, they never seem to manifest a change in themselves or their world. They, in other words, never get out of the armchair.

This is probably due to fear. After all, if one attempts magic in the street, in the real world, without the robes and instruments, and if it doesn't work, the mage must admit that he or she has been lying to him- or herself all these years. All that work has gone to waste. Performing practical magic is an exercise in self-trust. The more self-trust is increased, the more authority is increased. There are no theoretical mages.

Therefore, I always advocate magic in public places. One doesn't need to chant in full regalia to do magic. Performing simple magic in the coffee house, club, or office can be as outwardly unassuming as staring off into

space or toying with a napkin. One need not call attention to magic in public places; in fact, it's better not to. So how can one perform simple, unnoticed actions, yet cause real change in the symbolic world? Even an infinitely flexible mind cannot readily dip into trance at will. Or can it?

I have found the key to street magic is the anchor. An anchor is a simple symbolic action—a gesture, word, or sign—that has previously been linked to a symbolic state by the magician. The concept is, in fact, no different from that of the magical tool, except instead of linking the desired symbolic state to an object, the mage links it to a word or gesture, both of which can be easily performed in public without being noticed. This is similar to the use of barbarous words, which I spoke of earlier. Try this next exercise.

EXERCISE

Making an Anchor

Sit or lie comfortably in a place where you will not be disturbed. Your goal is to create a mental state of calm power, a sort of light hypnotic trance, and then link it to a gesture.

Relax completely by focusing on each part of your body, consciously relaxing the muscles in turn. When you feel so relaxed that you cannot summon the will to raise your arm, you are approaching an appropriately relaxed state. Your mind should remain alert; in fact, you may find your mind is even more alert than normal. I was startled out of my first experience with this state of mind by a series of horrible crunching noises. When I opened my eyes, I realized the noise came from my cat walking on the carpet.

Now, begin to count your breath; inhale and exhale very slowly and deeply. Continuously tell yourself that you are relaxing into your authority. In this state, you can manipulate the symbolic structure of the universe to conform to your will. I like to count to twelve, but some people prefer ten. Others prefer to count backward from ten to one. When you reach your preferred number, you should be entirely relaxed, yet energized and ready for any task.

Continue your relaxed breathing as you make an unobtrusive gesture with one of your hands. It can be as simple as crossing your

fingers or touching your pinky and thumb. Ultimately, it doesn't matter what you choose, for you will assign meaning to the gesture.

Making your chosen anchor gesture, mentally tell yourself: "When I make this gesture, I return instantly to this calm, relaxed, and powerful state of mind, in which I can perceive everything and accomplish anything." Tell yourself this three times while holding the gesture, then break the gesture and come out of the trance by reversing the earlier count.

When you open your eyes, go about your business as usual; doing so will help ground you back into conventional reality. If you wish to banish both before and after this exercise, you may; although, it is not strictly necessary, since you are not dealing with entities outside of yourself. When you wish to return to the state of consciousness just anchored—this *gnosis*, as it's sometimes called—make your anchor gesture, take a few deep breaths, and you will be there.

Of course, you shouldn't limit anchors to achieving altered states of mind.¹ Anchors can be used for every conceivable magical goal, from invisibility (which usually means going unnoticed, though actual invisibility is possible) to charisma. Follow this simple procedure for creating an anchor:

1. Achieve the state you wish to anchor through ritual, meditation, or any other series of symbolic acts that cause the deepest possible specimen of that state.
2. Perform a gesture or speak a word you wish to link with this state, and this state alone, while simultaneously telling yourself that the desired state and the anchor are linked.
3. Repeat the affirmation three times.

You may want to periodically refresh the anchor, but in my experience, simple use tends to refresh most anchors sufficiently.

1. I do not think this state of mind is particularly altered. I suspect our usual, confused, disordered, unobservant mind is the altered state of consciousness. I base my conclusion on the results of habitual meditation, which tends to make me more alert, relaxed, and simultaneously healthy. Stresses of an untrained mind often lead to disease and disorder.

One of my favorite uses of the anchor is the creation of glamours. A glamour is a mental projection of your self-identity so that others perceive you as you wish to be perceived. Glamours can increase your perceived beauty, strength, danger, or whatever you desire. I occasionally use a glamour that makes me appear like a dangerous monster to the unconscious minds of people, in order to avoid trouble when walking through dangerous parts of the city at night. A friend of mine experimented with a teddy bear glamour in order to increase tips at his job. He informed me that his tips had indeed almost doubled, but he was becoming annoyed at people addressing him in baby talk!

Usually people will not consciously perceive your glamour. But they tend to get a strong gut sense of your projected image and act accordingly. Glamours seem to tap into a much deeper current than our conscious minds; something in our reptile brain—the primitive part of our brain concerned with basic issues of survival—responds instantly to glamours. In fact, I think many skeptics and strangers to magic habitually use glamours in their day-to-day lives. Glamours, therefore, are quite easy to effect.

EXERCISE

Creating a Glamour

Achieve a comfortable trance state. In this state, imagine looking at yourself from the outside—again, this is as if you were watching yourself (third-person view) on a movie screen. Now, with your force of will, change things in this imagined representation of yourself. Add symbolic elements that recall the kind of glamour you wish to use. If you wish to be perceived as beautiful, use symbols of beauty; if fierce, symbols of ferocity. When you have sculpted the image into the proper symbolic representation—it need not even look like you anymore—then mentally step into it, so that you are within the image, looking out of its eyes and feeling its body around you.

Let yourself relax into the shape for a few minutes, then step back out to make any necessary changes. Continue doing this until the image is as strong and powerful as you can make it. It should also be symbolically significant and provoke a change in the way

you carry yourself, the way you feel about yourself, and your sensory input. When you have the glamour as strong as possible, associate it with an anchor, so you can call it up in any situation.

I should warn you that glammers carry some slight danger. If you create a powerful enough glamour, and use it often, you will begin to psychologically change shape in accordance with the glamour. So, if you overuse a demon-shaped glamour in order to scare away potential muggers, you may find yourself taking on “demonic” behavior. It is safer, therefore, to spend a few moments after using the glamour to remind yourself who you are through grounding and strongly reaffirming your sense of self.

Of course, this suggestion begs the question: what is it that I really am? Truthfully, I have no idea. It seems that most people consist of haphazardly-constructed glammers, sometimes conflicting with each other, sometimes working together, and sometimes utterly repressed! There may be nothing like a personality in any of us. In that case, the best we can do is convince our unconscious minds that we’re *not* demons or monsters, at least not full-time, and that we can be the kind of people we want to be, whatever that is. It’s a riddle, the self, and although I don’t have time to adequately explore it here, I wanted to bring it up to show that even the simplest techniques of sorcery can touch on the deepest mysteries of what it means to be human.

Detecting Auras

Some techniques of sorcery are so simple that many people do them unconsciously, like glammers. Moreover, the very thing that makes glammers work—the unconscious ability to perceive your symbolic status—can itself be learned as a skill. Since everyone is always projecting their thoughts, feelings, moods, hopes, fears, and self-image into the semiotic web, anyone can catch those projections and translate them. We compile a mixture of body language, “intuition,” and subtle clues into general impressions about people all of the time. Some people perceive these subtle clues as a wash of color around a person’s body. This wash of color is called an “aura,” and like most elements of sorcery, it is often misunderstood.

Let me say for once and for all, the aura is not the electrical discharge of the body. The phonline in your house throws off much more electrical discharge than your nerves do, and it doesn't have much of an aura. Moreover, although there is an energy field surrounding the body, it is not composed of any sort of magical energy—it's a mixture of body heat, magnetic fields, and a bit of trace radiation. It is not a mysterious force, it cannot be perceived by the naked eye, and it does not seem to reflect our thoughts or moods in any but the crudest fashions. The aura is not an energy field.

The aura is a *symbolic* field. We can perceive it as a wash of color not because it is a wash of color, but because that is a convenient symbol, inculcated by art and fiction for thousands of years. The aura exists, but it is not photographable nor is it measurable. I also have serious doubts that one can read an aura without being able to see the subject, unless through remote viewing. Moreover, I don't think the colors of an aura have a set meaning, but change for different people. For me, purple in an aura seems to mean sexual desire; for others, purple means spiritual matters. I suspect the color of an aura is determined by the symbol systems of the viewer; he or she sees the colors that correspond with the mental state of the subject according to his or her personal symbolism.

EXERCISE

Seeing the Aura

Reading an aura is actually quite easy, and is excellent training for building up the magical imagination.

Go to a public place where there are other people. You can try this with friends or strangers. Take paper and a pen with you. Once you reach the desired location, sit and calmly regard a person within plain view; focus your eyes about an inch in front of the person's face. Now, ask yourself, "If I could see auras, what kind of aura would this person have?" It may help you to visualize the person in your mind, or you may find it useful to imagine yourself painting a portrait of the person, including the aura as part of the picture. Alternately, you can try to trick your mind by "remembering" what the aura looks like. This trick of remembering things that have not hap-

pened is handy for all sorts of things—I call it “remembering forward.” Whatever method you use, write down the results.

Do not be surprised if your results are not visual. Just as I initially smelled visions when scrying, for years I would smell auras before I ever learned to see them. Now I’ve trained myself to visualize them as images, but sometimes smells, sounds, and even textures will come to mind as well. This is fine. When seeing an aura, you’re using a sense that the brain can only relate to through the other senses, so your perceptions will be translated into your favored languages.

If you can check your results, do so. Please have common sense and don’t bother strangers who are busy, but don’t be afraid to strike up a conversation. See if your assessments of people’s auras are borne out.

Influencing Others

The perception of auras can be used to facilitate healing, counseling, and manipulating people. Certainly many occultists would argue that the manipulation of others violates ethical principles. I suspect this attitude reflects an ambivalence toward magic. Many people, even mages, still consider magic to be something taboo or forbidden. Of course, if you don’t have the theistic framework to support such theories, they become outmoded. Yet, even atheists have moral frameworks. It is necessary for every person to reason out a moral approach to life and follow it. Reasoning can support the ethical use of magic to manipulate others. We manipulate other people all the time by more mundane means—we select our words and actions in hopes people will respond in certain ways. One could argue that using magic is unfair, because not everyone can do it; but then eloquence should also be unfair, because not everyone is eloquent. I think the use of magic to manipulate others is justified, if one does not manipulate them into immoral situations. Using magic to seduce someone is as morally iffy as seducing someone with eloquence or money. I include, therefore, methods of manipulation because, first, I am

not the moral arbiter of those who practice magic, and second, I believe there are some situations when magically influencing people is perfectly justified.

Methods of Manipulation

Auras + Glamours

You can use a mixture of the aura reading technique and the glamour trick to manipulate people if you have sufficient time. The method is simple. Read the person's aura, taking particular note of its shape, color, smell, sound, or any other sensory impressions you get from it. Then, carefully build up an image of yourself in your imagination, as when you did the glamour exercise. Instead of sculpting yourself into a symbolic model of your desired image, model yourself into the likeness of the person you wish to influence, paying particular attention to the aura.

While keeping this visualization in mind (an anchor will help if you find it difficult), visualize the person sitting across from you. You may wish to decorate the environment to make it comfortable for both of you. If you know this person's favorite environment, tailor it to that. Alternately, if the decision will be made in a particular venue, model the environment after that venue. What you're doing is creating an astral realm in which you can meet the subject halfway. Now, sitting across from the person, communicate your desire. You should provide at least three good reasons for the person to do what you desire. He or she may also speak back to you, particularly if they're at all magically aware. If they do, present a calm, reasoned argument in favor of your position.

This method bypasses a person's defenses; you convince the person that it is their own idea to act in the way you desire and provide them with reasons to do so. The drawback to this method is that it takes time and a number of finely honed skills. Also, you need to be fairly familiar with the person in question, so you can model their appearance and mannerisms. You can get people to do fairly complex things with this method: hire you for a job, give you a promotion, engage in flirtatious behavior, whatever. But sometimes you want to provoke people to act on very simple things and you don't have the time to go through this rigmarole. For example, if

someone is trying to mug you, you need to react instantly. A simple glamour might accomplish your desire by scaring off the mugger or at least granting you life, if not your money; but you may want a method to deal more aggressively with threatening people.

Solar Plexus Tentacles

Once a mage acquaintance used the following method to hold several muggers motionless while she and her friends walked past without being molested. One of the muggers yelled after her that she was a witch, which indeed she was. The method is simple. Unfortunately, it seems to provoke only simple physical or visceral reactions. It's great practice to try to get strangers to look at you; getting someone to stand up is fairly easy; but getting someone to pick up a certain book and turn to a certain page is almost impossible with this method (and, although I can often get dogs to respond to it, cats ignore it studiously).

Simply speaking, the method involves growing a set of tentacles out of your solar plexus and manipulating the subject with them. The solar plexus is a bundle of nerves resting approximately halfway between your navel and the bottom of your ribcage. It is this area in which we have "gut feelings" or feel our "hearts breaking." The solar plexus almost acts like a primitive, simple brain, concerning itself with matters of emotional and physical sensation. Just as you constructed a body of light, you can construct tentacles of light—appendages to manipulate your environment—out of your solar plexus. The symbolism is obvious: you are asking your emotional needs to act directly on the environment without intercession of your body. You'll find that you can accomplish some simple things merely by touching people with these tentacles. The disadvantage, of course, is that you must penetrate a person's mental or at least emotional barriers. The tentacles probably will not work on a person who has any magical knowledge, because such people often have shields or, at the very least, very strong wills.

The use of the tentacle method is idiosyncratic. I encourage you to experiment with manipulating people to do very simple things without violating any moral codes. Make strangers look at you. Make unhappy waitresses smile. Make your kids and pets behave. The most interesting thing I find with this method is the actual physical sensation that arises. It almost

feels as if your solar plexus is physically pushing against the subject. It is an odd sensation. When you find yourself accomplishing simple tasks with people, you may wish to experiment with achieving telekinesis, moving objects at a distance, which is difficult and at best too erratic to be useful even as a party trick, but does wonders for your self-esteem. Hang a very small pendulum (a dot of clay stuck to the end of a thread works) from a sturdy framework. Standing across the room, try to move it with your solar appendages. You'll find it very difficult. The sensation I usually get is of slipping against a magnet or a slippery, gelatinous surface. But sometimes you'll get a grip and the pendulum will kick.

Magical Influence Justified

The Political Mage

Although not every occultist is interested in politics, let alone political activism, there is a trend toward mages having a greater than average awareness of the political situation and to sense a responsibility for it. A mage may very well belong to any political party, or none. Rarely, however, is a mage a moderate in any sense. For some reason, those who hold political views hold them very strongly. Perhaps mages instinctively understand the role that passion plays in creating our world.

The liberal mage tends to be extremely liberal, even going so far as embracing communism of one type or another. Although democrat mages are common, even they seem to be extreme democrats. The conservative mage, although rarer, tends to be extremely conservative, even fascist on occasion. Third party or no party mages can be any mixture thereof—some of them may even look like moderates; although, even their moderate views are intense. Many mages are anarchists, in the sense that they distrust authority and work to abolish hierarchy. I don't necessarily wish to endorse any of the above. I'm more interested in the application of magic to whatever political views one might have.

Magical means of influencing elections and votes tend not to be very effective; after all, they're struggling against very powerful egregores of democracy and nation. It may be easier to influence particular politicians. This can be done in exactly the same way you'd go about influencing any-

body else. Some might argue that doing so is unethical, and perhaps in certain situations it is. On the other hand, it isn't possible, even by magic, to rob someone of free will completely. The best we can do is nudge and direct. Is a nudge unethical?

One may also influence large groups, particularly corporate entities. Many anarchic mages, concerned about what they perceive as corporate domination over our lives, attack such entities magically as part of their efforts to create a free society. One can also, of course, summon their egregore as if it were a spirit, direct it to accomplish certain actions, or even weaken it over time. A savvy mage without many scruples could become quite rich with some investing and judicious use of egregores.

The most interesting use of magic for political purposes is, by far, the use of protest magic. Protests often fail because of the unpredictability of large groups of people. The biggest danger in non-violent protest is not the police or counter-protestors attacking the demonstrators. It's the demonstrators themselves losing their composure. It's easy to do while chanting slogans or marching. By being magically aware of a group's egregore and keeping the lines of communication open, a small group of magical people can manipulate large groups to behave appropriately and not become mere mobs.

Mages can also cast a "come see me!" glamour over an entire group to increase exposure. Media exposure is one of the chief weapons of the non-violent demonstrator. By making a glamour that "looks interesting" to the media, a group can draw elusive attention. Nothing's more disappointing than staging a protest and finding it on the back page the next day. Bright flashing lights; loud astral noises, especially sirens; and "rising excitement" music, as commonly heard in movies, are all good images to get media attention. The media habitually under-reports numbers of protestors. A glamour of multitudes can make up for that frustrating tendency by swelling the apparent ranks of a protest.

Not everyone will be interested in political protest, nor even be interested in political protests for the same goals. But even in a democracy, magic can give us some tools to use with clear consciences to accomplish political ends. When protestors "take to the streets," they're more effective with some mages behind them.

Defending Yourself

Defending and directing a group is fine, but if you leave your house as a mage, particularly if you introduce yourself to other mages, you will eventually have to defend yourself. It is a miserable fact, but many people who profess magical knowledge lack certain social skills. Some of them—particularly, but not exclusively, those not connected with a theistic worldview—will sometimes try to injure you magically. To prove what? I don't know.² So it behooves you to learn some methods of defense. These are all relatively simple defensive maneuvers, using very basic magical abilities. The simplest defenses are usually the best; they rarely break down.

Shielding is the most popular defensive maneuver. Many occultists (sometimes a paranoid bunch) shield almost all the time. I think that's excessive. I only bring my shields up in particularly stressful situations, or when I suspect that I am under attack or the subject of some sort of manipulation. I am against the use of shielding to prevent empathic ability. It is more productive to learn how to control your ability than to be either emotionally castrated by a shield or utterly demoralized by every unhappy person you meet. A shield should only be used when one is under attack.

The shield procedure does not differ much from a glamour. It can also be connected to an anchor. A shield is simply a barrier you visualize surrounding yourself so nothing can pass it. You can embellish it however you like. Most people who use shields seem to rely on visual imagination in the construction of their shield, but I find incorporating other senses to be very effective. My shield, for example, smells like burned metal and sounds like steel knives sliding over each other. Many people have multiple shields, but I consider this overkill. One clearly imagined shield is quite sufficient for almost any situation.

The shield, like the magical circle wizards stand in while evoking demons, is an inviolable barrier, but unlike a magical circle drawn on the ground, it is portable and instantly available. As such, it is immune from magical and spiritual influences, but not from physical ones. You can still be shot with a shield on. In fact, if your shield is particularly threatening, it

2. Earlier I said I was not the moral arbiter, yet I refuse to include in this book methods of magical attack. The reason is more pragmatic than moral (although that figures into it). Magical attack is complicated and rarely effective. If you are inclined to violence, use a fist. Better yet, overcome violent urges and put that energy into something more enjoyable.

could even act against you in a physical altercation by spurring on your attacker to physical violence! I advise understatement. In most cases, a blue egg of protection is just as effective as a snarling ring of dragons and is less likely to unconsciously provoke an attacker.

I also advise a lack of fear. Most magical attacks are utterly ineffective. Last time I was magically attacked, I saw a good movie, ate a delicious meal, and spent the night making love. If I had spent my time worrying unduly about the so-called attack, I might have made myself sick—but I didn't. There is no reason to be afraid of magical attack because very few people are capable of doing it. Those few who have the skills probably wouldn't bother. In conclusion, although shields are a good technique because they teach you to build astral constructions, they're somewhat overused.

Overcoming Fear and Developing Social Skill

Fear is not a great enemy. Fear simply warns us when things are dangerous or suspicious; it manifests our intuitions in a palpable sensation that cannot be ignored; it can even spur us to action—either resistance or flight—in the face of immediate danger. Fear only becomes the enemy when it becomes constant and overwhelming, when it no longer provokes the “fight or flight” response, or when it is irrational and crippling.

Ultimately, fear is just an emotional response. The reason it has such power over us is that it is one of our most primal and animalistic emotional responses. Although we do not know if other animals feel fear, almost every animal, even the smallest, shrinks from perceived danger. When fear has too much power, we're “reduced” to being simple animals instead of rational humans. I'm all in favor of the technique of magical atavism, but atavism should be controlled by the rational mind, not thrust upon us by circumstances.³

Fortunately, fear is easy to deal with in most situations. Fear only wants to be acknowledged, and I find the easiest way to deal with fear is to do just that—acknowledge it. Do not shrink from it. Most phobias stem not from the fear of a situation itself, but from the fear of *the sensation of fear* that a situation provokes. I use a Buddhist method for dealing with fear. It also

3. A technique whereby a mage recalls in him- or herself the sensation of being a “lower” animal in order to gain insight and power.

works for other possibly harmful emotions like anger or lust. I inhale, mentally saying: “Breathing in, I know fear is here.” Then I exhale, mentally saying: “Breathing out, I take care of my fear.” Amazingly, fear decreases in just a few breaths. You are telling the unconscious mind, “Yes, I recognize this fear, but I must act in spite of it. I am not ignoring the warning, and intend to address it appropriately.”⁴

I address fear in the same section as social skills because fear often prevents us from having healthy social interactions. Because we are afraid to strike up conversations, take social risks, and so on, we often lack the opportunity to develop social interaction skills necessary to being a healthy, well-rounded person. A lack of social skills merely promotes more fear, and that fear assures that we never develop the skills that could help us survive in social situations! It is a cycle that can only be broken by addressing fear directly—acknowledging it and acting in spite of it.

I observe a particular lack of social skills among occultists. Perhaps occultists, having spent much of their time reading and, ideally, practicing magic, have had little time to develop the niceties of social interaction. Yet it behooves anyone who wishes to be powerful in any sense to learn how to deal with others. Certainly magical techniques like glamours and aura reading can help to some extent. With these techniques, we can at least know when our approach will be accepted and can make ourselves attractive. But to truly develop social skills requires intense introspection.

EXERCISE

Developing Social Skills

Sit down in a comfortable place with a pad of paper and a writing tool. These may be magical tools if you like, or they can just be ordinary. You may also banish or otherwise demarcate this operation as magical, if you wish. Since you are dealing with nothing but your own mind, and not a particularly dangerous part of it, banishing isn't absolute necessary, but it may help you take the exercise seriously.

At the top of the paper write: “I fear doing. . . .” Complete the sentence. Do this for at least ten minutes without self-censoring or

4. This technique is advocated by Thich Nhat Hanh, who also has other excellent pieces of advice for dealing with negative emotions.

stopping. You will have around a page and a half, more or less, depending on how quickly you write. Read over the list and find two or three things you would like to do that are not particularly dangerous in themselves, but that you fear. Take another sheet of paper and write the first of them at the top. Then draw a vertical line down the page. On the left side, write the idea causing the fear to arise. Do not simply write, "I am afraid." Introspect until you find a cause for the fear.

For example: "I fear learning to play the keyboard." Introspecting—perhaps with the aid of a magical tool dedicated to introspection—I find one of the causes of this fear to be: "I will be bad and invite ridicule."

Now, in the right-hand column, answer this thought with a logical argument against it. In my instance, it is easy to find such an argument: "Everyone who learns an instrument starts out bad, and no one says I have to play for people until I'm ready to do so. If I practice a few minutes a day, soon I'll be able to play one song." You might think of several reasonable arguments against the fear-causing idea. The best argument to use is always your own. The point is to replace the source of the fear with a counter-meme that struggles against it.

Do this for all of the ideas causing fear in each particular area. When you finish, take some positive step toward doing the things you fear. Action will prove to your unconscious that you are determined to overcome your fear.

Overcoming fear is essential not just in social situations, but in magical ones. A way to conquer fear other than acknowledging it, which you may not have time to do in a magical emergency, is to develop a persona specifically for dealing with fear. Many texts on magic suggest developing a "magical persona," with its own magical name or motto, whom you can become when doing magic. This persona has other uses, of course, besides

ridding yourself of fear. For example, you can meet it in the astral plane to ask for advice. This persona represents your most spiritual self. It is usual to choose a special name for this persona, and even to go by that name among other mages. I personally prefer to use my given name in those situations, reserving my magical name for inscribing on my tools and ritual use. Some people say that one should never tell anyone your name, but it seems to me that a name that no one knows is not, properly or semantically, a name. Either way, please yourself in devising a magical name around which to build your persona.

Please do not choose the name Merlin or Morgana, or any combination of common Gaelic names. Do not use a name from fiction unless, of course, that name means something else, and its use in fiction is incidental to your selection of it. If you create a persona modeled on a fictional or legendary character, you are not gaining the full benefit of the technique, because the identity is diluted by other people's ideas of what the being is like. Even if you think you are the reincarnation of a legendary figure, choose an original name.⁵ A common tradition among the Golden Dawn is to choose Latin or Hebrew mottos that exemplify what the mage wishes to accomplish. Hence, you have names like *Perdurabo*, meaning "I will endure," and *Sapere Aude*, meaning "dare to be wise." This approach requires knowing a few fragments of Latin, which isn't a particularly difficult language (refer back to chapter 5). If you don't wish to learn Latin, you can choose a motto in any language, including English.

Build the persona around the motto—by means of imaginative visualization—whenever you do magic. It is almost like invoking yourself. You imagine yourself as you are, but more confident, more in charge, more capable, and more calm. The magical persona technique not only increases your personal power in magic, it can rid yourself of fear in other situations (after all, it is Bob Smith, who might be afraid—his magical persona Evrah isn't afraid of anything). It can also be used with modifications to create other social persona.

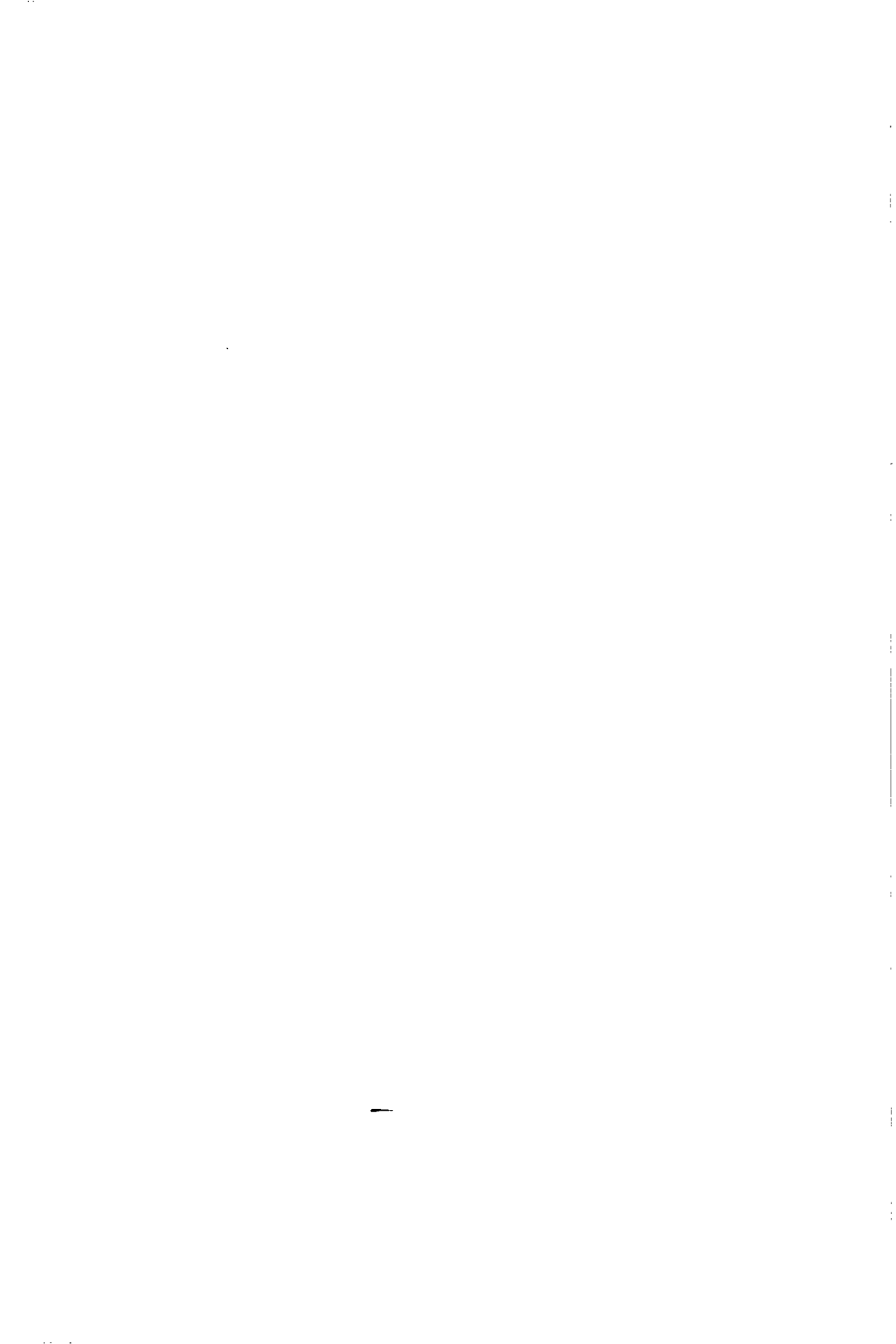
People usually have numerous personae, which they use in all sorts of situations. When I stand in front of a class, for example, I am the Professor;

5. A belief you might do well to keep to yourself, even if it's true.

when I am reading my poetry I am the Poet; and when I'm going out on a date, I am the Lover. What makes the magical persona different is that it is consciously constructed and anchored to a particular name and attitude—a sort of personal glamour made not just to influence others, but to influence yourself. You can just as easily create deliberate personae for all of your life-roles. If you do, I think you'll find there is no single, core identity to support all of them. There is only the point of consciousness, the personal *I* of awareness—what A. O. Spare sometimes called the *kia*—flitting from one personality to another. This *kia*, or I of awareness, is our perspective on our own consciousness, but like the eye, it cannot see itself. Sometimes we see ourselves as an aspiring artist, and other times, as a goofy uncle or powerful magician. None of them are true—and they are all true. It all depends what mask you are looking out of at any particular moment. So again, a simple technique to make life more effective comes down to the central mystery of selfhood: What is the self?

• • •

Getting out and about might not settle the central mysteries of life, but it certainly prevents stagnation and boredom. Even if you're not a particularly social person, even if you hate parties, try magic in other public situations. Learning to do magic on the fly, as it were, can also teach us a lot about ourselves, our limitations and our potential. So get out of the armchair!



DIVINING THE FUTURE AND THE PAST

If imagination is a fundamental skill of magic, then divination is the art of using that skill to its optimum capability. The universe carries on a conversation with itself; thus, to do magic, we communicate our desire to the universe symbolically, in an aesthetically pleasing manner. Divination is simply the universe talking back. Theoretically, we can find out anything we like through divination. As with magic, the more detail we seek, the more noise interferes with the signal and the harder it is to translate. It may seem, therefore, that the simplest possible method of divination should be the best one. Flipping a coin, for example, should be better than using tarot cards or the I Ching or any more complicated system. Yet it doesn't seem to be.

Just as there is a necessary aesthetic element to magic, there is an aesthetic element to divination. You must use a system of symbols that resonate not only with the universe but with yourself. The sides of a coin lack any sort of aesthetic appeal to most people. Therefore, a coin picks up almost pure noise. Some borderline systems, like the pendulum, seem to work very well for some people and very poorly for others. I suspect the root cause for such variations is aesthetic appeal. I know a pendulum works much better for me if it is made of a semi-precious stone I like, rather than a bolt tied to the end of a string. I hesitate to ascribe magical powers to the stone when I can explain it as an aesthetic reaction on my part.

So the first step in finding a divination system is to find one that resonates with your aesthetic sensibilities. Perhaps the most popular system is tarot cards. Every deck is different—painted by different artists, using different titles for some of the cards—providing a richness of possible symbol systems for any taste. We will discuss tarot card specifics, soon.

For a time, I gave tarot card readings professionally. Occasionally someone would say something along the lines of: “But can’t you detect a pattern in any random string of symbols and argue that it has some reflection on my life?” Absolutely. There is nothing magical about the tarot cards or their layout. No supernatural force manipulates the cards, and I have doubts that I am unconsciously detecting the cards and arranging them as I shuffle, as that seems an amazing skill that is otherwise unavailable, though it would be very useful while playing poker. The cards themselves may be random, but the patterns I detect *are* manipulated by outside forces. The pattern I perceive is the message from the universe. I perceive that pattern, and not one of countless others, because it *is* the message. The other patterns are noise.

The number of possible interpretations of any divination is usually exceedingly large. But we perceive, with proper training, only those patterns that apply to the situation we are examining. This is why systems like astrology work. The stars do not impel us toward particular behaviors. With skill in divination, we detect the very pattern we have to detect to make sense of any given situation. For example, I once cast a very insightful chart that explained and predicted quite accurately several things going on in my life; then I noticed that I had performed an incorrect calculation. A traditional astrologer would throw away the incorrect chart and start over. I used both the incorrect and correct charts to devise a detailed and accurate interpretation, because I knew the positions of the stars at the time of the question were incidental. What mattered was what I saw in those positions.

Imagine this analogy. You have a radio. As you are probably aware, the radio, if left to its own devices, will pick up a *mélange* of static consisting of radio signals from all over the earth—mostly of hydrogen atoms spinning in electrical fields deep in space. In fact, all the information coming through your radio, if heard at once, will sound like static—random gibberish, noise. But within all this noise, we can tune in to specific areas that

are more focused; we can hear “music” or “news.” We can then take information from such focused channels.

Properly reading the tarot cards is like spreading out all the static on the radio, tuning in to a small slice of noise, and resolving it into some sense. The flipping coin rarely works not because it is aesthetically uninteresting, but it contains no more information than a binary click. We need a rich, full range of random noise in order to pick out patterns within it, to tune in to the message. Without sufficient noise, there is no message.

Let me put it another way. All divination systems consist of a pile of Barnum statements, statements that are true in almost any situation. That is why laying out the cards and reading the meanings from a book rarely gets you anywhere; each card can easily apply to several different situations. But in a true divination, you are in a receptive state and can detect, amid all the Barnum statements, particular details that are true for the situation at hand. To be fair, there is an element of synchronicity as well; we cannot conclude from the static on our radio that all radio signals are static. In fact, we know that there is a communicator, a station trying to give us news or weather or music, so we tune in to that station amid the static. Amid all the possible messages, all the rich and wide number of relevant signals, one of them *is* the message we need. We can tune in to that station amid all the possible stations. The important bit, I argue, is the tuning. Arguing over the best possible divination system is a bit like arguing about what kind of radio to use. Some people prefer the tarot, while others prefer runes, just as some people prefer one type of stereo system, and other people prefer other types. To suggest the tarot is superior to the runes, or vice versa, is to miss the point that personal aesthetics matter more than details. One might make good arguments for and against certain methods, but at some point you need to just pick a radio and tune it in.

In this chapter I wish to outline a few common methods of divination—or more accurately, categories of divinations—and then discuss how to achieve a receptive state. I divide divination into three (somewhat artificial) categories: oracular trance, observation of omens, and sortilege—the randomized manipulation of physical objects like cards, runes, or lots. In each category the divinatory state of mind is the same.

Oracular Trance

The oracular trance shares certain characteristics with invocation. In fact, one can use invocation to divine the future or obtain advice. But oracular trance differs from invocation because the mage identifies with the god being invoked, whereas, in oracular trance, the seer merely communicates with that god and delivers a message, sometimes *in voce dei*. The Pythia, the famous priestess of Delphi, is never identified with Apollo himself; she is simply his mouthpiece. By the same token, the Seidhr of Norse legend are rarely identified with gods, but deliver divine messages as part of their work.

Attaining an oracular trance is not particularly difficult. The Pythia, according to legend, inhaled fumes or chewed leaves to attain trance.¹ The Seidhr listened to specific music. Many shamans dance or beat on drums. The trance itself, therefore, seems little different from any other kind of trance. Then, what makes oracular pronouncements possible? I certainly do not know, but try this exercise:

EXERCISE

A Sleep Oracle

Next time you go to bed, introspect carefully as you drift off. The shifting images arising just before sleep seem to come from a source of the mind deeper than our conscious awareness, yet can be consciously observed (as dreams frequently cannot). Force yourself awake after observing these images and try to write down the few you can remember; they tend to slip out of the mind quite readily. You may find many of these images applying to your life later, specifically the ones that seem to bear no relationship to you now.

As you work on this, you may find yourself having prophetic dreams. By paying attention to this half-dream state, you are training your mind to pay attention to the full-dream state as well,

1. I suspect the story about chewing leaves is mere propaganda, particularly because the type of leaves she was said to chew are not narcotic. The fissure that belched fumes, however, is an older legend than propaganda can explain, yet no evidence of such a fissure exists in the region. So perhaps this is an allegory for thoughts arising from a deep level of the mind.

specifically to seek oracles. Most of my prophetic dreams come to me from a figure in authority—sometimes a god, more often a parent or boss. Often, I do not see the person's face. Prophetic dreams are usually lacking in rich imagery, strangely enough; they often bear no relationship to my current worries and concerns; they often seem unlikely at the time, but eventually come to pass anyway; they are usually much easier to remember than more trivial dreams. Whether you experience prophetic dreams or not—I've only experienced a few—you'll find that dreamwork increases your capacity for introspection and imagination dramatically.

Observation of Omens

In ancient Greece the rich could easily travel to Delphi or Dodona and consult the oracles. They could afford the required sacrifices and didn't have to worry about leaving their farms unattended. The poor, however, had to make do with their environments. The ordinary farmer therefore learned to recognize omens. Recognizing omens consists of careful observations of various natural or human phenomena, with an eye toward predicting the future. I've outlined a couple of common types of omen observation below.

Augury

This, quite simply, is the observation of birds. It became such an important art in ancient Rome that before an elected official could begin office, the augur had to approve him—to "inaugurate" him—by consulting the omens created by birds in flight. Each augur was equipped with a crooked staff, much like a shepherd's staff, with which he created a magical space, dividing heaven into regions. Those to the left of the augur were regarded as inauspicious, while those to the right were auspicious. The complex art of augury is at least partially lost; what we do know is that birds flying into and out of zones provided information. If you wish to employ augury, remember that left is usually a negative answer and right is usually a positive

answer. Birds with distinctive cries are observed through their cries. Birds of prey, like hawks and eagles, are observed through sight. The only good source we have on augury is, unfortunately, Cicero, who did not regard the art highly, although he held the office of augur himself.²

Haruspicy

Haruspicy, the art of detecting omens from internal organs, especially the liver of animals, has an odd history. According to Roman sources, haruspicy was taught to the Romans by a small man that a farmer plowed up in his field. More likely, the Etruscans passed the art onto the Romans. Haruspicy was also practiced by the Greeks and several other cultures. The Chinese practiced a version of it with turtle shells, heated in a fire until they cracked. Some of the earliest incidences of human writing comes from these turtle-shell fragments. In Rome and Greece, the priest would examine the internal organs of a sacrificial animal. The evolution of this art is hardly surprising. Religious practice required an examination of all sacrificial remains anyway, since any flaw—a tumor, for example, or disease—would disqualify the sacrifice and require a replacement. It's just a small step from determining the suitability of the sacrifice to determining the suitability of an endeavor. Most people these days probably have little desire to practice haruspicy. If you do wish to learn the art, please conform to the law in your area and to standards of humane treatment of animals.

Kledon

My favorite method of observing omens is the kledon (pl. kleda). The kledon is a method of consulting Hermes, the god of communication, travel, and commerce. It consists of going to a public place, offering a prayer to Hermes, and plugging one's ears. The querent, ears stopped, walks to a place where people are conversing. He or she then unplugs the ears. The immediate conversation heard is considered to bear directly on the question. A sort of involuntary kledon also exists. The Greeks considered any utterance a potential omen, particularly if it was accompanied with some involuntary action such as a sneeze. The kledon was taken so seriously that

2. Cicero, *The Nature of the Gods* and *On Divination*.

many priests wore hoods that limited their sight, so they would not observe any inauspicious kleda during a ritual. They called for silence for the same reason. Although we might look strange walking into public places with our ears plugged, this is one of the few methods of observing omens that modern people can practice readily. The secrets of augury are more or less lost, and haruspicy is complicated by our culture, but kleda are accessible to everyone without the need for training or research.

One easy way to experience a kledon without going out into public with your fingers in your ears (although this is good practice in overcoming societal expectations and social fears) is to use your radio. Spin the dial, tune in to the first audible station, and listen to the first things you hear. Most often, the words you hear will apply directly to your concerns. It helps to ask for Hermes' help before doing this, but if you are hesitant for whatever reason to pray to him, substitute your favorite god. Atheists can consult their own unconscious minds.

Weather

Weather is unpredictable. Not even we can predict it with useful accuracy all the time. So it's an excellent source for omens. From lightning (which has been read much the same way as birds) to looking for images in clouds, weather was probably the very first place humans looked for omens from the gods.

Miscellaneous

A large number of superstitions, such as the black cat superstition in America, started as omens. I personally find this type of omen somewhat counterproductive. After memorizing hundreds of possible occurrences such as spilling salt, dropping a penny, walking under a ladder, and so on, we're scared to go outside our houses for fear of bad omens! In my opinion, the only time such an omen is acceptable is if one has asked specifically for it. Most black cats, for example, are neither good luck nor bad; they're simply cats.

Sortilege

The most popular of all divination systems, currently, is the variety of systems that involve manipulating tokens or cards to produce a random pattern. In this category falls tarot, runes, and dice, as well as hundreds of other methods. Historically speaking, just about every culture across the world had a system of sortilege. In Africa, for example, small leaves with symbols cut into them were manipulated by the wind or by large spiders. In China, coins were thrown or yarrow stalks counted to find a relevant page in the entirely fascinating *Yi Qing*.³ Throughout Europe, cards and "lots" (objects, such as runes, selected at random and interpreted as bearing on an issue) have been used right back to the Indo-European invasion. I wish to briefly discuss only the two most popular forms of sortilege: the tarot and the runes.

The Tarot

The tarot is the most popular of all means of sortilege. A tarot deck consists of seventy-eight cards. Twenty-two cards are considered the major arcana, sometimes called "the trumps." These trumps are numbered from zero to twenty-one, with traditional titles and a traditional order. The major arcana correspond to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and therefore to the paths on the cabalistic Tree of Life (although this association is probably a relatively recent innovation). The fifty-six minor arcana cards are divided into four suits: usually some variation of wands, cups, swords, and pentacles. These suits represent the four elements of fire, water, air, and earth, respectively. Each suit consists of pip cards numbered from ace to ten. These may contain pictures of people engaged in various actions, as in the major arcana, or just consist of a number particular to the suit, as on a modern playing card. The four suit cards are usually called something like page, knight, queen, and king. The lesser arcana vary considerably from deck to deck in artistic presentation. The Rider-Waite deck is the most popular deck, partially because it creates scenes for each of the minor

3. Sometimes called the *I Ching*, "The Book of Change" is one of the oldest books to survive to modernity. It consists of sixty-four sections of "hexagrams," each of which has a specific image, poetic verse, and commentary. I advise those interested in divination to find a copy.

arcana, making it easier to remember. So, while an older deck would simply have five wands drawn on the Five of Wands, the Rider-Waite deck and decks inspired by it have a melee with five fighters, each of them using a staff as a weapon.

The origin of the tarot is an absolute mystery, and anyone who claims to know otherwise is lying. Several fanciful stories circulate, though. My personal favorite is that the tarot is the mysterious *Book of Thoth* written by the Egyptian God Thoth himself. Other stories involve India, Italy, and Gypsies. The history of the tarot after its introduction to Europe is fairly well-documented, however. We know the tarot was used to play a complicated card game that evolved into modern day games like Euchre and Bridge. The tarot eventually dropped the trumps (except for card 0, the Fool, which became the Joker) and cut out the Knight from the court cards to become our modern deck of cards. At what point the cards, in either their older form or as modern playing cards, were used for divination is unknown. Even if the cards started as a game, as seems possible, the evocative images of the trumps must have impelled people to try them for divination fairly early.

When used for divination, tarot cards are usually laid out in a “spread” (a specific pattern). Each place in that pattern has a broad meaning, and the card occupying any specific place modifies that meaning. So, if one is using the Celtic Cross, one of the more popular spreads (although I have never understood why), the card covering the querent card indicates the present circumstances. If the Five of Wands lands there, the reader can predict with confidence that the present circumstances involve some sort of fight. On the other hand, if one is using the Twelve Houses spread and the Five of Wands lands in the second house, the house of money, then the reader can predict that a fight concerning finances is relevant. As you can see, this system provides enormous flexibility, which is one of the advantages of the tarot.

Another advantage of the tarot is that each deck is fundamentally alike. Although other divination decks exist besides the tarot, any true tarot deck follows, with some variation, the essential tarot pattern of seventy-eight cards. So anyone who learns one deck can switch to any other deck with

ease, and conversations among tarot readers are completely comprehensible even if they've never seen each other's decks. Moreover, this fundamental stability of design permits endless variation. For example, some people are offended by *Atu XV, The Devil*.⁴ But if one deck offends you, surely another exists that is in sync with your aesthetic and moral tastes. For example, *The Devil* card is renamed in some decks as "The Horned One" and still other decks refer to this same card as "Matter."

For me, the essential value of the tarot is the artistic presentation. Because the tarot is so old and so famous, almost every great artist, whether an occultist or not, has painted a tarot deck. There are tarot decks designed around cartoon characters, human-like cats, and paintings by Salvador Dali! Unlike almost any other system of sortilege, the tarot deck is richly beautiful. Many people who start as tarot readers end up collecting tarot decks simply for their beauty. Moreover, with a modicum of artistic talent, mages can create their own tarot decks quite easily, since blank decks of eighty cards (permitting you some mistakes) exist. In this computer age, there are even electronic decks, which can be consulted online, printed out on cardstock, or posted on websites.

When buying a tarot deck, ask to see a sample of the cards.⁵ Any reputable occult bookstore, or even regular bookstore, will permit this; many of them have sample decks already open for you to look at. Determine whether or not you like the art on every card before you buy the deck. Also check the paper stock used for the cards. One deck I bought, with pleasant art and an interesting concept, turned out to be printed on such flimsy paper that I tore one of them the first time I used it. Some decks have meanings printed directly on the cards. I recommend you do not buy these because they hinder learning. Eventually, if left to your own devices, you will determine meanings beyond those given on the cards. Every deck has

4. The major arcana are often referred to as *atu*, a word that is supposed to be Egyptian. The number of major arcana cards is almost always given in Roman numerals, while the number of minor arcana cards is given in Arabic (standard) numerals.

5. Some superstitions assert that you should not buy your own tarot deck. I loathe this superstition; it prevents people from acquiring the deck they really want—the one they feel most personally attracted to.

at least a slim instruction volume that will be sufficient in learning the “traditional” meanings of the cards, but you may also wish to purchase a more in-depth book on the tarot. Several are listed in the bibliography.

After choosing and purchasing a deck, it is common practice to sleep with the deck for a few days and to wrap it in silk when not in use. I did neither with my two favorite decks, and they work fine. If you feel that such actions symbolically renders the deck more *yours*, then by all means act them out, but it is not necessary. In learning to read the cards, you may discover “reversed” meanings. Not every reader interprets special meanings for reversed cards. Many consider the meaning of a card the same whether it is upright or reversed. You should decide which method you wish to use and stick to it.

The Runes

If the tarot is a rich garden of symbols, the runes are a starkly beautiful tundra. The runes consist of twenty-four symbols broken into three categories of eight. In some modern rune books—and even in some very popular rune sets—a “blank” is included. Any book that includes a blank rune should not be consulted as an authority. Historically, no one used a blank rune.

The runes were originally an alphabet called the Futhark (named after its first six letters F-U-Th-A-R-K). The Futhark was a Germanic alphabet, and variations of it were used all throughout Germanic areas, including Anglo-Saxon England. Several varieties of the Futhark exist, but most rune sets and books use a twenty-four set Futhark that is, in reality, a reconstruction. The meaning of every rune is not known for certain. Several poems, called the rune poems, describe each runic letter, but these descriptions are often riddling and unclear.⁶

Traditionally, the runes were drawn three at a time. A passage in Tacitus’ *Germania* describes the process of drawing lots, which were carved on fruit-bearing wood.⁷ This passage is the only evidence we have from antiquity that the runes were used for divination, and Tacitus does not use the word “rune.” The word he does use (*nota*—meaning “mark” or “sign”)

6. The rune poems are reprinted and translated in Jan Fries’ *Helrunar*. Fries’ book is also an excellent introduction to rune magic.

7. Tacitus, *Germania*, chapter 10.

could apply to any number of symbolic representations. The current interest in using the runes for divination began somewhere around the 1970s, when they were discovered by the New Age community.

I think enough circumstantial evidence exists to say runes *were* the marks or signs referenced by Tacitus. The word *run*, from which the modern English “rune” comes, meant—in the numerous Germanic languages in which it appears—*secret*, *advice*, *spell*, and *whisper*. Several accounts in the Eddas describe the use of the runes in casting spells. It seems reasonable, from the linguistic and circumstantial evidence, that the runes would also be used for the reverse procedure—that is, divining the future.⁸

As mentioned earlier, if runes were used for this purpose, their divinatory meanings are probably lost, at least partially. Several runes are confused in different versions of the rune poems, and other runes are utter mysteries. Yet, those who use the runes manage nevertheless. It seems that once one assigns some meaning to those mysterious runes, they snap into place on their own accord. However, the fantastic interpretations made popular by certain books are not necessarily valid; they tend to dilute the symbolic range of the runes, turning, for example, *thurisaz* (ice-giant, a very destructive force in Norse mythology) into “gateway.” If one neuters the runes into pleasant images across the board, one rids them of their symbolic beauty. The runes reflect a culture of struggle and fierce determination. Turning that culture into a gentle, kind, bourgeois middle-class American clone is insulting at best.

Those who use the runes must be prepared to undertake considerable research. Where the images on the tarot cards are richly visual and present their symbolism to anyone who wishes to observe them, the images of the runes are—as the etymology implies—“hidden.” To grasp them, the *rune-madhr* must study the historical basis of the runes intensely. It wouldn’t even be out of the question for someone truly interested in the runes to learn Old Norse, so that he or she could read the sources in the original language. Giving a full account of the syllabus for an aspiring rune master is beyond the scope of this book, but the bibliography gives some sugges-

8. Sturluson, *The Eddas*.

tions for good starting places. Anyone who assiduously mines the bibliographies of the books listed will have plenty to read.

The Divinatory State of Mind

Simply laying out the tarot cards into a spread and reading their meanings directly from a book is counterproductive. A good guide to the tarot will explain each of the images on the cards, their symbolic contribution to the overall meaning, and the esoteric, underlying structure of the deck itself. Same with the runes, or really, with any divination system: the “meaning” of each part of the divination system is not an object to be memorized by rote. Instead, the aspiring diviner should learn the cards (although everything I say about cards applies to all divination systems) as one learns the streets of an unfamiliar neighborhood: by walking around and observing them. A good deck will always reveal new things to the inquiring eye—a shade of color, an odd pattern, even accidental variations in the art can reveal more than any prescribed meaning.

EXERCISE

Divining for Yourself

Take out your cards, runes, or some other system. I’ll just presume you’re using cards for the sake of simplicity. Prepare your working area. For instance, if you use a table, make sure you wash the table and let it dry, and perhaps burn some incense or say a prayer. In other words, create a space conducive to your divination work.

Pick up the deck and look at each card in turn. This not only helps you make sure you have all the cards in the set, but it also places each of the symbols in your mind. You need not spend much time looking at each item. I riffle through the tarot deck quite quickly, in the matter of a few seconds, before every reading. While you’re looking at the cards, do not think about them, but take slow, calm, deep breaths. Relax as completely as you can.

Now, lay out a very simple spread. By far the simplest is the three-card spread: place three cards in a row, letting one represent the past, one the present, and one the future. Look at the cards all at once.

Is there a pattern among the cards? For example, do multiple cards repeat the same symbol? If they're the same suit, it means the concern associated with that element is paramount. But even cards of different suits might display similar symbols. Perhaps all three cards have a bird on them. Silently ask the bird, "What do you mean?" Repeat out loud whatever comes to mind. The most important thing is to not be afraid of sounding silly or being wrong. If you're reading for a querent, and they tell you, "That's wrong," say, "Okay, we'll see if it fits in later." Do not apologize or change your story. You're not reading the querent, you're reading the cards.

Look at the first card, letting your eyes relax. Remain focused on the card. Your eyes will naturally light upon some image, some visual symbol on the card. When they do, consider how that symbol applies to the traditional meaning of the card. Again, ask the symbol, "What do you mean?" and repeat the answer aloud. Work your way through all the cards in this way. Finally, look at the gestalt (the layout as a whole) again to determine another symbol.

Once I did a reading for two querents, a man and a woman. On almost all the cards I noticed ringlike shapes. When I asked the rings what they were, the answer came into my head, so I said, "I see a wedding ring. Are you two getting married?"

"No," they answered, but I kept going. The Moon indicated deception, but my eye lit on the image of the crab, representing lust (in this instance).

"I see someone is not being entirely honest about sex," I said. They both looked sheepish, but I kept reading the cards. Finally, when I saw a broken rim on the Five of Cups, I said, "There are broken marriage vows." The querents finally admitted the truth: they were having an affair, and they wanted to know if their spouses knew. "No," I said, "but they will know very soon, and one or both of you will be divorced." I don't know if my prediction came true or not, because I never saw them again, but I am confident I read the cards correctly.

Above all, divinatory trance is one of calm regard for symbols. Of course, if you're reading something like the runes, you have to let the at-

tendant symbols rise in your mind, not on the cards. Some people may find this easier, some harder. The imagination is key here. You must let it work without exerting control, as when seeing an aura or a spirit. Above all, you must trust what arises. If you read for yourself, you will have a tendency to edit your perceptions to cast the best possible light on the situation. Resist that urge. If you read for others, they may even become hostile if you give them bad or unpleasant news. By all means, try to tailor your presentation in such a way that it does not cause undue pain, but do not allow the querent to bully you.

I'd like to say a word about reading for others. One of the best ways to learn any divination system is to give lots of readings. For the most part, these readings will be for yourself. Giving readings for others, however, is often easier in some senses. It is also more fun and many times more rewarding. If you occasionally read for friends, you probably will want them to avoid heavy topics. Feel free to ask for their question beforehand (although a good reader can usually divine the question in the process of finding the answer) and reject any that might cause stress to either of you. I, for example, refuse to do "couple" readings for my friends, because one of their questions is almost always "How long will we be together?" I can't answer that, usually, but I can see how the relationship ends, and no one wants to hear about that, so I flatly refuse to answer that question. It's your psyche and your friendship, so feel free to reject any question you think might negatively impact either.

If you do tarot readings for money, it might be more difficult to reject questions. Unless you do charity readings—which must be both fast and cheap—I suggest you schedule an hour for each reading. Set a timer to notify you when that hour is up. Charge at least fifty dollars an hour. If you wish to make a living doing readings for money, you may wish to lower your price. Be sure to check local laws on fortunetelling. But you should not devalue your time or your readings. Dipping into someone else's mind is tiring at best. At worst, it's painful. You should be fully recompensed. Moreover, charging a larger fee discourages tourists and unserious people who are just looking for cheap entertainment. If you wish to provide cheap entertainment, by all means do so. In that case, you might as well just learn cold reading—the art of reading a person's body language in order to tell him or her what he or she wants to hear.

DIY Divination

Much of postmodern magic revolves around a DIY (Do It Yourself) attitude. The English magician A. O. Spare began his study of magic by reading playing cards. What Spare says about his method of reading cards may surprise some people: he arbitrarily decided what the cards should mean, wrote their meanings on them, and then edited those that didn't seem to "fit." For those who want a received tradition of divination, this might seem blasphemous; some will find it an exciting possibility. Spare recommended writing keywords on an ordinary deck of playing cards. He said to use the court cards to represent people and the pip cards to represent ideas. He also included a number of other cards: one to emphasize a meaning, one to negate a meaning, and so on. He advised letting a reversed card mean not the opposite but an emphatic version of the card's upright meaning. Finally, he suggested having multiple decks for different questions.

If you wish to try this method, create a list of terms you might use in divination. Try to choose terms that work in combination: Loss and Wealth together might mean a bad investment, while Beginning and Love might mean a new relationship. Write them on ordinary playing cards. My current deck (it mutates all the time) looks like this: Travel, Passion, Foe, Love, Art, Science, Virtue, Expansion, Instruction, Sacrifice, Beginning, Family, Power, Loss, Change, Happiness, Work, Destruction, Luck, Contraction, Public, Success, Health, Pain, Purpose, Collection, Intensification, Negation, Thought, Secret, Word, Need, Wealth, Inspiration. I also include the four kings to represent men, and the four queens to represent women. You'll notice there are far fewer than fifty-two cards in my deck. Not every card needs to be used.

To help test such a deck, you might give yourself a reading daily, changing cards that seem inaccurate. Unfortunately, this method requires you to have a day with a certain amount of variety. A better method is to ask the cards every night what sort of dreams you'll have. If you already keep a dream diary, you can record the predictions and test them that way. Of course, seeing the cards before you go to bed might influence your dreams. That may not be a problem if you're looking for subconscious suggestion as to what the cards mean. If you wish to avoid this possibility, lay the cards out face down before going to bed, turn them over only after recording your dreams in the morning.

Once you have your deck down pretty solid, and don't think you'll want to change it very often, you can transfer it from playing cards to a blank deck. Create whatever sorts of images you like—sigils, geometric shapes, pictures, or what-have-you—you like to represent the keywords of the cards. Do not hesitate to add cards, change card meanings, or create supplementary decks. This DIY system should be fluid and flexible; that's the joy and strength of it.

• • •

Divination is a fundamental ability. You can use it before practical magical workings to prevent undesirable results (you may wish to put the money spell on hold, for example, if the tarot indicates that your rich aunt Mildred is ill). You can use it as a research tool to corroborate or challenge your experiences. You can use it as a comfort in hard times. You can even use it to entertain and help people: to heal and to amuse. Ultimately, the ability to divine leads us to ask essential philosophical questions. Is time linear? Is there free will? If I am receiving this message, from whom am I receiving it? A good divination is as awe-inspiring as looking up at the speckled vastness of space on a clear country night. The small hairs on my neck have stood up and trembled at a particularly apt reading. Although I've had unsatisfied querents (whom I usually refunded), I have had many more who stared into the cards with fascination and a little fear, trying to delve into the vast mystery the Norse called *wyrd* (the weavings of fate). Perhaps of all the miracles of magic, divination is the greatest.



INCREASING PERSONAL POWER

What is power? Power is the ability to do work, to accomplish goals and fulfill our desires. The information paradigm provides instruction on how to increase this power (refer back to section on information paradigm, page 31). According to the information paradigm, magic is an act of communication. A brief discussion of communication theory, which describes how information is stored and transferred, may help us understand how to communicate more effectively and therefore increase our power.¹ Communication consists of five parts: the communicator, communicant, channel, and noise. The fifth part is the message—the thing that is being communicated.

The communicator encodes information into a message, which he or she then passes through the channel. The channel may be anything from a piece of paper to the air (agitated by spoken words), or even hand signals or electronic impulses. Within the channel, the message mixes with noise. Both the message and noise travel to the communicant, who tries to separate the noise from the message, decoding the message and then communicating back in an attempt to verify the message was properly understood.

1. My use of the word "information" here and elsewhere is the colloquial English use of the word. "Information" in communication theory and informational sciences has a much more specific meaning.

As we discussed earlier, the amount of information in any utterance is in inverse proportion to its probability. This means unlikely messages are harder to communicate than expected messages. If your spouse says “good morning” every day when you both wake up, you might find yourself confused if he or she were to say “How’d you sleep?” In fact, you may not even understand the question at first! The more improbable or unlikely a message is, the less likely it is to be received by the communicant. Of course, this relies largely upon circumstances—in a coffee shop “cappuccino” is a more likely utterance than “underwear,” but in a clothing store “underwear” is more likely than “cappuccino.” To assure the communication of a difficult message is successfully received:

- Increase channel size or signal strength: upgrade modems; talk louder.
- Add requests for greater feedback: Do you understand? Right? Follow?
- Slow down the communication: by decreasing the bit/second of information, one can utilize a much smaller channel.
- Repeat the message, or add parity: this allows the communicant several chances to decode the message successfully, with clues as to whether or not he or she understands.
- Eliminate or overcome noise: demand silence; reduce distractions.

What does all this mean for a mage? Well, if we consider magic to be an act of communication with some unknown communicant—call it “the universe,” for want of a better term, or “god” if you insist, although I suspect that would be an erroneous identification—then we must expect the rules of communication to apply. Communication is communication, whether it is to your neighbor or to God. For example, if we demand something too improbable from our communicant, we cannot expect it to come to pass as we’ve required. The message will be too large for the channel, and will therefore be unsuccessfully translated. If you wish to cause a glass to levitate, you are asking for something of almost infinite improbability. Such a request requires almost infinite information to be communicated. Unless there is remarkably little mental noise on your part and on the part of your environment (people, for example, who might be sending

messages such as “glasses don’t levitate” and “I like cheese” and “I’m horny”—in other words, the sum total noise of the human race being human), or your channel is of remarkable size, you are unlikely to successfully levitate the glass. Magic must not demand something too improbable.

Yet it is possible to communicate even the most improbable message with enough effort. How can we increase our personal power—in other words, our ability to successfully communicate with the communicant? The same way a communicator in more mundane situations might assure the communication of a difficult message.

Increasing Your Channel

You probably have noticed that it becomes easier and easier to communicate with people the longer you know them. You learn what to expect from them—their likely communications increase in probability. In other words, you can anticipate their message even before it arrives and therefore have a much better chance at decoding it properly. By the same token, one way to increase your channel and communicate more effectively in magic is to perform what I call “acts of power”—simple communications or acts of magic to increase both your personal sense of power as well as your facility in communicating magical desires.

A communicant does not know immediately that you wish your message to be heard. Most people throw off random and undisciplined thoughts; their channel is narrow and clogged with noise. Of course, the communicant does not expect meaningful messages from someone unless it has been trained to expect such messages. Acts of power train the communicant and you.

Acts of power are common in many cultures. Japanese sorcerers, for example, will subject themselves to extremely harsh conditions in order to increase their power: before healings they might sit under ice-cold waterfalls, or engage in heroic fasts, despite the fact that Buddhism, their avowed religion, does not endorse such rigid exercises of extreme asceticism. Some of them have even been known to starve themselves to death in such a way that they mummify their own corpses! These acts have their roots in

cultural expectations that go back probably as far as the Ainu, the indigenous people of the Japanese islands. We do not need to engage in such rigorous acts of power, but we can gain their benefits without pain.²

EXERCISE

Performing an Act of Power

The central requirement of an act of power is to communicate your desire to perform the act, then perform it. This sets up a pattern—what you will to do is done. This makes further messages of the same type—those in which you will something be done—more probable and therefore more likely to be successfully received. The act itself does not matter; in fact, it may be something that you do habitually. The important thing is that you do the act after declaring your will to do it. This said, when you first perform acts of power you should avoid declaring acts of power like stopping a bad habit or other life changes. Later you might use the act of power to do such things, but for now, stick to simple actions that you can easily accomplish.

Your declaration should be formal and magical in nature. In other words, it should be aesthetically pleasing. A silent declaration is hardly sufficient. Here is a written formula you may use, although I recommend you devise your own (and decorate it with whatever ritual actions you like):

“I, (your magical name or motto), hereby declare that I shall perform (action) in accord with my expressed will, and that in so doing, I shall achieve power and pleasure.”

For now, actions appropriate for an act of power include: brushing your teeth, taking a shower, eating a piece of toast, watching television—in other words, anything that you intend to do anyway. At first, you may feel silly doing this, but try to do it habitually, performing at least one act of power every week.

2. Which does not mean, of course, that pain does not have value in magic. Those interested in body modification can attest to the power of pain to change one's state of mind.

The act of power exercise works by convincing the communicant that when you send specific messages, you wish for those messages to be heard and acted upon. Unfortunately, the act of power also works in reverse. The mage who tells a lie is sending the message to the communicant that his or her communications are not intended in any way to reflect reality. A lie, after all, is a statement that contradicts reality. Unlike an act of power (i.e., an act of sorcery) the lie is not meant to change reality—it is meant to obscure it. Therefore, a mage ought not lie. Many people will find this requirement stringently difficult, but in fact, a lie undermines your personal power to a considerable degree. A mage who lies becomes less powerful with every lie. The Egyptians considered the most important quality for anyone who performed magical spells—even those performed after death—to be truthfulness. The gods would not hearken to the spells of a deceitful person.

Reduce Noise

Expanding the channel can only take one so far; eventually, you'll need to reduce noise as well. The difficulty with reducing noise is that noise is almost infinite. The noise of millions of people all communicating at once—fears, hopes, fantasies—is an ocean of turbulence into which you are dropping your message, in the hopes that it will accomplish some action. It is a wonder that any magic ever works, but it does. Evidently, the communicant is capable of discarding the noise far more efficiently than we are. In fact, I suspect that this simple model is fallacious insofar as the communicant may very well arise from the noise itself—from what I call the semiotic web, the web of symbolic associations. If this is the case, reducing all atmospheric, environmental noise would not only be difficult, it would be counterproductive. It'd be like cutting all the strands of a spider's web but the center spiral, and expecting that center spiral to remain hanging in the air.

If we do not worry too much about the noise of millions of people—and the many other beings—constantly shouting their desires into the semiotic web, then we are left worrying about a single source of noise: our own minds.

EXERCISE

Illustrating Noise

Set a timer for two minutes. Tell yourself that within two minutes you are going to clear your mind of all thoughts but one. It doesn't matter which thought you choose: perhaps a color, an idea, or a face. When you finish, write your assessment of your ability to do this.

Unless you're experienced at meditation, I'll wager that your mind flitted back and forth randomly from image to image, coming to light upon your idea, then immediately skittering off. Zen masters call this state of mind—the ordinary state of mind of most people in day-to-day life—"monkey mind." Like a monkey, your mind chatters and jumps and howls and dances and swings from thought to thought. Some people recommend that one clench down on the monkey mind, trying to still it completely. This, of course, is impossible. It is simply the nature of the mind to make constant random noise. Such exercises lead the neophyte mage to frustration, annoyance, and hopelessness.

More useful, I think, is the meditation known as *Zazen*. This method of training the mind does not try to "sit on the monkey." Instead, it sits *with* the monkey, and the monkey mind calms itself by example. *Zazen* is quite simple; one needn't be a Zen Buddhist to benefit from its effects.

EXERCISE

Zazen

Sit in a chair or cross-legged on a pillow. If you sit in a chair, put your feet firmly on the ground; if sitting on the floor, cross your legs in such a way that both knees are on the ground (this will require some flexibility as well as fluffing or folding the pillow). When you are comfortable, draw your back up straight by imagining your head attached to a string pulling you upright. Your back should not feel strained or uncomfortable. Slowly lean forward and back, to the left and right, until you find a comfortable center of gravity.

Now, fold your hands into a comfortable shape in your lap.³ Breathe in naturally through your nose, counting “one.” Exhale. Breathe in again, counting “two.” Exhale. Continue counting and breathing up to ten. Then start at the beginning of the process again. If your mind wanders, or you lose count, or you go past ten (which happens more often than you might suspect), just bring the count back to one. Do not be discouraged if you only get to the count of two without distraction; after all, when you do reach ten, you just start over again anyway. There is no goal whatsoever. You are not trying to control your mind; you’re just thinking about your breath. If your mind wanders, that’s okay; just bring it back to the breath.

This is the simplest and most effective form of Zazen (there are others, of course) for most beginners. You’ll find that your mind begins to focus more clearly in your day-to-day life, with no specific effort on your part other than the regular meditation. Other meditations may also be valuable. I do at least two different meditations a day: a period of Zazen and a healing Taoist meditation before I go to work. You do not need to sit for long; often, I only sit for a few minutes a day. But even a few minutes will have a big effect on your calmness of mind and the efficacy of your magic.

Gnosis

Another way to clear a channel of noise is to achieve an altered state of consciousness. These altered states of consciousness are called *gnosis*, a Greek word meaning “knowledge.” Other writers have written extensively on the topic of *gnosis*;⁴ I would just be repeating their work if I were to discuss it extensively here. Because some people consider *gnosis* essential to magic, I would be remiss if I did not at least discuss it briefly.

3. Traditionally, this should be the “enlightenment mudra,” the position the Buddha’s hands were in when he achieved enlightenment. Both hands are palm up and relaxed. The thumbs touch lightly to make an oval shape—left fingers rest on right. This shape becomes an anchor for calmness and insight, but you may use any mudra you like.

4. Peter Carroll has explored the topic extensively. I encourage those interested in *gnosis* to consult *Liber Kaos* and *Liber Null & Psychonaut*. The classifications “excitatory” and “inhibitory” are his.

Simply speaking, gnosis—no matter how it is achieved—is a state of mind in which conscious, rational thought (i.e., the monkey mind) is shocked or coaxed into silence. You can see how this would be useful in communicating a successful desire. Some people's entire magical repertoire consists of drawing a sigil and then "charging" it in gnosis. I have no problem with this technique—I've had phenomenal success with it. I doubt rather strongly, however, that gnosis is strictly necessary for magic. It seems simply communicating a desire in an aesthetically interesting way works sufficiently. But if gnosis clears the channel of noise even for a moment, then it is likely to help communication.

If you wish to experiment with achieving gnosis, the most popular method by far is orgasm. This is almost always self-induced by the magician. He or she masturbates to the point of orgasm while regarding the sigil or some other semiotic representative of the desire. The second most popular method seems to be auto-asphyxiation, which requires considerable care. The mage must plug all of his or her facial orifices with the fingers until lack of oxygen causes the hands to go slack. I do not recommend this method. It is incredibly dangerous. It can aggravate heart conditions, even latent ones, and respiratory problems the mage may be unaware of. Other methods include extreme tiredness, exhilaration, excitement, and so forth.

One problem I have with the use of gnosis as a regular component of magic is that almost all the methods in common usage tend to be excitatory in nature. They tend to put significant stress upon either the body or mind. Although excitement can occasionally be salutary, doing so habitually and routinely can wear out a mage at a young age. Certainly, excitatory gnosis has its place in magic. I am no enemy of ecstasy. I suggest, however, that the habitual use of excitatory gnosis can ultimately be counterproductive. It can even dull the experience, reducing its effectiveness, particularly with so-called chemo-gnosis—gnosis induced through drugs.

More useful, perhaps, is so-called inhibitory gnosis, in which the mage slowly reduces the amount of noise in the mind. The Zazen meditation I have already given is one example of inhibitory gnosis. Another type is deliberate relaxation (actually, auto-hypnosis), which I suggested in the anchor exercise in chapter 7. The advantages of inhibitory gnosis are mani-

fold. First, inhibitory gnosis actually *improves* a mage's health. Relaxation and mental calm reduce stress and therefore contribute to well-being. Second, inhibitory gnosis is more flexible and durable. Orgasmic gnosis lasts only for a few seconds, and the quality of that gnosis is hardly reliable (after all, some orgasms are stronger than others). By contrast, the autohypnotic trance is perfectly reliable and lasts as long as you like, theoretically. You can perform entire rituals in this gnosis, during which a symbolic message can be repeated over and over in a quiet state of mind. The only disadvantage to inhibitory gnosis is that it requires a slightly larger commitment of time at the outset. Everyone knows how to have an orgasm; learning to relax into a hypnotic or alpha (the brain state of deep relaxation, or of light hypnosis) state can take a few minutes.

Many people have illusions about the difficulty of achieving the alpha state. In truth, achieving the alpha state is so easy that you do it every night when you fall asleep, or even while driving or watching television. One slips in and out of the alpha state many times every day. In fact, I believe the alpha state is actually the natural, base state of our minds, and the more "awake" states of mind are actually agitations and disorders. Of course, I'm in the minority in this belief. The alpha state is more creative, more observant, more aware, and happier than our "normal" state of mind. To me, this sounds healthier.

Ultimately, the choice of gnosis relies upon a mage's personal style and beliefs. I would not attempt to circumscribe any mage's behavior; we all must be free to experiment. But I would encourage more mages to consider the possibilities and advantages of inhibitory gnosis over excitatory gnosis. Either method will stop the noise, but I suspect it's the difference between coasting to a stop and smashing into a brick wall.

The Holy Guardian Angel and Other Allies

It's popular in Hermetic magic to talk about the HGA, or Holy Guardian Angel. This isn't the childhood guardian angel, the being that snatches you away from danger; at least, it's *not just* this. The HGA is a sort of ambassador from the semiotic web itself, a locus of personal power. In some systems, the whole point of magic is to achieve "knowledge and conversation

of the Holy Guardian Angel.”⁵ These groups often perceive angels in traditional terms: a being with wings, a name, an identity, and a personality. Other groups consider the HGA a part of the mind, sometimes even the part that prevents magic from happening (although I can’t buy this model). All conceptions of the HGA agree, however, that achieving communication with this being is essential to personal power.

I suspect the HGA is a way of personifying the Communicant. Performing this personification can indeed increase one’s personal power. Of course, there are other possibilities, including the original concept: the HGA is an angel sent from God to protect and guide the mage. You really ought to decide for yourself by getting in touch with your HGA.

Even if it’s not the central goal of your magic, meeting your HGA can increase your power considerably. If the HGA is a personification of the Communicant, gaining knowledge and conversation is really constructive—you and the Communicant collaborate on making a sort of “translator,” a symbolic cluster tailor-made for your purposes.

EXERCISE

Initiating Contact with your HGA

To begin this operation, you need to bring to bear all your gimmicks. You need all your magical weapons, all your symbol systems, an act of power, and, ideally a symbolically significant time (dawn is good, dawn on your birthday is better, dawn on your birthday on a numerologically significant year is quite excellent. You can also select the day through astrology, numerology, or some combination thereof). You want to make your entire area as perfect a representation of the semiotic web, i.e., the cosmos, as you can. You may have to redecorate an entire room for this operation. Take your time. Make it perfect. You should also have some paper and a consecrated pen handy. You’ll want to record what comes through, if anything.

First, banish the area. Stand at your place of working—altar or otherwise—and attain a state of deep relaxation and self-confi-

5. This unusual phrase come from Mathers’s *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*. Other famous magicians of the twentieth century adapted the idea and terminology. Crowley’s speculations on the HGA in his *Magick Without Tears* are worth reading.

dence. You may use an anchor for this, but take your time. You want as deep a state as you can possibly muster. Nothing should be halfway. You're reaching out for something very large here. If you have a tool dedicated to invocation, pick it up. You're going to try to invoke the HGA.

The problem is, of course, that you have no idea what the qualities of the HGA are! You don't even know its name! This is the hardest invocation you'll ever perform, because you'll need to rely on the invoked entity to come halfway. Fortunately, the HGA wants to communicate with you, once it knows you're willing. So you have to start to convince it that you're willing.

The best way to do this, while at the same time increasing your magical authority, is to begin reciting your accomplishments, no matter how large or how small, including every act of power you've ever performed, every spell, every mundane success. You may feel silly recounting how you heroically recovered from the flu, but just keep pushing on. Don't think about what you're saying. Don't analyze, just *recite*.

At some point in this litany, which may take some time, you'll begin to feel something strange. You might start twitching or speaking in tongues. Maybe you'll just feel oddly diffuse in some intangible sense. Whatever happens, let your imagination take in every symbol of power with which you've surrounded yourself; let them congeal into an image, and let that image speak a word. That word is the HGA's name. Repeat the name aloud and write it down. You may also receive a sigil. If so, write that down, too. If you feel up to it, ask a question. "Where can I look for greater power?" might be a good initial question, as is "How can I be a better person?" Record the answer, even if it makes no immediate sense.

Thank the image, giving it the license to depart as you would in an evocation. Then banish the area and—if you find the experience as draining as I do—collapse for a while. When you've recovered, try to see if the name, image, and answer to your question (if you have one) fit together symbolically. You may find the name means

something in another language, or you may find some other connection. Remember, everything is a symbol, like in a dream, and in a dream you won't have any symbol you can't interpret. I can't give any more precise instructions than that. Here I have to leave the work up to and your HGA.

You can also achieve knowledge and conversation through astral travel, or by asking evoked entities that you implicitly trust for information. The problem with these other methods is not that they're less certain—although they can be, since entities lie and astral realms are notoriously unstable. But they fail to provide the experience of accomplishment like that of the more complicated invocation. Remember, it's the aesthetic result, not the physical result, of the magic that matters. If you surround yourself with images that provoke an aesthetic response (positive, negative, or, more likely, both), then your HGA knows you're serious, and will come.

Once you have a name and, hopefully, a sigil, further invocations will be easier. Some mages even advocate a sort of constant invocation, having the HGA follow you around everywhere. Although I can usually perceive mine when I drop into a trance, I don't find having him there particularly useful in a practical sense. The HGA's guidance is somewhat rarified. HGAs will direct you, but won't do the walking for you. And HGAs won't direct every step. They tend not to be garrulous beings.

More garrulous, and therefore more useful for complicated practical workings, are spirit allies. These usually appear in the shapes of animals, but not always. Finding spirit allies is immeasurably easier than finding your HGA.

EXERCISE

Finding an Ally

Astral travel to the middleworld with the intention of finding a spirit ally. Take a sort of undirected walk, just exploring and sending out a quiet but persistent call for an ally. I like to beat a drum softly as I astral travel. My body can keep the rhythm without my mind's help, and I can perceive the beat as the call, traveling out to space in waves.

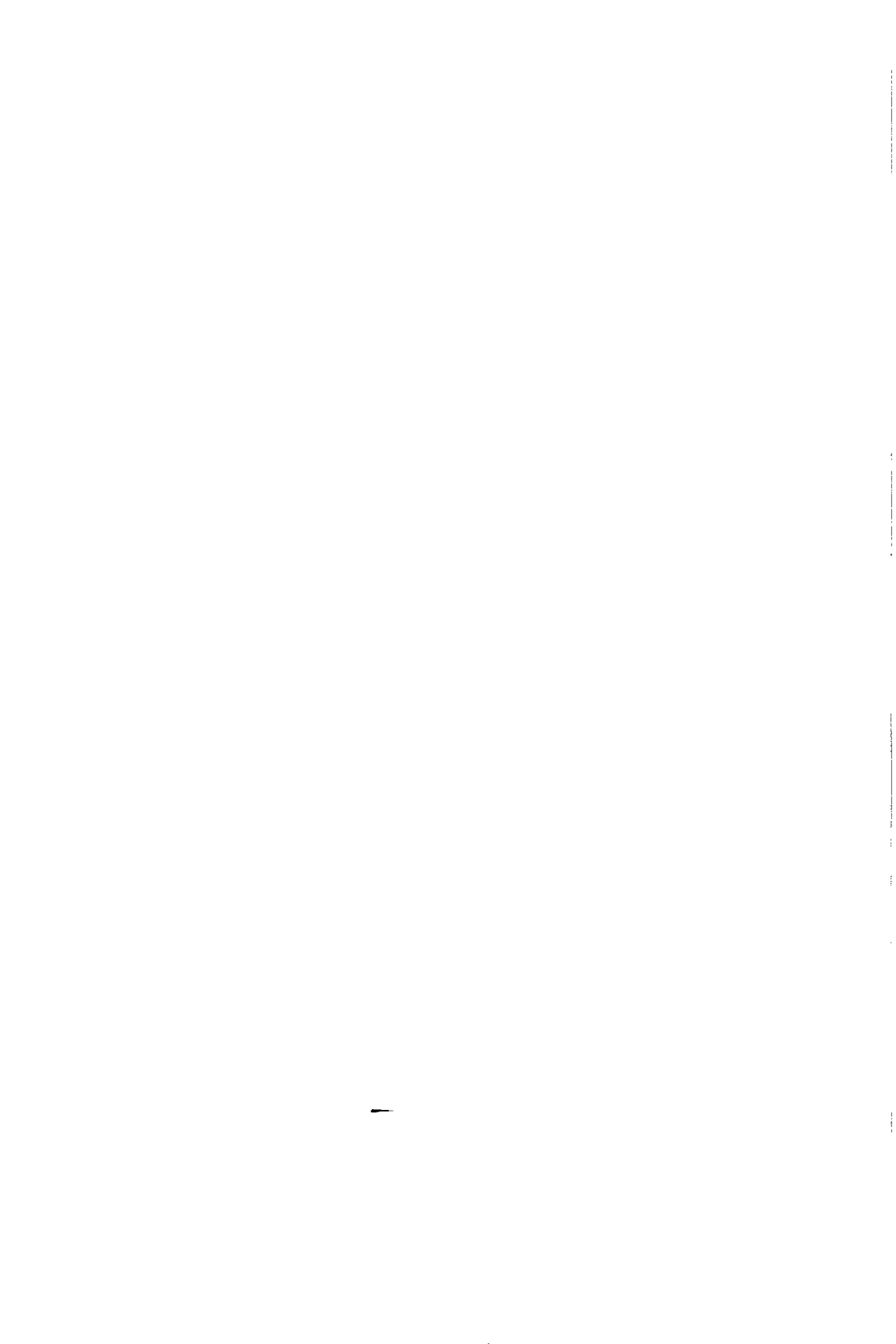
You will see animals and other beings in various milieus. When you see the same animal in several different milieus, address it by its species name: Eagle, Tiger, Deer, and so on. If it comes to you, ask if it wants to ally with you. You may want to introduce yourself, your work, and your interests. If the spirit agrees, it will “return” with you to your body. When you wish to communicate with it, you can use a tool of imagination and enter a light trance.

An ally is neither a slave nor a master. It may ask you to do things, but if you wish to, you can disagree. Similarly, it can disagree to do things for you. Banish any spirit who tries to make a bargain with a more firmly delineated direction of power, even if that proposed bargain seems to benefit you. Slaves are useless in magic, and masters are dangerous, especially to themselves.

Allies can act as intermediaries, since it’s usually easier to communicate with them than other spirits. They can also run errands, provide new ideas, and help protect you in dangerous situations. Sometimes they can even manifest physically. Don’t be surprised if your ally introduces you to others. Also, don’t be surprised if your ally manifests in a shape you don’t expect. People often go on an ally-scouting journey hoping for a wolf, but come back with a rabbit. A rabbit is *just* as powerful as a wolf. After all, a rabbit is a master of fertility, speed, and concealment.

• • •

Power, in the final analysis, is a matter of being powerful. This tautology might seem discouraging, but it really means that if one starts behaving like a powerful person, one will become a powerful person. And, contrary to the old saying, real power does not corrupt. In fact, it is only the truly powerful, those completely sure of themselves, who can afford to be kind. The frightened, the hurt, and the weak grasp for straws. They might rise to the head of a corporation, but their fear, pain, and uncertainty goad them to act, not like human beings, but like animals. The Golden Dawn described magic as a technology for becoming “more than human,” but really, it’s a technology for becoming completely human. Real power doesn’t corrupt. It teaches compassion; it teaches us to walk upright.



OCCULT NETWORKING

Anyone who studies the occult or magic will inevitably meet others who share similar interests. It used to be that meeting fellow occultists was difficult and unlikely, particularly for those in rural areas. But with the advent of the Internet, meeting fellow witches, wizards, occultists, and mages is not only easy, it's often too easy. We are no longer troubled with how to meet fellow occultists, but what to do when we do meet them—if meeting them is such a good idea after all.

There is something to be said for working alone and in secret. In my experience, it tends to focus one's attention, sharpen dedication, and allow exploration of new avenues of thought without the pollution of preconceptions. On the other hand, solitary mages can easily become discouraged. They can retrace ground that's been adequately covered before, waste time with fruitless experiments, and just simply become lonely. Eventually, even the most solitary of mages has to deal with others who know magic, or pretend to know magic. It just happens, despite the mage's preference. It behooves a mage, therefore, to understand and plan for such meetings. You have to know how to act, how to converse, and how to decide whether to continue a relationship with someone or end it. In many ways, dealing with other occultists is no different from dealing with anyone else who shares your interests; your behavior is circumscribed by the same social rules. But in dealing with occultists of various types, it's important to understand some rules of etiquette.

Magical Etiquette

Magical etiquette is based on the same principles as mundane etiquette: namely, treat others with respect and do not unduly inconvenience them. A postmodern mage may want to move between and among different occult groups—a Wiccan circle on Tuesday, a chaos mage kaffee klatsch on Wednesday, and a shamanic drumming group on Thursday. These etiquette guidelines will help navigate between groups without offending people:

- Do not touch another mage's magical tools without permission. Since it's not immediately obvious what is and is not a magical tool, even to magical sight, treat all the mage's possessions with a bit more respect than you might otherwise. Similarly, many mages do not like to be touched by strangers without permission—some may even have spirit allies who, like dogs, growl at perceived intrusion.
- On the other hand, if someone touches one of your magical tools without permission, you may politely remove the magical artifact from their reach and calmly explain that you prefer it not be touched. Do not, however, launch into mysterious diatribes about power and vibes. Other mages will not be impressed, and everyone else will simply think you are insane.
- If someone spouts what you perceive as nonsense, take the situation into account before you argue. There is no need to argue simply to support your own paradigms. If you feel that another person is spreading false or dangerous information, then you have the right to politely correct him or her. I once attended an hour-long lecture on the cabala by someone who had read a single book on the subject (a book I had also read). He literally covered it chapter by chapter, and misunderstood several of the fundamental points, and presented the information as his own without citing his sources to boot! I could have embarrassed him publicly, but as it would have served no purpose, so I remained silent. His errors were foolish, but not dangerous. Any in-depth examination of the cabala would reveal them almost immediately, so there was no need for me to show off.

- If you attend a public ritual, turn off your cellular phone and beeper. Make certain you know what will be expected of you. Once you are in a magical circle, it is very rude to step outside of that circle for any reason. If you really must step outside the circle, quietly ask someone—perhaps someone who is involved in the ritual, but not currently participating—to help you leave respectfully.
- Do not pretend to be an all-powerful mage. It reminds people of when they, too, behaved just as foolishly, and no one likes to be reminded of being a fool.
- Similarly, if someone behaves like a fool, remember how you behaved when you were young. Everyone, no matter how dignified, did at least one foolish thing in the past. For some, that may have been years ago. For me, it's usually a week ago.
- You are not obligated to be polite to those who use the occult as an excuse to bilk people out of their money. It is perfectly permissible to sell magical charms, spells, or healings for reasonable fees, but if you hear of people selling two-thousand-dollar curse-removing candles, they are conmen and deserve to be jailed.¹
- A common strategy among those who do not like your magical paradigm is to declare that you practice “evil” magic or that you are a “black” mage. I've been accused of this at least twice, and I know Wiccans, New Agers, and even a psychic healer who have been similarly attacked. You have a right to defend your reputation, of course, but consider the source. Follow the principle of least effort: unless attackers can harm your professional or personal relationships with their slander, there is little reason to fight them.
- Some people consider it rude for someone to do magic in their domicile. Ask permission before doing magic. Furthermore, if you do any magic, leave nothing behind, spiritually or physically.

1. Calculate the cost of materials, estimate the time needed to do the job, and determine your hourly fee by comparing it to those of other professionals. I usually set mine at around forty to fifty dollars an hour. Finally, total the expenses and time. Inform the person beforehand how much the job will cost. If, like me, you hate to say “no” and also hate to do magic for other people, increase the estimate by 100 or 200 percent to encourage people to look elsewhere. Never, ever tell someone they *need* work. In the unlikely event they do need a curse removed or something similar, offer to do such work gratis.

- If you are doing a public ritual, and a police officer asks you to stop, do so immediately. You can always redo the ritual after you've shown the officer your permits. It is much more difficult to redo the ritual in jail.
- Finally, if you've been invited to visit someone's group, unless they specifically request that you come as a guest speaker, do not dominate discussion or hold forth. A group to which I belonged had this experience with a fairly well-known occult figure from the Chicago area. He came and spoke at length, despite his not being on the agenda. Eventually, we asked him—less than politely—to please leave. The evening ended with shouting. His message, if he had one, was obviously lost in the rancor felt on both sides. If what you have to say is important, people will eventually ask you to say it. Until they do, do not force it on them.

Magical Groups

As my last example shows, people tend to be very defensive of their magical groups. Outsiders are often welcomed as visitors, but one should not attempt to take over. Magical groups have set routines that outsiders can unwittingly disrupt if they are not careful. It is important to know something of magical groups if you wish to involve yourself in occult networking. Eventually, you may receive a request to join a group, or you may ask to join of your own volition. Joining a magical group can be a good experience. You meet people, ideally, whose approach to magic is similar to yours, you receive training that you otherwise may not receive, and sometimes you even gain access to documents outsiders are not permitted to see. But it can also be a bad experience. When a person of weak character is in charge, a magical group can be anything from unpleasant to miserable.

I know of one small Wiccan coven whose high priestess used it as a dating service. Eventually, after engaging in short relationships with a number of members—including some who were already handfasted or married—she found herself in a three-person coven: her and the rest of her *ménage à trois*. I have no objection to alternative households, but I do disagree with using a coven or official title for ulterior motives. This woman obviously was not there to learn and teach witchcraft. I know of another magical

group whose leader committed suicide because he had convinced himself that he was a god. These horror stories, of course, are extreme. Most groups are perfectly respectable. If you make an informed selection, you can gain much from a magical group.

When investigating a magical group with the intention of joining, ask to interview a member. Ask what is required for initiation. They should at least be able to give you some idea of the work-load and requirements, if not details. Ask what activities are required for members; one group I became aware of was obviously just a front for sex with minors. If they indicate, or even hint, that you will be asked to participate in any activity you do not like, reject the group. Finally, ask for the member benefits to be explained. Some larger magical groups allow members to stay at various safe-houses when traveling; others provide you with access to large libraries or networking opportunities.

The most desirable group for you, of course, is a matter of personal taste. You may be attracted to a group that requires a year of service before you can be initiated, a yearly meeting in a large city, and monthly reports on magical research. I personally prefer networking groups with small requirements for membership and few demands of active members. The quality of membership tends to be fairly low, but the numbers of members are higher and their interests are more various. Again, it's a matter of personal preference. It might be wise to start with low-pressure groups and work your way up to more active, involved groups. I will now list some specific groups by category.

Asatru

Asatru groups (Old Norse for "true to the gods") are more religious than magical groups. They are certainly the best places to learn rune magic, specifically verbal rune magic, known as *galdr* (Old Norse for "incantation"). The Ring of Troth is one of the largest and best-known Asatru groups. It provides members with a number of resources as well as a complicated and in-depth training program. One must believe in the Norse gods to be a member. The training is clergy-training, not simply magical training. Beware of some magical groups under this category: a very small but fairly vocal number of them are racist. Most members, however, despise racism

of any type, holding that it runs counter to the Guest-Laws set up by Odin, the supreme god, himself.

Ceremonial Magic

Such groups study the cabala and are usually surrounded by Masonic symbolism, oaths, secrecy, and (occasionally) impressive resources. Ceremonial magic orders are what most people immediately imagine when they think of a magical group. By far the most famous of ceremonial magic orders is the Golden Dawn. The system of magic created by the GD, as it is often called, is almost omnipresent. One can even argue that the cabala, as we know it, was practically invented by the GD. Such magical groups usually require strict regimens of study and a lengthy training period, as well as a formal initiation. Springing out of the GD tradition are Thelemite groups who follow the religion created by Aleister Crowley. These include groups like the Ordo Templi Orientis and others. Some people consider these “black magic” groups. In my experience, they are no more evil than any other magical groups, although I find their magical system utterly uninteresting.

Chaos Magic

As a school of thought, chaos magic argues—as might be expected—a number of contradictory things. It argues, for example, that belief is a tool toward an end, and one can consciously change personal beliefs. Chaos magic arises out of the work of A. O. Spare and Peter Carroll, as well as Frater U:.D:. and Phil Hine. Its practice tends to be very free-form and eclectic, borrowing from ancient and modern sources. Sometimes it appears silly. At other times, it can be scary. I prefer chaos magical groups because they tend to require less from their members, and are open to new ideas. Others may find this unappealing. Peter Carroll’s group, Illuminates of Thanateros (IOT), is perhaps the most vibrant magical group still functioning, with chapters in the UK and US. They require a strict system of exercises for new members and frequent participation. Another magical group, arising out of a more-or-less friendly schism with the IOT, is the Autonomatrix (AX). The Autonomatrix has much less stringent membership requirements: one needs to be sponsored by a full member and design an initiation ritual. It is not necessary to be a member of the IOT to be a

member of the AX. The AX maintains a body of work, the *corpus fecundi*, consisting of experiments performed by its members. This corpus is not particularly well-maintained at the moment, and the group seems to be on hiatus.

New Age Groups

A wide range of groups arose out of the spiritism of the nineteenth century, the introduction of Eastern ideas into American culture in the twentieth century, and a millennial expectation for the beginning of an age of enlightenment and peace on Earth. Often New Age beliefs contain aspects of Christianity mixed with Hinduism, Buddhism, the occult, and New Thought. New Age people have a less than sterling reputation with many serious occultists, but like every kind of group, the members range from the utterly gullible and silly to the sophisticated and brilliant. There is no New Age doctrine, no central organization, and no fundamental belief system. Most New Age groups believe in reincarnation, spirits, the power of crystals and music, and a number of other ideas ranging from the bizarre to the suddenly prosaic. I once knew a whole group of New Age people who insisted they had alien implants in their brains and that the earth was hollow. Yet New Age groups, before medical science began to reluctantly admit it, have always argued that one's mental state influences one's health. New Age groups tend to be small, often designed as support groups or kaffe klatsches. They tend not to have initiation requirements or leaders, but may be hard to join since they tend to be private.

Satanists

Satanists come in three main flavors. The first two, the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set, are what one might call serious Satanists. The third consists mainly of disaffected teens and rock musicians. The Church of Satan and the Temple of Set apparently have had some differences in the past, but to an outsider they seem almost indistinguishable. The Church of Satan follows the teaching of founder, Anton LeVay, whose *Satanic Bible* outlines the beliefs of the Church. The Church believes in no supernatural entity named Satan; Satan, they say, is a metaphor for independence and the spirit of life in each of us. The urge for survival and pleasure is paramount. All teachings that urge we suppress our "will to power" are fascist

attempts to control the individual. Seen this way, the Church of Satan is a naïve mixture of Nietzsche and objectivism, with occasional flashes of pantheism. *The Satanic Bible* describes God as the impersonal force that holds the universe together, but claims that God does not care about humanity. The Temple of Set seems to believe in a literal entity, the Egyptian God of destruction, Set, who has been maligned as Satan.

These groups both have minimal membership requirements. Most people who belong to these groups are intelligent, well-spoken, and at least marginally capable of performing some kind of magic. On the other hand, the third type of Satanist, the disaffected teenager, rarely knows magic, owns but has not read the *Satanic Bible*, and clusters in groups rarely larger than three or four members. Sometimes this third type of Satanist will kill small animals as a “sacrifice.” Serious Satanists never perform sacrifices of this nature. There is a tendency among other magical groups to distance themselves from Satanists. Satanists make up such a small part of the entire occult community that this effort hardly seems necessary. If Satanists called themselves anything other than “Satanist,” they would no doubt be considered utterly innocuous. Their morality is no more evil than that of most stock brokers and their beliefs are hardly new or rare.

Wicca

The largest and most vocal body of occultists in the world are also religious. Wicca, founded in the middle of the twentieth century by Gerald Gardner, is the belief in the power of nature, represented by a Goddess of fertility and a God of the hunt.² Wicca, as part of its religious practice, employs magic. Although solitary Wiccans are common, a number of covens (as Wiccan groups are called) have sprung up all over the world. It is impossible to get an accurate count of covens; they are usually independent of central authority and are sometimes extremely fluid and informal. A

2. This is a good opportunity to correct a bit of misinformation. Often books will state that the word “wicca” comes from the Old English *wiccan*, meaning “to bend.” It does not. Nor does it come, etymologically, from words meaning “wicked” or “wise.” The earliest use of the word in print is 1000 CE, by Aelfric, as the compound word “wiccecraft.” It apparently always meant “a person who does magic,” and may be related to an Old Norse word, *viki*, which means simply “witch” or “seer.”

coven is usually headed by a high priestess and a high priest. Sometimes only a high priestess is in charge. In any event, she usually outranks the priest when both are present. For the most part, an initiate can expect to be trained for a year and a day before being allowed to join a coven. That training will involve religious and magical training. Usually, an initiate needs to be accepted by the whole coven in order to join. Covens traditionally do not allow themselves to exceed thirteen members. If they do get larger than thirteen, they either close themselves to new members or split into two different covens. Wiccan rituals can be breathtakingly beautiful. Even if you have no intention of joining a coven, the members may allow you to witness certain seasonal celebrations.

Miscellaneous

Many magical groups consist of a group of like-minded friends joining together, performing occasional magical operations, sharing knowledge and information, but having no charter, no initiation rituals, no leaders, and no agenda or mission statement. In many ways, this type of magical organization can do more for a young mage than hundreds of members, complex knowledge-lectures, or intricate rituals. These groups of friends often have no name, and do not even consider themselves a magical group. Sometimes, such a group can be dangerous: I've seen a group of deluded and mentally ill people feed each others' delusions. But for the most part, just as one's good friends will warn each other away from mundane danger, a group of diverse people who feel some real affection for each other will be safer than any hierarchical group.

EXERCISE

Finding a Magical Group

If you are interested in joining a magical group, both divination and introspection are in order. Create a partial list of groups you may wish to join. Perform a very short divination on each of them (refer back to page 169). Choose the three that seem most interesting in terms of what they offer and what the divination reveals, and write their names straight across the top of a sheet of paper. Now, under each organization name, write a list of at least twenty words that

describe what you find attractive about this group: “strict, organized, intelligent, old, respected . . .” and so on. When you finish, write another list of at least ten words that do not necessarily apply to a group on your list, but that describe your ideal magical group.

You may discover your list for an ideal group is longer than any of the lists describing the existing groups you’re interested in. If this happens, it may be an indication that you have chosen groups that do not adequately reflect your magical personality. It may also indicate that you should form your own working group. You can use your list of words to draft a mission statement and to advertise for members.

Group Dynamic

Both magical and mundane groups have a group dynamic that manifests itself in a number of noticeable magical ways. Each group has a center focus of more or less defined character. Eventually, this focus will become an egregore in its own right and can be dealt with like any other egregore or godform. But even if the group center is not yet well-defined enough to take on its own personality, a rudimentary communication can be set up with it.

EXERCISE

Communicating with a Group’s Center

Relax and become comfortable in your ritual space. If you like, have tools of imagination and authority nearby. Consider your group’s logo, name, symbol, or other identifying characteristics to create one cohesive symbol for the group. Just as you might astral travel through a symbol, move your consciousness through the group’s central symbol as if it were a doorway. You will open up into a symbolic realm that reflects the current group situation. You may be in a small room, a large wasteland, a rich forest—the possibilities are numberless. When you have adequately explored this realm, return

to ordinary consciousness, and, in writing, introspect on your experience. What might some of the symbols you encountered—a cactus, say, or a tiger—mean in relationship to the group? Is there a member who is prickly? A member who is subtle and predatory? Or do they represent your relationship to the group dynamic? This exercise can be enormously useful when you feel you are not fitting in, or are having difficulty with one or more members.

Just as each group has a center, the members of any group take on a number of archetypal roles. In some larger groups, these roles may be spread out among a number of members. Not every member will take on a role, but at least some of them will, particularly in very new and very old organizations. It seems that when the group egregore is just being born and coming to self-awareness, it requires certain social roles to be filled.

The King

The king, of course, could just as easily be the queen. This is a person who believes he or she is in charge of the group, whether or not this is true. They take charge, control meetings, organize events, and even though they can be infuriating to other members, they're often quite productive and necessary.

The Rebel

This is the person who directly confronts the king. He or she works to undermine the king's authority, both openly and covertly, and to establish either anarchy or an alternative king. The rebel is sometimes spread out over a large group of people, particularly in groups of some size. It is possible to institutionalize the rebel. In one group I belonged to, I was declared Official Opposition Leader simply to prevent this sort of rebel/king conflict from destroying the group.

The Fool

No one has any idea why the fool belongs to the group. He interrupts with inane jokes, he says things that he thinks are profound but are not, he distracts and discomfits guest speakers, and sometimes he completely destroys meetings. At the best of times, however, the fool, like the rebel, can be planned for and incorporated into the social structure. Every so often, if given the space to speak, the fool will say things that are remarkably intelligent and witty. If not given the space to speak, however, the fool will fall back on jokes, interruptions, and inappropriate observations.

The Negative Ground

The negative ground comes in two types. The first is an absolute disruptive influence. Not as occasionally clever as the fool nor as intentionally subversive as the rebel, the negative ground simply does not understand the purpose of the group and will not understand under any circumstances. They insult members and attack others—in other words, they refuse to play nice. The second type of negative ground is in a constant state of frustration. Instead of turning the frustration outward toward the group, they turn it inward and spend several hours after every meeting feeling depressed and disliked. Negative grounds are not entirely necessary; they're often a symptom of poor member selection or poor member preparation. In a healthy group, the negative ground will turn into an amicable rebel or a clever fool. In unhealthy groups, the negative ground will need to be forcibly removed. I have actually seen a negative ground become verbally abusive.

The Sage

An older group will, if lucky, see a sage arise. A sage is a member who is willing to share keen insight. In younger and smaller groups, the sage usually becomes either a king or a rebel. In older, more solid groups, the sage will consult with king, rebel, and fool to help negotiate a mutual consensus and respect.

These roles are different from—and more than—mere offices. An archetypal role is a participation in the group dynamic. Those who involuntarily take on their roles can assume them for good or ill, but one may choose to assume a particular role voluntarily. Planning for the arising of certain inevitable personalities in a magical group can both strengthen a group's sense of community and ensure its longterm survival. Moreover, just as a mage can communicate with the central egregore of a group, a mage can communicate with these archetypal roles as well, invoking them like god-forms. Every group, magical or mundane, accidental or deliberately designed, develops at least some of these roles. And understanding the roles can help a mage deal more efficiently with large numbers of people.

Anti-Occult Groups

Working within magical groups provides one set of problems and opportunities, but not every group is magical nor does everyone like magic. A number of religions forbid its practice, obliquely or directly, and members of those religions sometimes take it upon themselves to “protect” people from mages. If they do this legally, by talking and publishing books against magic, there is little problem. Besides, those who read such books are only those whose minds are already made up. But sometimes anti-magic fanatics take illegal measures. The fire-bombing of occult bookstores is not as common as it once was, fortunately, but it still occasionally happens. Similarly, but more subtly, occultists may be fired from their jobs, evicted from housing, or denied custody of children. All of these have occurred in the past ten years, sometimes even with legal sanction.

By far the easiest way to avoid such unpleasant circumstances is to avoid the people who instigate it. Do not publicly announce that you are a mage. Of course, some people will argue that they should not have to live in secrecy. This argument has merit. If you do, however, come out of the broom closet, expect some trouble in at least some quarters.

Even if you keep your interest in magic a secret, avoidance only works up to a certain level. At some point, you may face a blatant act of violence, discrimination, or other unpleasant circumstance. It is vital in such situations to have a lawyer. Often, you can successfully argue that your belief in magic is, like a religious belief, protected by the first amendment. Many

non-discrimination clauses, in those communities that have adopted them, contain “creed” as a protected class. Creed covers both religious and non-religious beliefs. The process of suing is unpleasant not just for the defendant, but for you, the plaintiff. Yet demanding your rights legally establishes a precedent that can help others. It could be construed as a moral obligation to sue those who attempt to discriminate against you simply because of your involvement with magic.

If you find yourself more immediately confronted, cast a non-threatening glamour and retreat to a public place. If you feel threatened—if, for example, you expect that some people are waiting outside for you—do not hesitate to call the police and ask for an escort. If you receive threatening letters or experience vandalism, preserve or document it and call the police immediately. Your landlord may wish to wash off discriminatory graffiti, reasonably enough, but request that this be done after police examine it. Most police will be solicitous of your welfare and—even if they think you are weird—will not want to see you victimized. In the rare instance that you find a police officer who scoffs or ignores your fears, ask politely to copy down his badge number. Go to the police station and report the incident to a superior.

Fortunately, such unpleasant events are rare and becoming rarer. Many people have, for example, heard of Wicca, and will not think it too odd that someone believes in magic. Furthermore, America is becoming steadily more progressive in terms of beliefs and lifestyles. Twenty years ago, violence against occultists was relatively common, particularly due to the absurd Satanic scare of the '80s. Today, many people will think you are strange if they find out about your interest in the occult . . . but many more will eagerly ask you to read their tarot cards!

Magical Attack

The dangers from those who hate mages are real and physical, but the dangers from those who *are* mages can be even more severe. That said, most instances of magical attack are, as previously mentioned, not serious. Most mages who have enough authority to accomplish a magical attack are unlikely to do so. Almost every new mage goes through a phase in

which he or she suspects magical attack; to a person already convinced that they are under attack, every ache and pain is simply proof of the evil eye. In reality, aches and pains are just part of being human, as is occasional bad luck. The best means to overcome such an attack is, simply, to act as if it's real but not particularly serious. Even if you are an unusually socially active and simultaneously offensive mage, you are unlikely to ever experience magical attack. I don't wish to give you the means to undertake it yourself. Instead, just in case you do offend someone who threatens to "curse" you, follow the following simple procedures to rob the curse of power.

EXERCISE

The Spirit Attack

Many mages who perform magical attack immediately do so by sending a spirit or servitor. *The Goetia* is full of spirits useful for causing untold problems to one's enemies. Unfortunately for the attacker, this is by far the easiest magical attack to thwart. A simple shield will prevent the spirit from being effective, and a habitual practice of a banishing ritual will scare the spirit away quite easily.

If you see a spirit, do not immediately assume it was sent from an enemy. Some spirits are curious and will seek out people who do magic simply to watch them. If they make you uneasy, ask them to leave, or complete a banishing ritual. Otherwise, they are unlikely to cause you any trouble.

The first evidence that you are under magical attack by means of spirits is a simultaneous inability to concentrate and a sense of being watched. Immediately upon sensing this, put up your shield. See if the feeling goes away or if your mind focuses more clearly. If it does, perform a banishing ritual (see Appendix A or use your favorite method). When the spirit is gone, you can ward your house by visualizing each wall covered with glowing bars. It may help to touch the walls and speak some words, such as "I ward this house against evil and hate; anyone that means me harm cannot enter." In fact, it's not an entirely bad idea to do this before trouble develops. At least it will scare away potential burglars and keep workmen honest.

EXERCISE

The Sending

The most amateurish of all magical attacks is the “sending.” This consists of delivering a magical object, often carved with symbols, or disgusting items. The idea is that, first, the receiver will be so terrified by this dramatic announcement of an enemy’s hate that sickness will set in. Second, the magical “charge” of the object will pass immediately onto the receiver and her or she will not be able to avoid the curse.

This silly, romantic notion has its origin, I suspect, in the American myth of the voodoo doll. In fact, one of the few “sendings” I’ve seen was, in fact, a voodoo doll, made quite cunningly out of clay, nailed to someone’s wall. That sending was certainly dramatic! But any general will tell you, a dramatic attack is rarely an effective attack. A sending directed at someone who does not know magic might be effective (although stupid—after all, it is illegal to threaten someone, even with bizarre symbols scratched on a chicken bone), but a sending directed toward a mage is worse than ineffective.

If you receive a sending, the first thing to do is resist the temptation of strong emotion—revulsion, hate, anger, or, above all, fear. Instead, laugh as loudly and as deeply as you can, then bring the sending into your working area. Banish thoroughly, clearing the area of all extraneous influences. You want to work in a magical, “clean room” for this. Take up your athame or some other device indicating your will (in a pinch, use your finger). Now, look at the sending with your imagination. You are looking for two connecting lines, cords, or cables. One of them will connect to you, usually in the solar plexus, but sometimes in other parts of the body. As close to your skin as comfortable, use the athame to cut through this cord. You may have to try several times, but eventually you will feel a sort of involuntary spasm or lurch. This lurch indicates that the cord has been cut. Once the cord is cut, there is little danger of the sending being recharged. The sending is now useless; you can throw

it away if you like, or keep it for evidence if the altercation is likely to go to court.

A skilled mage can use the other cord leading out of the sending to track down the attacking mage, or as a magical link to retaliate. I don't recommend retaliation in most cases; it's hardly worth the effort.

EXERCISE

The Direct Attack

The third most common type of attack consists of a deliberate and entirely magical exchange. The mage sends you hate and ill-will, infecting you with it. Untreated, particularly among those without magical training, such an attack can lead to any number of physical or mental disorders. Traditionally, this kind of attack is called the "evil eye," but one need not even see the person to attack.

If you feel you are under direct attack, there are several steps you can take to minimize your danger. First, gather the ill-will and hate through a gesture or ritual action. Traditionally, the triangle of manifestation is used: place your hands palms outward, fingers and thumbs touching, to form a triangle. In the center of the triangle, visualize a pentagram or other symbol of protection. Thrust out this gesture, visualizing the pentagram flying out and directly impacting your attacker.³ This will return the hate to its source. Immediately thereafter, strongly shield yourself. You may find it useful to visualize a mirror-like texture to your outer shields.

You will rarely need any of these counter-magic techniques. As I mentioned earlier, one of the few times I have knowingly been under psychic attack resulted in an extremely pleasant evening that I still remember fondly. Most mages who know enough to instigate a successful attack prefer to invest their energies in other directions. After all, which is better: making your enemies suffer or fulfilling your own desires? Do not worry too much about magical attack. It

3. This technique is borrowed, with modifications, from Melita Denning and Osborne Phillips, *Psychic Self-Defense and Well-Being*.

is not likely to happen in the first place—and if it does, you can easily deal with it.

Dealing with other magical people can be dangerous. Your belief in magic can stir up opposition outside your magical group, in the form of discrimination or prejudice, and your fellow mages might also take a notion to cause you harm. Ultimately, the dangers are no greater than those in joining a church group or a political movement. And the rewards, in terms of friendship, support, entertainment, information, and training, are much greater. Magical groups range from the most strictly structured hierarchies to the most freeform anarchic conglomerations. Anyone, of any temperament, can—with some searching and determination (and perhaps a talisman or two)—find a magical group or group of friends, and thus share in the wildly diverse and sometimes hilariously funny occult community.

GOING FURTHER, GOING BEYOND

By now it should be apparent that magic and science are separate disciplines. As already explained, magic is an art; science examines the quantifiable, not the aesthetic. Yet we can meaningfully speak of magical “research.” It differs from scientific research in at least two ways. Magical research does not necessarily apply to everyone. What I discover from a spirit may only have meaning for me; in the hands of someone else, someone who thinks in different symbols and is stimulated by different aesthetic experiences, it may be meaningless. My discovery might be valid and useful for many, but not for everyone. A scientist testing a hypothesis sets up an experiment that will work for everyone who sets it up the same way, and his or her results should apply to anyone investigating that same hypothesis. A mage trying to contact a god will set up a ritual based on his or her own personal, idiosyncratic understanding of the deity in question. A mage’s results—communication from the god—may only hold relevance to the mage and not to anyone else.

The Internet is by far the largest clearing-house of magical research. Without the quality-control of a formal journal, the information on the Internet varies in quality. Most magical research published on the Net consists of what I like to call “cream cheese sigils.” These are variations of techniques, so obvious and brainless and uncreative that they’re akin to

suggesting one should draw sigils on bagels with cream cheese instead of on paper with a pencil. In other words, they're no real advancement to the field of magic; yet among the "cream cheese sigil" techniques are occasional new ideas. Mining the Internet requires the ability to assess the exceptionally good ideas from the atrociously bad ones.

There are three questions a person can ask him- or herself in order to assess the quality and likely usefulness of a webpage. Answering these three questions can help you do this at a glance, saving time in the frantic culling process of surfing the Internet.

First: Is this webpage on its own domain, or is it part of a free service offering websites to users in return for advertising space? Not every free webpage service hosts garbage, nor is every free webpage useless, but someone who has placed a bit of money behind his or her site is likely to care more about its content than someone who just signed up for a free site. Exceptions to this rule are extremely plentiful, but it's a good initial guide.

Second: Who wrote this page, and what do I know about the author/designer? Authors of magical books often have their own webpages. The material on those pages is likely to be—assuming you like their books—more interesting to you than a person lacking credentials or familiarity. Of course, not everyone wants to—or can—write and publish a book. Perhaps you've seen this person's name in newsgroups or email lists. Or perhaps the site appears as a link on other sites; this acts as at least a sort of peer review, letting you know that other webmasters at least like their material.

Third: Does the site have a page with links to other resources you like? At times, this can be more valuable than the site itself. Even a bad page can have good links. But if a page on, say, the goddess Kali, links only to Wiccan webpages and not to any Hindu webpages, you can assume the person's research never got as far as secondary, let alone primary, sources. Sometimes you can judge a page in a matter of minutes by means of its links.

The Internet is hard to wade through efficiently. The quality of occult information in books and magazines tends to be more reliable. Of course, commercial concerns intrude, especially in regards to books, but good qual-

ity works can be produced, can be found, and can provide new techniques and experiences for a mage to ponder. It is wise for the savvy mage to make a list of his or her favorite books and their publishers. Publishing houses tend to publish similar books; therefore, you can trust particular publishers to provide books you find interesting. You can usually order a catalog of titles directly from a publisher.

Conducting Your Own Research

Occasionally, you cannot find the answers you want in any books. Or you find the answers, but they seem wrong, or not applicable to your experience. Sometimes if you want to know answers, you must find them for yourself. You can go in search of a teacher or guru, though there is no guarantee that you're going to find an expert who knows the specific answers you want. In some cases, the only option is to conduct an experiment, an act of magical research. As already discussed, magical research differs substantially from scientific research in a number of ways, namely: experimental magical results are not universal.

Magical research differs from scientific research in another way. The repetition of experiments with the same results is what establishes the validity of experimental findings in science. In magic, since the results of your research may apply to you alone, other people repeating your experiment may be of limited value. Introspection is more useful in determining the validity of a given experiment. If the mage introspects, particularly on paper, and comes up with some new insight, understanding, or realization, then the experiment—whether it achieved its stated goals or not—is at least a partial success. To this end, I recommend mages who wish to do research use a magical diary.

The magical diary is a custom honored, in at least some sense, more in the breach. Although I rarely meet a mage who does not recommend the use of a magical diary, I find few mages who use the diary habitually. Let me be the first to say: a magical diary for day-to-day rituals may be of limited value. Some people argue that you can find patterns—of mood, weather, astronomical phenomena, and so on—to increase one's personal power and success in ritual. But digging through magical diaries is usually an exercise (particularly if one keeps it daily) in mingled embarrassment,

frustration, and nitpicking. I know of few mages who comb their diaries for clues to their successes; mostly, they just search for excuses of failure. Certainly I am not against keeping some sort of written record; I myself have several different diaries and journals I write in habitually. But keeping a strictly magical diary of your daily rituals—every talisman for money and servitor for romance, every banishing ritual and tarot reading—often overwhelms the mage with so much information that nothing can be made of it later. On the other hand, keeping a magical diary for shorter periods of intense work can be extremely valuable. If embarking on a long magical project, you may wish to keep minute records so you can introspect more accurately later.

In Appendix B, I've included a reporting sheet. You can use this in any way you like. Feel free to make photocopies or punch holes in it to use in a three-hole binder. These report sheets are particularly useful for longrange workings, in which you're trying to ascertain something about the fundamental nature of reality, for instance, or astral visiting a series of symbolic realms.

Not everyone will be interested in conducting magical research, of course. Some people are happy with spells for money, love, success, and the like. But many of those attracted to the occult are attracted by the promise of enlightenment regarding ultimate reality. What's *behind* everything? Why am *I* looking out of these eyes and not someone else's? A mage often carries the questions most people leave behind as children, because they are dissatisfied at science's answers (or, in most cases, non-answers). Magic can provide some answers to these questions. But first, a mage must decide what specifically to research. And how to go about that research.

Research Needed

I'd have to be a megalomaniac to suggest I have all the questions, let alone all the answers. The ones that drive you might differ completely from the questions that drive me. I'm concerned with aesthetic matters and the experience of the numinous, but you might be interested in how physical matter interacts with the mind, something that doesn't interest me at all. By all means, follow your own genius—not mine! Here are some questions

that magic texts seem to skirt; you might consider investigating one or several of them, if they speak to you.

- **Issues of Self and Other:** Is the self a discrete entity? Is it the only thing that exists, or does it not exist at all? What happens when one wills deliberate fundamental changes in the self, such as acting like an animal or like someone else for a prolonged period?
- **Prophecy and Predestination:** Do we have the free will to deliberately counteract our foretelling? Or are we bound into action despite knowing the future? Moreover, how accurately can we know the future?
- **Space and Time:** Can a mage travel in space magically? In time? In what senses: mentally, physically, spiritually, metaphorically? Is telekinesis possible? Teleportation? Manifestation?
- **Mind and Personality:** Can a mage copy his or her personality to another willing person? Can a mage's mind be deliberately structured, perhaps to be more efficient? What models of cognition can a mage use to understand servitors and spirits?
- **Spirits:** What can a mage learn from interviewing spirits? What do spirits believe about mages? Do they have a culture, a society, a civilization? Or are they just parts of us?
- **Astral Realms:** Can a mage gain mastery of a symbol system by traveling to its symbolic realms? What is the deep structure of the astral plane? How does the astral plane interact with the physical plane?
- **Symbol Systems:** Is there a symbol system, theoretical or actual, that best reflects the deep structure of reality and our minds? Can we discover or construct such a symbol system?
- **Nature:** How can a mage help heal the earth's current problems? Can magic be used to prevent natural disasters, such as earthquakes, volcanoes, and storms?
- **Government:** Can or should a mage influence human government? How much effort does it take to move a group of people to a certain action? Is such an exploration ethical?

These are just some suggestions. Certainly not all of them are entirely safe. Remember, there may be some risk to any magical exploration. I urge caution if you intend to explore magical research. I also urge some ethical code, to prevent atrocities of magic. Would it be fair, for example, to influence an election? Not if one respected the democratic process. You should have clear ethical and moral philosophies established prior to influencing anything with magic.

Methods of Research

A magical experiment without a plan of research is just a half-hearted attempt at something. It might have some value, but it's just as likely to be a waste of your time. Without direction, you cannot be sure where you are going. With a plan, however, you can maximize the results of your magical experiment. A good research plan for magic is much like a research plan in any academic endeavor: you need to ask yourself three basic questions.

1. What is my *research question*? What question do I intend to answer by undertaking this experiment? *Example*: Let's say that I wish to explore the possibility of telekinesis. My research question is: Is telekinesis possible for me?
2. How can I most efficiently determine an answer to that question? What specific research *actions* shall I take? *Example*: I decide to construct a pendulum with a thread and a dot of clay, and hang it from a support on the other side of the room. Such a small pendulum is likely to move in random air current. I decide that, to make sure it is moving in accordance with my will, I will make it move in a clockwise circle. Furthermore, I will do so three separate times. That will prove to me that I can move objects with my will alone. It may take numerous efforts to move the pendulum; let's say that I will conduct this experiment for a few minutes daily, using a different method each week, for three months.
3. What *benefit* can I gain from this experiment? What will it teach me? Will I become aware of at least one answer to the question? *Example*: There is not much practical benefit in moving a pendulum, but

doing so will increase my confidence. Moreover, it will show that there can be a physical element to magic; it is not purely psychological.

With such research, it may be good to fill out a weekly progress report. Even daily reports could be helpful, especially if something important—such as success!—occurred. List methods in as much detail as possible. Say, for the first week, you grit your teeth and imagined pushing the object with your mind. Record the results. *Example:* It trembled a bit, probably due to random air currents.

At the end of each week, introspect on the progress reports, writing thoughts and talking back to them on paper:

Thought: “This experiment is a failure.”

Response: “I suspect gritting my teeth and wishing the object to move is not effective; I didn’t really think it would be. But I figured I’d get it out of the way.”

Thought: “If I can make the pendulum move, I’ll be the most powerful mage ever!”

Response: “Certainly, if power were measured by making clay dots move in a clockwise circle.”

Thought: “Next week I’ll try making a servitor.”

Do not censor thoughts, not even the silly ones. Simply respond to them until it seems a conclusion or a comfortable attitude is achieved. It’s possible that the research could continue for an entire three-month period with no success at all. If this happens, the only conclusion to be made is: the methods chosen for the three-month period were not successful. So, you know what not to do. If it seems fruitful to do so, the experiment and plan may even be somewhat modified. In any event, you will know—and have a record of—several ways you *cannot* manage the task at hand! That in itself is fairly valuable.

To conclude my discussion on magical research, do not get stuck in either a specific method or plan that seems to be going nowhere. If, in the third week of my example, I discover that it gives me grinding headaches to conduct this experiment, it would be foolish in the extreme to continue.

I could find some other way to conduct the experiment, one that did not have a deleterious effect. If I discovered that the first method of gritting my teeth and mentally pushing didn't work, then it would be silly to continue gritting my teeth.

It seems many mages do not conduct independent and original research, yet I suspect that most of them want to. Maybe the complexity of "research" intimidates them. In reality, though, research is no more complicated than any other creative act. I hope that the future sees creative, honest, careful experiments along not just the lines I've laid out here, but other lines as well. And I hope that the publication of these research experiments are disseminated more widely, among more people.

EXERCISE

Doing Original Research

Discover a question that you want answered. Perhaps you would like to search the astral plane for some knowledge, or try to accomplish something considered "impossible." In any event, design a simple program to find an answer to your research question, following the three-question method laid out earlier. What do you wish to discover? How will you discover it? What benefit will you gain from discovering this knowledge? I cannot force you to limit yourself to safe or ethically responsible research, but I urge you not to undertake anything unduly dangerous. Dangerous experiments can, in fact, cause longterm problems. Choose a question that will not require you to risk much or infringe on others' rights.

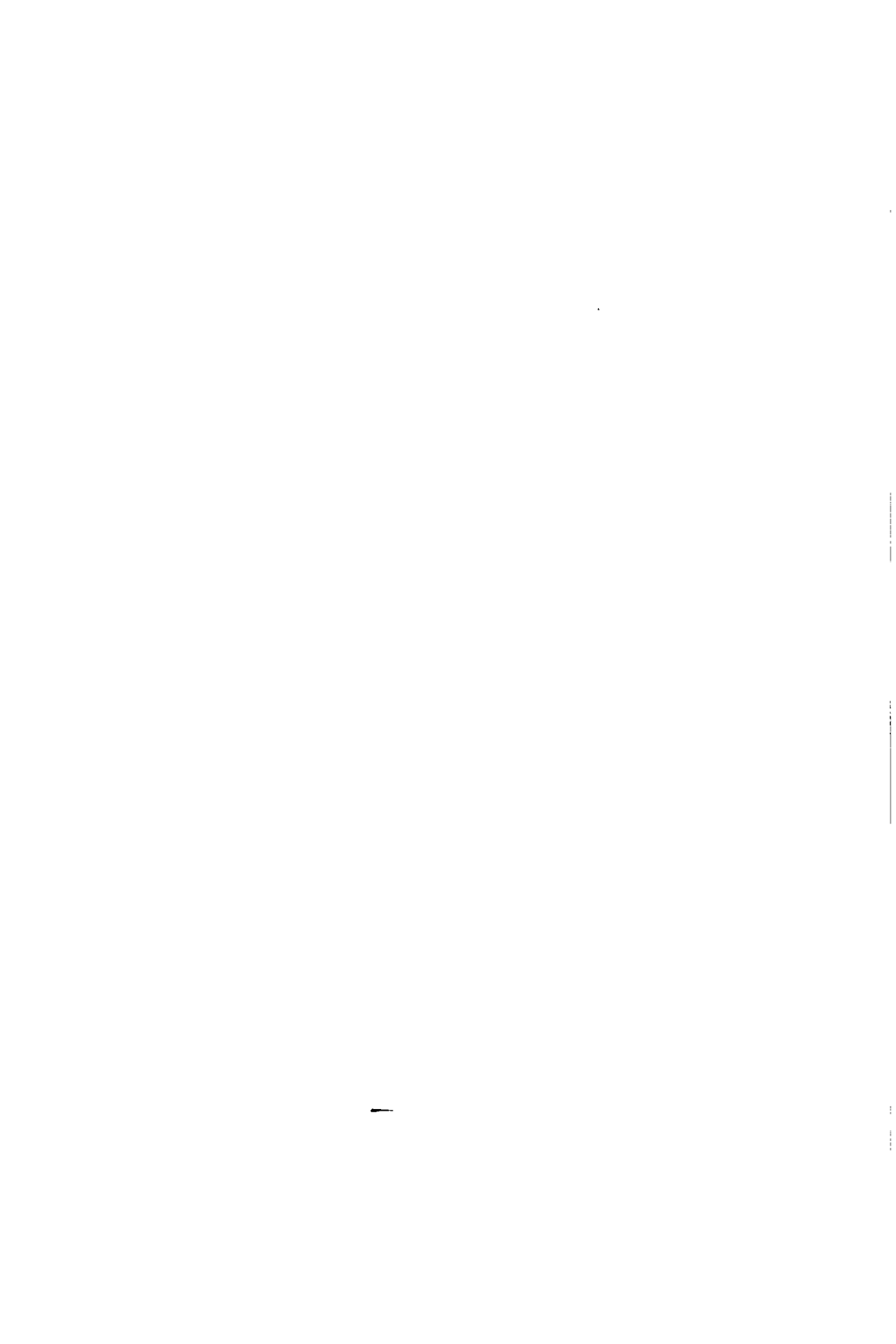
Once you have designed a plan, follow through with it, recording your results either on the form in Appendix B, or in a format of your own design. You can write up your results and attempt to submit them for publication—or self-publish them on the Internet. I would personally be very interested in your research, and would happily read and respond to any research or other correspondence addressed to me. You can reach me in care of my publisher (whose address is listed in the front of this book).

Learning More

No book on magic can cover everything, nor should it. Much of magic's value lies in the things a mage discovers on his or her own, by means of his or her own impetus. If I were to provide all the answers here, I would be doing my readers a great disservice, both by being dishonest and pretending to know all the answers, and by robbing them of the process of discovery and the thrill of exploration.

I urge those starting out in magic to read everything available, both in and out of your field. In many ways, magic is about making connections—a liberal arts education is worth more to a mage than to almost any other person. Ideally, a mage should know history, science, and arts, so that he or she can draw on all the experience of humanity. The bibliography of this book provides a good source of quality books. Mining those books' bibliographies, in turn, will expand a potential mage's reading list to any length he or she desires.

To those who have some experience with magic, I have another message. You may, like me, be frustrated by the lack of new works on magic. Although a few new paradigms, approaches, and works have come out in recent years, much of the literature available rehashes the workings of well-known techniques. Hopefully I have struck a blow against that tendency in this book by presenting the methods and techniques I use on a day-to-day basis and have refined through practical experimentation. I further hope other frustrated mages will conduct their own personal research, publicizing their techniques and results for all to use. Only in this way will the discipline and art of magic advance into the twenty-first century.





APPENDIX A

Magical Space and Banishing Rituals

Some mages argue that every magical act, whether ritual or not, needs to take place in a magical circle, a space reserved particularly for magic. Perhaps it is a good idea to be overly cautious and deliberate, by setting up a magical circle for every working, but often I do magic on the fly—on the streets or in a club. I can't very well make a magical circle there! Yet the skill involved in making a magical circle is useful. It teaches the mage to visualize (i.e., actively imagine) shapes, lines, diagrams, and geometric patterns in the air, and trains the mind to treat such visualizations as having real power.

Furthermore, it is important to banish both before and after a working. Some people refer to an initial banishing as “cleansing” and a closing banishing as “banishing,” but I use the terms interchangeably since the procedure is essentially the same. A banishing ritual consists of three parts: defining your authority by imagining yourself at the center of the universe; demanding all unwanted beings leave the area; and inviting in any positive beings or allies with whom you want to work. Banishing can also be a simple matter of commanding an area to be clean. Many chaos mages—independent mages working from self-made paradigms—banish by laughing hysterically. It is valuable to experiment. Banishing before a ritual is also known as “separating.” It is essential in creating the proper mindset: just as a chemist makes sure his or her beakers and flasks are

clean before using them, so the mage must make sure his or her mind and physical area of work (which are ultimately the same thing) are clean. A “clean” space settles the mind, for one thing, and helps eliminate non-physical distractions. By “clean” I mean both physically and, more importantly, mentally clean. The room should have no negative associations nor should it make you uneasy in any way. Are these rituals strictly necessary for every act? No, I don’t think so, though I prefer to work inside a circle. I use a circle whenever I have the time and space.

Magical Circle

An easy magical circle is sufficient for most magical needs. More complicated rituals satisfy the aesthetic requirement, not the technical requirement. This aesthetic requirement is indeed important, and the example below can be easily modified to provide the desired aesthetic complexity. The ritual is broken into two parts. The first part defines and creates the place of working. The second part of the ritual cleans the workspace, banishing all unwanted entities from that space.

EXERCISE

Making a Magical Circle

Stand facing east. You may prefer to stand behind an altar or some other specific place of working. Create an aesthetically pleasing environment.

Important note: You may, for a multitude of reasons, prefer a different direction for your starting point. This is fine. Remember, my example makes most sense to me, but your practice may be entirely different to resonate with your own personal intuition and experiences. Being in tune with your personal connections is most important: it is only you, the mage, who must be aesthetically empowered in a way that will be conducive to altering your reality and achieving your magical goals.

Although I use the system of directional correspondences I learned first, the one used by the Golden Dawn and other ceremonial magic groups founded on the same principles, I have met people who use other systems that work just as well for them. The

important thing is to have a reason behind your direction correspondences. The Golden Dawn faces east because it is the direction of the sun's rising, therefore symbolizing light. Others face north because of its magnetic associations. I know several people who, when working indoors, just name the nearest wall with a window "east" and treat it as such!

Begin controlled breathing, inhaling and exhaling deeper and deeper with each breath. Once a meditative rhythm is established, inhale and then exhale deeply as you visualize a beam of light coming down from an infinite height above, extending through your body, and reaching down to the center of the earth. With your next inhale and exhale, imagine another beam expanding outward, horizontally, from your heart (out the right and left sides of your body) to infinity. Now, as you inhale and exhale for a third time, let a final beam shoot forth from your heart ninety degrees from the other two, extending infinitely in front and behind you. This is called "grounding" and "centering." It establishes you as the center of the working place and symbolically assures yourself of your authority. If you do it properly, you should feel anchored in every direction and completely stable. You may embellish this operation with magical or religious names, tools, and so forth, if you prefer more complexity.

Now, extend either your athame or your finger and begin to draw a circle around the place of working, moving clockwise from the east to the south, west, and north, and finally ending again at the east. Imagine this circle pouring out of your finger like solid electric blue light. Some people embellish this stage with pentagrams or invocations at each of the quarters. This area is usually circular, but it need not be if you prefer to work in a magical square or polygon. Simply be aware of the personal aesthetic appeal of the shape you choose. A circle is often the most stable shape for many people—cultures all over the world have traditionally used the circle for religious, spiritual, and magical work. Still, experiment with your own variations.

EXERCISE

Cleaning the Work Space (Banishing)

When you finish the circle, return to the center, facing east again (or your preferred starting direction). Inhale deeply, visualizing white light pouring in from above to fill your body. Exhale strongly, seeing that light burst out of you like a nova, pushing all extraneous entities and influences out of the circle, purifying the area. You should feel a strong sense of purification if this is done properly, almost as if you just got out of a shower.

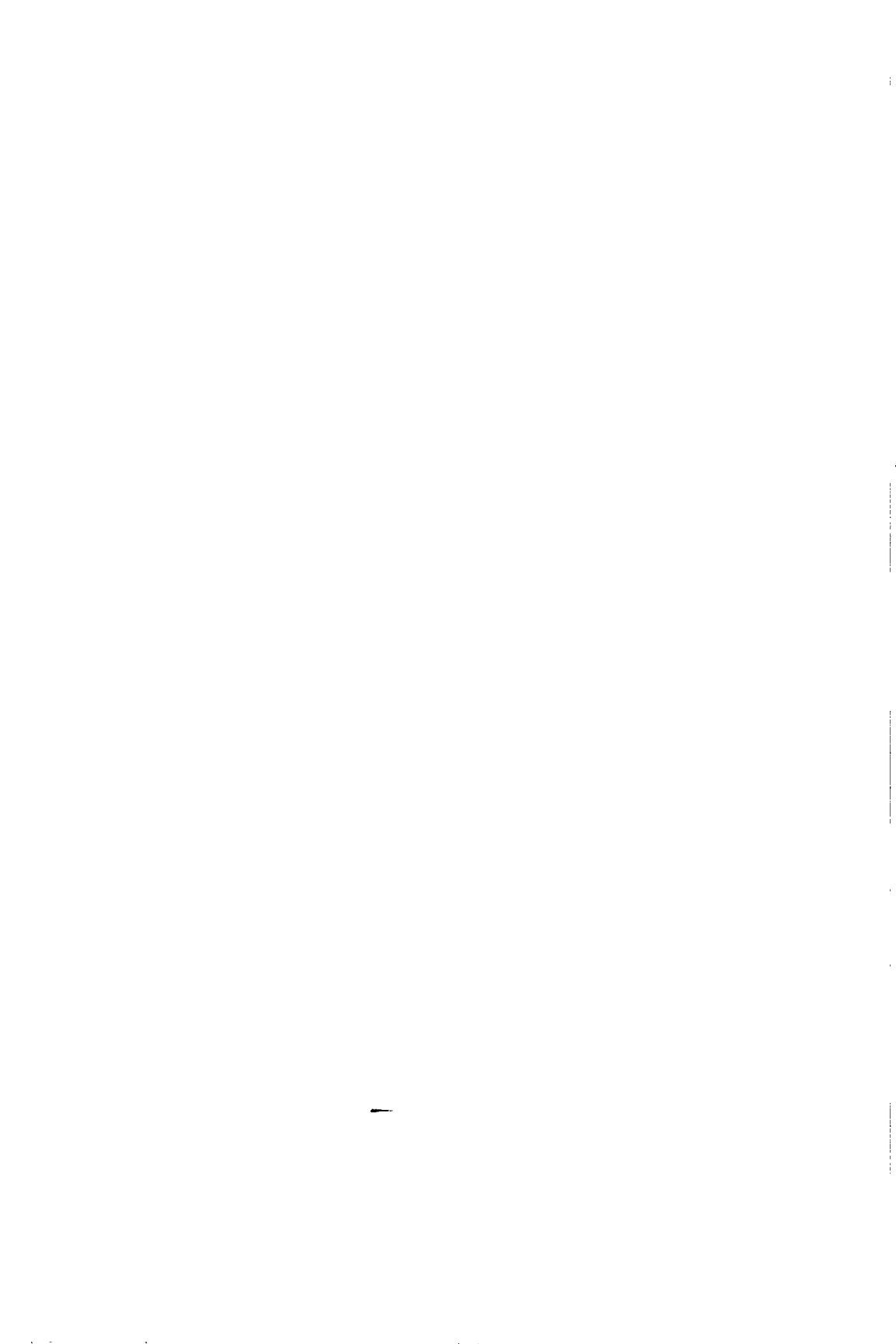
You may embellish this banishing procedure with some sort of magical utterance, if you like. I like to use *Hekas! Hekas! Este bebelloi!* It is Greek for “Go away! Go away! All you profane things!” Other people prefer to use a name of God, often referring to him simply as “He” in Hebrew, which is pronounced as Hu.¹ Still other people prefer silence. Some people like to use an abrupt shout or hysterical laughter. Many mages insist that hysterical laughter is all that is necessary for banishing.

Traditional methods of banishing, such as the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram (which has been so adequately reprinted that I don’t need to repeat it here) are variations on the basic skeleton I have just provided. Of course, these traditional rituals have aesthetic power, but just as the personal nature of aesthetics makes it unlikely that you will like all the songs I like, so it is unlikely that every mage on Earth will find Hebrew names evocative, or respond to the images of archangels.

I advocate an attitude of playful experimentation with this and every magical technique. I also advise a strong familiarity with at least one banishing ritual. Banishing can help you center your thoughts, concentrate when distracted, give you an island of calm in a stressful day, and increase your sense of personal authority. Incidentally, banishing can rid your environment of unwanted spirits and influences, even parts of yourself that you may be dubious of (such as negative emotions like anger or fear). Today, many mages

1. Original Hebrew spelling: איהו

and magical orders spend long periods of time working on banishing, before any other method is learned. The Golden Dawn, for example, expects you to spend up to a year or more just working on the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram, a simple five- or ten-minute ritual. Traditional magical orders spent just as much, if not more, time on the issue of banishing because it is, in fact, more important than almost any other technique. Practice it diligently.





APPENDIX B

Below is the reporting sheet you can use to record magical research. It includes the three main questions of magical research with spaces for your answers. There is also space to record date, time, and miscellaneous information you deem germane to the experiment, i.e., lunar phases, state of mind, or mood.

The space for “method” is where you can carefully outline the procedure you intend to use. You may record any steps you intend to take, such as astral travel to certain realms, or a ritual (which you should also keep a record of, in more detailed form), or an experiment (refer to the telekinesis example in chapter 11). There is also a space for you to record the results of these procedures.

After recording methods and results, you can write introspections on the experiment. Write thoughts that arise in the left column and respond to those thoughts in the right column. You may have to work down the page, recording thoughts arising in response to your responses. Write until you have no more thoughts, or until you achieve some realization or insight.

This form is not intended for day-to-day magical use. If you wish to keep such a diary, Donald Michael Kraig publishes a blank diary for that purpose, or you can make your own. My form is for recording magical results from specific experiments and longterm workings. In the case of a longterm working, use one sheet a day or per operation, dating each sheet separately.

———— *Reporting Sheet* ————

What is my *research question*?

What *action* will I undertake to answer that question?

What *benefits* do I expect from this experiment?

Date: Time:

Miscellaneous Information:

Method:

Results:

Introspection

Thought

Response



STUDY QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

I have designed these questions and activities not as tests of your memory, but as encouragement for further study and self-exploration. If working with this book in a reading or practice group, you may want to give each member some time to formulate his or her ideas about each question, then come together and share your responses in order to start a discussion. Alternately, if working alone, you may wish to use these questions as “magical diary starters” to help you formulate your ideas about magic.

Chapter One

1. What are your attitudes about magic? These may conflict or cover a wide range—if so, when do you feel one way about magic and when another?

2. What paradigm do you naturally fall back on when trying to explain or understand magical theory? Which is your least favorite? Try to reconceptualize some magical work or idea in several different paradigms. What did you find easy or difficult about this exercise?

3. Who were your childhood imaginary friends? If you were to invite them into your adult life now, what roles might they play?

4. Of the three skills, imagination, introspection, and authority, which do you excel at? If working in a group, identify each others' strengths as well. Do others' perceptions of your strengths differ from yours? How might you go about developing your weaker skills?

Chapter Two

1. What symbols do you feel drawn to? Are you drawn to any particular culture's magical or religious practices? How might you use their symbols?

2. If you were to create your own symbol system, what might it consist of? Draw up a plan of ten to fifteen symbols and try using them in magic.

3. In what ways might you use the elemental system to manifest a current desire? Can you construct a method of "firing" a sigil using the elemental symbol system?

Chapter Three

1. What traditional magical tools appeal to you? Which of them can you imagine yourself using and for what purposes?

2. What non-traditional magical tools might you construct? How might they be used?

3. What are some famous magical tools from folklore, mythology, and fiction? How might you use or modify these famous items (such as the Tolkien Ring of Power or the Excalibur sword) for your own purposes? How do you feel using these “fictional” items?

4. What is your position on “cultural imperialism,” the use of spiritual artifacts by someone not of that culture (for example, the use of the medicine bag by someone who is not Native American)? Why might certain groups be upset about these practices? How might you respectfully borrow from other cultures?

Chapter Four

1. Have you had any interactions with spirits? Share them with your group or write them down. Can you identify the class of spirit?

2. How might you incorporate servitors or egregores in your magical work?

3. The idea of “memes” (word-viruses that spread from human mind to human mind) has become popular in recent years. What do you think of this idea? What uses might the idea have in your life? How might the idea be abused? Is the idea itself a meme? If so, what does that mean?

Chapter Five

1. What foreign languages have you studied? What foreign languages appeal to you? What are some of the fears you have about studying a foreign language, and how might you respond to those fears?

2. If working in a group, you may be interested in a time-honored way of learning dead languages: the “reading group.” In this system, instead of classes, each participant works from the same text, translating a certain number of lines each week. Grammatical points are explained as they come up. Usually it helps to have someone more familiar with the language than the other participants, but a reading group can be successful even with complete “duffers.” Figuring out grammatical rules together can be much less frustrating than doing it on one’s own, and working with a text is much more fun than working through a grammar book.

3. Choose a magical concept and ask each person in your group to devise a “word of power” that represents that concept. Which methods did each of you use, and why? Do the words of power have anything in common? If working alone, you might come up with four or five words of power on your own, using different methods.

Chapter Six

1. Share your astral travel experiences with the group, or, if working alone, write them in your diary. What insights can you gain from these experiences?

2. What are some specific possible uses of remote viewing and astral travel in your personal magical system?

3. Create a system of three or four simple, graphical symbols. Travel into them one at a time, one per day, writing down experiences in your journal. An interesting exercise is for each person in a group to create a magical realm and compose a sigil for it; then have everyone pass the sigils around. In this exercise, each member travels to someone else's realm and reports back. Obviously, no one should create an unpleasant or dangerous realm for someone else to visit. Perhaps you will meet new spirits or gain new insights into the system you or others have created.

Chapter Seven

1. What are some techniques you might use in a public environment? Try them and report back to your diary, magical group, or both.

2. What sorts of traits should a good magical persona have?

3. What is the single greatest fear blocking your personal fulfillment? Introspect about it and replace it with a confident idea.

Chapter Eight

1. In a group, perform readings for each other using your preferred divination system or, alternately, one you've created yourself. How accurate are

those readings? Keep records and check them later. Alternately, do a series of readings for yourself, again, keeping records.

2. What practical uses can you find for divination that are not covered here?

3. Create your own tarot or rune spread by dividing up your life into parts that you find important. You might use the symbolic realms you used in chapter six. Perform a reading for yourself and for others using this system.

Chapter Nine

1. What are your strengths and weaknesses in magic? What do you do well, and what do you need to work on? How might you use your strengths to compensate for your weaknesses?

2. Brainstorm, either alone or in a group, on the idea of “power.” Try to identify all your concepts for power, whether you suspect they’re true or not. How might you construct a more useful model of power?

Chapter Ten

1. Brainstorm, alone or in a group, ways to defuse conflict with those who disapprove of magical practice.

2. If in a group, identify roles. This can be turned into a game in which people vote to give members titles, but please avoid accusations and attacks. Then, deliberately swap roles. Let the King pretend to be the Fool, and the Rebel pretend to be the King. Are these roles solid parts of a person's identity, or is swapping easier than you expected?

3. If in a group, how would you describe the egregore of your group? Together, give it a name and an image.

4. If you prefer to work alone, describe why, and then brainstorm advantages of working with a group. If you prefer to work with a group, describe why you prefer group work, and then brainstorm the advantages of working alone.

5. If you work alone and would like to work with a group, create a plan to find or create a group, using divination and introspection. Carry it out.

Chapter Eleven

1. What are some additional ways in which magical research differs from scientific research?

2. List some sources that are explicitly *not* magical, yet that have magical application. These might include poems, pieces of art that move you, or

books on philosophy or science that give you ideas. Use this list as a springboard to research.

3. If working in a group, consider putting together a periodic newsletter on magical research. This can be done inexpensively and can even be published on the Internet. What sorts of things would you include?

4. Write to the authors of your favorite magical books, introducing yourself and letting them know what you found particularly useful in their work. Tell them what you'd like to see in future works. I hope to hear from you soon!



GLOSSARY

Abbreviations:

LAT—Latin

HEB—Hebrew

GRE—Greek

CHI—Chinese (Mandarin)

ON—Old Norse

SUM—Sumerian

SAN—Sanskrit

?—Uncertain

Alphabet of Desire: A collection of sigils (q.v.) created to represent an individual mage's magical universe. See symbol system.

Alpha State: A state of consciousness in which the mind and body are relaxed and receptive to suggestion. See gnosis.

Amulet: See Talisman.

Anchor, Magical: A simple symbolic act or gesture that is linked to a mental state or spell. See mudra.

Astral Plane: The symbolic space that exists congruent with physical reality.

Astral Travel: Movement in the astral plane (q.v.).

Atavism: The magical practice, central to the magic of A. O. Spare, of identifying oneself with an animal form in order to gain insight and power.

Athame: GRE? (AH-tham-ey or AH-theym). A ritual knife used in Wicca and ceremonial magic, usually to create the magical circle.

Augury: Divination by omens (through analysis of bird flight, for example).

Banish: The practice of clearing the mind of distraction and the working area of unwanted entities before and after performing magic.

Barnum Statement: Named after entertainer P. T. Barnum. A statement that is true for almost every situation, e.g., “You are usually a considerate person, but sometimes are forgetful of other people’s needs.”

Burin: An archaic engraving tool. A burin was once a common magical instrument, but now has fallen out of favor.

Cabala: HEB. A system of Jewish mysticism based on the idea of successive emanations of deity. Versions of the cabala include Christian, pagan, and eclectic ideas.

Center of Perception: At any given moment, the center of awareness that creates a person’s sense of self.

Chakra: SAN (chak-rah). Translates as “wheel.” Wheels of energy said to lie along the spine or at other significant parts of the body—usually located at the crown of the head, third-eye, throat, heart, solar plexus, groin, and tailbone. Other systems have fewer or more chakras.

Clean: See Banish.

Channel: The means of communication between any two entities.

Chaos Magic: A system of magic that relies on, among other things, belief engineering and paradigm (q.v.) shifting.

Consecration: According to etymology of the word, the act of “making one with the sacred.”

Correspondences, Table of: A list of symbols that refer to other symbols in a given symbol system (q.v.). Often used in creation of rituals, a table of correspondences allows the mage to create a consistent symbolic environment for a given ritual goal.

Defixio: LAT (Deh-fix-ee-oh). Plural: defixiones. A spell performed by writing a letter to a deity, usually on a piece of lead, which is often thrown in a well or pit. Sometimes these spells are nailed shut or “fixed,” hence the name.

Egregore: GRE. A spiritual entity created by a large group, sometimes identified with a god.

Element: In magic, one of the four fundamental symbolic nodes of a common magical system. The traditional Western elements are water, air, earth, and fire. Often a fifth element is included, called spirit or quintessence.

Elemental: A spirit being composed of or imagined to dwell in a specific element (q.v.).

Enochian: A “language” and system of magic devised by Dr. John Dee in the sixteenth century through scrying (q.v.). It consists of a series of angelic names written on acrostic tablets and invoked by means of symbolic poems, called “keys.”

Evocation: The calling of a spirit (q.v.) outside of a mage’s sphere of sensation (q.v.). See invocation.

Far Seeing: The practice of detecting what is going on far from the mage through magical means. Involves increasing the sphere of sensation (q.v.).

Five Element Model: Including fire, water, air, earth, and spirit.

Glossalalia: GRE. Speaking “in tongues.” The production of “chaos language” (random words and phrases, seemingly in a foreign tongue).

Gnosis: GRE (Noh-sis). 1. Direct knowledge of reality. 2. An altered state of consciousness, which results in an intuitive understanding of spiritual truths.

Golden Dawn: The original Golden Dawn was founded in 1888, but suffered a schism in 1903, splitting into three different magical orders. At least one of them continues under the name "Golden Dawn." Other orders working under that name continue to exist, thanks to the work of Israel Regardie, who broke his oath after the order broke up and published a collection of their working papers in the endlessly fascinating *The Golden Dawn* (Llewellyn, 1986). The contemporary Golden Dawn has been reformed from the fragments of the original group's collapse.

Grounding: 1. The practice of imagining oneself connected to the earth, common in workings using the energy paradigm to prevent flightiness and burnout. 2. The creation of a physical object, work of art, or other manifestation of a spiritual experience.

Haruspicy: Divination through the entrails of slain animals (especially the liver). Said to be taught to the Romans by a small blue child named Tages that a farmer plowed up in his field.

Invocation: The calling of a spiritual entity into the mage's sphere of sensation (q.v.). See evocation.

Jung, Carl: A former student and rival of Freud, Jung developed a system of psychotherapy in the early twentieth century. An "archetype" in his system is any event that is so common as to be universal, such as the experience of having a mother. Jung postulated that we share our archetypes because of a collective unconscious, a sort of unconscious group mind. Although most contemporary psychologists no longer subscribe to his theories, they remain influential in fields such as literary criticism and art.

Kledon: GRE (kleh-don). Plural: *kleda*. Divination through chance overhearing of conversation. Sacred to Hermes.

Logos: GRE (LO-gus). Translates as "word." In Stoic philosophy, the underlying principle of order. In Christianity, Christ in His eternal pre-existent, pre-incarnation form.

Lots: Small tokens inscribed with symbols such as runes. They are thrown or drawn randomly to predict the future or to communicate with gods.

Me: SUM. (mey). A divine instruction, given in the form of Words of Power.

Meme: (meem). A word-virus. An idea with a life of its own, which spreads from mind to mind.

Mudra: SAN. A traditional gesture that is used in icons of the Hindu gods and in yoga to achieve various states of mind. See anchor, magical.

Mystes: GRE (moo-steys). A person who is about to be initiated.

Necromancy: GRE. The practice of communication with and divination by the dead.

Noise: Extraneous information that interferes with communication.

Ouranian-Barbaric: A magical jargon created by means of inspiration, random drawing of lots, and other means.

Out-of-Body Experience (OBE): The experience of sensing that one's center of perception (q.v.) has moved outside of the body, and is hovering near it. Often associated with near-death experiences; sometimes confused with astral travel (q.v.).

Paradigm: A set of usually unquestioned (often personal) assumptions about reality.

Qi Gong: CHI (chee goong). Translates as "breath work" or "energy work." The practice of Chinese medicine involving subtle energy flowing through the human body. Martial artists employing Qi Gong are rumored to have power over the physical world.

Reality: The total perceptions of any given consciousness.

Remote Viewing: The practice of perceiving, usually visually, a physical location distant from that of one's physical body. See also far seeing.

Rune: A character in one of several Germanic alphabets used for magic and divination.

Scry: To look into a shiny surface and perceive clairvoyant images. See shewstone and seer.

Seer: One who scries (q.v.) in a ritual or other magical operation. Alternately, a person with clairvoyant abilities.

Seidhr: ON (saith-r). The practice of Norse shamanism, usually by women, involving a shaking trance and communication with the gods and the dead.

Semiotics: The study of symbols (including the symbolic nature of words).

Semiotic Web: A metaphor for the way in which symbols (q.v.) refer to each other.

Servitor: LAT. Translates as “servant.” A spirit created for a specific purpose, usually by a single mage. See also *egregore*.

Shed: HEB. (plural—*shedim*, pronounced: shuh-deem). In the cabala, a demon or spirit created by God to work harm in the world.

Shewstone: (show-stone). A shiny object used for scrying (q.v.).

Sigil: LAT (sih-jill, sometimes sih-gill). An abstract graphic representation of a desire. See *symbol*.

Signature: In magic, the outward symbolic representation of an object’s interior magical purpose. A red stone, for example, might be said to have a “fire” signature because of its color.

Solar Plexus: A cluster of nerves right above your navel. When we feel sick because of nerves, we’re often feeling impulses originating in our solar plexus. Strong emotions are often felt in the solar plexus as well as the brain.

Sortilege: Divination through analysis of the random fall of tokens or cards, or the drawing of lots. For example, the reading of runes (q.v.) is a form of sortilege.

Sphere of Sensation: The range of labels one applies to oneself. When one adds more labels to the self, accepting more possibilities for personal growth, it is said that the sphere of sensation increases.

Spirit: A being composed of pure meaning; a collection of symbols (q.v.) with self-awareness.

Stele: GRE (steh-lee). 1. A monument representing some historically significant event or the exploits of a hero or king. 2. In magic, a symbol of the mage's self-concept.

Symbol: Anything that stands for something else. A sigil (q.v.) is a specific type of symbol.

Symbol System: Any collection of symbols that relate to each other in a consistent way.

Table of Correspondences: See correspondences, table of.

Talisman: A small object designed to be carried in order to manifest a specific purpose.

Tarot: (ta-ro). A deck of 78 cards used in divination and to play an ancient card game.

Tattva: SAN (tut-vah). One of five symbols associated with the five elements (q.v.).

Telesma: GRE (tel-ez-mah). An object designed to become a talisman (q.v.); a talisman before being consecrated (q.v.).

Temurah: HEB. In the cabala (q.v.), a means of discovering hidden meanings in Hebrew words by use of a substitution cipher.

Words of Power: Any word assumed to contain power in itself. Sometimes these words are described as formulas containing hidden meaning, such as the word of power AGLA being an abbreviation of "ata givur l'olam adonai" (thou art great forever, my lord). Other words of power contain no information, just sound. These are sometimes called barbarous words of invocation.

Wyrd: ON. Fate.

Yi Qing (often *I Ching*): CHI (yee ching). Translates as "Book of Changes." A divinatory book composed of 64 hexagrams, each composed of two trigrams of three lines each. Each hexagram has an associated image

and text. Which hexagram bears on any given issue is usually determined by the systematic division and counting of yarrow stalks, or the throwing of coins.

Zazen: Japanese for "sitting meditation." A practice of sitting meditation that involves following the breath and stilling the mind. Used in zen yoga practice.

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A very useful system of divination, presented in a relatively easy-to-understand fashion. Although the system of hexagrams used by the *I Ching* has both magical and divinatory uses, only the divinatory ones are touched on here.

Websites

<http://philoctetes.free.fr/heraclite.pdf>

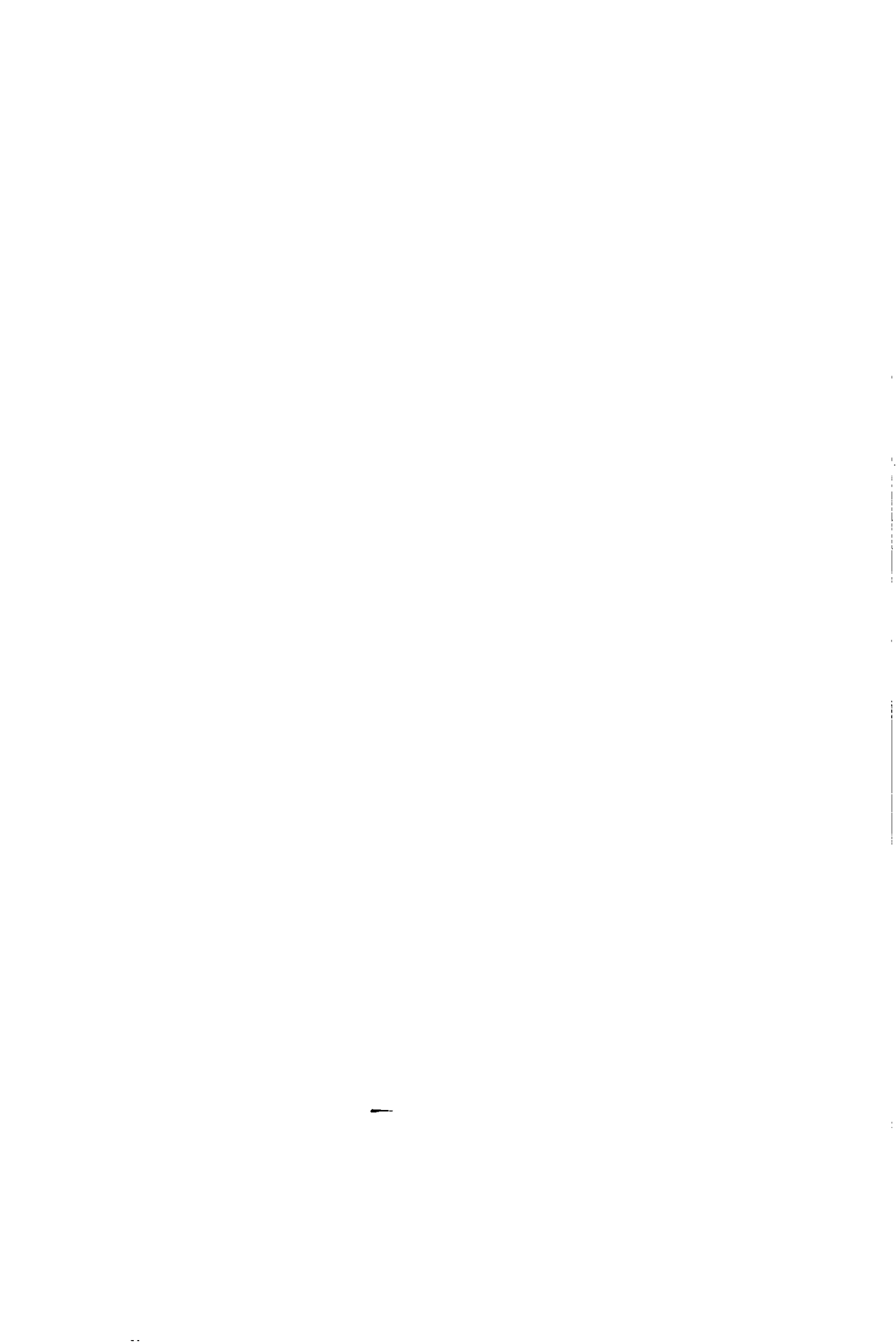
A translation of *Heracitus* online.

www.perseus.tufts.edu

A large quantity of ancient texts in both translation and original languages.

www.forteantimes.com

The homepage of the "Fortean Times," a journal containing articles on unexplained phenomena.



"If everything we believe about the world is an arbitrary, socially constructed symbol, if nothing inherently means anything, if reality itself—as many postmodernists claim—is just a collection of such arbitrary symbols, then magic becomes not only possible but inevitable. . . . If reality is symbolic, reality is mutable."

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Patrick Dunn (Illinois) has studied several systems of magic, including runes, the cabala, and shamanism. After earning a master's degree, he synthesized his knowledge of linguistics and magic studies. Currently he is a college instructor.

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