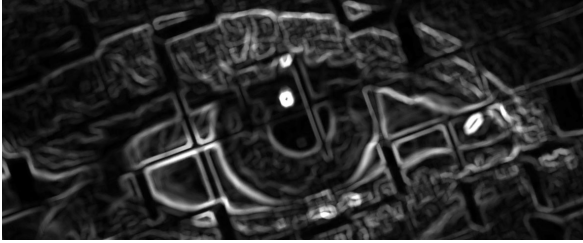


THE GIFTED

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.
- William Shakespeare



THE EDGE AND BEYOND

*If we wish to understand the nature of reality,
we have an inner hidden advantage:
we are ourselves a little portion of the universe
and so carry the answer within us.*
- Jacques Boivin

To fully grasp what one of the Gifted really is, it's helpful to take a look at what he isn't. First, we have the broad swath of humanity. Those who do not know about the supernatural, the Gifted, or magic are called normals or mundanes. Neither of these slang terms are very positive, but they've been called worse. Mundanes make up a vast majority of the human population.

A narrower slice of humanity are what some call Edgers. These are people who know of the existence of magic and can even perform some of the easier Rituals. These people are special. They only have access to the normal human limit of three permanent Focus, but Edgers will see and remember the supernatural when they encounter it. Because of this, Edgers regularly are found in the world as shamans, priests, visionaries, explorers, and occultists. They don't naturally shy away from the unknown, like the normals do. This also frequently places Edgers inside of Gifted society – they are much like the Gifted, except for the lower Focus and the (therefore) lack of Special Abilities.

The Gifted are those who are beyond the metaphysical “edge” that the Edgers live on. On a very deep level Gifted have accepted the higher truths of reality into themselves; it is this acceptance that makes them what they are. The Gifted take reality's true nature to heart. The more they accept, the more powerful they become. And in doing so, Gifted move further away from where they came from and further toward becoming... something else entirely.

BECOMING GIFTED

*It is sometimes an appropriate response to
reality to go insane.*
- Philip K. Dick

There is no “process” to becoming Gifted. It is a state of being, not the result of a twelve step program. There are an untold number of paths to this life. There is only one real commonality – the time is a traumatic one. Some refer to this place in a Gifted's life as the Becoming, or the Changing Time. Others refer to the occultist's Initiation. Whatever the name, this shift is the result of an acceptance of the Cosmic Truth, generally following a perception-altering, life-shattering event.

It takes a lot to shake a modern person down to his very foundations. For some, this happens around puberty, when the scope and depth of the adult world suddenly looms. There have been recorded instances of Gifted finding themselves while losing their virginity, using psychedelic drugs for the first time, or while reeling shell shocked on the battlefield. Some occur in the wake of natural disasters, even, or during riots, raves, or in the aftermath of reality twisting events called Nightmare Storms.

Whatever the reason for it, a newly Gifted person usually discovers true cosmic meaning on their own. Many Factions try to watch for potential new initiates where the above things occur, but most Gifted have to come to grips with newfound insights, awareness, and ability by themselves. It's a frightening, exciting, wondrous time. More than a few newly Gifted have ended up in mental institutions.

Not all Gifted get that way because of disaster, though. There are some who seem naturally oriented to the state, and merely needed their early years to fine-tune their personal metaphysics. These Gifted “found themselves” during profoundly peaceful moments in the countryside, watching their children play, or during deeply restful sleep.

An important note is that, because Gifted effectively occur “naturally,” a grand majority are normal people who suddenly find themselves changed. From there they explore on their own until they encounter some aspect of Gifted society, either because they seek a particular Faction out, or because they get recruited into one. Being in a Faction is a matter of personal choice, like being a member of a secret fraternity, political conspiracy, business league, or select social scene.



YOU HAVE TO FOCUS

Focus is one of the most defining characteristics of the Gifted. It might as well be called soul, well of belief, mana, insight, gnosis, or pool of enlightenment. Focus exists in two ways. First, it is a permanent stat that equates with a character's level of universal, cosmic understanding of reality. Secondly, it is the size of the temporary Focus pool a character can hold at one time. An old mystic once compared Focus to both the size of a cup and the amount of water that could fit into it.

Human beings have Focus as well – it's just that they don't have as high of a potential as the Gifted do. In game terms again, it is the attainment of the fourth permanent Focus point that defines the Gifted, where Edgers and Mundanes are stuck with three or less. Whenever a character does something supernatural, he has to spend a requisite amount of temporary Focus first. If he doesn't have enough Focus saved up, he can't exert the proper amount of push on reality to get it to do what he wants.

Spending Focus

When a Gifted spends Focus, it is understood that he is only expending the temporary Focus points from the "pool" he has at the time. These are spent to activate Special Abilities, empower Ritual Magic, or to direct his will into a single, mundane action. If the Gifted has too few points available, he can't do these things. A Gifted with an empty Focus "pool" is not physically, mentally, or emotionally weakened, though many claim to feel such just the same (there are no in-game penalties for being out of Focus, but many players feel helpless in this condition).

Regaining Focus

Gifted regain temporary Focus points all the time. So much so, in fact, that many take constant Focus replenishment for granted. It's not quite that simple or easy, but Gifted can regularly regain three or more points per day without much effort, even outside of places heavy with supernatural energies (called Vales).

Gifted replenish their Focus by performing actions or enjoying scenes that reinforce themselves and their place in the world. In short, any character who is enjoying himself, relaxing,

So Focus energy exists in rocks, trees, cats and dogs, and even in electricity?

Yes. But only a very, very small amount – so little, in fact, that most supernatural senses can't see it. Focus is in lowest concentrations in "dumb" energy, like heat or electrical energy. There is more of it holding together inert matter like rocks, and a good deal more of it in simple living things like trees. Compared to trees, animals are massive containers of Focus, though a cat still only has as much Focus as is required to hold its cells together; there isn't any "extra" like that held in human or Gifted Focus pools. A rough comparison is that one "point" of temporary Focus is equal to the Focus energy required to maintain the bodies of a hundred cats.

But my cat has feelings! My dog dreams! And dolphins and chimpanzees are really close to being as smart as humans!

Having Focus isn't about emotional capability, attainment of dream-states, or intelligence. Human beings are metaphysically different than these in that they have the capacity to not only believe, but to share belief with one another on a cosmic level. Reality is what it is because humans believe it to be so.

or doing anything that defines him as a character (like a musician performing music) is going to be getting their Focus recharged.

Focus - What is it?

Even the most advanced occultists and philosophers of Gifted society argue about the true definition of what this energy is. They know that the energy has no material weight or measurement, but can't doubt its presence. It is a cosmic force tied to higher reality – this is considered a given. And studies indicate that when the Gifted replenish their Focus reserves, this energy is not coming from Vales directly, nor is it being generated spontaneously within the Gifted. It's coming from somewhere.

The best explanations center on the theory that Focus is a universal, cosmic energy tied into the very nature of what reality is and how it works. Everything – mundane matter, both living and unliving, and all forms of physical energy – is made up of Focus. But this universal mana only collects in excess (and in vast amounts of excess) in conscious, self aware beings.

MORE HUMAN THAN HUMAN

*In regione caecorum rex est luscus
(In the country of the blind the one-eyed man is king)
- Erasmus*

The Gifted aren't just humans with super powers. Gifted can reshape reality itself by the exertion of will and the infusement of this will with belief, or Focus. The more permanent Focus a Gifted has attained, the farther they have gone from humanity. It's said that Gifted who have great amounts of Focus start to rise above the physical world – that they cease to be human in any real sense and become abstract symbols or living archetypes.

The catch here is that with more power over reality, Gifted lose their connection with those things that make power worth having. The mundane world tends to forget about the most powerful Gifted altogether, and this includes non-Edger family and friends. Even physical records have been reported to shift and erase the existence of these “archetype” Gifted, leaving information only in records of a mystical nature. Such power, then, comes with a price. It is, however, a great deal of power.

The defining strengths of the Gifted are their Special Abilities. Again, Gifted society has many names for what these are called. A Gifted can demand that reality consider him faster, stronger, or even smarter – and make it so. These Special Abilities can even do things that force other beings to subvert themselves to the Gifted's will, with feats like mind reading and emotional control. The most powerful Gifted are akin to gods of the ancient Greeks. In fact, some of those gods probably were members of the Gifted, once upon a time.

MAGIC IS REAL

*Above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you
because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places.
Those who don't believe in magic will never find it.
- Roald Dahl*

The lives of the Gifted are filled with surreal, supernatural, and reality-twisting experiences. This is to say they are intense. Meaning – deep, often disturbing meaning – is part and parcel of what the Gifted struggle to deal with on a regular basis. A good deal of this struggle's difficulty stems from the cosmic nature of the subject matter. For a being that once knew life as a normal person, dealing with ghosts, spirits, parallel realms, invisible energy, and abstract, esoteric mysteries is quite a challenge.

Still, through all of the internal strife and external challenge, the Gifted live lives that are astoundingly beautiful. They can perceive the universe at its hyper-real roots. They can visit Planes of existence that mere mortals can't even comprehend. They can do things that the mudanes can only imagine. The lives of the Gifted are magical.

Special Abilities

*The most powerful weapon on earth
is the human soul on fire.
- Ferdinand Foch*

Through their connection to higher cosmic truths, Gifted can gain access to methods of bending reality to their will. These are the Gifted's Special Abilities. They range in power from subtle to outlandish, and can affect everything from Focus energy and fate to psychic consciousness, or even physical reality. Each Special Ability is a unique trick that the Gifted has learned to do – it is another button to push that can affect the machine of the cosmos.

One Gifted urbanite described Special Abilities this way. “Well, it's not like I'm changing anything that's real, as in physical. Like this brick. I can pick it up, it interacts with gravity and mass and everything – that's real. Now, when I change this brick into silly putty, I'm not changing the brick. I'm grabbing ahold of reality's core programming and rewriting it. I ignore the ‘brickness’ of the brick. I go right for what makes the brick have ‘brickness’ in the first place, and that's the higher reality. And that's the way everything we do works. Doesn't matter if you're making your body run faster or you're making a telepathic link to someone. It has nothing to do with muscle and bone, or neurobiology – and it has everything to do with what runs beneath the skin, or between the minds.”

The whole of Special Abilities is divided into categories of type, and each type has a Skill associated with it. Each time a character wants to use a Special Ability, they will be rolling their Skill that governs that Special Ability type. Also, each Special Ability has a Focus requirement. This is the minimum level of permanent Focus the Gifted must have in order to learn that Special Ability.

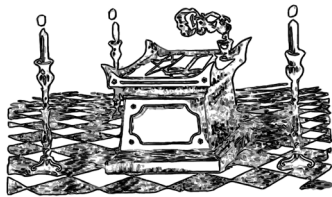
Of course, the Gifted themselves rarely, if ever, think about themselves this way. Instead, Gifted spend time considering their work on achieving transcendence, enlightenment, or the accumulation of gnosis. They know that the further their acceptance of higher universal truth, the more powerful their command over the form and color of reality. Also, Gifted will speak of the types of “influences” they have over different parts of reality – and how they've learned to use an area of influence more accurately or powerfully over time.



Ritual Magic

*Every house a temple, every heart an altar,
every human being a priest.*
- Moritz Lazarus

If Special Abilities are the “inner” mysticism of the world, where the power to perform miracles comes from within, Ritual Magic is the “outer” mysticism. All of the strength of Ritual Magic comes from its compliance with what consensual reality thinks is possible. Human beings still believe in certain forms of magic, in their heart of hearts. This belief is what the modern priest or occultist builds and channels, through ritualized forms, into repeatable effects in the world. If human beings didn’t believe in magic, none of this would be possible.



This is due to the consensual nature of reality. If enough people believe in something, that something is lent the power to exist in the literal sense. Different forms of religion and esoteric philosophy, then, provide the possibility for magic effects. These effects are merely the product of the will of the magician and the belief structure he interacts with, through the method of ritual.

Consider the Hermetic magician. The belief structures that support this type of magic are laid well and deep in Western thought, even to the point of invisibility-through-prevalence in the modern world. Everyone has some idea of how a crystal ball, magic wand, and Tarot cards work, even those who only think these things exist in “the movies.” This is a passive, non-critical sort of acceptance, but is acceptance nonetheless. Beneath this, of course, is the “hardcore” belief built up in the collective consciousness by the ardent followers of Hermetic thought.

When the Hermetic magician works a ritual, he follows the ways of his chosen art. Each belief structure has its own inherent “rules” that govern its active principles. By following the rules that govern the ritual (the words needed to be spoken, the shape of mystical symbols, etc.), the magician is participating directly with the structure that contains Hermetic belief. With the ritual properly followed, the raw belief within the belief-structure is unlocked and performs on reality – in this case, by creating the magical effect.

It all works the same way, whether the Ritual Magic practitioner is a Pure Chaos street mage or a Catholic priest. The existing belief within consensual reality is what makes the ritual forms, and by following the ritual forms the unleashing of magic into reality is achieved.

The Gifted do not hold a monopoly on the performance of Ritual Magic. Edgers can do it as well, though they have difficulty with more intense rituals (and their higher Focus cost to the practitioner). By and large, this works out fine for the Edger practitioner, who likely only has pressing need for the most common of Rituals.

Ritual Magic can be found anywhere where reliance on “faith, belief, and conviction of thought” are the most important aspects of a given snapshot of society. This means that many of the world’s priests, rabbis, monks, shamans, holy men, and even experimental scientists are really Edgers, and that many of the things they do can be defined as Rituals.

Science? What’s that got to do with the occult?

Do some research. You’d be surprised. But in this context, the fact people say they believe in theories (as opposed to knowing theories) suggests that science, especially in mostly uncharted areas, relies more on ritualized actions based on consensual possibility than it does on shoving around matter, atoms, and chemical interaction in a sterile, fact-based way. Scicery is the name of the School for this form of ritualized thought, and it’s within the context of the Chaos Style of Ritual Magic.

The Shroud

Few people have the imagination for reality.
- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Most of humanity has no idea that magic actually exists, or that reality can be bent and reshaped, or that any of what the Gifted encounter on a daily basis is even in the realm of possibility. The Gifted explain the mundane’s inability to perceive and understand the higher truths as being a result of the Shroud. The Shroud is simply the dogged disbelief most normal people have in anything relating to the supernatural. This disbelief is more than just the refusal to believe, however – the Shroud is an actualized force in the cosmos that plays a role in keeping a fluid consensual reality stable enough to exist in the first place.

When faced with facts they don’t want to accept, most people fall into denial. When faced with metaphysical truths they can’t understand, much less accept, most people would experience psychological, even psychic-surreal harm. The Shroud protects humanity from having to face that which would damage them to simply know.

The Shroud in action keeps humans from being able to perceive supernatural energies. This is why non-Edgers can’t learn the Supernatural Talent in Perception, or the Ability or Mystic Skills to perceive Special Abilities or mystical forces of reality. If a human witnesses a reality-bending act by one of the Gifted, that human’s memories of the event will be clouded. This will give that human’s personal paradigm enough breathing room to make up a version of the event that the person can more easily accept.

Gifted can learn to notice when the Shroud is having an active effect on a person (this is part of the Mystic Skill). A person with “Shrouding” effects on their consciousness is a sure sign that they’ve encountered the supernatural recently. Certain Factions of Gifted (like those of the Order) use such signs as evidence of reckless Gifted, and have been known to hunt such Gifted down.

The Shroud’s effects give rise to all sorts of arguments in Gifted society. Some of these are philosophical, relating to the nature of humanity and its collective desire to deny itself the secrets which are its birthright. Ethical arguments step from the Shroud, too, as proof that the cosmos considers the selfish use of Special Abilities that affect humans to be “wrong” on a metaphysical level. Of course, elitist political argument in Gifted society suggests that reality puts the Gifted “above” humanity, and that the Gifted should rule the masses of earth. The standard counter-argument, that the Gifted should be humanity’s shepherds, instead (for humanity’s own good) is, in some cases, even more frightening.



Vales

*We are not human beings having
a spiritual experience.*

*We are spiritual beings having
a human experience.*

-Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Vales are places in the world that hold a special place in the collective consciousness. These are the landmarks, monuments, and cultural icons that cement the symbolic firmly into the material world. Because of their importance to the cosmic psyche, Vales are places of hyper-real power. Here, the walls between worlds are breached and supernatural energies flow like water.

Gifted find that recovering spent Focus is very easy within a Vale. Practitioners of Ritual Magic also enjoy a greater ease inside of Vales, though this is only true of Vales that relate to the paradigm their magical belief is based on. For these reasons, and more (see *The World Beyond the Mirror*), Vales are high-value real estate to the Factions of the Gifted.

Because of their obvious value, Vales are frequent sites for constructing Citadels on. These are literal fortresses made of magic. They have long been employed by Gifted (and other supernatural beings) to claim and hold important places in the fabric of reality. Citadels are built to protect a Faction's members from enemies on both sides of the Mirror.

With or without a Citadel, a Vale is a place of extreme meaning to the Gifted. Many give spiritual significance to these

places, especially those Vales found in nature. More often than not, though, modern day Vales are found in urban areas. Places with historical significance, government buildings, city parks, churches, universities, and museums are commonly Vales or have Vales in them – this is also true of popular night spots, malls, and amusement parks.

The common thread between all Vales is that they are places that resonate with mundane society. These places stand for something greater than themselves; Vales grow in locations that are heavy with human emotion, imagination, thought, and attention. They are the places where important memories – both good and bad – are forged on a regular basis.

The largest and most powerful Vales are those that are known far and wide as culturally significant. These are the national landmarks and the religious holy sites. And the longer a place has been important to humanity, the greater the accumulation of concentrated psychic power. The Empire State Building and the Golden Gate Bridge are impressive Vales, but even more so are the Statue of Liberty, which itself pales in comparison to the Pyramids of Gaza or the Wailing Wall.

The Astral Plane

*I simply believe that some part
of the human Self or Soul is not subject
to the laws of space and time.*

- Carl Jung

The physical world (known as Incarna; see section below called *The World Beyond the Mirror*) is divided into two overlaying Planes – the Material Plane and the Astral Plane. The Material Plane is the “regular” version of earth where humanity, the environment, and civilization are found. Most Gifted don't refer to it as anything other than the normal world. The Astral Plane is another case entirely.

The Astral Plane is very connected to the Material Plane. It overlaps it entirely, but only has an abstract nature. It is the Plane of what some call spirits, idealized objects, and, according to some, our projected thoughts. The Gifted can observe the Astral Plane with their otherworldly senses, and even travel to it through forms of Astral Projection. In doing so, the Gifted leave their physical bodies behind and enter the Astral Plane as a psychic embodiment of the concept they hold of themselves.

Although some Special Abilities and Rituals can affect things on the Astral Plane, actually entering through Astral Projection provides the best means to interact with what one might find there. Doing this grants the individual what is called an Astral Body. This is a purely psychic “body” that houses the individual's consciousness. Contrary to popular belief, a person can be seriously injured while on the Astral Plane. Loss of memory, personality disintegration, insanity, and even death-of-consciousness can occur.

The Astral Plane has long been the focus of shamans, holy men, and metaphysical journeymen. “Natural” thought-projections from the world's collective consciousness appear here as spirits. Ancient Gifted and Edgers have historically been the intermediaries between humanity and these abstract reflections of Incarna. These talented peoples would communicate with animal and forest spirits, negotiate with weather spirits, and combat spirits of disease, warfare, and hatred.

The World Beyond the Mirror

*There is another reality
enfolding ours - as close as our breath!*
-Don Pendleton

There exist two separate worlds. Incarna is the world of the conscious, and Maya is the world of the unconscious. They are separated by a barrier of perception called the Mirror. Vales are doorways through this Mirror, where Incarna and Maya fully overlap. Maya is one full half of reality, yet most humans have no concept of it. However, this doesn't keep Maya from being just as vital to the functioning of the cosmos as is the material universe. The Gifted travel to Maya frequently, so understanding this world is quite helpful to learning more about the Gifted and their way of life.

Through the Mirror, one first finds a Shadow. This is the immediate unconscious reflection of the physical world, sometimes referred to as the local unconscious. A Shadow resembles a dreamlike zone that works as a metaphor for the area. For example, there is a Shadow New York City, and a Shadow of the Badlands in the Dakotas. Because a Shadow is a metaphor for the reflected area, it does not match the physical reality block for block. Instead, it resembles the material world as an unconscious representation.

Beyond the Shadows, an entire region of physical reality projects into an unconscious territory called a Caerra. It is understood by Gifted explorers of Maya that there are ten Caerra that correspond to North America. Each Caerra is a larger, extended metaphor for the "dream" of the area. For instance, the Caerra of the East Coast of the United States, the Sprawl, is a composite symbol of repeated, rusting industrial cities. To get to any one specific city area in the Sprawl requires the traveler to find the appropriate Shadow of, say, Philadelphia, in order to find any landmarks that relate to Philadelphia specifically. Although Caerra relate to one another in a way related to their physical-reflection's geography, this is not exact.

Vispiri are pathways, rivers, and roads found at the "outer" edges of a Caerra. Vispiri lead to small, individual worlds, collectively called the Outer Realms. These Realms occupy their own section of humanity's collective metaphor of the psyche, and most closely resemble micro-universes of genre, mythology, or other space believed in subconsciously. The largest of the Outer Realms are the Valley of Heavens, the Pit of Hells, Carnage, the City, and Faerie.

To complicate matters further, the Outer Realms are frequently thought of not as spaces separate from one another, but instead collected into related Spheres. Whether or not this is merely a naming method used by Mayan travelers, or if it has an actual working upon Mayan "geography," is unknown. In Mayan Sphere Model Theory, there are eleven Spheres that contain all of the existing Outer Realms; the Afterworlds Sphere, according to the model, contains both the Valley of Heavens Outer Realm (the afterlife paradises of all of the world's religions) and the Pit of Hells (the afterlife dimensions of torment and pain).

See the Maya section in the Running the Game chapter for a more detailed layout of the psychic geography of Maya.

The Elements of the Universe

*The starry vault of heaven is in truth
the open book of cosmic projection,
in which are reflected the mythologems,
i.e., the archetypes.*
- Carl Jung

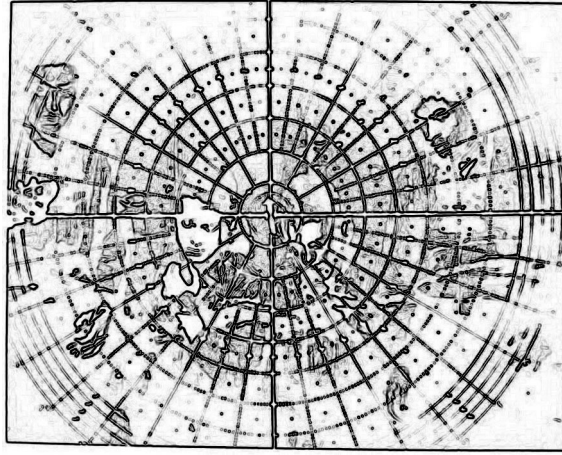
The most powerful beings in the cosmos are known to the Gifted as the Elements. These are conscious, individualized archetypes that exist in the "higher" realms of pure concept and belief. For the nigh-godlike Gifted, the Elements are the true gods.

The Elements belong to 32 Domains that function as cosmic rules and rulers of the universe – 16 Domains of Order, and 16 of Chaos. At the pinnacle of these Domains rests one Prime Element. This is a being best described as a personified ideal, or as an anthropomorphism. Below each Pure Element exist an entire court of Elements within that Domain, who perform duties too arcane to be known or detailed here.

For example, one better known Domain is the Domain of Knowledge. It is ruled by the Prime Element Verithir, who is the absolute ruler, function, and essence of all that is and can be known. If the Domain of Knowledge was ever somehow destroyed or countered in reality, all knowledge would cease to exist. Gifted Scholars assure one another that this is a universal impossibility, since the removal of an Element (as has occurred from time to time) simply means that another being steps up and assumes the "office." Even Prime Elements have been replaced over Gifted known history.

The lower Elements have been known to involve themselves in "lower" affairs. Some are rumored to interact with Faction leaders, both as advisors and as oppressors. At several times in history Elements have been reported watching human affairs, in which they sometimes intervene. Elements are even known to grant favored Gifted powers called Blessings, so that they might act in a way that supports the Element's Domain.

Reaching the Domains is no easy feat. The most powerful of Vales not only act as doorways between Incarna and Maya, but the largest of these at times reveal pathways of higher cosmic truth called Spires, which go "up." Spires only connect Domains and Vales that have a corresponding resonance of worldly, otherworldly, and cosmic vibrations. Relating to the above example, the Domain of Knowledge is thought to have been accessible from the Vale at the Library of Alexandria, and might be reached even today from the Vale beneath the Library of Congress in the United States. Spires are nearly impossible to climb without the Elements of that Domain wanting you to, however, and Elements act as very powerful guardians - many times stronger than even the most formidable Gifted.



SECRET SOCIETIES, HIDDEN CONFLICTS

*The men in see-through mirrors who observe the masquerade.
And we the masqueraders – who believe we have it made.
Who believe we have it made – here on earth.
– Love and Rockets*

The Gifted experience a way of life that is dominated by secret societies called Factions. These societies are the bulwark of Gifted culture; normal culture no longer pertains directly to a Gifted's life, so his or her Faction takes up the slack. Factions are social as well as political entities. Some are also concentrations of philosophical or religious thinking, learning centers for the metaphysical, or even projections of military power.

Factions, in one form or another, have existed since the beginning of recorded time. Gifted are counted among the courts of ancient chieftains, kings, and emperors. They have long guided the flow of civilizations, and for just as long collected into like-minded temples and fraternities. These "secret societies" knew of one another and played out diplomacy, trade, communication, and (sometimes) warfare behind the scenes of mortal men.

As history advanced, the scope and strength of these localized gatherings of Gifted expanded. Now, the organization of Factions is quite sophisticated. The most powerful band together into consortiums called Sects. For example, the largest Sect in North America is called the Order. It dominates the workings of the US government and most of the corporate world. Very little happens at the top without the Order's permission or guidance. The inner workings of the Order are obscured from those not well-placed, but is assumed to be one or two orders of magnitude more complicated and controlled than its mundane arms, which are the US military, intelligence agencies, and global mega-corporations.

Because of the Gifted's hidden nature, their influence on humanity over time is also hidden. Historians and conspiracy researchers alike note anomalies in historical trends, and great shifts in politics, war, religion, and technology. Although some of these occurrences are simply random exchanges by unknown mortals, a good deal more are the result of coordinated action by one or more Factions. Their struggles with one another have left an unmistakable trail through the development of the world.

These hidden conflicts among the secret societies of the Gifted play out as you read this. Culture, trends, economies, paradigms, and the function of geo-politics are merely the mundane, worldly tools used by these otherworldly, conspiratorial Factions.

Each Faction is different. Some act more like country clubs or biker gangs than intelligence agencies, but then again, more than a few can put the CIA to shame. Just because someone belongs to a Faction doesn't mean that their "duties" to their rank, position, or office are all-consuming. Again, each Faction is different.

Membership in a Faction is (for the most part) a matter of choice. Each has its own agendas, even if these are social in nature. There is a Faction, or Subfaction branch, for just about anybody.

The Free Societies

These Factions hold a loose pact of cooperation and non-aggression toward one another. This isn't to say the Factions in the Free Societies don't argue. They do. It's just that it rarely leads to bloodshed as a matter of policy. The Free Societies are not considered a true Sect, even though together these Factions have a large number of members. They are too disparate in interests, organization, and ideology to call the Free Societies a proper Sect, in the same way the Alliance or the Order are.

Bacchus: Artists, sensualists, explorers of altered states, performers, and modern day shamans.

The Collective: Localized urban tribes of mutual defense, underground police, gypsy-like caravans, and cooperative farmers.

The Daedalists: Cyberpunks, hackers, technology fetishists, and do-it-yourself inventors.

The Gaia Progeny: Naturalists, environmental activists, "old ways" shamans, and druidic priests.

The Halveyan Society: Philosophers, social engineers, guardians of humanity against supernatural threats, and the "Gifted police."

The Harbingers: Radicals, post-modernists, data anarchists, and culture jammers.

Paldin: Historians, teachers, warrior-monks, and metaphysical philosophers.

The Alliance

This Sect is a conglomeration of sub-groups from other Factions formed around a newly emerging one, and is a growing resistance movement against the Order. It has sparked a low-intensity guerilla war, with the conflict acting to polarize the Factions on the continent – the Independent Factions and the Free Societies feel pressured to take sides in the blossoming Alliance vs. Order conflict. As a Sect, the Alliance is very young. It is grudgingly accepted as a full Sect due to the influence it is having on the shape of the Gifted world as a whole.

The only fully unique Faction (and not Subfaction) in the Alliance is House Aruithinea. This Faction is made up of soldiers, ritual magicians, and Celtic bards. Various like-minded allies have come forth to House Aruithinea's cause. These hail from Bacchus, the Collectives, the Daedalists, the Harbingers, and even a reluctant Subfaction of Paldin.

For more information on the resistance the Alliance presents to the Order, see the Alliance Revolution in the Gifted Society section.



The Order

The largest and most powerful Sect of Western Civilization is also one of the most closed and secretive. Those Gifted who have encountered the Order describe it to something akin to an iceberg submerged in dark waters, with only a tiny fraction of the juggernaut visible from the surface. The Order is an oppressive, controlling force. It likes seeing the other Factions so divided, as it keeps them from presenting any meaningful opposition to its agendas. The Order owns the media, creates wars, and runs the economy. It shapes the minds of whole societies. The Order is a secret Orwellian dictatorship that has open ambition to rule all of reality, from the shadows.

At this time, the Order is not available for player characters to be a part of.

The Administration: The ruling bureaucracy of the Order.

The Alturists: Intellectuals and scientists.

The Church of Purity: The secret priests and leaders of the Christian and Judaic religions.

The House of Raeford: Metaphysicians, Ritual Magic scientists, and occultists.

The Lacrutians: Economists and politicians.

Terishor: The intelligence and military arms of the Order.

The Independent Factions

These Factions all exist as entities separate from one another. While many are a good deal smaller than the Subfactions of the “real” Factions, others are quite a force to be reckoned with. These Factions are shown in more detail in the Factions chapter.

The Outer Societies

Sects and Factions that are based out of other corners of the world. These include the Hidden, who oversee the Triad societies of China, the Jade Empire in Japan, the Faction Illiesh of the American and European mafia families, the Shacti of South America, the outlawed Palace of Enlightenment, the Ideologues of Russia, and the secret Sect within Islam, the Guiding Name.

