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American Utopias

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Building a Utopia: One Skill Role at a Time

Utopia: a noun from the Greek *outopos*, meaning “Non-Place” (*Online Etymological Dictionary*). In a way, that should have been a clue to utopia builders of all stripes, especially those of the American transcendental movement who focused on physical plots of land to build their communities. Though Thomas More may have described his fictional Utopia as an ideal island state, the tongue in cheek nature of the name is likely just as telling as all of the attempts to build an ideal society in the United States: Brook Farm, New Harmony, Fruitlands, Walden and others. But, as the United States aged, her residents clung to the hope that society could be perfected with just the right mix of reason and hard work. We are left with a legacy of thought from that era, wisdom and folly wrapped up into narrative fiction and journalistic accounts from Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Bronson Alcott and others; and that legacy is not left untouched. Not only are their works still read sometimes as entertaining fiction and oftentimes as prescriptions of the ideal, the structure of their approach still survives today.

Unfortunately, rising land values, increased commercialization of farms and general lack of the idle rich seemingly necessary in utopian efforts of the past have complicated things. While communities like Twin Oaks in Virginia have flourished, Brett Ramsay has informed the author that many have either lost steam or failed completely (Ramsay). Indeed, fewer than ten percent of nonreligious groups survive a full generation. But, utopian communities seem to keep springing up everywhere. Whether it is a Mormon settlement in Texas or a high school nation-building project, Americans seem to have an inherent drive to create something better than they see around themselves. Given the difficulties above, though, how can one possibly create a utopian experiment with much weight behind it? I propose the use of role-playing games (RPG's).

Actually, I did not propose it; others were on similar lines of thought before this exposé on the uses of tabletop gaming was even a thought in my mind. One such group of others who seem to have done so intentionally is White Wolf Game Studio, a game company based around Atlanta, Georgia. Beginning in the early 1990's, they have seen their World of Darkness from creation to apocalypse over a period of thirteen years, and within it the histories of over a dozen supernatural groups. It is the lives of these groups that, I believe, allow players to mirror the actions of other utopia builders. Though there is significantly less personal risk in using these games to create a utopia than that taken by those physically inhabiting their projects, there is also the kind of flexibility that would have given groups like Fruitlands a second chance.

First, a word on the system and sources: each "dot" ranking in an attribute represents the degree of proficiency in that area, typically ranging from zero (complete lack of skill or knowledge) to five (world class). If there is a chance for a character to fail an action, she must roll a number of ten-sided dice equal to the number of "dots" involved in the action, and all that show a certain number (typically six) or greater are "successes," while all that show ones are "botches" and subtract from success. Other numbers are considered failures and neither add to nor subtract from success. For example, Jennifer, a senior Literature student, prepares to write her final seminar paper and rolls her four Intelligence dice (representing her ability to use what knowledge she has) and three Academics dice (representing the scholarly knowledge she has gleaned in her twenty-two years of life). Assuming she achieves sufficient successes, in this case just one would be necessary, she is able to organize her thoughts. A second roll would likely be necessary to determine how well she conveys those ideas in writing. This is the basic system in determining success and failure, and represents a key differentiation in using RPG versus thought experiment in creating utopia.

By using figured statistics, chance of failure in most actions and inherently flawed characters, White Wolf's RPG's allow players the chance to put a thought experiment to test.

The end of Louisa May Alcott's *Transcendental Wild Oats* shows the necessity for these factors:

About the time the grain was ready to house, some call of the Oversoul wafted all the men away. An easterly storm was coming up and the yellow stacks were sure to be ruined. Then Sister Hope gathered her forces. Three little girls, one boy (Timon's son), and herself, harnessed to clothes-baskets and Russia-linen sheets, were the only teams she could command; but with these poor appliances the indomitable woman got in the grain and saved food for her young, with the instinct and energy of a mother-bird with a brood of hungry nestlings to feed. (Alcott 166-167)

The men have gone out to preach the glory of their farm, leaving that glory to its rainy doom. In terms of White Wolf's system, this could be treated as a two-point Flaw, *Overconfident* (in terms of their community). It is not debilitating, it would not directly lead to a character's demise, but it is enough of a hindrance to cause problems, such as the men regularly taking the mother's work for granted – for which she refers to herself as the lone beast of burden on the farm (Alcott 163). Nothing extreme, but still a character flaw these men must work with. Moreover, there is a chance to fail the gathering of the harvest before the storm – luckily, Sister Hope passed her Wits + Leadership roll and none of the children failed a simple Stamina roll (to withstand the physical labor) in the collection of grain.

Compare all of this to the opening of her story, in which we meet every character and they give us this plan for their community:

...“Neither sugar, molasses, milk, butter, cheese, nor flesh are to be used among us, for nothing is to be admitted which has caused wrong or death to man or beast.”

“Our garments are to be linen till we learn to raise our own cotton or some substitute for woolen fabrics,” added Brother Abel....

“We must yield that point [about shoes] till we can manufacture an innocent substitute for leather. Bark, wood, or some durable fabric will be invented in time. Meanwhile, those who desire to carry out our idea to the fullest extent can go barefooted,” said Lion....

“We shall go without [lamps] till we have discovered some vegetable oil or wax to serve us...”

“...We shall rise at dawn, begin the day by bathing, followed by music, and then a chaste repast of fruit and bread. Each one finds a congenial occupation till the meridian meal; when some deep-searching conversation gives rest to the body and development to the mind. Healthful labor again engages us till the last meal, when we assemble in social communion, prolonged till sunset, when we retire to sweet repose, ready for the next day’s activity.” (Alcott 153-154)

It almost sounds as though the men are not taking their own humanity into account. They intend to omit as much of everything as they can; they want to avoid sturdy clothing preferred by farmers, avoid any meat or foodstuffs that are grown without exploitation labor and attempt to use only natural light to work by (limiting their productive time to fourteen hours on long summer days, significantly less in the winter). In a sense, by eschewing the things that make productive farm-life possible, they attempt to become Non-Men within their Non-Place. This moment is the simple thought experiment we want to avoid in building a utopia, as it is easy enough for our Utopians to dig a canal separating them from the imperfect, easy enough to spring our Republic into life in response to the inequities of modern government and corruption of the contemporary soul and unbelievably simple to allow a *deus ex machina* to drop the final book of the Bible into the middle of our New Atlantis, not to mention talk about how we barefoot vegans will work but three hours a day to support ourselves. What is difficult is managing personality and idealistic differences a la Coverdale and Hollingsworth, is keeping society intact when the Guardians fail a pivotal battle, is keeping your one-man pond-side farm operational when you come down with the flu.

Fortunately, these difficulties do not discourage people from attempting to create fantasy utopias. Instead, as Greg Costikyan argues, “players must feel that they have freedom of action ... within the structure of the system” (Costikyan 6). The freedom of the thought experiment must be there, bolstered with a sense of reality, story and continuity. And so, in *Mage: The Ascension*, players participating in the Ascension War (Appendix III) will likewise attempt Brook Farm’s goal of affecting all humanity by microcosmic work, by changing individual beliefs on the nature of reality and hoping for a ripple effect outwards. Replace the belief in magic to a belief in a humanist ideal, and you have the same goal professed by founders of Brook Farm: when the Fourierism and seriality were completely embraced, it was realized that “If the individual’s interior world is serially connected with the macrocosm, his or her thought, despite that ‘almostness’ which can account for human restlessness, has the capacity for operating directly on the external world and thereby transforming it” (Francis 41). But the two groups would likely have difficulty getting along: reality-bending Mages recognize their capacity for Hubris, and at least one in a cabal would hopefully ask their friends to step down from the ivory-tower before thinking their small community would change the entire world.

Which brings us to the first of the major evolutions from older utopian thought to its current incarnation in RPG. Ironically, it is that the fantastic evolution emphasizes the necessity of the real. As Hawthorne notes in his introduction to The House of the Seven Gables, creators of stories (he says writers, but I expand that term to include Storytellers and players) can choose to either present straight reality (in the form of the Novel), or stretch the truth and present a Romance. Storytellers and players, then, can choose to play a game of only mortals, in the most mundane of worlds (in which form you will find the aforementioned Jennifer’s character sheet). Though it would provide the truest means to create a utopia, it probably would not be very

entertaining. Alternately, Storytellers can adjust some “latitudes,” as Hawthorne puts it, and allow those mortals to act from their afterlives, with psychic or magical powers, or even greater latitudes in the form of demonic possession or vampirism. But, however great the latitude taken may be, “[the writer] will be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and, especially, to mingle the marvelous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered” (Gables 9). We may overstep those bounds by allowing a demon-possessed player character use her infernal charisma to rally a crowd to her cause (Demon: the Fallen 179, “Aura of Legend”), but we demand a Manipulation + Leadership to provide that element of failure that the men of Fruitlands ignored.

This element of the real is what Costikyan referred to as the “structure of the system.” It is that structure that gets characters interested in the first place. Otherwise, you get an issue noted early in *Wraith: The Oblivion*’s core-rulebook, in explaining why there are rules in the first place:

...unlike pretend, there are a few rules to help you roleplay. They are used mainly to avoid arguments – “Bang! Bang! You’re dead!” “No I’m not!” – and to add a deeper sense of realism to the story. Rules direct and guide the progress of the story and help define the capacities and weaknesses of the characters.

(Wraith: the Oblivion 26)

While Hawthorne does expand his first claim to a writer’s freedom of latitude to say that “[the writer] can hardly be said, however, to commit a literary crime even if he disregard this caution [to limit use of the marvelous]” (Gables 9), *Wraith: The Oblivion*’s creators seem to feel that it would be a literary crime to disregard that caution, as these restrictions better define the characters. And, through better definition, “the stories they create through play can be as emotionally powerful and personally meaningful as anything you find in a novel or movie – perhaps more so because the players are personally involved in their creation” (Costikyan 9).

And so, in role-playing games we have immensely powerful tools both for realistic character creation and world building. But, as I stated before, this is not an original tool in utopia building. I could point out civics classes in middle schools across this country, in which students are asked to create their own ideal states. I will look back a little further into the past, back again to Hawthorne's Blithedale and the Brook Farm upon which it was based. Hawthorne himself wrote to his fiancée, Sophia Peabody, intimating that he was essentially there to play the role of a farmer, of one of the communitarians:

The thin frock, which you made for me, is considered a most splendid article; and I should not wonder if it were to become the summer uniform of the community. I have a thick frock, likewise; but it is rather deficient in grave, though extremely warm and comfortable. I wear a tremendous pair of cow-hide boots, with soles two inches thick. Of course, when I come to see you, I shall wear my farmer's dress. (Francis 50)

As Richard Francis comments on the final line of that passage, "Hawthorne will wear his farmer's 'dress'" (Francis 50). From this we can see that role-play need not always be bound to a table and dice. While I do not intend to broaden my view to include Live Action Role-Playing (LARP) games, there is something to be said about going that distance. But, not this was not the extent of Hawthorne's role-play: in fact, according to letters and journals from the community, Brook Farm and the fictional Blithedale both used masquerade as their primary after-hours pastime as well as the means by which writers became farmers. While their effect was often more in terms of entertainment, masquerade often serves the greater function of increasing empathy – by putting one's self in the mindset of another, it allows for greater understanding of another's life. Hawthorne may have left the community in a huff about his digging manure for months when he could have been writing, but one wonders what his understanding of the simple life brought to his writing or personal life.

This idea of playing at roles to increase empathy has not lost its value in the gaming world either. *Vampire: the Masquerade* (Appendix I) focuses on this to such an extent that the main internal goal of the game (that is, motivation from within a character as opposed to rewards or fame) is an eternal masquerade. Like residents of Brook Farm, many Kindred spend their unlives playing at roles of others. As noted in Appendix I, one of the primary attributes of a *Vampire* character is her Humanity score. As far as individual game cultures and the canonical plots of the game go, it is interesting to note that the Fourierist hope of humanitarianism radiating out from the goodly individual rarely occurs on any scale: characters who reach Golconda (Vampire-enlightenment through self-restraint) are few and far between, inspiring more legends about their state than imitation. Even in groups that subscribe to alternate moralities that one would think easier for a vampire to adhere, false Golcondas are still just as rare. While statistically this could be viewed as good game design (limiting the amount of players to ever achieve the gains from those states), thematically there is something deeper. The primary antagonist in the struggle for a high Humanity score is the character herself, or rather, the Beast of the character.

The fact that White Wolf uses an aspect of the self as the primary hurdle to reaching Humanitarian enlightenment can easily be seen as a point of contention with transcendental writers. In order to understand it more fully, we will look at the game's definition of the Beast, found in the introductory glossary for new players: "The inchoate drives and urges that threaten to turn a vampire into a mindless, ravening monster" (*Vampire: the Masquerade* 59). This is a broad definition, so we will look a little further at the monster within from a state called "frenzy," in which the character's Beast has assumed full control for one scene.

During a frenzy, a character literally – and usually unwillingly – gives into the darkest instincts of the vampiric nature. The character is consumed with rage or hunger, unable – or unwilling – to consider the

effects of any action. Friends, foes, lovers, ethics: None of these things matter to a vampire in frenzy. If a vampire in frenzy is hungry, he will feed from whoever is closest without regard for the vessel's well-being. If the vampire is angry, he will do everything in his power to destroy the cause of his anger. A vampire struck by fear will commit any atrocity to remove himself from the source of his terror, regardless of the consequences. The character completely surrenders to the basest aspects of his Nature, shunting aside the Demeanor most commonly presented to those around him. He is, in short, the Beast. (228)

So, in the World of Darkness, the wolves wear sheep's clothing. But, it is the same greedy, self-centered wolf that Fruitlanders tried to deny. And, a century and a half later, it is the wolf that modern utopian thinkers try to deny, like Richard Eckersly appeals to readers of Futurist, in an attempt to convince readers that consumerism must be replaced with sustainability (Eckersely 42). Not only is it an important enough theme for Mark Rein-Hagen et al. to put into their game as the primary antagonist for most characters, it is an important enough theme that in larger circles we discuss our difficulties with it by a different name.

Here, we enter the second major evolution of utopian thought through RPG. Not only must our efforts have a sense of realism in our roles lest they fall apart in our minds, they should also allow players to honestly address these new roles. Here, White Wolf Game Studio takes a very clear break from many other RPG groups, in that its system outright addresses these issues. Empathy is an important trait both in terms of immersing one's self fully into the (hopefully) realistic characters that White Wolf's limitation-oriented system aided in creating. Although, admittedly, when one plays such games as *Kobolds Ate My Baby* or *Munchkin*, it can become a rare sight. In the realm of the more serious RPG, however, developing empathy both as a player and a character can become a serious goal. As Gary Alan Fine discovered in his research on tabletop fantasy RPG's, "Fantasy gamers... are explicitly concerned with the development of a cultural system; they judge their satisfaction with the game by the vigor of the culture they have

created and by the degree to which they can become personally engrossed in it” (Shared Fantasy 229).

To return to *Wraith: the Oblivion*, we will look even deeper at the empathic roles a player may have. Looking towards the bottom of the main character sheet (Appendix II), we see the attribute Pathos. Taken directly from Greek, it is the emotional fuel the character runs on – supernatural abilities often require Pathos to be “spent,” and characters become ghostly and translucent even among the other Restless Dead when they run low on it. The easiest way to regain Pathos is through empathy. Above the Pathos score are blank lines for a character to fill in Passions, which are usually constructed in the form “Say goodbye to my wife (Love) ...” Meaning that if a character is ever able to actually say goodbye to his wife, he would roll three dice at a low difficulty (six is default), each success garnering a point of Pathos. However, like this example, the primary goal of most wraiths’ Passions is beyond them. Otherwise, they would be accomplished very easily, and not be a driving force that keeps a soul tethered to our world after death.

Thus, we get the more common way for wraiths to regain Pathos: living their drives vicariously. It is not uncommon for wraiths with strong Joy oriented Passions to attend College graduation ceremonies, or those with Grief oriented Passions to linger in libraries for the final test period shortly before. It might be a higher difficulty to regain Pathos using this method, but characters sure can collect much easier and more often. What is more, they never have to face the reality of the things that keep them in limbo.

It appears we may have found another contention with transcendental thought. While empathy ought to be prized as a means for stopping humanity from inflicting suffering on itself, it seems that it might be a little dangerous in taking the focus off the self. Octavia E. Butler’s

Parable of the Sower features a living character, Lauren Olamina, afflicted with “hyper-empathy,” a state that makes her like White Wolf’s wraiths: able to feel another’s pleasures and pains so clearly it is as though she herself were the owner. Discussing this state with another character, she is told “it might not be so bad a thing if most people had to endure all the pain they caused” (Butler 277-278), in complete imitation of earlier thinkers, all the way back to Crèvecoeur’s enlightened Quaker. After all, how could we treat another human being in ways we would not wish to be? How could Rein-Hagen insinuate that the easier method of gaining Pathos, that empathy itself, could be holding us back?

The answer lies in Lauren’s response: she fears she would be useless in any dire situation if Bankole were ever hurt (Butler 278). She fears that her hyper-empathy can make her focus on others too much to notice her own problems. I believe that this response is clever cover for the idea that regular empathy, let alone the hyper variety, can cause individuals to focus on others to the point that they neglect themselves. This same fear is illustrated by the other hyper-empathetic characters, which initially refuse to join Lauren’s group. Even after joining, however, they remain standoffish, unwilling to put themselves at risk by becoming too deeply tied to those around them. At the end of a conversation, Lauren “let [herself] stumble. It was easy. [She] still had little feeling in [her] feet and legs. Mora stepped aside. He didn’t touch [her] or offer help. Sweet guy.” (Butler 302). Butler is showing that empathy not only cannot tear down all the walls, but that those who are most in tune with it seem to have the most to lose. Much like Hawthorne in his “gold mine” (Francis 49), those truly attempting to dive in to another’s life seem to put their own existence at stake.

This is illustrated through the Shadow of *Wraith: the Oblivion*, the “second half” of every character, played by a second player. The Shadow represents everything most people would

rather hide about themselves: their childish urges, selfish desires and petty thoughts, everything they regret doing and wish to keep secret. It is akin to the Beast from *Vampire: the Masquerade* in that it occupies the same hidden space during life but is given new voice and strength in the afterlife. The Shadow gives life to Lauren's fear through game mechanics. When a character resolves a Passion (for instance, actually saying goodbye to his wife rather than empathizing with emotional equivalents), it is gone. It no longer has the same depth of meaning for the character and thus cannot hold him to the afterlife any longer, nor can it replenish Pathos, and resolution of Passions is one step to Transcendence. But, it is a difficult and often actively avoided step. Many of the wraiths in existence have been around an incredibly long time by focusing more on the empathetic high than taking the necessary psychological steps to move on from their current state.

And what happens during this time within the wraith? The Psyche and the Shadow are constantly wrestling for dominance, and as long as a Psyche (player character) is gaining experience, so too is his Shadow. Plenty of wraiths, especially the older ones that ought to know how to handle their dark reflections, have "turned Doppelganger" (that is, to permanently change the dominance of the character from Psyche to Shadow and become a Spectre) by extending their existence and power through riding the roles of others or focusing on friends, relatives and descendents they are attached to (Fetters, an aspect of *Wraith: the Oblivion* discussed in Appendix II) rather than their own transcendental needs. To expand this outside of game mechanics, as long as a character focuses outside herself and neglects the important aspects of self, the only growth is that of the childish, selfish, petty side of the character. What would a farm-dressed Hawthorne say to all this?

That abominable gold mine [manure patch]! Thank God, we anticipate getting rid of its treasurers, in the course of two or three days. Of all hateful places, that is the worst ... Even my Custom House experience

was not such a thralldom and weariness; my heart and mind were freer. Oh; belovedest, labor is the curse of this world, and nobody can meddle with it, without becoming proportionably brutified. Dost thou think it a praiseworthy matter, that I have spent five golden months in providing food for cows and horses? Dearest, it is not so. (Francis 49)

One can almost feel Hawthorne's Shadow scratching these letters out to Sophia after enough Angst has built up to allow a moment of Catharsis. The ultimate effect of all this was for Hawthorne to leave the community, only to return as a paying boarder. No longer would he wear the "farmer's dress," instead he would only be Nathaniel Hawthorne. Leave the life of pretend to his fictional characters.

We are beginning to see a trend. Though modern RPG represents an evolution of American utopia building exercises, it seems to criticize or overturn many of its predecessors' assumptions. We have seen that these sentiments can be seen in other modern instances, such as Parable of the Sower. For all of this, can I really continue comparing it to the transcendental movement of the nineteenth century? I believe so, in virtue of the fact that the transcendental movement's primary concerns. Richard Francis (from whose book, Transcendental Utopias, I have been borrowing lines from Hawthorne's letters) notes two currents of transcendental thought in the American tradition: one attempting to gain a purely objective view of reality, as from Emerson's over-soul, the other attempting to make reality entirely subjective, where only the eye and the beholder can truly tell us what is out there (Francis 20-21). I believe that despite (to borrow terms from the Storyteller system) the differing Demeanors of these modes of thought, the Natures are the same. The idealism born in an era of antebellum revival and abolitionism, tracing its lineage through Romanticism and the Enlightenment has been supplanted by a mixture of realism and pessimism, born through two world wars, a cold war and the supposedly last-standing global superpower losing its footing to a hodgepodge of powers

formerly playing bit parts on the world's stage. The requisite faith in humanity to claim that seriality and interconnectedness could cause small communitarian groups to change the culture of a nation is now tempered by the memory of how that worked out. But, do not to cancel the parade just yet; I am through raining on it.

We have focused heavily on two games thus far, *Vampire: the Masquerade* and *Wraith: the Oblivion*, two of the darker games released by White Wolf Game Studio. They also focus on mortals who have been set aside from the Divine in some way – vampires are afflicted with the Curse of Caine (the ambiguous “mark” placed on Cain in Genesis 4), and wraiths are kept outside the cycle of death and rebirth through their attachments to the living world. Two other games I have mentioned in passing are *Mage: the Ascension* (Appendix III) and *Demon: the Fallen* (Appendix IV). In each of these games mortals are touched by the Divine. In the former, mortals are gifted with an intuitive understanding of the cosmos (“Arete,” from the Greek “function” or “purpose”) and how to manipulate it. In the latter, mortals are possessed by those Miltonic fallen angels that followed Lucifer in his rebellion. Though in *Demon: the Fallen* characters are no longer their mortal hosts but the creature inside, their memories and much of their personalities remain intact enough that the change is difficult to notice. Either way, we have two twists on Francis' definitions of the transcendental, with demonic characters often trying to regain the Truth they knew of the universe when they created it and mages' ability to alter reality through their subjective views of reality. These games represent the clearest chances for the deepest goals of the transcendental communities to live on.

For chronology's sake, we will look at *Mage: the Ascension* first. The two major powers in the world are the Traditions (most likely the player characters' affiliation) and the Technocracy, each fighting for one half the utopian vision Francis' transcendentalists managed

whole. Each group has even created its own “Horizon Realms,” astral or extra-dimensional places where their views of reality are law. As Horizon Realms have little impact on the world of the Sleepers (normal folk like you and I), they represent less of the serial ideal that their reality will radiate out into the Umbra/Astral Realm/Inter-dimensional Space and into this plane and more of a simple base of operations, a basic understanding among all in their political party what it is they are striving for. Indeed, although this game is less openly critical of old utopian methods, it still has a burst of the realism we have seen in other White Wolf Game Studio products: the first two editions of *Mage: the Ascension* centered on the Ascension War (details to follow), while the third is life after. The first two editions had characters believing that their actions could change the world, while the third is a coming to grips with the fact that they cannot.

At its core, the Ascension War was one for the collective minds of humanity, at least in the collective sense (individuals often let these goals slide in favor of personal ones). On the Traditions’ side, you had archetypal mages wielding magic and sorcery, attempting to convince humanity of its power of will over reality. If a local Verbena convinced a village that a certain herb had healing properties, eventually that folklore could become so embedded in the minds of the many that it could be true, and its truth would radiate out into the larger world. On the other hand, the Technocrats were classical scientists, understanding not Arete or magic but instead looking to Genius; they attempted to convince the masses of the power of mind over reality. It seems like splitting hairs, but the difference between the subjective reality (believe it and its true) of the herb and the objective reality (its true, believe it) of penicillin is the same difference Francis points to. All of these attempts to understand the world around and pass that

understanding on through a series of middlemen share the common faith in mankind's collective ability to understand and change.

All of these attempts fail to take into account mankind's propensity to do no such thing. The third edition of *Mage: the Ascension* takes place after the Technocracy has technically won the Ascension War, through details that, for space's sake, can be found in Appendix III. Unfortunately, mankind does not rush to their cause and begin building technological and scientific wonders. Instead, mankind (specifically that of the first world) takes pleasure in the creature comforts that centuries of science have brought us: television, frozen dinners and non-prescription sleep aids. Mankind has lost so much interest in the objectivity/subjectivity, science/magic and reason/faith arguments that its collective will for apathy effectively stagnates the Technocracy's winnings. Here we leave the idealistic mindset we have seen to be more characteristic of transcendentalists and enter the grim reality of what John Gray calls the death of utopian thinking.

In his analysis of the war in Iraq and the United States' role in it, Gray points out the fact that while the United States used to be a superpower, the only unmatched power it seems to have left is the "unilateral... power to bomb, the limits of which have been demonstrated in Iraq" (Gray 180). At the same time, Gray goes on to say that the United States' second highest priority on the world's stage, the market economy (second only to national security), has created other immensely powerful with that as their highest priority. "China, India and Russia are now behaving as the US has done in using global markets to advance their power in the world while American power is in steep decline" (Gray 180). Like the Traditions and the Technocracy, which once had the power to control mankind's destiny, the United States and all its utopian thinkers

are discovering there are forces at work even they cannot challenge. At the end of this section, Gray begins a particularly dour thought:

States have failed throughout history – we need only think of the centuries of anarchy that followed the fall of the Roman Empire or the era of Warring States in ancient China. It will not always be possible to prevent states failing in future. To encourage that failure is folly – especially at a time when the development of technology makes anarchy more threatening than ever before. Yet that is what overthrowing governments while lacking the ability to put anything in their place means in practice. (Gray 183)

In this picture, the end most certainly is nigh. The war in Iraq, like the Ascension War, has been “won” by a side that has no power to effect change over its trophy. However, mages and Gray alike have forgotten an important piece of the puzzle. Gray compares the decline of American power to that of ancient Rome and China, failing to realize that other states have risen in their place. If Rome had never ceased being a superpower then, American would never have been a superpower now. And, despite the fact that all mages, not just the Traditions, seem to have lost the war for Ascension in one way or another, that does not make now the end. Rather, it makes now the beginning of a decline, where another power must rise in its place.

That power is to be found in *Demon: the Fallen*. I stated earlier that all of these games take place in a concurrent World of Darkness, but have not yet acknowledged how they interact. While most of their storylines are independent (so that Storytellers need not purchase and learn a dozen distinct games and histories), there is a general storyline running in the hidden places of every game. Mages have long been tampering with the spiritual barriers between worlds, hoping either to gain the patronage of a powerful entity or to return the earth to a primal state where such barriers do not exist. Eons ago, a group of vampires found a way into the Shadowlands (using some of the methods mages used), traversing the world of the wraiths to build a Second

City, a copy of the Biblical Enoch where Caine was said to reside. An army of wraiths, upon discovering this city, set out to destroy it with a relic atomic bomb (see Appendix II). The resulting destruction widened the original cracks caused by millennia of tampering with the spiritual barriers between worlds and allowed the smallest of Lucifer's army to escape their imprisonment. This final segment occurred at the release of *Demon: the Fallen* in 2002. This sounds like a similar sort of apocalypse, as now God's sentence that the fallen remain in the Abyss for all eternity is put into question, much like the United States' mandate that there will be democracy in Iraq. Both superpowers are being called into question, and it seems that darkness and anarchy are once again at our doorstep.

But, in the final game to be released before the apocalypse (only two years before the apocalypse supplements began to be released for these games), there is hope. On the *Demon: the Fallen* character sheet, there is an attribute called "Torment." This represents the epic frustration, anger, depression and hate that have built up over ten thousand years in Hell. As it turns out, when a demon escapes imprisonment, it is made weak in the process and must bind itself to a person, place or thing in order to avoid being pulled back. Player characters must opt to possess human beings. The Humanity that vampires attempt to adhere to is the basic moral code for nearly all human beings, and when one of the fallen consumes the soul of their host, they gain the memories and personality of him or her. They also are struck by what most people inherently believe humans ought to be. In a moment that would make Brook Farmers proud, the individual affects change in this infernal creature and reduces its Torment to a manageable level – to the point that that anger and frustration no longer guides the fallen's actions. The Torment score works similar to Humanity; that is, at a low score one can almost forgive the past, while at a high score one feels so much anger and indignation few actions can escape the taint of hatred. Those

that are summoned out of Hell through magical means or that do not find a mortal host retain their Torment at its highest level, where no amount of morality can stop them from taking their due revenge on a world that forgot their sacrifice.

But, the fact that it takes only the human heart to change the will of a being that once had a hand in the creation of the cosmos is what I am focused on. In this, we see what is forgotten in Gray's argument and the survivors of the Ascension War, and that is the sense that all human beings have at least a little bit of decency that just needs to be awakened. The divine spark that brought a Renaissance from a Dark Age. With the escape of many fallen from Hell, the apocalypse is due to begin, and it does, beginning with the vampires and ending with the fallen, nearly every supernatural superpower will be erased from the earth. Many of the supplements feature grand apocalyptic visions of fire, brimstone and the destruction of most the earth. But, the official stories (those that White Wolf Game Studio would like its games to be remembered as ending) tell a tale of quiet destruction. In Gehenna, a red mist descends from the sky and removes the power of all vampire Blood, causing every one of them, save a handful who redeem themselves, to turn to ash and fade into the night. Ends of Empire tells a tale of a few wraiths struggling to preserve the western empire of the Restless Dead against a tide of chaos – only to be left with fragments of the state and questions of where to go from there. Ascension has two tales, each severely fragmenting the power of organized mage groups and leaving the Sleepers to decide their own fate. And, Time of Judgment (a general supplement for all the games lacking their own big book of doom) has a story for the fallen, some of whom are forgiven by God as a result of their deeds on earth, the others sent back to Hell.

The end result of all this? Humanity is left on its own to decide its own fate. Darkness and anarchy may follow in some areas, now that powerful patrons and protectors are gone, or

after powerful bogeymen struck out in fear of their coming end. No longer will White Wolf Game Studio challenge transcendental thought directly, it has only set the arguments in motion and left players to decide how to create their own utopias. Whether or not Storytellers choose to use apocalyptic scenarios, the fact remains that creators of these games have called for the destruction of the supernatural creatures lurking on the fringes of our society. They have left us to focus on think about ourselves, not others, and how we ought to handle our world. It becomes a cold place for players who shared fantasies of people given a second chance after death to set things right and a lonely place for those who thought about all the possible spiritual layers of the cosmos and how to bend them to their will.

This is not to say that role-players are out of touch with reality or that these games are just group hallucinations, good entertainment for one night each week. Instead, White Wolf Game Studio has presented us with a new brand of utopia building. Where former American writers and thinkers would have us take a plot of reality (preferably with enough acreage for self-sufficiency) and imagine how to build a better world from their, White Wolf Game Studio has told us to take a handful of imagination and fantasy, build a world in those terms and, through the ultimate destruction of those worlds, compare it with what we have without it. If a starting *Demon: the Fallen* character can forgive ten thousand years in the void and a lack of thanks for serving that sentence, and (in the event of an apocalypse scenario) be granted Divine forgiveness or go satisfied back into the abyss, then we ought to reasonably expect a little more Humanity in the society around us.

Appendix I

Vampire: the Masquerade

Overview:

Vampire: The Masquerade bases its mythology shortly after the Biblical Fall. All vampires trace their lineages in the number of generations removed from the first vampire, Caine (of Cain and Abel, Genesis 4). It is important to note that though the story of the First Vampire begins with the death of Abel, the story of the vampire Eden takes place shortly after.

White Wolf plot developers trace the story of how Caine became a vampire rather than an immortal (after God places the ambiguous “mark” on him) through his travels east and his unnamed wife. In the Talmud (a portion of the Hebrew religious literature), the character Lilith is frequently referred to as a demon-woman, and is often inferred to be Adam’s first wife. In the White Wolf history, Lilith is the woman Caine meets in the eastern deserts and eventually marries. In order to survive, she teaches him to drink his own blood (the birth of a vampiric need for blood).

Further, as they are each only a generation or two removed from God, they are assumed to bear much more of His image and power: accordingly, Lilith teaches Caine the foundations of vampiric Disciplines (supernatural powers), though they are more like extremely powerful Mage spheres than modern disciplines (see Appendix III). Unfortunately, Lilith still refuses to submit (the reasoning for her expulsion from Eden in Genesis I) and thus cannot feel true love. Caine flees his bride to find a city, Enoch, created by the descendents of his brother Seth.

Eden¹:

When in Enoch, Caine is an immensely powerful person. However, he knows he is cursed, as the sun (the “eye of God” in many older, middle eastern religions) burns his flesh. For ages he watches the men of Enoch live their lives, but becomes lonely. In an act of desperation, he Embraces (makes a vampire of) a woman in the city to keep him company for more than the mortal lifetime. In time, however, she spurns him. Each Embrace more mortals, creating more vampires.

For most vampires, this is seen as their Eden. Their supernatural powers and long lives make them mythic figures for humanity. They do not have to hide themselves as in the modern day, and their closeness in generation to the First Vampire gives their blood the potency to work miracles with high-level Disciplines. Essentially, they are the lords of the earth.

Fall:

In the interest of space, we will skip the stories of the major players that survive to the modern world. Suffice to say the Childer (vampiric descendents) of Caine wreak havoc on humanity. They create and destroy empires and cultures on a whim, they Embrace with abandon, they are generally not good people. God speaks to Caine, telling him to punish his children. Caine refuses to take responsibility (noting that the sins of the son should not reflect on the father). To clean the mess Caine has made, God floods the earth – Noah, Caine, and the eldest vampires survive.

¹ A note on terms: In all Appendices I have used the terms “Eden,” “Fall” and “Utopia” to describe the various plot states of these games. While these terms may evoke set notions, they are the most convenient to explain the states. “Eden” refers to a past, irredeemable Paradise. “Fall” refers to the event or events that destroyed the “Edenic” state and led to the Modern era. “Utopia” and “Apocalypse” refer to the ultimately positive scenarios in Apocalyptic supplements and general transcendental goals for characters.

Modern Era:

In the modern day, vampires must remain hidden. In White Wolf history, during the Renaissance humanity learned enough of the predators around them to turn superstition into an Inquisitional hunting guide. Thus, in the 15th century the Camarilla was born. This organization created laws for vampires in an effort to maintain safety among the race, with punishments varying from denial of free will (via Blood Bond²) to death. In response to the amazing degree of change, a rival group, the Sabbat, was also formed, proclaiming vampires the hunters of humanity. The Sabbat claimed that vampires should revel in their nature rather than hide it, but in practice they are often as hidden as the Camarilla. It is important to note that most of the Sabbat's ranks are filled with Neonates (vampires less than a century old) – few seem to survive long with their philosophy.

Player characters are typically placed in the modern era (supplements exist that allow play between the Dark Ages and the Modern Era, though there are none for before the Fall or in the future), and generally play a Camarilla coterie. While the Sabbat is often typecast as the blood-covered, babbling antagonist, players can opt to form a Sabbat pack. Either way, there are two types of goal an individual can pursue: as a group or individual, they can attempt to complete mundane tasks and amass political power in their city or region; or, they can attempt to reach a true or false Golconda.

Utopia:

² Upon drinking a vampire's blood three times on three separate nights, all within one month, an individual becomes "Blood Bound" to the vampire, a la Bram Stoker's Renfield. At each drink, the individual becomes successively less willful towards the vampire, until on the third draught they cannot deny any command from their master. If the Bond continues long enough, the individual may develop psychological disorders regarding their beloved source of Blood.

Golconda is our primary target here, as it is a personal utopic state for vampires. All vampires have a Morality score, rating from one to ten, one being the most Bestial and ten being Enlightened, though their particular moralities may vary. The most common, and only true path to Golconda, is Humanity, where the transgressions for each level of morality correspond to what most people would consider good and evil. For instance, murder holds the lowest levels of Humanity while property damage, theft and selfish thoughts hold the higher levels. A “sin” only occurs when you violate your level of morality or lower. Thus, the average person (Humanity 7) would feel remorse for theft, vandalism and murder, while a vampire with poor feeding skills or a particularly depraved human (Humanity 3) would only feel remorse for killing another, and even then not always.

False Golcondas work in a similar way, though with different Moralities. Rather than delving into these individually, we will just look at the general idea behind them. The need for human blood as sustenance (animal blood just does not have the vitamins and minerals necessary for a growing vampire) can easily result in a handful of accidental murders in a Neonate’s first few years. Moreover, maintaining a normal level Humanity is difficult when the easiest way to obtain blood is through theft (rarely would an individual give or sell their blood save to a licensed doctor). As a result, vampires have created alternate moralities based in philosophical principles, typically a study of something. Whether the study be of Death, the Blood (vampiric histories and power), Excess or any of a dozen other topics, the goal is to remain Intellectual rather than Bestial. However, these paths are innately inhuman, and vampires on these paths lose what little luster their bodies once had: where one feels an innate fear of the occasional low-morality criminal, the same feeling is present with these vampires regardless of how high their Morality may be.

The end result of Golconda is largely material. The character does not spend as much Blood to awake each evening, she is in a state of calm unheard of among vampires and becomes almost alive once again. Unfortunately, should the character ever lose points of Morality (by committing any sin and failing to feel remorse), they lose this state and can rarely achieve it again.

As a side-note, in Wraith: The Oblivion (see Appendix ##), vampires who have achieved Golconda transcend upon death. They also cannot be diablerized (have their soul consumed for power) by another vampire after reaching this state.

Apocalypse:

The “official” Apocalypse story comes first in the Gehenna supplement (though there are three others for a more action-packed game). Though God tells Noah he will never create another great deluge to punish humanity, options remain for purging the earth of Caine’s wayward children. In the story “40 Nights of Gehenna,” a red star appears in the sky and a red mist, visible only to vampires, descends upon the earth. The mist drains all vampires of their power until their Blood no longer supports their immortality and they crumble to dust. Characters in this scenario must survive forty nights in an abandoned church, facing moral challenges most of the nights. They need not be on the Path of Humanity to be led to the church, but they must appropriately pass each challenge to be spared (and granted a second, mortal life on the forty first dawn). Challenges range from simple right/wrong (a non-player character in the church is willfully causing harm to other characters) to those with no good solution (an old woman wanders into the church to evict the squatters and suffers a heart

attack – calling 911 alerts others to the vampires' presence, while letting her die is not the most moral of acts).

On the forty-first dawn, a strong wind comes from the east and collapses one wall of the building as the sun rises. Characters are either burned to dust where they stand (if still not to standards for survival) or made mortal again. Either way, “not a drop of Caine's blood is left on the earth.”

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Appendix II

Wraith: the Oblivion

Overview:

Wraith: the Oblivion centers on the souls of the formerly living. Players act as ghosts tied to the world of the living (the “Skinlands”) through emotional and physical bonds, but forced to act in the world of the dead (the “Shadowlands”). A character is made of two halves, the Psyche and the Shadow. The Psyche represents the face that most people see on a regular basis, and it is the half of the character is played strongest. The Shadow is played by another player in the game, (typically one who plays the Psyche of a different character) and represents personality traits one would rather keep hidden. In a western setting (Shadows play different roles depending on the region a wraith is from), the Shadow is typically childish, self-centered and petty. Interaction between these halves is primarily internal, though some powers can change this – rarely will other characters see a friend’s Shadow unless the character undergoes “Catharsis,” a scene where the Shadow gains enough power over the Psyche to gain dominance of the wraith.

Game play generally focuses on group and individual dynamics rather than external goals, as all the Restless Dead (general term used by wraiths for themselves) must come to grips with their afterlives somehow.

The geography of the Underworld is twofold: the Shadowlands are a dark mirror of the Skinlands, though everything is touched a little more by death and decay. Glass is cracked and grimy, roads and buildings look like they will crumble at the slightest touch, the living that are close to death show marks of how that end will eventually come. The other is known

as the “Tempest,” and is based heavily on ideas of the unconscious mind and Underworld myths. It is comprised mostly of open sea, though if one does not have a boat landmasses conveniently trace the way to a destination. The Tempest is infinite in size and contains an infinitude of “Far Shores:” Heavens, Hells, Nirvanas and other places of Eternal Retirement. These are the places Charon and later individuals who took up an oar ferried the deceased off to.

Eden:

Very little is said about a Shadowlands Eden. Charon, the Greek ferryman of the river Styx, plays a pivotal role as Emperor of the western ghost empire, Stygia. Eons ago, however, he was the first man to take up a raft and pole with the intent of guiding the recently deceased to their final resting places. The earliest times of Stygia were centered on this group of Shining Ones, as the books call them.

Fall:

The Fall comes when Charon realized the nature of the Far Shoes he had been ferrying the recently deceased off to. Realms were often headed by ancient wraiths grown fat with the power of age and experience. Hells were torments that souls did not necessarily deserve for eternity, Heavens were rarely much better. Charon decreed that souls should no longer be ferried to those false afterlives, but instead should be brought to the isle of Stygia to start a nation of their own in order to reach their just ends. Multiple stories exist as to why the Shining Ones (later simply called “Ferryman”) were barred from Stygia, but the truth is that an ancient being that called himself Osiris had found a method of separating Psyche and

Shadow. He asked that all Shining Ones undergo this ritual, that they would never need to fear their Shadow meddling with a journey – Charon knew both that his own Shadow was too powerful to be trusted on its own, and that if the two were split there would essentially be “good Ferryman” and “bad Ferryman” carting people off to various destinations. Once the group decided to accept the ritual, Charon left them and barred them from his nation.

Modern Era:

Since the ban of the Shining Ones, Stygia has gone from democracy to republic to empire. In each evolution the expanding bureaucracy squeezes what little life wraiths have out of them, to the current point of automatic conscription into the various Legions of Stygia upon death, with membership depending on the way an individual died. This and other historical events have led to the creation of three distinct groups in Underworld society: the Hierarchy (Stygia herself), the Heretics (those who choose religious means to reach Transcendence rather than simply “getting by”) and the Renegades (those who just want to “do their own thing”).

Most player characters will be in the Hierarchy, and their typical duties will be protecting an area from any and all incursions of Oblivion – Spectres and otherwise. The Hierarchy’s main goal here is to only stem the tide of death and decay, not to make any positive steps, the rationale being that as long as things are in stasis, wraiths can take whatever steps they need in order to Transcend. Within the massive bureaucracy and between shifts, however, Transcendence can be a difficult goal.

Apocalypse:

Apocalypse comes when the Jade Empire (the Asian wraith kingdom), led by an ancient Spectre (wraith with permanent Shadow dominance) who long ago devoured and assumed the form of the Jade Emperor, invades Stygia. This coincides with several relic atomic bombs (see below on Relics) destroying an ancient vampire city in the Tempest, creating an enormous Maelstrom that consumes both sides. Maelstroms are Tempest storms that can invade the Shadowlands (and often do shortly before or after events like wars, plagues or disasters) but mostly travel through the Tempest, spreading Spectres and destruction in their wake.

Once the Maelstrom and ensuing Spectre attack are complete, the empire of Stygia is left in ruin. Charon Transcends before a crowd of onlookers and many of his heads of state are missing, assumed destroyed. The Underworld goes on, though now individuals with ties to smaller groups, rather than three massive political parties populate it.

Relics, Fetters and Passions:

Relics are objects with large emotional investments that are destroyed and come across the barrier between worlds. The keys to a car collector's first car, family heirlooms and some objects purposefully destroyed by wraiths can all have relic versions in the Shadowlands. The attack on the vampire city in Ends of Empire (noted above) is done with a pair of atomic bombs that were destroyed by wraiths for this purpose.

Fetters are objects or living beings to which wraiths have strong ties. Family members, pets, possessions and other, more bizarre, objects can all be Fetters. Wraiths rarely know why certain things are their Fetters, and coming to the realization of why it has such power over them is one key to Transcendence. Supposing a man has a bowling trophy as a Fetter, he may

rarely question why it was so important to him, thinking it was just because he became runner-up in the league championship back in '89. But, as a part of a chronicle, a Storyteller may try to get that individual to come to the realization that it was just the most glaring reminder of how he always strove to be first place but never achieved it in anything he thought meaningful. Letting go of that ambition could resolve the Fetter, leaving one fewer tie to the physical world but also loosening his shackles to the afterlife.

Passions, like Fetters, represent bonds to the living world. They are typically constructed in a "Goal (Tied emotion)" format, such as "Say goodbye to my wife (Love)." They are the main mode of replenishing Pathos (the "fuel" for supernatural abilities). Characters understand their Passions much more and thus become easier to resolve, especially when the goal can be achieved like in our construction above. By actually accomplishing that Passion, the character resolves it and it no longer ties him to the afterlife, nor can it refill Pathos.

Utopia:

Characters achieve individual utopias by Transcending, that is, escaping the Underworld. In order to do so, a character must lose attachment to all Fetters and Passions, whether through resolving them, having them destroyed or the ties to them deadening with time. Several other steps must be taken, but once those two main parts are achieved a character undergoes a Final Harrowing. Harrowings happen regularly in the Underworld, whenever a character is reduced to zero health, loses a Fetter or Passion through any means other than resolution, or loses all of his or her Willpower. During one of these events, a character is put under duress by his or her Shadow and must pass some kind of test in order to escape unscathed. The format is very loose, and often depends upon the player playing the

Shadow and the Storyteller to create an appropriate scene. Failure can mean anything from loss of a Fetter or Passion to loss of existence. The Final Harrowing is one where the Shadow and Psyche face off for one final match for dominance. Should the Shadow win, the character spirals off to Oblivion. If the Psyche wins, the character successfully Transcends. Nobody knows what either end truly means, but it is assumed that Oblivion is not the better option.

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Appendix III

Mage: The Ascension

Overview:

This Appendix will not include “Eden” or “Fall” sections, as mages carry the same historical background as the rest of humanity. Depending on religious views or knowledge gleaned from time-travel, these histories change from character to character.

The game, however, puts players in control of individuals with minor control over reality. Still much more control than we average mortals (“Sleepers” in game terms) can ever hope for, but not so much to be considered godlike. The primary motivation for action is often external, as the little bit of power that characters have often prompts them to find more. Whether it is using their knowledge of Life magic to heal the sick (and extract huge donations in their television broadcasts), their skill with Mind magic to gain political power or their knowledge of the occult to increase their magical abilities to even higher reaches, powerful mages are often out looking for ways to become even more powerful.

The only difference between a mage and a Sleeper is knowledge. A mage (usually) knows that she can manipulate reality, and a Sleeper does not. The only limitation on most mages is that of foci. In order to actually bend the rules, most mages believe that they need some kind of tool to do so. Super-scientists can time-travel, but they need complex machines and preparations to do so. Powerful wizards can throw fireballs, but they need some sulfur, a pinch of bat guano and some Latin chants in order to do so. Televangelist healers can cure the sick, but only if the power of Christ truly compels thee. Large groups of Sleepers, however, can do just as much. A century ago, everyone knew space travel was impossible,

but after Sputnik was put into orbit we were able to launch so many satellites and manned missions that space debris blocks out a significant amount of starlight.

The Ascension War:

Beginning in the Renaissance, groups of scientists and reason-minded individuals began questioning old superstitions that they saw holding humanity back. When a doctor has access to leeches, bleeding and tonics, the amount of trust placed in hermits and their herbal remedies seemed absurd. Thus began the war for the minds of humanity. As far as early Technocrats were concerned, while humanity held on to superstitions and sorceries we would never leave the dark ages and a few individuals would have power over many. Technology and science, then, were pushed as the next wave, phasing out the old ways. Mages, who believed in the power of the will over reality, without aid from machines and reason, took up the side of the Traditions and the war was on.

The war rages in our world and outside it. In space and other dimensions and spiritual realms. The key to victory is either to completely annihilate the other side (which will never happen) or so thoroughly convince humanity of your side's veracity that that your opponent can no longer create magical/super-scientific effects.

However, the Technocracy ultimately wins, and finds that to neither side go the spoils of war. All of their science and technology has created a world of creature comforts, where the basic needs of most people are met (even if inadequately so), and so pushing the bounds of science even further is just too much of a hassle.

Modern Era:

Depending on when the Storyteller chooses to place the game, most modern chronicles will take place shortly before or after the end of the Ascension War. Unless a Storyteller wishes to run a very high-powered chronicle, characters will likely have little to no role in the Ascension War. Instead, they will have to face trials of everyday life, learning to use their power and dealing with the problems that arise from using it.

Apocalypse:

The common antagonist to both Technocrat and Traditionalist is the Nephandus. Where the former two work to Awaken mankind and eventually Ascend (gain so much enlightenment and understanding of the universe that an individual becomes one with it), Nephandi work to undo the universe.

Several centuries ago, one powerful Nephandus was locked in a bubble of reality outside time and space. In 2004, he escaped his prison and attempted to destroy both the physical world and the spirit world by bringing comets down in both. In order to avert this apocalypse, characters will have to use both Technocratic and Traditionalist tools. The end result is a brief unification of the two, as well as the destruction of each of their extra-dimensional strongholds and many of the leaders therein.

Sleepers and Reality:

All of reality is governed by whatever principles the majority of people believe in – it is reality by consensus. Magic and Super-Science are generally governed by the same principles, save that the strength of the users will dictate how much he can deviate from the consensus. The only danger is that reality can snap back (called Paradox effects) if stretched

too far. So, to return to some of our earlier examples, the wizard creating fireballs out of sulfur and bat guano is entirely outside of the norm. This kind of magical effect can be very difficult to bring to bear if any Sleepers are a witness to it, and only a little less difficult if there are none. Failure can quickly result in the mage suffering ill-effects of attempting to bend reality too much (perhaps the compounds she was using could create small fires, so she burns her hands instead of her enemies).

All of humanity then, not just a few enlightened individuals, decides our collective fate.

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Appendix IV

Demon: The Fallen

Overview:

A game of *Demon: the Fallen* centers on a group of characters that have all been possessed by fallen angels escaped from Hell. Unfortunately, in the escape the fallen had to “squeeze” through the cracks in the walls of Hell, shedding much of their power and memories in the process. Upon reaching this plane of existence, Hell attempts to pull them back and they must anchor themselves in whatever person, place or object they can find. Player characters must choose mortals. While the word at the top of the character sheet says “Demon,” characters are encouraged not to go with a mindlessly evil character. In fact, upon possessing a mortal, the fallen gain all memories and personality traits of that individual, often tempering their anguish of ten thousand years in Hell with human morality.

Characters can have a range of knowledge about their nature, from absolutely nothing (which makes reflexive manifestations of their demonic Lores interesting) to most of the time before and in Hell. Demons are sustained by Faith, which was once granted every morning by God himself and was used to shape the cosmos to what it is today. Now, they must garner it from the individuals around them, who are often so devoid of potential Faith that having enough is a rare occurrence.

Eden:

The history of the fallen loosely follows Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, with Lucifer rebelling against God, taking one third of the heavenly host, and eventually the lot of them being

thrown into the Abyss for their revolution. The changes are that the act of rebellion was to bring mankind knowledge in the first place, as Adam and Eve were the pinnacle of all creation but seemed to not be advancing to their potential at all. They could have been as God, but their lives were more like the opening scenes of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Fall:

It is difficult to pinpoint the end of Eden for the fallen – it could have been the time until they rebelled and actually became “fallen,” or it could have been the moment they were cast into Hell. Despite incurring God’s wrath and waging war on the Heavenly Host, the time between Lucifer’s act of rebellion and the sealing of the gates of Hell was almost a paradise, as fallen angels worked with mankind to create a Golden Age.

Whenever the first fall was, once the gates of Hell seal shut, the fallen realize Lucifer is not among them. He was not locked away as they were (though his punishment was to watch mankind flounder with immense knowledge and no wisdom).

Modern Era:

Now that they are out of Hell, the fallen must come to grips with what has happened. Different political factions form, each with broad goals for their future. Should they look for Lucifer? Should they try to make peace with God? Or, perhaps they ought to destroy creation so that no one may enjoy it? Should they make another Golden Age, placing themselves at the head of a new kingdom? As the game existed for only two years before its Apocalypse supplement, what exactly ought to happen in a *Demon: the Fallen* game is largely up to players and Storytellers, as are the details of most of the world.

Apocalypse:

In the end, God and Lucifer have to settle things their own way. In order for the Apocalypse to come to a “good” end, Lucifer must apologize to God. Characters in this scenario get to interact with the Morning Star himself, but mostly are forced to deal with his five Archdukes, the Earthbound, summoned out of Hell shortly after the gates shut. They did not understand that his punishment was to be different from theirs, and so their Torment caused them to become the bloody gods of empires past.

Utopia:

As such, the ultimate end goal for the fallen is not as far reaching as other games. Almost immediately out of the Abyss they have this charge put before them. What is the ideal end? Should characters succeed in thwarting each of the Earthbounds’ plans, they are either granted forgiveness by God for their previous actions and ascend to Heaven, or they proudly return to Hell to finish a punishment they once shirked.

References:

Bates, Andrew, and et al.. Demon: the Fallen. Stone Mountain, GA: White Wolf Publishing, Inc, 2002.

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