

Story Notes:

The working title of this novel is “Magik”. Please, oh please, somebody suggest something better. All C&C appreciated. Please send correspondence to cevans0423@rogers.com.

Note the deliberate misspelling of “magik” in the working title and used sparingly throughout the work. It is meant to be neither “magic” nor “magick”, but a cross between the two. For the purposes of this story I needed an “older” form of the word, and didn’t want to use either of the other two in order to distinguish it.

I didn’t want to step on the turf of magick. This book is not meant to have any witchcraft, pagan, or Wiccan themes. If there are any, it’s unintentional, since I admit to knowing nothing of these things, other than their existence.

The chapters are also quite short, so they may conglomerate later.

Copyright ©2002, Chris Evans. Permission to download, store and retransmit this PDF or PS file in whole and in any media for non-commercial use is hereby granted as long as the content, especially, but not limited to the copyright notice remains intact and unmodified. All other rights are reserved by the author. Enjoy!

Contents

Chapter 1

Embarkation

Fiona stepped off the school bus and made her way up the driveway. It had been a long, boring day at high school. She unlocked the door, walked in and locked it, and then went upstairs. As she dropped her books on the floor of her room, she was taken completely by surprise. A powerful and odd sensation, like nothing she had ever experienced, prompted her to look over to her bed. On her bed was a book she had never seen before. She cautiously walked over to her bed, sat down, and picked it up. It seemed heavier than she originally thought.

The binding was of dark brown leather, and it looked very well used. The writing on the cover looked handwritten. There was an ornate circular symbol, and the words “First Steps: Being an Introductory Treatise on the Use of Magik” in black ink, barely distinguishable from the colour of the cover.

That’s odd, she thought, isn’t magic spelt with a “c”? Come to think of it, I’ve seen it spelt “magick”, but not “magik”. She looked at her watch. As usual, she would have about an hour and a half until her mom got home. Well, I suppose it couldn’t hurt to read a little, she thought. I wasn’t going to do my homework before supper anyway.

She opened the book, and saw that the foreword was also handwritten. As she flipped through the book, she realized all the other pages were blank.

First Steps: Preface

The Protectorate has offered you this book so that you may understand the Ability that you have. Your Ability is a rare gift, and the talent to control the gift, rarer. This book will first help you to realize you have a gift that most people have not. As you continue to explore this book, you will gain the talent to control your Ability. Not everyone who has the Ability has seen this book, and some with the Ability never will.

You must discuss this book with no one. Ask not your parents, for it does not pass directly from parent to child. If you attempt to show this book to people who have not the Ability, it will appear not to them. If you rustle the pages, those without the Ability will hear them not. If you press further to make those who have not the Ability aware of the book's existence, The Protectorate will reclaim the book as easily as it has been left for you.

More information about The Protectorate you will not find in this book, for it is an organization shrouded in secrecy, and must remain that way. As you progress through the book, more and more chapters will become open to you. Once you finish the third chapter a member of the Protectorate will meet with you to discuss the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of membership. The fact that this book is in your hands shows you The Protectorate has invested considerable time in ensuring you will be able to meet the requirements of membership. However, an organisation which forces membership on its members will eventually crumble. It is the strong hope of The Protectorate that you become a member, however, it is your choice to make.

If you choose to become a member after completing the Chapter Three, you will immediately be granted the rank of Initiate, and you may continue reading the book at your leisure. You will be free to leave The Protectorate at any time.

If you choose not to become a member, you will not be allowed to continue to read the book. It will be reclaimed.

Now that you have read this preface, the first chapter will be open to you.

Good Luck,
The Protectorate

“Kind of clumsy writing. It seems like someone’s trying to write like Shakespeare, but I’m getting tired just trying to read it. Open to me? Wait a sec. Wow... All the pages were blank before! Now I see chapter one written here. I hope the rest of it isn’t written like the preface.”

First Steps: Chapter One: Feeling Your Energy

Those with the Ability naturally attract magikal energy. You probably aren’t aware of this energy right now, but this chapter will show it to you and teach you how to feel it.

To help you, this book has its own energy, and some of the examples will use it up. Once an example has been completed, you will need to provide your own magikal energy to perform the example again. The book will show you the way, but after you complete an example, you will not need the book to perform it again.

Magikal energy is a type of energy, just like heat, light, sound and movement. The difference between it and other forms of energy is that most people feel heat, see light, hear sound, and feel movement, but only those with the Ability can feel and use magikal energy. Popular works of fiction and some role playing games refer to “mana”, and this is a simple word to say and write, so when we refer to mana, it is magikal energy that we are talking about.

The first example will reveal to you where around you your mana is and how much of it you have. People have the Ability to varying degrees. If your Ability is strong, you will attract mana faster, and your mana will be packed more tightly around you. Mana is not bound by matter or other types of energy. It will flow through air, water, light, stone and fire with equal ease.

When you finish reading this page, and turn to the next, you will see your mana around you as a blue fog. The denser the fog, the denser the mana. Shortly thereafter, the fog will dissipate. When the fog dissipates, it will dissipate from the centre outward, so you will be able to see how far away from you it stretches.

She turned the page. Suddenly, the book glowed a soft blue, and the fog formed quickly in the same colour. It was difficult for her to see. She could only make out the book, parts of the bed and herself. After a few moments, the fog started to dissipate, and a few moments after that, she saw the edge of a sphere of fog reaching out to the far wall, and she was in the centre. Then the fog vanished. She continued reading.

When the fog first formed, if you were unable to see the edge of the fog, then you have the Ability strongly. If you were still able to see everything around you, then you have the Ability weakly. Remember, it is not black and white, strong and weak, but shades of grey, in degrees. No two people have exactly the same strength.

Her final traces of doubt were completely gone by this point. Her world had changed. She checked her watch again, and noticed she had an hour until her mom came home. “I’ve been looking at this book for half an hour? Where did the time go?”, she wondered aloud.

It is time for you to feel what you just saw with your mind. You now know that you have the Ability, and you now know your mana is surrounding you at this very moment. It can travel through all forms of matter and energy and it forms a sphere around you, called your mana field. This book also has its own supply of mana imbued within it. First, you will learn to feel this book’s mana. When you first walked into the area around the book, you likely felt its power. It was probably a feeling you would not be able to describe to another person, because it is likely you have never felt it before, and were never taught the language to describe it.

“So that was what that feeling was...”

At the end of this paragraph, leave the book where you found

it, and walk away from the book. Go further away than when you first experienced the sensation, then back toward the book again. You will likely start to feel it again when the periphery of your mana field crosses the book. Do this several times to orient yourself with the feeling, until the feeling becomes more familiar to you.

Fiona walked out of the room and waited for a moment to try to contain her excitement and nervousness. She walked back into the room and felt the strange sensation again. She also felt tingling down the back of her spine. She walked in and out of the room a few times until she no longer felt the tingling in her spine. She walked back to the book and continued reading.

Now you know how to experience the feeling you are searching for. Imagine that this feeling is a sixth sense. You have always had it, and you have always felt your mana around you with this sixth sense. Over time you have learned not to pay attention to it because the amount of mana around you doesn't change unless you start to use it up. If you ever noticed that you felt it again, or tried to describe it to someone else, they wouldn't understand, because they don't have the sixth sense that you do. Until now, you didn't know what to do with the information you were getting, but now you know what it is. Imagine that this information you are getting is similar to the sensation of touch. You can touch things, and move them around with your hands. You can use this sixth sense to feel and manipulate mana in the same way.

Try to once again feel the mana around you, as you once did as a child, not knowing what that feeling was, and unable to communicate it to others. Concentrate on the same experiences you had when you walked in the room, and use those experiences to guide your search. Remember the size and density of the blue fog you saw earlier. Now search for that fog again, only with your sixth sense, your magikal awareness, instead of with your eyes.

Entranced by the words and the meaning behind them, Fiona gradually

started concentrating on the experiences she had had. She remembered the fog that had surrounded her before. She was just starting to feel something when she heard the door unlock. She quickly put the book back on the bed, dived into her backpack, and grabbed the book she was supposed to be reading for English class, “Who has seen the wind”, by W.O. Mitchell. As she picked it up, her mom walked in the door downstairs. Phew, just in time, she thought. Fiona walked to her door.

“Hi, honey.”

“Hi, mom.”

“Anything interesting happen today at school?”

She hesitated and said, “No.”

“Is that book for English class?”

“Yep.”

“We’re going to have lasagne for supper.”

“Great! I can’t wait.”

To herself, she thought, I can’t wait to keep reading that book. She remembered reading that those without the Ability would not be able to see the book, so she thought it was safe for now to sit on the bed. She also thought if someone caught her reading the book, it would look like she was staring at her hands. She started reading the book for English, but couldn’t put the other book out of her mind.

She couldn’t concentrate on what she was reading, so she just set the English book back down. She closed her eyes and concentrated again on feeling her mana. After what seemed like a full minute, she started to feel the mana all around her. She kept at it, each time reducing the amount of time it took to find her mana slightly. Her mom’s voice broke her concentration.

“Honey?”

Fiona opened her eyes. “Yes, mom?”

“Are you tired?”

“Yeah, it was really boring at school today.”

“Maybe you should go to sleep earlier tonight.”

“Mom, I’m 17 years old. I think I know when to go to sleep.”

“Alright, alright. Could you come and set the table for me, please?”

Fiona hesitated slightly, and gave in. She set the table quickly and returned to her room. She picked up the book for English again, and tried to read, but the words didn’t sink in. Her mind kept wandering to the other book. She shut the door to block out the sounds of supper being made, but it wasn’t what was keeping her mind from her homework.

After more struggle to read the book for English, her father came home. She knew it must be close to supper time. She could hear her father and mother talking through the closed door, but couldn't make out the words. After a moment, she opened the door, and walked downstairs.

"Hi dad."

"Hi honey. Anything interesting happen at school today?"

"No."

"Your mother tells me you were actually getting homework done before supper today. I'm impressed."

"Well, I have to get two chapters read by tomorrow."

"Supper is in about 10 minutes."

"Thanks."

She went back up to her room, and started to take notes to force herself through the book for English. Supper was good, but she was preoccupied, and participated even less than usual in her parents' discussions. After supper, she went back to her room and closed her door again. She worked on her ability to find her mana until it only took a second or two with only a little concentration.

Fiona looked her watch again, and was surprised to see that it was getting late. After the effort of the day's mental concentration, she was able to fall asleep easily.

Chapter 2

Laying the Groundwork

The next morning, Fiona woke up to the harsh sound of her alarm and turned it off quickly. She remembered strange dreams of shadowy figures in blue fog. Her first classes were all extra boring today because now she had something to look forward to that had nothing to do with school. In English class, the teacher asked her a question about one of the chapters she was supposed to have read but she couldn't answer it.

"Fiona, you really need to keep up with the book or you won't get as much out of class."

"Alright, I'll catch up tonight.", she said, trying to end the issue quickly. It wasn't like her to promise such a thing so hastily. She saw a few brief confused looks from her friends out of the corner of her eye. Fortunately, the teacher relented, and stopped asking her questions.

With her mind still firmly on the book, and not the English book, time passed slowly, until she was finally back at home, alone.

Once you can see your mana, chapter two will be open to you.

I didn't realize I could start on chapter two already, she thought.

First Steps: Chapter Two: Focus is the Key

Mana, or magikal energy, is just another kind of energy, like heat

energy, light energy, sound energy, electrical energy, and kinetic energy. Also, it is possible to convert between these different forms. That means it is possible for you to convert the mana that surrounds you into heat, light, sound, electricity, or movement. This book has been imbued with these transferences. But before you can convert between different kinds of energy, you must learn to focus your mana on the area where you want to convert the energy. At the end of the chapter, you will focus your mana on this book, and in so doing, move this book across a smooth, flat surface with the power of your mind.

A tingling sensation ran down her spine.

First, find a flat, smooth surface to set the book on. The top of a desk or table is best. Clear out a space about two handspans around the book.

She grabbed most of the papers on her desk and quickly dumped them on the floor.

Take a moment and feel the mana around you, and feel this book's magikal power. As you hold that feeling, and turn the page, you will sense the transformation from mana, magikal energy, to movement, kinetic energy, and the book will move to the right. Again, make sure there is some space for it to move. Turn the page.

Fiona concentrated on her sixth sense, and turned the page. She felt the book get more powerful somehow, as if it were larger, and it started to move to the right. Not only was there the sensation she had learned to interpret as mana, but a new sensation. It felt like the book was a part of her body, and she could feel it move with her sixth sense. When the book stopped, so did the feeling. It had moved about the length of a ruler.

When you turn the page, this book will levitate. As it does so, it must continually convert mana to kinetic energy in order to remain balanced against the force of gravity. You will feel the book continuously using mana, but it will float motionless in the air.

She turned the page, and could feel the book get more powerful again. It rose to about the length of a ruler over a few seconds. She could feel the book continuously using its energy to remain in place. After a few moments, the book slowly came to rest back on the desk, and the feeling died down.

Now, you will provide some of your own mana to the book as it moves to the left. The first step to accomplishing this task is to learn to focus your mana, and make it denser around the book. You have learned to feel where your mana is, and you will now try to focus it. If you don't focus your mana, then it will be denser around your body. Think about this concept for a moment, and feel your mana around you once again, and understand that the farther away you feel your mana, the less of it there is. When you turn the page, this book will pull some of your mana towards it. Concentrate on the feeling you have. If you concentrate on the feeling after this book stops tugging on your mana again, it will form the key to focusing your mana all by yourself.

She focussed her mind on her mana as much as she could, and turned the page. She could immediately feel a pull on her mana, almost like a drain pulling water down. At first she tried to resist, and hold her mana where it was, but realized that she wanted to focus her mana, not pull it away. As she tried the opposite approach, the book started to move to the left. She felt the same odd feeling of movement again. She was so surprised that she stopped, and so did the book. A tingle ran down her spine. She focussed her mana again, and the book moved further to the left. When the glow around the book started to fade, she stopped again. Words started to appear on the page.

Congratulations. You have learned to focus your mana. Chapter Three is now open to you.

Fiona looked at her watch and realized it was just about time for her mom to come home. She quickly hid the book under her bed and put the papers back on the desk in her room. Although it was unlikely anyone else would see the book, even in plain sight for her, it was out of the way so at least no one would trip over it.

She thought about the day, and that she had promised her English teacher that she would be caught up by tomorrow. I better read those chapters because I *know* she'll ask me about them tomorrow, she thought. She still felt drawn to the book, but she knew she had to read her English book tonight for sure. It made it even more boring than usual, but that night she managed to finish her homework.

Chapter 3

A Glimpse of Things to Come

As she pulled the book out from under her bed, she remembered back to English class that day. After a good grilling, her English teacher was convinced that she had read the book. Thank goodness that's over, she thought, and opened the book to Chapter Three.

First Steps: Chapter Three: Getting into Motion

In the last chapter, you focussed your mana on this book, and this book used that energy to move. Now, with some help, you will provide the energy /and/ the will to make this book move. By the end of the chapter, you will be able to move objects around with your mind, without the need for this book's power.

A now familiar tingle ran down Fiona's spine.

Clear a space around the book so it is free to move. When you turn the page, focus your mana on this book as you did in the last chapter. As you concentrate on focusing your mana, also feel the tranference of the energy. Only by observing this feeling closely will you be able to move this book by yourself.

She turned the page. Nothing happened. She focussed her mana on the book, and it started to glow a soft blue and move to the right. She could feel the mana being transferred into movement. It felt like the book was a part of her body and she could feel its movement to the right with her sixth sense.

Now, remembering the feeling you just experienced, focus your mana on the book, and cause that feeling to occur. This time, you do not need to turn the page, since the book will not be using its power.

She focussed her mana on the book, and started to remember the feeling of movement she had from the book. She imagined that the book was just an extension of her body, and she wanted to move it to the left. At first nothing happened. She redoubled her efforts, focussing more of her mana on the book, and trying to move the book more. The book slid very slightly. She focussed even harder, and forced the book to the left. It slid right off her desk, taking the rest of the papers with it. She was too stunned to move. She looked over at the book with a weird mix of delight and fear. She stared at it, wild thoughts running through her head. Suddenly, she heard a key opening the front door. She quickly grabbed the papers and started to put them back on her desk, leaving the book on the floor for the time being.

“Hi, honey.”

“Hi, mom.”

“What’re you up to?”

“Oh, just organising some papers on my desk.”

“Wow, first you do your homework before supper, now you’re cleaning your desk. I’m impressed. You haven’t even gone out with your friends in the past few days, so you could finish your homework. I don’t know what’s gotten into you, but I must say I like it.”

She needed to switch the topic of the conversation, fast.

“What’s for supper?”

“Chicken helper, the roasted garlic one.”

“Great, I can’t wait!”

She thought she heard her mother say, “That makes two of us.” With her mom busy in the kitchen, she picked up the book to put it where no one

would trip over it, but stopped. She opened the book to the next page, and read:

You have completed Chapter Three. A member of The Protectorate will come to see you when it is convenient with you to discuss the rights, responsibilities and privileges of membership.

If you choose to become a member, you will immediately be granted the rank of Initiate, and you may continue reading the book at your leisure. You will be free to leave The Protectorate at any time.

If you choose not to become a member, you will not be allowed to continue to read the book. It will be reclaimed.

All the other pages were still blank, which was nearly all of the book. By the number of pages that were left, there could be fifteen or more chapters, similar in length to the previous three. What was that about "convenient with me"? How will they know what's convenient with me until they talk with me?

Brenda turned over in bed to talk to her husband. "Tom?"

"Yes, hon?"

"Do you think she's asleep?"

"I think so."

"Have you noticed how Fiona seems to be, well, different lately?"

"She seems to be a bit more interested in her school work."

"There's that, but I get the feeling she doesn't want to talk anymore."

"When did you notice it?"

"In the past day or so."

"How can you tell in just a day?"

"Call it...women's intuition."

“OK, so what do you think is happening?”

“Irritability, not going out with her friends, tiredness, those are all signs of depression.”

“What do you think we should do?”

“I’ll try to watch for anything else, and I’ll try and talk to her.”

“I think you worry too much. Promise me you’ll leave it be for a few more days at least.”

“Alright.”

“Speaking of being tired, we should get some sleep too.”

Chapter 4

The Meeting

The next morning she awoke with memories of dreams of tall men in black suits, black ties, black sunglasses and earpieces coming to find her. Half the time she was trying to run away, and half the time she was looking for them.

After school, she got home and made extra sure to lock the door. She went up to her room, and as she dropped her backpack on the floor, she heard a knock at the door. She froze. Oh, it's probably some kid wanting me to sponsor him or her for something or other. No big deal. She walked downstairs and opened the door, and saw a boy about her age in a silverchair T-shirt. As she was about to say, "Are you here to get me to sponsor you?", he said, "I'm from The Protectorate".

She paused. "Huh?"

"I'm here to answer your questions about The Protectorate."

"I thought you wanted me to sign up to sponsor you for something or other. You don't exactly look like a secret agent."

"Yeah, I get that a lot. But seriously, if I looked like a secret agent, I'd stick out like a sore thumb. Why don't I just wear a sign that says, 'Hi, I'm from a secret organisation?'"

She thought about this, and laughed. "Come on in", she said, her guard let down a little at his joke. They sat down at the kitchen table.

"Could you pull out the tome?"

"You mean, the book?"

"Yes."

"Oh, sure." She went to her bedroom to grab the book, and returned to the kitchen table quickly. She was still a little unsure about her new visitor.

“OK, let’s start with the name, ‘The Protectorate’. What exactly are you protecting, anyway?”

“Innocent people.”

“That’s kind of vague.”

“Well, that’s the best I can do right now. Exactly what we do needs to be kept absolutely secret, and until you’ve been with us for a few months, and we make sure it’s a good fit, I can’t tell you.”

“Hmm...sounds like I’m applying for a job.”

“That’s not far from the truth, except that instead of paying you, you get to meet people like yourself and hopefully save more lives using your Ability than anyone has in say, firefighting or police work.”

“So you protect innocent people?”

“That’s right.”

“Protect them from what, exactly?”

“I can’t say yet, but the major responsibility of membership is going to come at some point in the future, when there will be a lot of lives at stake. Unfortunately we don’t know exactly when.”

“You mean like some major Earth disaster like a meteor or earthquake or something?”

“Something like that.”

“How do you know it’s going to happen? It seems like all those other kooky end of the world stories that never happened. Like Y2K, but even more vague.”

“With Y2K, we had time to get prepared. I hope it’s the same with what’s in store for us. By the way, we call it ‘Phase III’. Hopefully, it won’t be the end of the world, because we’ll be ready for it, and we’ve planned for what happens after it as well. Unfortunately, I can’t explain why we know it’s going to happen or what it is that’s going to happen until you get promoted.”

“Alright, so what *can* you tell me.”

“How about the rights, responsibilities and privileges?”

“OK.”

“You have the right to leave at any time. As for responsibilities, we need to have a rapport of absolute trust. If I ever lied to you, I’d be out of the organisation, no questions asked, no excuses taken. Same with you. Unfortunately, you can’t be as candid about us with non-members. We’re all preparing for Phase III by continuously honing our Abilities. When it happens, everyone’s going to know who we are and what we’re doing, and

hopefully we're going to save a lot of lives, but before that happens, you've got to be quiet about all this. It's unfortunate that we're asking you to be completely truthful with members and hide all this from non-members, but for now, it'll have to stay that way. I suppose it's part of the tradition of our organisation, and it has served us well, but it's a bit hypocritical. That also means not using your Ability obviously in public. Do that and you're out. It's fine in a small way, if no one sees or understands what you're doing is, say, beyond reality. Keep it a closely guarded secret.

"The privileges are that you can ask for my help when you're troubled or in danger, and I'll be there no matter what. If you join, I'll teach you how to signal me. I know a lot about you, in fact I was the one who suggested we give a book to you, but unfortunately I can't reciprocate. We have strict rules about contacting other members. Those with lower rank signal people of higher rank, but those of higher rank don't go and see people of lower rank regularly so that it limits what we know in case someone from the outside wants to tear down the organisation. I don't know how to contact people of higher rank other than signalling them, and they can assess the situation properly when they arrive. People at the same rank don't know each other, and don't find out about each other. That way, if one of us is captured, which hasn't happened in over two hundred years, the people of higher rank will scope out the situation, and try to rescue a person in danger if possible without revealing who they are. That way, if a person of lower rank is coerced into signalling a person of higher rank, the person of higher rank won't get captured."

"Wow, you guys have thought a lot about all this."

"In the beginning, when more people knew about magik, more extreme measures were needed to ensure that we remained a secret. Unfortunately it was needed because regular people tend to mistrust us. The rules are strict, but we've remained together for quite some time. No one knows exactly how long, but there are rumours The Protectorate has gone back to the Dark Ages."

"So that explains the preface of the book."

"The writing in the preface is meant to be a balance between the original preface from ages past, but it's still meant to be readable for someone not as versed in middle English. It's a difficult balance, but its important to stress the age of the tome."

"Have you ever considered just rewriting it in plain English?"

“The Protectorate has been around for a long time. We wanted to put that in the writing style as well.”

“Is there anything else you can tell me?”

“I’ve layed out all the rights, responsibilities, and privileges, and you’ll have to base your decision on that. For those three things, there aren’t going to be any more strings.”

“And I can read the rest of the book.”

“Yes.”

She thought about all this for a minute in silence.

“Alright, count me in.”

“OK, but remember, you can’t lie to another member or reveal your Ability to anyone, regardless of the consequences. That’s absolutely unforgivable.”

“I understand.”

“Alright, I’ll teach you how to signal me. Use it when you’re in danger, or if you’ve been on one chapter in the book for a week and can’t get it. Don’t abuse the signal.”

“I won’t.”

“Alright, here goes. As a courtesy, I’ve pushed some of my mana away from you so that you didn’t get overwhelmed when you walked to the door. You’ve only experienced the tome’s energy, and the tome’s energy pales in comparison to both your energy and mine. Do you remember the feeling you get when you walk close to the tome?”

“Yes. I can feel it right now, in fact.”

“That’s good. I’m going to slowly move my mana back around myself now. You’re going to feel much the same sensation, but it will be stronger this time, since I control more mana than the tome. Ready?”

“Yes.”

“OK.”

At first, she felt as though there were two books in the room, but the new one got stronger and stronger, and closer and closer to the boy. Soon, it was so strong that she didn’t need to concentrate to feel it anymore.

“How are you doing so far?”

“OK, I guess.”

“Alright, I’m almost finished.”

She could then feel his full power. It was roughly the size of her own.

“Am I about as strong as you?”

“You have about the same amount of mana around you as I do. Your Ability is about as strong as mine, which is pretty strong. When I first noticed you, I nearly froze up. But size isn’t the only thing that matters. It matters how well you can use it too.” He said suggestively.

Slowly she could feel the mana surround them, and soon couldn’t tell the difference between her mana and his mana.

“When two people who have the Ability meet and hold their mana close like this, it surrounds both of them. Mana doesn’t have an owner, it just moves toward people who have the Ability. If a stronger person has used up some of their mana and walks near a weaker person, then more mana will collect around the stronger person. If you were weaker than me, when I left, I’d focus some back into you from a distance. You should do the same if you meet someone weaker than you. It’s only fair.

“Also, when two or more people perform some collaborative magik, they work closely together so that they can benefit from the mana of all of them combined.

“To signal me, you need to focus your mana and transfer a lot of energy in a short burst. You should always keep some mana around for signalling in an emergency. Don’t ever use it all up. It doesn’t really matter what you transfer, but the best thing in most circumstances is to make the wind around you blow faster. First of all, it’s simple. You already know how to move a solid object, the tome, so making the wind around you blow faster will be child’s play for you. Second, it’s not as conspicuous as, say, making a fireball flame up to the sky like a flare.”

Fiona laughed, then nearly jumped in surprise.

“Can you really make a fireball?”

“It’s difficult, but possible. It wastes a lot of mana, but it’s really showy.”

“No doubt...”

“You’ll get there. Now slide the tome a little on the table.”

She remembered the force she used before, and eased it off a little. She focussed the same amount, but tried to slide the book just a little. The book slid slightly on the table.

He looked impressed. “Great. That’s a good measuring of force. Now focus on the air above the book, and move that.”

She did, and felt a very small breeze.

He said, “Good. You know you made a new record.”

“I did?”

“Yeah, you got through the tome in three days. I think you have a natural talent to go with your Ability. Most people struggle with the first few chapters for a couple of days each. The previous record was five days.”

She didn't know what to say, so he continued, “Now force the air above the book harder.”

She focussed the same amount as before, but used the same amount of force she used on the book when it slid all the way off the desk. They both felt a strong breeze.

He said in amazement, “Wow, that's good. I could have felt that in the next block. Try moving the air outside.”

She got up out of the chair. He said, “No, have a seat. Do it from here.”

“OK...”

She focussed her mana on the air outside. It took more effort than usual to pull the mana from around her body outside, but she managed. She forced the air to move, slowly at first, but with increasing intensity.

“OK, stop now. You're going to blow the trees in your backyard over.” He joked. “With the amount of transfer that you just did, I'd be able to feel it from across town. Also remember that anyone else with the Ability who is near will also be able to feel it, and in time, you'll be able to feel it if I did the same amount of transfer across town.

“After I feel you signal me, I should be able to be near you in about ten seconds.”

“Did you say ten seconds?”

“That's right.”

“From across town? How?”

“That's another secret for now. It's in chapter fifteen. Oh, and signal me when you get to the end of chapter fifteen.”

She heard her mom drive up in the car.

“Oh, shit! My mom's going to see you!”

“My cue to leave. Good luck, Initiate.”

He put his hand on the book and it started to glow a faint blue. Then he stood up and a blue fog encircled him. She could feel that he was using a lot of mana for whatever it was that he was doing. Very quickly, it seemed as though he was made of the blue fog. Then he was gone.

She heard a key in the lock, and realized she wanted to hide the book, but it was too late. She was standing by the time her mom opened the door.

“Hi honey, what's up?”

“She looked at the fridge. Oh, I was just looking for something to eat.”

“Well, there’s some leftover Chicken Helper in there.”

“Oh, right. That sounds good. Actually, on second thought maybe I’ll just have something to drink.”

She grabbed a glass from the cupboard, and got some water.

“How’s school going?”

“OK.”

She focussed her mana on the book, and she held it aloft. Her mom didn’t even blink. Good, she thought, she can’t see it. She carefully moved the book through the air, past her mother’s head to the stairs. Her mom was completely oblivious. It was all she could do to avoid having the water go up her nose. As the book got further out from her, it got harder and harder to focus on it. It then slammed to the ground, making a huge thump. Fiona cringed.

“What?”

Quickly thinking of a cover up, she said, “Oh, I just remembered that I have to read two extra chapters for English class tonight. I’d better get started.”

“OK. You know if there’s anything you want to talk about, I’m here.”

“Yep.”

She took what was left of the water to the stairs. When she got there, she floated the book up to her other hand, taking it up the stairs in one fluid motion. She set the book and glass of water on her desk, and closed her door. That was odd, she thought. I’ve never tried to move something at the edge of my mana field. I’d better not try that again. She opened the book to chapter four.

First Steps: Chapter Four: Heating it Up

In the past chapters, you learned how to convert mana into kinetic energy. In this chapter, you will learn how to convert mana into heat. This book is special in many ways. In particular, it can’t be burned. At first, you should focus on this book when you practice. You must take great care when you perform the conversion, or you may set something on fire accidentally. It is a good idea to have some water nearby.

She looked over at what was left of the water sitting on the desk. That was lucky, she thought. I hope I don't have to use it.

When you turn the page, this book will use some of its mana, and heat up a few degrees. Hold your hand on the book when you turn the page, and as you feel the book heat up, concentrate on the energy transference taking place.

She turned the page. It felt as though the book was a part of her body, it was cold, and it was heating up to body temperature. She could also feel the temperature by touch, and tried to put these two feelings together. It only rose a few degrees, barely able to be felt by touch, but slightly easier to feel with her sixth sense.

Now focus your mana on this book, and raise the temperature further. Make sure the water is within easy reach.

She moved the glass of water closer to the book, and focussed hard on one spot in the centre of the book. She felt the book as an extension of herself again, and tried to imagine her blood flowing through the book, warming it up. She felt a spike in the temperature of the book, and quickly stopped. She picked up the book, to look for any ashes or burn marks on the table. There were none. As she placed the book down, she saw new words on the page.

Heat is difficult to control, and you should always be careful when using it, since fires are even harder to control, magikally or otherwise. Chapter Five is now open to you.

She realized that it wouldn't be long until supper, so she put the book out of the way, and started on her homework.

Brian phased in on Drexel. He remembered the startled reaction on Fiona's face when he left so abruptly. He tried to remember the first time he had seen someone phase out, and smiled at the recollection. He had picked up the use of the fog to ease the impression on people seeing it from his mentor. It was practical, but it had a certain flair to it. Without the fog to cover his exit, she would have seen his insides as he phased out. It had taken some time to become used to the sight of someone phasing out without the fog as well as with.

It had also taken him quite some time to get used to the bluish tinge in the trees and grass, and the two suns here. He didn't need to signal his presence, since anyone here could feel that amount of mana being used. Ken opened the door of the cottage and rushed up to greet him. His long cloak was flapping in the breeze.

"Brian! Have a good trip?"

"Hi Ken. It was pretty uneventful."

"I hope it didn't take too much out of you."

"I've been making a lot of runs lately, but I'm starting to get used to it again."

"So I assume by that smile on your face that you have good news for me. Why don't you come in and have a seat?"

"Sure."

They walked into the cottage and took seats at the large table. Both the cottage and table had seen a lot of use, but they were well kept. Most of the important meetings in his life with The Protectorate had happened around this table.

Ken started first. "So she accepted?"

"Yes."

"Excellent. You said that she has the Ability as strongly as you do?"

"Yes."

"We can't afford to lose her."

"I know. Should we have a 24 hour guard?"

"You taught her how to signal you?"

"Yes."

Ken contemplated in silence for a moment, and said, “How many operatives to we have in the immediate area, on average?”

“Enough to cover her 24/7.”

“Hmm...I think the shield should offer her enough cover while she’s asleep. We haven’t had any enemies show up for quite some time. Besides, we don’t want to violate her privacy. How much did you tell her?”

“Only as much as she needed to know to make a decision. Although something tells me that if she got to keep the book at the end of the deal, she would have agreed to anything.”

“The book holds a great deal of power over someone who has just received it. It is imperative that we don’t use that power incorrectly.”

“I know.”

“What about her talent?”

“She beat the record.”

Ken was left speechless for a moment, with his mouth open. “How many days?”

“Three.”

“That’s a cause for great celebration! That will give us a much needed boost for Phase III. Although, we should wait until she finishes the book before we celebrate. That will also give me time to prepare. What’s her favourite food?”

“Chicken nachos supreme.”

“A girl after my own heart.” Ken chuckled.

“Is there anything else?”

“Any news on the Amulet?”

“We’ve got everyone we can spare still looking for it. We’re trying to reach as far as we can out there, but it would help if we had someone who could Travel farther and detect it from farther away.”

They lapsed into silence as they both contemplated what would happen if someone else found it first. If The Protectorate found the Amulet first, then they could choose when Phase III would begin, and where. Even if some other group found it before them, it could still turn out to their advantage, as long as they didn’t use it against Earth directly. Although The Protectorate had not existed the last time it was used, other races they had met told stories of its existence, and that after its use worlds had been conquered and massive trade alliances had been formed. It seemed that nearly every race that had a story about the Amulet had a different perspective on how it should be used, if at all. Some would be perfectly content if it was never found again.

They had heard a full range of stories, from the genocide of several species of sentient life in great lengthy wars, to opening the door to meeting hundreds of peaceful civilizations. The Protectorate sometimes dealt with one trade alliance that had been formed after the use of the Amulet, and the alliance had been around for millennia. Those ties would become crucial at the start of Phase III. If everything went according to plan, Earth could become a new centre of trade in the universe. If not, the consequences could be equally devastating.

Chapter 5

Self-Confidence

The next day, Fiona said goodbye to her mother and father as usual before they left for work, and as she was tying her shoes, she wondered how small an object she could move with her Ability. She looked at one of the laces, and thought it would be a good test. She focussed her mana on it, and tried to move it, but felt and saw both laces move. Fiona focussed tighter on one of the laces, and successfully moved it slightly with her Ability. Her concentration was broken by the need to get out to the end of her driveway to catch the bus, but she vividly remembered the feeling of satisfaction she got by passing her own test, even until lunch hour at school.

As she was walking toward the cafeteria with her friends, she saw a bully berating a smaller kid near one of the doors. People were standing around, but everyone was focussed on the argument. Carefully, she made sure no one was watching, and slowly untied the bully's laces with her Ability as she distracted him and the onlookers.

"Hey, what do you think you're doing!" Fiona yelled at the bully.

"What's it to you?"

"Don't you think he's had enough?"

"Mind your own business!"

"Pick on someone your own size!"

"Who, like, you?"

He lunged at Fiona to try to scare her away, but tripped over his own shoelaces. There was a huge uproar of laughter, then the smaller boy darted into the cafeteria. The bully tied his shoelaces, and stomped off, thoroughly embarrassed. She felt a jolt of satisfaction.

“That was lucky,” her friend Mary said.

“He had it coming to him. Besides, if he had of made it over to me, I would’ve kicked his ass anyway.”

“Where did all that self-confidence come from? You’ve never stood up for anyone that I can remember. Sometimes not even yourself. Luckily I’ve been here when that happens.”

“I appreciate that. I’ve been reading a...self-help book.”, she covered quickly. That’s not even far from the truth, she thought.

“So that’s why you haven’t been out of the house lately.”

“Yeah.”

“The author of your self-help book needs to write more about socializing with peers.”

“OK, ok, I get the hint. How about we go to the Palasad tomorrow night?”

“Sure.”

After she got home from school, and was walking up the stairs, she heard a knock at the door. She walked back down the stairs. I wonder who that could...but her train of thought was derailed as the full force of another mana field caught her by complete surprise. Why is he...Oh my God I’ve used my Ability in a public place, oh shit I’m going to lose the book. As she opened the door she expected to see anger and resentment for trusting her on his face, but all she saw was a bright smile.

“Hi, come in.” She said lamely.

“I was impressed with how you handled that incident at school.”

“You...were?”

“Yeah, I would’ve done the same thing.”

“Really? But what about using my Ability in a public place?”

“I admit it was gutsy, and if anyone found out...that would have been...a very unfortunate turn of events, but you distracted them pretty well. Protecting the innocent, which is exactly the reason we exist, is what you did today. Doing it with your Ability without anyone knowing takes talent and skill. Today, you showed me you have both.”

“Oh.”, was all she could manage for a moment, and then asked, a little indignantly, “How did you know?”

“I keep a close eye on you. It’s part of my...job.”

“You’re watching my every move, just waiting for me to screw up!”

“No, that’s not quite true. Yes, I’m responsible if you make a mistake. But it’s partly for your protection as well. We can’t afford to lose you, we

can't afford to lose anyone as a member, really, but that doesn't mean you get carte blanche. Everyone needs to abide by the rules. You let your emotions guide your actions today, and sometimes that's exactly what you need to do. But when you think about using the Ability in public, you better use your head too, and make sure no one finds out. All I'm suggesting is that you look before you leap and use a little restraint. I'm watching what you do to make sure you live up to our high standards, since I know you're capable of achieving them. You know how I mentioned you made a new record with the tome, and the previous record was five days?"

"Yeah?"

"That was my record. But don't worry, I don't hold a grudge." He smiled, and just as before he seemed to become the blue fog that surrounded him, and he was gone.

Damn, she thought. I forgot to ask for his name. Although, he probably wouldn't have told me anyway. Fiona locked the door, and went back to her room to study the book further. She still had an hour before her mom was due back home.

First Steps: Chapter Five: Just Chillin'

In the last chapter, you learned how to convert mana into heat. In this chapter, you will learn how to convert heat into mana. Cold is the absence of heat. When you convert heat into mana, it will make the focussed object cold, and you will have added its energy to your mana field. Performing this transformation is exactly the opposite of the last chapter, so use that fact to your advantage.

When you turn the page, this book will use its power to convert some of its heat energy into mana. That mana will be formed near this book, and will become part of your own mana field. You don't need to concentrate on how much mana you get, because it will only be a small amount. Concentrate on the transformation taking place, and remember it.

She turned the page, but kept her hand on the book. It felt as if it were an extension of herself, and it started to cool down slightly. Words formed on the page.

Now, perform the transformation yourself.

She focussed her mana on the book, and remembered how she heated it up in the last chapter. The book started to warm up. Now she imagined pulling some of the heat out of the book, and adding the energy to her body. Nothing happened. With the confidence she had learned in the previous chapters, she tried again, with more effort, but still, nothing happened. She focussed her mana tighter on just a small part of the book, near her hand, and tried with a lot of effort. Nothing happened. “What am I doing wrong?”, she whimpered aloud.

She remembered that the boy had told her not to signal him unless she couldn’t figure out a chapter in a week. It made it even harder on her that she had just seen him. A week? Surely he couldn’t have meant a whole week. I’ll try for a few more days. I’ll get it, she resolved. Unable to continue for now, she started her homework.

That night she was sitting at the supper table with her mom and dad as usual.

“Could I have the car tomorrow night? A bunch of friends and I are going to the Palasad.”

Her mother and father looked at each other for a moment, and her mother said, “Don’t they serve alcohol there?”

“Only after 9 o’clock. Then you need to get an arm-band. But don’t make me come home at 9. It’s just getting interesting by then. Besides, all my friends and I are under-age, how am I going to get a drink?”

Her mother thought about this for a moment, but she didn’t really need to. Fiona had used this argument before, and already knew the answer before she opened her mouth.

“So you meet a cute guy who gives you a drink.” She quickly added, “That’s even worse with all those ‘date-rape’ drugs around. You can never tell.”

“Mom, I’m old enough to take care of myself. Besides, I’d be driving home, and I know better than to drive drunk. Especially under-age.”

Her mother and father shared a long look, and her mother relented.

“Alright, I suppose you deserve a break after studying so hard for the past few days. Be back by 11 o’clock.”

“Thanks! No problem.”

“And if you have any alcohol...”

“I won’t have any alcohol,” she emphasized.