

# Anthology Two Presents Mysteria: Frozen In Heaven



by Chris Munn

Copyright © 2010 by Chris Munn and Artifice Comics

Cover art by Dwayne Biddix (<http://dlxscscomicartist.deviantart.com/>)

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

Published by Artifice Comics - <http://www.artificecomics.com>

"Six and Three...Six and Three...Ia Sakkakth...Ia Sha Xul..."

"Just get on with it now. We've not all night to tarry so."

"Creep is right, Lady. Let's get this show on the road."

"Fuckin' aye, lads."

The Lady of Knives paused in her incantation, darting her eyes across the faces of the three men that encircled her around the square table. "If you don't mind, gentlemen, I'd really like to not be eaten by Humwawa tonight. Can you at least grant me that simple wish?" The men offered no reply to the woman, who despite her youthful and beautiful appearance was the oldest of the group. She smiled in acknowledgement of her partners, clearing her throat in preparation to continue.

"I don't know why you bother about with those elder gods, my Lady," the man directly across from her stated, his voice a shrill rasp of hissing air, "you should really seek out some of the newer deities. Not as powerful, of course, but so much easier to deal with." Smoke billowed from the fleshless face of Doctor Creep as he spoke, a cigarette dangling from between his teeth. A skeleton in a bathrobe - or, as he liked to call himself, the Hugh Hefner of the Occult. "They've not quite as much to prove as the nasty gods, you know."

"You know the Lady, though," the oldest looking of the four (though, as previously stated, not the oldest in age), to the right of the Lady and the left of the Doctor, said with a laugh, "all style and no substance. You ask me, to Hell with all the so-called 'gods', and take it back to the old school. Magic for magic's sake, none of this 'invoking higher powers' crap. I can do the same trick you're doing now, and not have to worry about ol' Hummy coming down to eat my penis." Deadman Smith, his long white hair hanging in strings from his balding scalp, tossed a playful wink in the Lady's direction.

"Fuckin' right on!" the youngest, in both age and appearance, bellowed from his position across from Smith, "This shit's waaaaay passe', gang. Chaos magic is the way to go nowadays, slippin' in through the bloody Internet and tearing the walls of the Infonatural Superhighway to fuckin' shreds! It's a trip...and, um, yeah, no penis-eating involved there, either." The boy, twenty-three years old if he was a day, snorted as he lightly stroked the spikes of his purple mohawk. Termin was his name, one he invoked with as much smug pride as humanly possible.

The Lady of Knives cocked an eyebrow at the youth. "Now do you remember," she asked with a sigh, "why we don't get together like this anymore?"

"This night carries with it important work, my Lady," the Doctor said, the smoke from his cigarette now drifting up and out of his skull's facial holes, the places where his nose and eyes once sat, "we four are the only beings capable of steering her in the right direction. The only other alternative is ruin and destruction."

"I know, I know," she answered, a small dagger flipping into her hand from the holster on her wrist, "but that doesn't mean I have to like it."

"So wa'is this all for, anyway?" Termin asked, a tarot card nervously dancing between his fingers. "That looks like a protection spell, am I right?"

"That's right, kid," Smith replied as the Lady finished her spell, a wave of crimson magic erupting from the center of the table, "to keep the beasties and other not-so-nice people from interrupting this little pow-wow."

"The fuck?" the youngest sorcerer stated eloquently. "Then how's this ol' bitch supposed to get 'er way in here?"

"Easy, youth," Doctor Creep stated as he put his cigarette out in the ashtray, "Our guest of honor is already here. Been here for nigh on ten minutes now, wouldn't you say, dear?"

All four of the sorcerers turned their gazes toward the far side of the room, staring intently at the young woman in black. She stumbled slightly, taken aback at the Doctor's statement. "I don't -

you can see me?" The domino mask across her eyes couldn't disguise the look of confusion on her face.

"Victoria," the Lady addressed the newcomer, waving her to the table, "come and sit. We are the Mages of America...and we have much to discuss."

\* \* \*

"Alright young'un, we've got some stuff to tell you," Deadman Smith began, Victoria sitting across the table from him, "so pay attention. It's for your own good, trust me. If I'd had somebody explaining this shit to me when I first started, well, it'd have probably saved me from dying the first three times."

Mysteria glanced out of the corner of her eye, spying the other three Mages as they talked amongst themselves around the couch on the far side of the room. "Don't you be worryin' none about them," Smith said, snapping his fingers in the woman's face, "there's a silence bubble surrounding us. They can't hear what goes on in here, because what I have to say is for you, not them."

"Okay, then let's hear it, old man," Vicky said, swiping Smith's hand away from her face, "why'd you people contact me? How did you know that I was Mysteria?"

Deadman laughed loudly, a laugh interrupted by a fit of coughs. After a second he collected himself, then resumed the discussion. "We used to be heroes, doll. Back in the 40's, me and the Lady and Creep over there, we were the Mages of America. There was Sparkfly, god rest his soul, and Magenta. That's why you're here. Magenta the Magician. Ring any bells?"

"Albert Weisz..." she mumbled, thinking back to the old man that gave her the mystical scarab, the man responsible for her becoming the heroine Mysteria.

"S'right," Smith answered with a smirk, "at least you're not totally brain dead yet."

"So what about him?" she asked, ignoring the old man's barb.

"You're his chosen successor, kid. That means you're one of us by default, one of the new Mages. You understand?"

"I...really don't think I do."

Deadman sighed, rubbing his eyes with thumb and forefinger. "Look, there's a series to all this. You'll learn what you gotta learn, but not all at once, y'know? It's like steps, and this is number one."

"Funny, to me this barely seems like anything, let alone a step in my life. As far as I know, you guys are all a bunch of weirdoes that couldn't hack being super heroes." She paused. "Okay, except for maybe the guy with no skin."

"Compared to Doctor Creep," Smith stated coldly, "I'm the fuckin' Easter Bunny."

"Cute. So what's this first step you mentioned?"

"You get to learn about your maker, Vicky Burke," Smith said "it's time you learn just who Magenta the Magician really was."

\* \* \*

**JANUARY 5th, 1946**  
**NEW YORK CITY**

"Calm down, son," Magenta said as he placed an assuring hand on his young partner, "we shouldn't go in without a plan. This is a dangerous man we're dealing with."

"I'm not your son," the boy, seventeen years old, spat as he shrugged Weisz's hand from his shoulder, "I'm older than you, remember? Just because I'm Deadboy Smith, that doesn't mean you can talk down to me."

"My apologies," the sorcerer said as he raised his cane into the night air, "but you must understand how hard it is for me to think of you as anything more than a child." A faint glow began to pulse from the end of Magenta's staff, bathing the rooftop around them in a soothing yellow light.

"Yeah, I know, I know," Deadboy said as he crouched down, taking a peek off the building's ledge, "but remember this: when you're dead and gone, I'm still going to be here. The body may change, but the mind stays the same...resurrected until doomsday."

"Are the others going to join us tonight?" Albert asked, choosing not to comment on the sadness that so obviously came across in the boy's voice. "I don't know how comfortable I am with just the two of us confronting the Steeplejack. Even one of the other Mages could possibly give us the advantage..."

"I did a spread with the cards before I left the house," Smith answered, "and it looks like we're it for tonight. But it should be fine, there were no negative omens in the reading."

"I've been wondering," Magenta started hesitantly, "what do the boy's parents think of your...situation?"

"What, you think they know?" Deadboy replied with a chuckle. "Yeah, I can see it now - 'Sorry ma, pa, but your baby boy here is actually the reincarnated soul of a thirteenth century magician'. Imagine how well that would go over."

"Touche," was Albert's only reply as his fingers danced lightly across the golden scarab artifact affixed to his neckline.

"You any closer to figuring that thing out?" Smith asked, returning to a standing position.

"Six years, and I'm still learning something new about it every day," he said with a sad little smile, "almost makes me feel like a fool sometimes."

"We all go through that," Smith said, "heh, imagine what it was like for me, first time I died. A knife in the back in 1278, and the next thing I know I'm pissing on myself as I pop out of mommy number two's womb. I had to figure it out for myself, just like you and that scarab. Sure, I know a little about it, Creep and the Lady even more. But, it's not for us to tell you. You'll figure it out, I'm sure of it."

"I hope you're right," Weisz muttered softly.

Deadboy Smith took a last look out into the city, taking in the view with a smile. "Okay, Magenta. Let's go in there and show this Steeplejack fella the error of his ways, whatta ya say?"

When no answer came, Smith turned back toward his partner, only to find him gone. "I hate it when he does that."

\* \* \*

Cigarette smoke rolled out of Termin's mouth, past the piercings that adorned his lip and nose. A permanent smirk blazed across his face, the youngest Mage kicked his feet onto the table as he leaned back in the wooden chair. "So 'ow'd it go with Smith? Bugger's a bit off his rocker, inn'he?"

Victoria sat upright across from him, her arms folded across her chest impatiently. "He's an ass. I also didn't learn a damn thing from him, other than, well, the fact that he's an ass."

"Heh," Termin took another drag off his cigarette, momentarily removing the smirk from his face, "so what's a fine lookin' woman like you doin' messing around like a chicken with no head? Shouldn't you be shackled up with some nice, burly man, popping out the kiddies like there's no tomorrow?"

"Don't make me hurt you, kid," Mysteria stated through narrowed eyes, his statement obviously touching on a raw nerve.

"Okay, okay," he raised his hands in an apologetic manner, "didn't mean to step on yer tit, I'll back off a little. So what kinda name's 'Mysteria' anyway? Really are jonesin' for a little hero cred, eh?"

"You should talk, 'Termin'," she remarked.

"Aye, that's Termin the fuckin' Vermin, love. Three meanings: 'terminus', 'terminal', 'terminate', respect."

"Whatever," Victoria said as she stretched her arms up over her head, "so don't take this wrong way, but you look like you just stepped out of the womb. What could you possibly know about these guys, since according to Smith they were heroes back in the forties?"

"I can't tell you shite," he answered with a laugh, "hell, I only met this Magenta fellow once. No, what I got to say ain't about some poofter superhero nonsense...it's about yer heritage. It's about that nagging voice in the back of yer head, the one that keeps telling you to go out and jump about the rooftops at night. It's about the other Mage that's no longer with us."

"That would be who, exactly?"

"His name was Sparkfly, me mentor and the one that brought me into this life. The same way Magenta brought you in, love. Had things been done correctly, had Magenta not died before the rites could be performed, then, well, none o' this would be necessary. I got all the memories of Sparkfly in me head, downloaded into me consciousness at the moment o' his death. He'll be the one speaking to you in just a bit, so show some bloody respect for the man."

"How did you get picked for this?"

"I don't really know, magic works in mysterious ways. I was eleven years old when Sparkfly died, and I'm still figuring stuff out. You ready to hear what I got to say?"

"Bring it on..."

\* \* \*

## **OCTOBER, 1982**

### **LONDON**

Rain pelted the two men as they stood in front of the house, their trench coats turning a darker shade with each drop of water that hit. Magenta pulled the brim of his fedora hat down over his eyes, his gaze locked on the other man.

"Isn't he beautiful, Albert?" the second man asked, his hands cupped over the window as he peered through. "Children are the most amazing creatures..."

"That they are, Sparkfly. I must also ask that you not say my true name aloud. There's an ominous air tonight, and your words may catch the ears of another."

"I met his mother when she was pregnant, right after the father had abandoned her. What kind of man leaves a woman and child to fend for themselves in this world? Not a man at all, I say..."

The two remained silent for several seconds, Sparkfly still staring at the toddler through the blurred window. "He is to be my successor." He said, breaking the uncomfortable silence.

"Your successor?" Magenta asked with an upturned eyebrow. "Is there something wrong, Sparkfly? Are you ill?"

"No, no, nothing like that," he answered, "but think about it for a moment. You and I are the only Mages that are mortal, you know. Smith will live on in other bodies, the Lady is an immortal being, and Creep, well...there's really no fear in the good Doctor going away any time soon. When we die, Magenta, we're going to need replacements. The other three are capable enough to protect

this world, but they all suffer from flights of fancy. Who knows if, when the world really needs them, they'll be in a position to even care?"

"I see..."

"I imagine that son of yours will be carrying on your legacy, but I have no one. That's why that boy in there is so special. He's the one I chose to take my place."

"What about what the children want?" Albert asked as he placed a hand on his partner's shoulder, gently pulling him away from the window.

"Destiny chooses their lives before they're born, Magenta," Sparkfly stated, now looking his fellow Mage directly in the eye, "just like your scarab chose you all those years ago. Perhaps you are simply afraid that little Johann will embrace the power that you deny?"

Weisz offered no reply to Sparkfly's question, prompting a solemn nod from the other man. He turned back toward the window, peering inside yet again. "Have you seen Burke's daughter lately? I believe she turned 14 not long ago, if I'm not mistaken. Sad news about her mother, though."

"I haven't talked to Henry in quite a long while," Magenta admitted, "and the last time I saw Victoria, hmm, it was on her fifth birthday."

"The new guard is growing up fast, my friend. Soon, there will be no more need for us. Johann, Victoria, and my young friend inside...they are the future."

"The future..." Weisz repeated. Though he said nothing to his companion, the words echoed through his mind, causing a wave of inexplicable sadness to flow through him.

\* \* \*

"So what have we learned so far, dear? I hope those two didn't waste your time with simple reminiscing."

Mysteria fidgeted in her seat, her rear beginning to numb from the extensive time she'd spent in the one position. The Lady of Knives smiled warmly at the girl, waiting for an answer to her query. "Well," Vicky began, "I learned that Weisz knew even less about this scarab than I do."

"That," the Lady rebutted, "isn't necessarily true. Albert knew what the scarab was capable of, but he chose never to test his findings."

"Why's that?"

The Lady laughed slightly. "He was afraid of it, I suppose, of what it could do to him. He was a cautious man, a trait that always struck me as being strange, what with our given duties and all."

"Why was he afraid of it?" Mysteria asked, a slight chill running down her back as the words came out.

"That, we cannot tell you. Just as we could not tell poor Albert, all those years ago. We are bound by the rules, and those rules forbid us from giving you information about the scarab."

"So you're useless," Vicky stated with a smirk, "and this is all just a big waste of my time."

"Do you know why Albert chose you to be his successor, Ms. Burke?" the Lady asked without skipping a beat, disregarding Vicky's statement.

"Actually, I've been asking myself that question for a long time. Termin mentioned Albert having a son, so what happened there? Why am I stuck with this instead of him?"

"Johann Weisz," the Lady said with a sigh, her eyes drifting down to the table between them, "is another story all together. He is inconsequential to our purpose tonight, but you must realize that there are several possible reasons why Albert decided to keep the scarab from him. Perhaps he felt his son should be given the chance at a normal life, instead of one cursed by the touch of magic? Perhaps he felt his son wouldn't be up to the task, that he would fold under the pressure of such a huge responsibility. Or perhaps..."

"Perhaps what...?"

"Perhaps he felt his son would succeed where he had failed?"

"I don't understand," Vicky said as she leaned forward, her elbows now resting on the table, "how did Albert fail?"

"You recently invoked a power, Victoria," the Lady said as she removed the dagger from her wrist holster, "one that frightened you beyond all belief. That act, despite your current fear, is exactly where Albert failed."

The Lady placed the dagger to her wrist. "Now it is time for you to get an answer to a question, my dear. Ask what you will, but keep in mind what I told you about the rule."

Victoria thought for a moment, tossing around several possible questions. "Termin mentioned my dad. He mentioned me. What do you people know about my father?"

"The question is asked." The Lady slid the blade of her dagger across her wrist, opening up the vein beneath the skin. Blood poured onto the table, causing Mysteria to scoot backwards in her seat in surprise. "The blood is drawn. Watch the pool, the patterns in the red. It will answer your question for you."

Slowly, Vicky moved back to the table, her eyes locked on the flowing crimson fluid. Her eyes widened as images began to form in the blood.

Images of her father...

\* \* \*

## **AUGUST, 1989 BOSTON**

"Henry, so glad you could make it," Albert said as he took the hand of Henry Burke III, shaking it firmly. The funeral parlor was swimming with an odd collection of mourners, the service blocked to anyone without a proper invitation. Flowers adorned the back wall of the room, surrounding the mahogany casket like a wreath.

"I came as quickly as I could," Henry said sadly, nodding at a few of the fellow mourners as they passed by, "how did it happen?"

"It was so mundane, for one of our ilk," Weisz replied as he moved through the crowd, Burke following immediately behind, "poor, old Sparkfly. He was gunned down in a gasoline station, during a robbery. None of the magic in the world could save him from bleeding to death, I'm afraid."

"The world is unpredictable, my friend," Burke commented as the two reached the casket, "and dangerous. Sparkfly's death, while tragic, was no more mundane than what happened to Fast-Forward a few years back."

Albert cocked a curious eyebrow at his friend, an incredulous look wiped across his face. "If I recall correctly, Fast-Forward fell asleep and ran into a bus. He's actually recovering nicely from that accident, I believe, so forgive me for not seeing a parallel between the two."

"You're right, Albert," Henry said, nodding his head in solemn agreement, "you're absolutely right."

"The last time I saw Sparkfly," Albert began, his voice a barely audible whisper, "was in London, back in 1982. He had chosen a young boy to be his successor. For all we know, Sparkfly could be playing in some English woman's yard right now, laughing at all of us for mourning so."

"You hear about Harbour City's newest hero?" Burke asked as he and Albert moved away from the coffin, making their way to the corner of the room. "He calls himself the Grim Knight. An appropriate name for the new breed of heroes, I think. We're going out of style, Albert."

"Fast-Forward, the Fist-Fighters," Albert agreed with a descending frown, "and now the Mages, who really could care less about fighting evil anymore. We're getting too old for this, Henry."

"Then let the new guard have their time in the spotlight," Burke answered with a smile, placing his hand on his friend's shoulder, "and the two of us can retire and get old peacefully."

"And may our children never know of this world in which we live," Albert added, offering a smile of his own.

Henry Burke's smile faded, though in a way that was hardly noticeable. "Amen, Albert. Amen."

\* \* \*

They'd sat in silence for close to five minutes, Victoria's eyes locked in an awkward stare toward the fleshless creature across from her. Doctor Creep had yet to mutter a word since he'd taken his place at the table, opting to do nothing but smoke cigarettes. He'd just lit his third one, causing Mysteria to cough at the increasing cloud of smoke that hovered over them.

"Would you like to hear a joke?" Creep asked, finally breaking the silence. Vicky jumped slightly, not expecting the man to speak at all.

"A...a what?"

"A joke," he explained, the smoke from his cigarette filtering through his skeletal system in an almost mesmerizing display, "you know, a funny. A ha-ha."

"Uh, sure, I guess."

Creep took one final draw off his cigarette before butting it into the ashtray. "What has two legs and bleeds profusely?"

Victoria blinked. "What?"

"What has two legs," Creep reiterated, "and bleeds profusely?"

"Uhhh...I don't know?"

Creep leaned forward on the table, his hollow eye-sockets staring straight at his companion. "Half of a cat. Do you get it?"

Her face contorted with disgust at the answer to the riddle, leaning back in her chair as far away from the Doctor as possible. "Half of a cat? Are you fucking serious?"

"Half!" Creep shouted, his skull thrown back in a fit of uproarious laughter. "Half of a CAT!" The laughter continued for close to a full minute, to which Victoria could only cross her arms in a display of impatience. "Sorry," the Doctor finally said, apologizing for his outburst, "I love that joke."

"So what secrets are you here to tell me?" Burke asked. "Will they be as helpful as what your friends told me?"

"You need to learn to read between the lines my dear girl," Creep replied, lighting up yet another cigarette as he spoke, "otherwise you'll learn nothing. You've been told so much this night, but it's up to you to understand the information."

Creep adjusted the collar on his bathrobe with his bony appendages, maintaining his air of playboy superiority. "Me being in this city again is not a good thing for you, my baby Magenta. Bad things are going to happen, and you must be prepared to face them. The only way you can do that is to learn about what has come before. I was in this city just three years ago, and I'm not particularly happy to be back this soon."

"What happened three years ago?" she asked. "What am I preparing for?"

"The tragedy is different each time," Creep answered, "but it can be stopped. There's a first time for everything, they say."

Creep paused.

"Of course, that's what I said the last time, as well..."

\* \* \*

**OCTOBER 27, 1999**  
**PACIFIC CITY**

"He'll stop them. He has to."

Standing atop the biggest building in the city's harbor industrial center, two figures watched what could easily be conceived as the end of the world. The skeletal man, known by the title of Doctor and the name of Creep, inhaled deeply on the cigarette that was clutched tightly between his bony fingers, offering no reply to the statement of the second figure. An older man, his presence marked not by body, but by the form of his spirit, watched with wide-eyed fear and awe at the scene unfolding on the harbor below them.

"Is this..." the spectral man asked, turning his ghostly head in the direction of his companion, "is this what you saw in your vision? Is this why you came back to this city?"

"He's not going to stop them, Albert," the Doctor replied, "only I could have stopped it. I failed. Now, our friend is going to die."

Albert Weisz nodded solemnly, his gaze returning to the battle below. Henry Burke III, the Millennium Man, knew not the danger he was in, as he faced the war machines of four former allies. The Faustian Four, who Burke had known as heroes in the past, had laid siege to the city's harbor with their weapons of destruction, their true motives for the act unknown to any but them. Burke had stumbled onto the event almost by accident, having chased the now-fleeing vigilante named Raven into the city's busiest port of commerce. Two of the machines had already fallen to the Millennium Man's power, but the wear and tear on his body showed that even he was feeling the effects of the struggle. His fist collided into the chest region of the third engine of destruction, the steel and circuitry collapsing inward with the force of the hero's blow.

"He's going to stop them," Albert reiterated, turning again toward the silent Doctor. Creep offered no reply, his own eyes locked on the unfolding scene of destruction.

The fourth and final war machine lumbered forward, clumsily attacking the weary Burke. Yet another volley of punches rang out against the machine's body, sending it crashing to the ground with a furious crash of sparks. Albert grinned from ear to ear as the triumphant Millennium Man stood proudly over his defeated adversary, confident that he had once again triumphed over the forces of evil.

"How did I know," a booming voice came from the dismantled robot, "that it would be you we encountered first?" Burke, along with the distant observers, watched as the construct's chest plate began to change, to transform, opening wide as a large cylinder emerged from within it's body. A small video screen complimented the strange device, the grinning face of Charlie Winters displayed prominently on the monitor. Henry scowled at the face of the Faustian Four's leader.

"Goodbye, Henry," Winters said with a wink, "say hello to Hero for us."

With only those words as warning, the device protruding from the machine flared to life, lighting up the night sky like a small sun. As the Millennium Man raised his hands to block the light from his eyes, the cylinder exploded outward, the power from the energy blast erupting forth in a single destructive wave. Buildings crumbled under the force of the explosion, Pacific City's harbor becoming ground zero for the weapon of devastation. Throughout the onslaught, only one building remained unscathed. Doctor Creep withstood the onslaught, rooted to his standing position on the Annex Fish Co. Albert's astral form wasn't so strong, fading and disrupting from the tremendous amounts of energy released by the weapon.

Moments later, after the wave of energy had dissipated, the once proud harbor of Pacific City was a smoldering crater. Fires were widespread amongst the broken buildings, the lives of countless people snuffed out in an instant. Creep walked through the destruction, toward the apex of the detonation, yet another cigarette stuck between his skeletal teeth. He noted the broken and burned body of Joseph Liebowitz as he passed, thinking to himself that at least one good thing came out of the tragedy.

"C'mon out of there, Hank," he stated, extending his body hand to the ash-covered spot where the Millennium Man had stood before the explosion. Slowly, painfully, Henry Burke's own hand emerged from the debris, clutching the Doctor's fleshless appendage desperately. "Close call, MM?"

"Creep," Burke strained out, "I'm not sure why you're here."

"There's people out there dying, sir," Creep stated as he brushed some of the dust off of Burke's torn and tattered costume, "you should be out there, doing the hero thing."

The Millennium Man said nothing, simply nodding at the Mage's comment. The hero of Pacific City took to the air, shaky at first, but took only a moment to regain his composure. Creep watched as he flew into the city, desperate to save any lives he could.

"You were wrong," the reemerging spirit of Albert Weisz said, "Henry didn't die."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," the Doctor whispered in a barely-audible voice, "I wouldn't be so sure."

\* \* \*

"Six and Three...Six and Three...Zi Anna Kanpa...Zi Kia Kanpa..."

"Ah, to breathe air from outside that damnable protective circle again. It gets so stale after a while."

"How the hell can you even tell, Doc, what with the constant smoking of those cigarettes? Care if I get one off you?"

"Creep, oi, you made her cry? Jaysis, and I thought I was rough on 'er."

Creep cocked his head at Termin, who sat to his left at the table. Smith and the Lady just smiled to themselves, refraining from any comments themselves. "She simply realized," Creep answered, "that the tragedy I alluded to was in fact not the loss of life that day, but the loss of her father's life months later. It hit her rather hard, I'm afraid."

"She's going to need help in the coming days," the Lady of Knives commented, to the nodding agreement of her peers."

"I'll be staying on in the city," Creep stated, "so I'll be keeping an eye on her."

"Well, I just gotta say that if you're stayin' here," Smith said with a laugh, "then I'm gonna be on the other side of the goddamn hemisphere."

"I think I'll be stayin' on meself," Termin said, placing a friendly hand on Creep's shoulder, "never took the time t' see the sights 'ere in Koala Land."

"Then I suppose this is it," the Lady continued, "the final act of the Mages of America?"

"Let the whippersnappers pick up the slack," Deadman answered, "I need some goddamn rest and relaxation."

**THE END**

**Handbook To The Artifice Universe****Hero Name:** Termin**Real name:** Cecil St. John**Occupation:** mage, musician**Place of Birth:** London, England**Date of Birth:** April, 1979**Ethnic Group:** Caucasian**Known relatives:** Rebecca St. John (mother)**Group Affiliation:** Mages of America, New Mages**First appearance:** Anthology 2 - Mysteria: Frozen In Heaven

**History:** Cecil St. John was born as the first child of a single working mother in London, and while he did have an affinity for technology at a young age he was nevertheless the standard for normality. However, unbeknownst to the boy, Cecil had been chosen by the sorcerer Sparkfly as a successor to his magical lineage. It is unknown just how Sparkfly went about preparing St. John for this, but it is known that he refrained from ever meeting the boy in person. In 1989, a few months after Cecil's 11th birthday, Sparkfly was gunned down in Boston, Massachusetts during a random robbery of a gas station. Upon his death, all of Sparkfly's memories and knowledge were transferred into the mind of young Cecil, the result of Sparkfly's succession plans for the boy. Because of the sudden influx of information into his mind, St. John's mind effectively shut down, sending him into a coma state. He remained in this condition for five months, waking only after his mind was able to process all of the mage's knowledge.

In his teenage years, St. John began to violently rebel against his mother and her working class background. Enamored with the punk culture of the city in which he lived, Cecil took up the guitar and aspired at being a musician. Though he possessed all of Sparkfly's magical knowledge, he was unable to make sense of the conflicting memories and voices in his mind, causing him to withdraw into himself and become an introvert. In 1997, on his 19th birthday, the four remaining Mages of America traveled to London and informed Cecil of his magical heritage. Finally being able to clearly hear the voice of his mentor in his mind, Cecil agreed to fulfill Sparkfly's plans of succession and joined the Mages under the name Termin. He remained with the Mages of America until they journeyed to Pacific City in 2002, where they confronted Victoria Burke in much the same way as they had Cecil. Following this, Termin remained in Pacific City with Dr. Creep, who inducted him into Romanov/a's newly formed New Mages.

**Height:** 6' 1"**Weight:** 178 lbs.**Eyes:** green**Hair:** black**Other Distinguishing Features:** A product of English punk culture, Termin generally wears his hair in large Mohawk spikes. He also has several facial piercings.**Character Traits:** Rude, brash, and not afraid to say what's on his mind. He likes to consider himself smarter than the average person.**Known Powers:** Termin is a techomancer, meaning he can utilize magic through digital pathways and electronic interfaces. Though he is trained in the use of several magical disciplines, Termin prefers to use chaos magic, which plays upon the random nature of the universe to produce unexpected results. Due to his connection with Sparkfly, Termin can access all of the memories and thoughts of his former mentor to the point where - through self-hypnosis - he can submerge his own personality and allow Sparkfly to speak through him.**Weapons:** none