THE SORCERER'S SOUL

THE SORCERER'S SOUL

by Ron Edwards

THE SORCERER'S SOUL

SUPPLEMENT #2 FOR SORCERER

By Ron Edwards

Jeremy McHugh

ADEPT
PRESS

CHICAGO

CONTENTS

Contents

Acknowledgments

Brian Martinez

PREFACE

This is the second supplement for SORCERER. You need to have a copy of SORCERER already. The topic is **Humanity**: what it means in terms of game mechanics, theme, role-playing, and scenario design.

As with SORCERER AND SWORD, this supplement is written and published to conform with the following principles.

▼ **Innovation**. Here you'll find a completely original method for designing role-playing scenarios, plus a "great leap forward" for role-playing story ethics.

▼ **Worthy source material**. The source this time is modern detective fiction, which is perhaps the most coherent body of literature regarding the limitations of right and wrong.

▼ **Service to your own game**. To address both the perennial cry of the role-player: "But what do I do?" and the perennial cry of the GM: "I need a plot!" – here you'll find example scenario frameworks, new rules ideas for demons, and ways to use Humanity and related mechanics in all aspects of your game.

AN INVITATION TO LEAVE THE CLOSET

Why does role-playing culture not talk about its primary, defining activity? Oh, we talk about anticipating the experience, about buying and owning the games, and about playing them in the abstract, but rarely, if ever, about what we do while actually playing them – their content that we create. The literal act of role-playing is not part of gamer culture, as we mainly discuss its trappings (the book, the system, industry gossip) rather then "what happened" during play.

Even when we do discuss the play itself, more often than not, the content is incoherent: "My guy did this, my guy did that," deep inhale, "and then he did **this**." Such talk may even turn into a litany of die rolls, punctuated by enthusiasm for what is, after all, a predictable outcome ("And then, I got a 20!"). If role-playing really were what it sounds like when described, it would be a worthless and pathetic thing.

This situation should change, if not in the overall culture, then at least in the experience of individuals. Role-playing is not perversion, we are not weird or fringe because we enjoy it, and frankly we should start behaving accordingly.

At the Sorcerer site

The new services on the SORCERER website are designed to transform users' experience of role-playing from a closeted thing into a public, mutually beneficial thing.

The simplest activity is simply to post material as an archive for your own play and for others to read. Characters, demons, the founding principles of your game, and more can be displayed and coded for viewing as you see fit. More importantly, a set of standard questions is available to help you create a conceptual profile for your SORCERER game, which is also made public as a basis for discussion.

The questions include the following:

▼ How many sessions have been played so far?
▼ How many Humanity checks or gains are made during a session, and for what?
▼ Based on the circumstances of these rolls, what does Humanity mean?
▼ What is the setting for play, and what sort of information did the players have to begin?
▼ What sorcerous technicality and general back-story were represented in the original preparation for play?
▼ What types of Bangs show up during play? What actions tend to result in rolling victories into subsequent rolls, and what role-playing announcements tend to result in bonuses to rolls?

▼ Describe any moments of play trouble or rules questions.

▼ Describe the best character moments in the last session, and the most compelling NPCs.

Your own answers to these questions permit you to assess and develop your game, beginning with its pre-play preparation and continuing over time as sessions are played. Therefore the topics and content, the role-playing and preparation techniques, literary or film references, and social issues among the group members are made clearer to anyone, and with any luck to you as well.

As your game becomes better known and understood to all of us participating at the site, feedback and discussion about it may develop, either through private e-mail or at the SORCERER forum at The Forge (www.indie-rpgs.com). Meanwhile, of course, the same is happening with others' games, and the play content and role-playing techniques of all the groups are existing and evolving simultaneously. Over time, we will all be able to enjoy one anothers' **stories** as well, on the same basis as enjoying a movie, novel, or play.

The goal is to assemble, sustain, and continue to add to a genuine artistic community, proud of what we do and willing to develop it among one another's perceptions. Coherent role-playing should lead to coherent stories emerging, as well as the enjoyment of those stories and the techniques to produce them. Let's initiate these effects among ourselves as an active community, not merely as deviants sequestered into huddled conclaves.

Jeremy McHugh

Chapter One:

HUMANITY
CONSIDERED

The strictly game-oriented purpose of Humanity in the SORCERER rules is a form of role-playing balance – how do you keep a character from becoming the invincible multiple-demon-man? But like all reward systems, it gives rise to a value system. This mechanic and what happens to it generates the meaning of a SORCERER story.

"Meaning" in a role-playing game? What kind of pretentious crap is this? You get your character, you figure out his stuff, you get the best attack in the book, and you roll better than the other guy. Right?

OK, I'm kidding. If you own SORCERER already, you know that it results a different kind of role-playing altogether, called Narrativism: the act of role-playing in a group is supposed to generate some kind of story. The main characters face a problem, it turns out to be a doozy, and the players create the story by determining the actions of the protagonists. Furthermore, such a thing (a story) gains meaning under the following conditions:

▼ the problem carries emotional weight or recognition among the role-players themselves

> "You are a devil!" she sobbed. "Not I!" he laughed. "I was born on this planet long ago. Once I was a common man, nor have I lost all human attributes in the numberless aeons of my adept-ship. A human steeped in the dark arts is greater than a devil."
> —R.E. Howard, The People of the Black Circle

▼ dealing with the problem requires testing the character to the limit.

If the above material means nothing to you – you say, ah, to hell with this English 101 noise – then you're not really a good customer for this supplement. But if this sounds like something that shows up in your role-playing already, or if you'd like it to, then the key to playing SORCERER to its utmost lies in making the most of Humanity.

CONCEPTUAL CONNECTIONS

Clearly the word "Humanity" means more than its biological definition. It's an emotionally loaded term, much like "demon," which must be defined by how it affects the listener rather than by a cut-and-dried paragraph in a dictionary.

What does it mean to you? The answer may be broad or specific, singular or plural. Here are some possibilities: **sanity, empathy, soul, identity, cultural mores, the ability to love, honor, social or emotional boundaries, maturity …**

A given role-playing group may be using any one or a couple of these, but every GM or player should feel free to add to this list or to create sub-categories of any item. The simplest way is to take a single definition and work from there, but it may be possible to run with a more plural approach. I don't especially recommend playing catch-as-catch-can, i.e., letting every player-character be working off a different definition of Humanity, as this variable has such potential as a play-group unifier.

Humanity definitions do correspond to genres to some extent; since players often have a good feel for genre, it might be useful to start from there. However, single-word genre labels are usually not sufficient and some discussion is highly recommended. For example, in a SORCERER story set in a fairly classic fictional version of the Old West, Humanity would be associated with clean-livin' cowpoke virtues, which often includes gunning down no-goods. If on the other hand the story were set in a more gritty, harshly symbolic version of the same era (e.g. *Unforgiven*), Humanity would certainly be challenged by taking life, up to and including versions of killing that seem justified and even law-abiding to the perpetrator.

Whatever definition a group settles on, the answer has serious repercussions for the other terms used in the game. Here you are, about to play SORCERER with some friends you've threatened or bribed into it. And without the rulebook's help, you personally must define:

▼ Humanity itself
▼ how it's used as a resolution-mechanic
▼ what demons are

- ▼ what's meant by a demon Power score
- ▼ the conditions for Humanity loss and gain rolls
- ▼ the means for beginning and increasing Lore
- ▼ the actions that are associated with the rituals

And here's the point: these variables are related. A given definition of Humanity will carry with it the definitions for the rest of the list.

Let's take "sanity" as an example. If Humanity means how sane you are, the actual score might refer to a person's groundedness, or emotional stability, or grip on reality especially as defined by other people. Humanity in this case turns out to be a social, interactive issue, not some private inner score.

How would it be used as a resolution mechanic? This kind of Humanity would be rolled when the character may have mixed feelings about something, or has to rely upon or to question the evidence of his senses.

Demons could be defined in part as things which challenge the ability to rely on one's sanity; demonic Power would thus be defined as the strength of that challenge. Sorcererous thinking would include skipping from conclusion to conclusion without evidence or connection, inventing evidence to support a conclusion consistent with your obsessions, or over-reacting to events around you.

Defining Humanity as sanity also affects what Lore is. In this case, it would be defined as a matter of wrenching one's mind out of the kinds of connections and judgments carried out by most people, yet staying focused in terms of the precise sort of madness being sought. This would of course be reflected in the details that the GM and players role-play in conducting the rituals.

- ▼ Contacting might require the equivalent of a psychotic episode. The sorcerer must literally, briefly go off his or her nut in order to Contact a demon, in a specific way depending on the demon.
- ▼ Summoning might require generating an insane event that affects objective reality – a paradox of some kind, or at least symbolizing one. The demon materializes in the midst of such an event.
- ▼ Binding might require formalizing a specific nonconsensus interpretation of some set of events – that is, deal (with the demon) by explaining the current circumstances in a way that most people would consider irrational.
- ▼ Containing might require devising a very personal symbology, items or actions that represent how the sorcerer manages to maintain normal behavior (medication comes to mind, or perhaps nonsense rhymes he or she devised as a child).
- ▼ Banishing might be literally disbelieving the existence of the demon,

which on a very basic level means rejecting (healing from) the brand of mental instability represented by that demon.

Again, using sanity in this way is only one of the dozens of possible options, depending on how you and your fellow role-players want to address the issue of Humanity. My hope is that, in considering how aspects of sorcerous activities are so strongly affected and even defined by your take on Humanity, that the idea of a role-playing session actually concerning themes and consequences doesn't seem so pretentious after all.

STORY IMPACT

So how to use Humanity, once it's been defined? In many ways, this is also to ask, how shall we play? A SORCERER story may be defined as the means by which challenges to Humanity are experienced, avoided, or succumbed to. All Bangs, Kickers, plot twists, and so on offer instances for this particular conflict to occur.

Well, now that idea leads to the issue of ethics embedded in the events determined by role-playing. Never mind the character's effectiveness, or how many hit points they have left, or any of that stuff – armed with Humanity as the central unifying issue, the group now encounters the moral consequences of their actions, arising directly out of regular ol' play sessions. When those actions are magical (that is, highly symbolic, psychological, and powerful), that's all the more reason to consider them in terms of their morality.

Before getting too wound up in the profundity of it all, maybe I better switch to the examples. Take the four Humanity definitions suggested in SORCERER: sanity, soul, mastery, empathy, acknowledging that many others are possible, and that a given group would probably only use one or two. Not only does the first row apply, as suggested in the rules, but you can follow the implications for other aspects of the game as well.

| | Humanity is your ... | | | |
	Sanity	Soul	Mastery	Empathy
at 0 Humanity, you are...	a gibbering wreck	damned	a Possessee, dinner, etc	a sociopath
Demons will...	challenge and disrupt reality	tempt you to sin	subvert your commands	bypass "decency"
Humanity check to...	keep your grip	perceive moral consequence	reinforce a precise command	understand others
Rituals are based on...	contradictions of time and space	apostasy of some kind	artistic and scholarly skill	transgressions toward others

The contents of the cells are actions – they are things that player-characters and NPCs actually do during play. The definition of Humanity and associated variables, once applied to a group of characters in a setting, results in consequences of those actions and, indirectly, the content of future events. Each definition of Humanity therefore carries its own set of possible conflicts.

▼ A Sanity story is largely a matter of inner conflict, and the balance between perceiving things differently from everyone else, yet still functionally in terms of a given problem.

▼ A Soul story is concerned with ultimate moral judgment and the character's role in over-riding, cosmic issues of right and wrong.

▼ A Mastery story seems tailor-made for a classic apprentice vs. master power conflict, as well as for battles of wits and will between master and demons.

▼ An Empathy story is embedded in the multiple conflicts and mutual needs of people, in terms of family, love, resentment, and similar bonds.

▼ and so on, for any versions of Humanity that suggest themselves.

Denise Jones

MAILING LIST ARCHIVE

Angel. *Sorcerers, by and large, choose their actions, for better or worse. The darker nature they sometimes give in to isn't a ravening monster, it's a tempter, a manipulator, and that most dangerous of all evils: a rationalization. If a hungry vampire drains and kills a victim, it is almost certainly because he lost control. A sorcerer who kills a victim might be doing so out of rage or desperation, and in these situations he may become more callous and less caring, but I don't think he's becoming more bestial. But I think the deeper issue with Humanity in SORCERER comes when he kills for a sacrifice or to eliminate a foe. When he kills for power. Then, as above, he is becoming more callous ... but he is also becoming openly cruel and self-serving and there are no emotional*

rationales. No heat of the moment. No loss of control. No way to avoid the fact that he is becoming more immoral (as opposed to the amorality of the Beast).

A sorcerer who is very low on Humanity isn't necessarily becoming more feral, I think. He could still be just as lucid and calm as ever. He might even fit into normal society ... A vampire can't do that.

In the games I run, ... dealing with demons won't inherently make you less human. How you gain or lose Humanity depends on your actions. Now, dealing with demons often entails rather nasty require-ments and that's where you'll have your Humanity checks. In my liter-ary experience, it's the decisions the sorcerer makes to appease the demon that eventually cost his soul. I guess in short what I'm saying is that I think Humanity in this game is dependent on the idea of, what are you willing to do?

Losing humanity

In quite a few role-playing games, even the ones in which player-characters are undead, the primary goal for a player-character is to avoid being killed. In SORCERER, though, physically dangerous though it might be for the charac-ters, the main quality at stake is Humanity.

On its own, that's not original. Personality mechanics, especially "person-ality hit points" and "fear checks," date back to *Call of Cthulhu* and are now found in many role-playing games. However, in SORCERER, there is one key difference: **specific scores of Humanity do not dictate or limit the range of possible character behavior.** That's right: a person with Humanity 1 can still perform any act from the entire moral spectrum, and so can someone with Humanity 8 or 9. Humanity does not **model** personality or morality, but rather it tracks the **stability** thereof.

Therefore Humanity's primary purpose is to serve as a metagame indica-tor. It is a signal to everyone involved regarding what "story state" the charac-ter is in, regarding o Humanity. High-Humanity characters may be considered buffered against those consequences, which of course is not a condition to be abused for long; whereas low-Humanity characters' position puts their every moral decision into more consequential story terms. In some ways, Humanity scores are the "incidental music" of Sorcerer, which let everyone know just how much moral risk applies for each character, per act.

That point feeds into a second one: that Humanity rolls, whether for gain or loss, rely only on actions, not on reactions. One does not make a Humanity loss roll upon viewing something appalling, but upon **performing** something appalling, and the same applies to Humanity gain rolls and meritorious or "good" actions.

Now for the extreme version of Humanity loss: going to the big zero. According to the base rules, when one's character's Humanity goes to 0, the character is essentially lost to the player, becoming an NPC. That's pretty harsh and final. Here are some rules options to make it more interesting for everyone.

▼ The GM does take over the character, but not permanently. Control of the character is returned to the player, but with Humanity 1 and with any aspects of the character (scores, descriptors) altered as the GM sees fit. Also, the circumstances of the character are decreed by the GM, so that the player may re-acquire the character in the midst of serious trouble.

▼ The character undergoes a grievous bodily change, becoming much more like an Imminent demon and subject to Binding and other rituals (although not Banishing). See Chapter Two for more rules about changing into a demon.

▼ The character is guaranteed to die in the following session of play. The player and GM may want to collude regarding some of the preparatory details, or they might not, but one element of the final session should include a Humanity-crisis type of decision. Whether the player decides to have the character respond positively or negatively is wholly determined during play. (This option was conceived by Jared A. Sorensen and presented in his excellent mini-supplement, SCHISM.)

▼ The character doesn't change hands at all, but the player must re-write the character wholly, and certainly not for the better: all scores drop by 1, all Binding is cancelled, and all descriptors are re-defined.

▼ Very, very brave GMs may choose to leave all consequences for 0 Humanity completely vague – that is, there is no game effect at all beyond the fact that the score is 0 (e.g. for Banishing or other task-roll purposes) and cannot be raised by ordinary means. This option goes well with some of the afterlife-oriented cosmologies discussed in Chapter 3.

HUMANITY AS AN ABILITY SCORE

Humanity is of course an ability score, usable as a resolution mechanic just like Stamina, Will, Lore, and Cover. As such, it may be used in three specific ways.

1. Rolling Humanity against a set difficulty roll. What this means depends heavily on the role-playing group's definition of the score. The roll might represent an effort to understand another's point of view, to pray for insight, or to maintain one's ability to react normally in the face of stress.

2. Rolling Humanity against another's Will or Humanity. This may be an appeal to another's "humanity," to invoke mercy or to inspire action

Brian Martinez

based on empathy, as opposed to simply dominating the other or appealing to their ego (these last would be Will rolls). One might also employ Humanity against a demon's Power, which could even serve as a form of protection, the victories of a successful roll to be used as bonus dice when defending against that demon in any way.

3. Rolling Humanity against another of one's own scores (or vice versa). This is dealing with internal conflict; all of these rolls have no immediate result, but they generate bonuses for a "true roll" later. Some examples, using the schools of sorcery from Chapter 7 in SORCERER, include:

   - Dark Lady rituals rely on sexual power. The sorcerer must engage in intercourse of some kind, and roll Humanity vs. his or her own Will in order to "bliss out." The victories of a successful roll generates bonus dice for the next, which is Will vs. Humanity, representing the effort to re-take control of the physical sensations and channel them into the ritual at hand. Any victories from this second roll, of course, are used as bonus dice for the ritual roll.

   - The Psyche Junkies use drugs in various combinations, which of course have their own predictable and unpredictable effects. A Stamina roll against a set difficulty based on the drugs themselves seems called for. But the main roll would be Lore vs. Humanity, to convert whatever chemical personality-altering effects are occurring into a sorcerous act. Victories from this roll become bonus dice for ritual rolls.

   - Black Wheel necromancy usually follows extremely rigid, classical procedures and goals. However, a sorcerer may roll Will vs. Humanity in order to modify a ritual for a new effect. (If a demon objects to such a novel purpose, that might entail a Lore roll vs. the demon's Lore to

convince it to behave; the dialogue accompanying such a contest might include lot of legalistic occultism.)

An optional metagame mechanic

One possible use of Humanity is to permit players to sacrifice ("burn") a point in exchange for one of the following.

- ▼ Re-rolling a given roll
- ▼ Negating (forcing a re-roll) of an NPC's roll
- ▼ Negating (with no re-roll necessary) the results of a Humanity check that brings another character to 0 Humanity

All of these effects have a strong impact on game events, although the price is certainly high. Role-players should permit one or more of these options only after serious consideration before play ever begins, and it is perfectly all right for the group not to use them at all.

HUMANITY-RELEVANT PLAY

Given all the points above, the role-playing experience becomes more than the GM saying, "Where are the monsters and what treasures do they hold," or the players saying, "How do I hit the monsters and what do I get for it." It's even more than "Figure out the villain's plot and thwart it," or, "Discover what's behind all these strange happenings." All role-playing games are about what happens to a character, but SORCERER emphasizes **why** a character may do what he or she does. Events and judgments occur as a direct result of the characters' own actions. This section concerns how to bring this element into existence as the centerpiece of play.

Humanity challenge

A GM may consider his or her main responsibility in SORCERER to be to generate as many legitimately dramatic Humanity-oriented rolls in a session as possible. Calling for such a roll is a direct red flag from GM to player: "This is important. This is what separates right from wrong. Your character is free to cross that line, but you should know, this is where it is." Ideally, a scene including this roll should involve the character acting upon power that he or she possesses. The character, in acting in such a way that results in this roll, is expressing precisely how far he or she will go.

MAILING LIST ARCHIVE

If the pits of hell were yours to command,
What wouldst thou wish?

To outlast the stars in stolen life?
The caresses of a willing wife?
Treasures of gold to rival kings,
Through which one could gain all things?

Or do old memories still remain,
Old taunts and blows still give pain?
If the demons would perform one task,
Would revenge be what you'd ask?

The Scarlet Jester

Of course, there are two main ways to have to make such a roll. The first is taking an action that the GM deems morally questionable; the second is conducting the main rituals of sorcery, Contacting, Summoning, and Binding. Ideally, again, these two categories may well have a great deal of overlap. Non-sorcerous actions that entail Humanity-test rolls should be much like those aspects of sorcerous rituals which do so as well. For maximum reinforcement of the concepts involved, the details and content of the rituals and the more "typical" ethical questions should, to some extent, match up.

Here are some GM techniques to bring this idea into play concretely.

▼ Set up situations in which any action of the character will result in a Humanity check. Consider the idea of a morally-challenging situation, rather than trying to categorize a whole slew of actions, individually, into either-or good-or-bad.

▼ The above idea especially applies to the Kicker, which should include an ethical dimension and be presented as such, recast as a question. The Kicker is just the first Bang for a character, but as it plays out, it should be revealed to be an interesting, meaningful one.

▼ Recall that victories on a given roll may be used as modifier dice on a subsequent roll, for a wide variety of reasons. Thus a roll for resolving a morally-questionable action may have its victories translated into either bonuses or penalties for a Humanity check. Or conversely, a successful Humanity check roll's victories may be bonuses on the attempted task which continues a morally-laudable course of action.

Attention to these matters results in solid links between the demons in a story, the motives of the people in the story, and the decisions that must be made in the crucial scenes. And of course, those decisions result in events, and sooner or later the role-playing group has a story outcome on its hands. If the characters, their demons, and the Humanity issues have been solidly utilized, then with any luck you're looking at one of the Big Four Outcomes for at least one of the characters.

▼ **Retribution**: the character's plans and goals blow up in his or her face.
▼ **Remorse**: the character succeeds, but badly – the sorcery or other actions necessary to do so required too high a price.
▼ **Outlaw prevails**: the character triumphs, demons and all.
▼ **Redemption**: the character abandons the sorcerous path to success and resolves the conflict using other means.

Now, the GM must be willing to let the players themselves arrive at these outcomes without trying to force the issue. It's not always easy; the role of GM necessarily lends itself to control-freak personalities (don't I know it), even if his or her desire is merely to entertain and to help generate the most satisfying ending. That's why the player has some things to consider too.

The player's part

Ultimately, the SORCERER player must care, in the sense that an author cares, about what happens to his or her character. What makes this game different from some RPGs is that "what happens" is not merely, does "my guy" get lots of stuff, or does he continue to survive lethal situations, or does he increase in his game-effectiveness. Again, at the risk of being pretentious, a SORCERER player might think about caring in terms of making a moral statement. His or her goal might be to role-play toward those Big Four Outcomes from the inside.

This approach takes some maturity. One must be able both to identify enough with the character to care, yet separate your own player-interests from those of the fictional person's. Ultimately, it means being willing to abide by any of the Big Four Outcomes that legitimately occur.

Here's one issue to consider. The player has an interesting choice to make simply in terms of his or her starting demon's Power. Do you play it safe or push it hard?

EXAMPLE: In an early SORCERER playtesting story, the player Dan Kazi came up with the character Nancy, a teenage girl with Stamina 2, Will 3, and Lore 5 (defined as madness), which is about as good a candidate for demon-mastery trouble as you can make. He also wanted the character's starting demon

to be absolutely huge, and ended up, based on the abilities, with this monstrosity of Power 11. Details aside, that put Nancy's initial Binding roll at 5 dice (based on Lore) against the thing's Will of 11! I went for it, because Dan wanted to play a character who was doomed to sooner-rather-than-later destruction unless she underwent some serious changes or received some major help along the way. The risk, as well as the rush of being associated with and sometime commanding such power, was the whole point of playing that character.

Even if you're not planning on being that radical, there is still a subtler style issue that deserves some attention: how carefully does your character concern himself or herself with how the demons get something done? No option is safer than another, Humanity-wise. Whether the character plays it close to the vest, not permitting demons to perform any unordered task, or play it from the center of a web without asking too many questions of the minions ... either way, moral responsibility and the resultant Humanity checks devolve onto the character.

A SORCERER player should consider his or her character to be at risk by definition, and work with that risk and its resolution as the whole point of play. It's very different from carefully constructing a character for maximum survival and effectiveness value. Characters that maximize or are at least open to risks to their Humanity turn a game-balance type of punishment into a narrative opportunity.

Chapter Two:

INNER DEMONS

Jeremy McHugh

Going by the rules, a demon is a demon and a person is a person, and ne'er the twain shall meet. However, this concept was definitely made to be broken by experienced and clever SORCERER role-players. Advanced play may well include exploring, blending, reversing,and redefining what the terms "human" and "demon" really mean.

DEMON DEFINITIONS

Just as an example, here is what I think when I consider the metaphorical term "demon."

▼ Demons are inhuman, but whatever they are, whatever their agenda is, we (humans) are part of it and we matter to them. I've never been especially compelled by the idea that they are just inhabitants of some other dimension.

▼ Demons are transgressive. Their enigmatic agenda, when translated or applied to human terms, ends up breaking human

> Demons, few of whom lack some human component, may have been the parent stock of Man. Or they may have been spawned by man, his degenerate progeny. Possibly, they are his invention run wild, artifacts of a potent but diseased sorcery he once possessed. And conceivably ... demons arose as a "spiritual distillate" of human evil, a "coagulation" of psychic energies into the material entities we know today.
>
> —M. Shea, Nifft the Lean

rules. The slasher-vicious version of this, made famous by the average horror flick, is an unimaginative example of the general principle underlying any form of the Binding rules: that demons are almost totally powerless unless some person, in some way, agreed to cross an important line.

Again, as with Humanity, the individual role-playing group is required to refine or even disagree with any aspects of the above ideas.

MAILING LIST ARCHIVE

Jared Sorensen. *Be they slimy, evil 'n' nasty or otherwise, I think that all demons have a couple basic traits ...*

– Demons have a sense of independence: Whether moving freely amongst humanity or enthralled to a powerful mage, demons retain a sense of self; that they, ultimately, have control over their own actions and that despite any efforts to enslave them, they can never be truly controlled.

– Demons are enigmatic: You can never ever be sure what one is thinking. Their demonic natures gives them a unique perspective on events, both mortal and cosmic. They're totally alien and they have their own agendas. Which leads to –

– Demons aren't human: they don't have a human morality and most (I would think) don't understand many aspects of humanity. Love, pain, fear... if these are ever experienced, they're experienced through an intellectual filter.

Gareth Hanrahan. *Demons are the dark drives in the back of your head that you won't admit are part of you. I have this vision of some guy running down an alley, this shadowy terror stalking him relentlessly. The two are intertwined on some basic, secret level, but the guy won't admit it. The question "is the demon a real entity from some unknown realm who's torturing him by driving him towards things he doesn't want to do/hates/fears, or just some aspect of him" can't be answered definitively. When someone is described as being possessed or tormented by demons, it can mean both mental pain and being troubled by external entities on a mental/psychic/spiritual level.*

Raven. *A demon may be the result of someone very tortured, very depressed, or very evil dying without resolution to the extreme issues in their lives. They are literally the living manifestations of the "emotions" of a deceased human or humans ... the tortured poet, the starving artist, the scorned lover ... perhaps twisted in some way since,*

now the person is dead, the issue cannot be resolved.

To me, the word means a spirit, an entity of semi-malignant nature. Perhaps not meaningfully malignant (no more than a chipmunk means to be cute), they just happen to be, they may not even actively work to cause pain, harm, suffering or etc. Those are just the effects they produce when they are around ... so make no mistake, they are corrupt beings. That's the word I'm looking for ... corrupt.

The big psychological angle

Are demons archetypes? Does their presence in nearly every mythology and culture represent some kind of shared, symbolic, psychic "need" or component? I confess that this issue doesn't get my motor running, but judging from some discussion on the SORCERER mailing list, it bears some reflection.

Take it away, guys ...

George Pletz. *If demons are the embodiment of some sort of arcane knowledge hitherto lost to us, could they not emerge from The Collective Unconscious? Perhaps demons are just the living essence of taboo and transgression? What I like of this idea is that you would still be able to work in those occult/esoteric bits which gives the image of the demon its power and its context. Demons should be alluring and scary at the same time. They are paradoxical. They should draw upon our vision of what they are and then go against it.*

Ran Hardin. *I can't get away from the idea that demons are somehow "bound" to humans (pardon the expression) – to human civilization, or perhaps the human unconscious ... for example, the very fact that they have needs and desires hints at a connection to human drives. I don't know if I like the idea of demons being drawn directly from the unconscious mind of the sorcerer or some other person, but it's easy to see how an inventive GM could have a Freudian field day with the reverse idea: that demons, somehow are the human unconscious, or maybe the creators/inventors of same, perhaps as a "back door" into the earthly realm?*

It's also useful to consider the colloquial meaning of "inner demon," that is, a personal drive that listens to absolutely no qualifiers, no excuses, and makes no apologies. Contacting and Binding, especially, take on special meaning in this sense, in that both appear to be dictated by the demon's own nature, but in thematic or even more literal terms are better understood as self-expression

of the SORCERER character. The demon Types which are best suited to exploring this issue are Possessors and Parasites.

Possessors

I find that one of the most difficult demon types to play is the Possessor. It's really hard to relate to them as characters. I always end up with either the *Exorcist* type, which is big into spewing stuff and hurting its host and otherwise acting like a very disturbed human; or the Pod Person type, that ... can't ... quite ... act ... right ... honey. Both of these lead to fairly standard and, at this point in time, boring plots. And when I try to get away from these, it's all too easy gradually to forget about the host and end up with, functionally, a Passing demon.

Solving this problem requires re-interpreting the rules a little. They say, "If the takeover is successful, the host remains as a flickering bit of consciousness barely hanging on" ... which may be understood as something a little more active. Say, the Possessed host may cancel an action of the demon's, or say something, or even control a limb (e.g. to write or grab). To do this, the host must win a Will vs. Will roll, with the demon gaining bonus dice equal to the victories of the initial Possess roll. So if the Possession was tenuous, you get two jockeys on the horse. If a GM finds this a little too "kicky," they might rule that the demon would have to be stressed or distracted even to permit the inner rebellion at all.

However, the full solution is to play off an element that isn't discussed in SORCERER: at least some degree of host complicity. In this case, the demon and host actually "switch reins" in some pre-arranged conditions or perhaps under time limits – the details would depend on the specific instance of Binding.

MAILING LIST ARCHIVE

Ran Hardin. *Possession may be not unlike being addicted to a drug with extremely pleasing effects, but a nasty comedown.*

This all started in my mind by imagining being possessed by a demon who made me stronger, faster, tougher, etc., but who wasn't always active inside me. Kind of appealing in its own sordid way, and with an intelligent enough demon, the difference wouldn't be vivid enough for people to start shouting for Father So-and-so to splash holy water all over everything.

Charles Ferguson. *To me the salient point here is the weird inversions and identifications that can occur between individuals or groups locked together for a time, where there's an imbalance of power (e.g., prisoners and guards, hostages and captors, torturers and victims).*

This is separate from the "rush"/addiction of using/feeling such supernatural powers, which as Ran points out is probably directly analogous to certain drug addictions in many respects – although the two facets (identification and addiction) would no doubt react with and reinforce each other in strange and unwholesome ways ...

I'd say the key here is, as Ran has identified, the remnant of the human personality. With it, there's a place for interaction, intense moral conflict, the pathos of ascendency and/or disintegration of human/demon: it's a relationship and as such has its own dynamic which can be role-played.

I can't really see any way out of the role-playing situations you describe (i.e., playing possessors as either vomiting fiends or passers) without allowing the host to 'share' control of their body in some circumstances.

All sorts of interesting versions of host-Possessor collusion are possible, to the extent that the Type can be divided into categories.

▼ Full control, host is submerged entirely, with no active consciousness or presence of mind during the Possession. Here's where you find the pod-people (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers, I Married a Monster from Outer Space*), the raving tormentors (*The Exorcist*), and the anarchists (*The Hidden, Fallen*).

▼ Collusive to varying degrees

▼ Unconscious. The demon appears to be in complete control, and the host is buried quite deep, but it so happens that the demon's deeds accord quite nicely with the host's most hidden desires.

▼ Conscious but in denial. The host and demon struggle for full control, with the host convinced that the "evil thing" is entirely separate from himself. Each is conscious and aware while the other is in control.

▼ Willing abnegation. The host is content to let the demon run his or her life, participating as a spectator.

▼ Switching reins. As above, but the host may be in control with the demon's permission.

Robert Stallman's Book of the Beast trilogy (*The Orphan, The Captive, The Beast*) offers a wealth of insights concerning identity, possession, and desires, across the full spectrum of cooperation and conflict between Possessor and Possessed.

> **EXAMPLE:** Lee Alexander Gallagher is a nebbish of a grad student: henpecked by his professor, saddled with a teaching load that would flatten a tank, paid worse than a waiter, and almost totally incapable of asserting himself.
>
> **Lee: Stamina 4, Will 3, Lore 3, Cover 3 (grad student), Price –1 (wimpy), Humanity 2.**
> **Telltale: photographs taken of him turn out all blurry**
>
> However, Alex, his Possessor demon, is suave and smooth, everything Lee wishes he were. They have a deal for switches, in which the demon gets Lee into totally gratifying situations and then cuts him in on it to reap the enjoyment. It also confers certain powers when it lets Lee have the reins.
>
> **Alex: Stamina 4, Will 6, Lore 5, Power 6. Its Desire is Sensation; its Need is to be praised and admired.**
> **Abilities: Perception (sensual pleasure), Vitality (these are what Lee experiences when Alex lets him take over); Travel, Armor, Special Damage (killing kiss) (these Alex uses itself).**
> **Telltale: impeccable grooming**
>
> The story potential should be apparent as, over time, Lee gets a clue and starts to imitate the demon's persona and behavior when he is in control. He learns to be cool, ruthless and manipulative. And then a real power struggle begins...

Parasites

Demons of this type do not exert direct control over ("take over") their host's actions. They live in or become part of the host body, in any of the following ways, or any way similar:

▼ actual critters inside, nestled somewhere comfy

▼ replacement body parts, semi-, fully-, or even extra-functional

▼ any kind of substance or essence imbuing some or all of the host tissues

Also, in general, their abilities are conferred to the host – he or she uses the abilities at will, insofar as the demon permits.

Conceptually, Parasites are interesting because the boundary between host and demon may be quite blurry. For instance, if the thing confers all of its powers, and if it is unable to communicate except through sensation, and if it receives its Need and gratifies its Desire only through the host taking direct action, then the host has to act, well, like a demon.

However, unless the GM is careful, such Parasites can be exploited by players as ultimate utility-demons, simply banks of powers that for all intents and purposes are owned by the host. For a Parasite to take the role in the story that any demon character deserves, some attention must be paid. Specifically, the demon should be strongly committed to its Desire and also need its Need quite frequently, perhaps even every time its abilities are used. The fun part, of course, is that unlike (say) a Passer, one cannot just tell it to go off and find or do what it might want; the host actually has to perform the actions that get the demon its Need.

Furthermore, the Parasite may be quite stingy with how often it confers its abilities to the host's control. It may even reserve them only for instances that were agreed upon by the terms of Binding. This option is very effective; it turns the Parasite into an attentive, responsive character, always interested in whether its host is making good on the original agreement.

If all this still seems too passive, here are some options to give a Parasite a little more proactivity.

▼ It may exert sudden, specific instances of bodily control (e.g. making an attack, or moving the host body somewhere, or even speaking via the host's voice).

▼ It may do direct damage to the host, with a Special Damage just for this purpose (not exactly subtle, but effective).

▼ Its abilities may "go off" when conferred, insofar as they conform to words, actions, or perceived intent of the host.

MAILING LIST ARCHIVE

Raven. *A parasite wouldn't take control, but it might provide you with powers you don't really want. I'm thinking here of the Hand and Eye from Moorcock's Corum series; he chooses to use them, but they have a life of their own, at times, the effects are ever-present and thus so is the price.*

Good ideas for how to role-play a Parasite demon may be found in these examples: Genesis, the inhabitant of Jesse Custer in the comic *The Preacher*; Firx, who infects and torments Cugel in Jack Vance's *The Eyes of the Overworld*, and the Hand of Kwll and Eye of Rhynn in Michael Moorcock's *Swords Trilogy*. In each case, the demon (using the term in its most general sense) definitely has rules and standards for how it wants the host to act, and across these three examples can be seen the whole range for how much the host agrees: most of the time, not at all, and half-and-half, respectively.

Another approach to Parasites may be found in David Cronenberg's films *Shivers*, *Rabid*, and *The Brood*, in that the demon literally imbues novel biological function to its host, and this function may be congruent with the host's unconscious desires.

Just how well the host understands the demon's Desire and Need can certainly vary; either incomplete or complete knowledge can be the foundation for some good stories.

EXAMPLE 1 (this character first appeared in SERENDIPITY'S CIRCLE #17, 1999): Ed Primrose is the very definition of a human pimple. He lives in a wretched apartment smelling of human secretions, he's a cop wannabe who works part-time as a security guard in a warehouse, and he is the most inconsequential form of satanist, subscribing to some low-budget mag and hoping to contribute an article to it some day. He thinks Zed in PULP FICTION is just the coolest. He's not even a cultist. Left to his own devices, he'd be scribbling in tiny letters in his secret notebook and lurking on alt.satanist.fetish.feet.

Ed: Stamina 4, Will 4, Lore 2, Cover 4 (cop wannabe), Price −1 (loser, applies to any roll for anything proactive).
Telltale: same as Vassht's Telltale, below.

But Ed's Parasite demon, Vassht, has inspired him to bigger things. Vassht's Need is easily met (see below), but it pretends it is in desperate Need all the time and won't tell Ed what it is, limiting itself to phrases like, "You know … you know you know." Ed's Lore is too low for him to realize he's being taken for a ride as he frantically tries to imagine and satisfy his demon's Need. His

2attempts have gone from disgusting to criminal and on to atrocious, and Vassht is enjoying itself thoroughly.

Vassht: Stamina 6, Will 7, Lore 6, Power 7. Desire Corruption, Need to eat human detritus, which Ed provides in quantity.
Abilities (all but Hint confer to Ed): Travel (run on air), Armor, Vitality, Fast, Hint, Taint. These abilities, used properly, stack up to a serious combat monster.
Telltale: Ed's skin breaks out in lumpy white nodules, small but distinctive.

EXAMPLE 2: This example is essentially a modern rewrite of Robert E. Howard's character De Montour, from his story 'Wolfshead'. Ryan is an ex-military, quintessentially American wanderer, the kind of guy who just couldn't fit in back in his hometown after service. So he's wandered all over the world, and lately, he's picked up a friend who's given him all the more reason not to stop moving. Since Ryan is a good guy, the danger he now poses to anyone who likes or trusts him is far too great; of course, since he has the power to deal with all sorts of nastiness now, he ends up helping people and thus causing them to like and trust him, and so on and so on.

Ryan: Stamina 5 (scrapper, ex-military), Will 4 (belief system; he's a good Christian boy who considers himself possessed), Lore 1 (naïve; knows just enough about sorcery to be wrong), Cover (mechanic, just passing through), Humanity 3.

His Parasite has no name, or at least Ryan doesn't know it. It's pretty unsubtle, and its terms are well-known to him. Basically, Ryan is a werewolf, insofar as he must satisfy the demon's Need, or else the thing will act up by conferring Shapeshift unexpectedly and he'll end up maiming someone. Just to avoid stereotype, though, he doesn't turn into a wolf so much as a contorted, savage, shadowy version of himself (this concept follows the Howard story).

The demon: Stamina 7, Will 8, Lore 4, Power 8. Desire Mayhem, Need for lots of hot blood.
Abilities: Shapeshift, Special Damage (rending talons, etc), Vitality, Cloak

Now that I think about it, this character also strongly resembles a famous comics and TV character, but there's probably no need to dwell on that. An archetype is an archetype, so there.

TWISTING IT

Changing demon type

Sure, the rules suggest that any given demon is simply of a given Type, and that's that, but so what? Some fluidity to that part of a demon's definition is a great source for story ideas.

A GM may permit demon Type to change during play. One way to do this is to assign given ranges of Power to given Types, thus setting up a progression into new Types as the demon gains in Power (which itself proceeds according to what the GM wants: age, certain deeds, number of Sorcerers reduced to 0 Humanity, or whatever). The order of Types might be something like this:

1. Inconspicuous (Power 1–2); proceed next to #2 or #3
2. Object (Power 3 and up); this step is terminal
3. Parasite (Power 3–4)
4. Possessor (Power 5–6)
5. Passer (Power 7+); this step is terminal

Each transformation would certainly require some kind of specified satisfaction of the demon's Desire – for example, a demon with a Desire for Corruption might have to influence a person to drop to 0 Humanity for each step. The terminal points of this progression (#2 and #5) would indicate the demon becoming as fully anchored in real, material bodies as they can get. One might imagine status hierarchies among the demons themselvs reflecting the ranking.

Or another progression could be used; perhaps the reverse of the one above, or something entirely different.

Alternately, a role-playing group could even conceive demons to have no Type until they are Summoned "into" a given form. The entity reached by a Contact would be some sort of "essential form" of the demon, which might not even look anything like its material version. Therefore the sorcerer would have to specify during the Summoning just what it gets Summoned as. This option permits a great deal more customizing and creativity on the part of the players, which may be quite a good thing.

Human-demon confusions

This section concerns demons who think they're human, and humans who think they're demons. These are always fun to role-play, as the rules include no automatic "demon sense," so there's every reason to be worried no matter what someone claims or even believes about themselves. The story

> Yes, spook is a good word for it ... sometimes a troublesome goblin, sometimes a huge, embracing lubberfiend, sometimes an ugly animal creature, sometimes a helper and server, even a lovely enchantress, a True Princess from Far Away: but never a full and complete human being.
>
> —R. Davies, The Manticore

and meaning in such a case relies on assuming that ultimately these delusions break down or are otherwise revealed in telling ways.

If a demon thinks it's a human, the question becomes, given its relationships with others and personal goals, how does it **fail** in being human?

> **EXAMPLE (using terms and rules from SORCERER & SWORD):** a woman named Margaret is a suburban homemaker, and for whatever reason, she has come to the attention of a sorcerer.
>
> The demon he Summons and Binds is a duplicate of her: a Passer, with the same Stamina (4) as she. Its Will and Power are 5, and its Cover, obviously, is the same as hers. It goes by "Maggie," and begins to make a hash of her life by subtly acting as her, very carefully. Some good abilities for Maggie include Daze (specifically for creating observer uncertainty between self and model), Perception (of Margaret's current doings or effect on a scene), and Travel (to model, or to be really nasty, to switch places; whole stories might arise from that alone).
>
> However, Maggie is curious about its "self," and is willing to Pact with Margaret to take her place periodically. Such a Pact is indefinite and concerns, each time, a single task, resulting in +2 to Maggie's Pact roll. Margaret must beat the victories of the demon's initial Binding, or it will misunderstand the stand-in situation in a crucial way – perhaps initiating an affair with the grade-school principal, rather than negotiating the little son's detention. Over time, Maggie may well end up rebelling against its master and trying to become Margaret as best as it can.

On the other side, a human who thinks he or she is a demon should similarly fail to conform to the meaning of "demon" in the Humanity-relevant way. Thematically, the GM might like to explore the difference between "demon" as conceived by a theology or narrow morality with a "real" demon. Such a character is easy to generate.

▼ A naïve sorcerer or non-sorcerer might host a Parasite demon and never realize that the abilities he now controls are really deriving from another individual.

▼ An unbalanced individual might have some loopy notion of "demon," say from a harshly religious upbringing, and act accordingly due to low self-esteem.

▼ More grimly, a badly-traumatized child with Multiple Personality Disorder may carry out truly horrific, murderous acts, conforming very well to the classic violent-Possessee model (a good example is found in Andrew Vachss's novel *Sacrifice*).

Derek Stevens

Human-demon transformations

The above section assumed that any human-to-demon or demon-to-human conversion is doomed to fail. But what if that's not necessarily the case?

Are demons bad? Are they evil? Just what relationship do they have to the admittedly horrific effects of their presence? These questions become most interesting because demons have no narrative role worth mentioning unless a person is involved in the situation too. Demons' "bad-ness" is expressed in the actions of people. SORCERER is predicated on the idea that there are in fact things and events that can be identified as evil, but also that if you just point your pious finger at "demons," and think your moral conundrums are over, you'll be in big trouble.

MAILING LIST ARCHIVE

Ran Hardin. *There are two elements here:*

1. *Demons are nasty/evil by nature.*
2. *Sorcerers are in danger of losing their humanity by engaging in their "craft" (and the possibly immoral acts they must perform to engage it).*

I do not see these two elements as necessarily conjoined. In fact, I could even see a set-up where demons are essentially benign creatures, who are abused and misused by human sorcerers – hence, the Humanity loss. An interesting metaphor of trading innocence for temporal power could be built by such a scenario. It could even be that demons don't want their needs and desires – but humans know they can hang on to their power objects by supplying them with nasty item X every other day, whether it's a bloodletting or a virgin's turd.

Perhaps it is humans who corrupt demons... it could be that the "tainting" of the demon by the sorcerer's Summoning and use causes it to become a wrathful creature bent on proving that "paybacks are hell." That way, an ominous tone could be built over the course of play.

However, I don't think that such a tone is necessary to successfully tell SORCERER *stories. This doesn't mean the story would have no tone, or a comical one, but exploration of different approaches is the key to wanting to play a game more than once or twice, in my view.*

A good concept-base for this approach would be thoroughly pagan, considering the spirits and whatnot of the world to be inherently positive in their roles. The moral transgression, then, is inherent to the rituals of sorcery, which themselves may be seen as the corruption and abuse of the spirits themselves, resulting in the nasty or appalling aspects of the Bound entity.

HUMAN TO DEMON CONVERSION

The GM should consider using this option carefully, because, if included, it has a tendency to take over the story. It involves decreasing Humanity to 0, obviously, but also converting it to Power along the way. Just what specific behaviors are involved in this process, as opposed merely to losing Humanity in the mechanical kind of way, relies seriously on the given role-playing group's Humanity definition. However, the Type and other details of the demonized character are certainly not determined randomly; they will accord with whatever rituals, acts, and other aspects of the process the GM deems appropriate.

Here's how it might work. When a character's Humanity decreases below his or her Will, then roll Will vs. Humanity. If successful (I use the term loosely), the victories turn into a potential-Power reservoir. The character still has Humanity, so the Power isn't actual; however, when Humanity drops to 0, this pool of Points does become Power. Note that if Humanity goes up at any time during the process, the potential-Power points are not reduced.

Also, along the way, each time Humanity drops, roll Lore against the new value. The victories gained in successful rolls set how many demon abilities

the character gains. They won't be usable until Humanity is 0 and Power is active, but that's how they are chosen.

After Humanity drops to 0 and the Power is "activated," the character is now a demon. He or she may use demon abilities, is subject to any of the sorcerous rituals, cannot carry out any of the rituals, suffers the effects of un-Bound status, and has a formalized Desire and Need.

DEMON TO HUMAN CONVERSION

This process necessarily entails building a Humanity score up from scratch. Again, the specific behaviors and deeds involved depend on how the role-playing group has defined the term, but here's how the mechanics might work. A demon who's embarked on this "self-improvement" plan must begin by reducing the level of Power that it employs for its abilities. The actual Power score does not change, but the demon simply will not use it except at a lower level. The difference between the full score and the reduced-level is the demon's fake-Humanity (for lack of a better term). As long as any abilities are used at or below the reduced-Power level, that's fine ... the fake-Humanity may even be employed much as a person uses Humanity, although not to Banish (demons can't employ sorcerous rituals).

The character may reduce Power all the way down to 0, although the GM might decree that each increment dropped requires a Human act – the kind of thing that, for the given group, would get a character a Humanity-gain roll. Once the reduced-Power score reaches 0, the character is now eligible for Humanity rolls with fake-Humanity – success means the character is now human, with a true Humanity of 1. He or she maintains the original Lore score and has no demonic abilities, which in practice have "withered away." Failure at this crucial roll has no effect; the character may stay with fake-Humanity and 0-Power indefinitely.

A fine reference for this concept is Roberta A. MacAvoy's *Tea with the Black Dragon*.

One of the most interesting versions of

> "Do you recall how, when we strove upon the balcony, you mocked me? You told me that I, too, took pleasure in the ways of pain upon which you work. You were correct ...
>
> "Know then, that as we existed together in the same body and I partook of your ways, not always unwillingly, the road we followed was not one upon which all the traffic moved in a single direction. As you twisted my will to your workings, so was your will twisted, in turn, by my revulsion at some of your deeds. ... This is why your pleasure has been broken. This is why you seek now to flee. But it will do you no good. It will follow you across the world. ... It will pursue you wherever you go."
>
> Taraka covered his face with his hands.
>
> "So this is what it is like to weep," he said, after a time.
>
> —R. Zelazny, *Lord of Light*

this process arises from the potential complicitous relationship between Possessor and host discussed earlier in the chapter.

This whole process, of course, should be rather stringent in terms of what actions the demon is performing – only those things that would unequivocally yield a Humanity-gain roll should be considered. Also, at any time during the process, the demon may go ahead and use an ability with Power above the reduced value, up to its full level, but even a single instance eliminates all fake-Humanity and the process must begin all over again.

An interesting wrinkle, especially if one is playing one of those rare forms of SORCERER in which demons may be player-characters, is to permit the above process to occur without the character's knowledge.

TWISTING IT MORE

The best means for exploring just how human a demon might be, and vice versa, is to call in the most basic human needs, drives, and activities.

Demon-demon mating

The GM must consider whether this is something demons generally do. If so, then fine, you just get another demon, and all that's added to the story is the concept and implications of demonic family ties, if any.

If on the other hand, demon-demon parenting is unheard of, then what do you get when two of them try it? Some options might be:

▼ an ultra-powerful infant demon
▼ a new sort of Type never before encountered
▼ an Imminent (given that the parents are True Demons), e.g., the founding member of a race of Old Ones
▼ an entirely different, non-demonic sort of being

Demon-human mating

As far as the mating and pregnancy themselves go, in most sources, this is played as pure and simple horror (e.g. *Rosemary's Baby*), but I suppose it could be all romantic and passionate. I guess.

Don't get confused by gender; a demon is fundamentally an "it" regardless of its physical features and demeanor. The person who mates with it may be either male or female; the person may carry the child whether male or female. Which way this last detail goes probably should be left specific to the events and concepts in a given scenario. The same goes for just how the human and demon have, ah, congress – it could be very graphic and physical, or it could be abstract or even immaterial, not physically sexual at all.

Here's one sequence of rolls that might represent such an event. Of course, any of the following can be dictated by the GM rather than rolled.

1. The person makes a Stamina roll vs. the demon's Stamina, which regardless of winner provides a number of victories. (How the outcome of this roll translates into physical, sexual terms is up to the GM, although it seems reasonable to include a Humanity check in this step.)

2. If the person is a sorcerer, he or she rolls Lore vs. dice equal to this number of victories. If this roll fails, all of the demon's subsequent rolls in the ritual will have the victories as a bonus; if it succeeds, the human parent's next rolls in the ritual will have the victories as a bonus. (If the person is not a sorcerer, the demon gets the victories from the initial Stamina vs. Stamina roll as an ongoing bonus.)

3. Roll the demon's Power vs. the human parent's Humanity; the victories determine the child's Lore score. (If the parent wins this roll; the child will have to develop Lore like a human sorcerer.) This step also includes a Humanity check.

4. Roll the human parent's Humanity vs. the demon's Will; if the person wins, the victories give the child's Humanity score, but if the demon wins, the victories give the child's Power score. One cannot have both Humanity and Power.

Demon children

You mean there's any other kind? (Someone had to say it.)

The Bradbury quote here is extreme, but children are in fact a tad uncanny, in all their phases: embryo, infant, toddler, child, pre-teen, and teen. The GM might give some thought to developing a general view of them for story purposes. Are they:

▼ Little thugs differing from adults only in subtlety and skill?

▼ Innocents who must essentially "die" to become adults?

▼ Occult sensitives whose senses dull as they mature?

▼ Raw material that gets honed into a working human being?

> It's a repulsive thing I'm speaking of. How many mothers have died at the birth of their children? How many have suckled strange little improbabilities who cause death one way or another? Strange, red little creatures with brains that work in a bloody darkness we can't even guess at. Elemental little brains, aswarm with racial memory, hatred, and raw cruelty, with no more thought than self-preservation. ... What is there in the world more selfish than a baby? Nothing!
>
> —R. Bradbury, The Small Assassin

The literary sources for demonic, mutant, occult, and otherwise spooky children are legion. A fair piece of the short-story medium across the last century

can be found in the collections edited by Roger Elwood and Vic Ghidalia: *The Little Monsters, More Little Monsters, Young Demons,* and *Demon Kind,* and Mildred Clingerman's stories *The Little Witch of Elm Street* and *A Red Heart and Blue Roses* are not to be missed. Cinema, of course, offers the Unholy Three of *The Exorcist, The Omen,* and *Rosemary's Baby,* as well as a host of variants and imitations.

Scary-kid themes fall into extremely neatly-defined categories:

▼ The child is plain evil. This is disturbing to anyone, especially if the child's behavior is a warped version of normal behavior. A parent protagonist is in special trouble, as his or her instincts to protect the child are a liability (e.g. *The Omen*).

▼ The child is a victim. The opposite, more straightforward option, in which the powerful parenting instincts are called into play. The more horrific or dangerous the threat to the child, the more primal commitment is required from the adult (e.g. *The Exorcist*).

▼ The child is collusive. Here, given that the child is not outright evil, the story depends on the child's innocence being a source of danger, as his or her limited view of reality takes on great danger or meaning once provided with the power of a demon.

▼ The child is alien. This option is tricky, as the child's needs and concerns are inhuman, but not abominable, morally speaking – its activities arise from its inhuman biology and make perfectly good sense in those terms. The protagonist has to deal with the danger without the added booster of moral outrage.

So much for theme. How does all this work into SORCERER rules and story ideas?

DEMON KIDS

All in all, demon kid characters are either very sympathetic or very evil. Designing and GMing them is a matter of defining their specialized Desires and Needs. Such a "child" has some pretty definite concerns:

▼ to grow and develop physically (this requires food and protection)

▼ to mature socially: to learn, to develop relationships with others

▼ to be nurtured, to model and try out one's behavior on particular people

These concerns lend themselves nicely to Desires and Needs in demon-rules terms, in a variety of combinations. For example, one demon kid might Desire to try new behaviors out, but its Need is massive amounts of food; whereas another might Desire to mature physically but Need extensive nurturing and affection. Since we're talking about demons, though, these concerns must be

considered specifically in terms of Binding – that is, they depend on the complicity of humans, and even the biology of childbirth and child-rearing may take on a warped, sorcerous quality.

> **EXAMPLE 1:** a Parasite demon manifesting and developing as a fetus in utero. Its Desire, of course, is to mature, and its Need could be practically anything the mother must ingest. Its abilities are Link, Special Damage, and various protective abilities, both conferred and a couple for itself; these permit it to punish its "mother" when she fails to act as it desires. At birth, of course, it transmogrifies into a Passing demon.

> **EXAMPLE 2:** a Passing demon appearing as a child and never growing up. It never learns or develops, presenting a perpetual repetition of childlike needs and experiences. The grimmest version of this idea, of course, destroys its family in some tragic, untraceable way, and moves on to another one.

DEMONS IN OR WITH KIDS

Here, the character really is a human child, and actual "kid reality" is the issue here. Kids look at the world with these priorities on full blast:

▼ to play (test new behaviors, exercise possible insights)
▼ to rely on parents for safety and resources
▼ to out-do siblings; simultaneously, to be helpful to siblings

They are also weak, physically and socially, although sometimes quite powerful within a family. The intense passions (this word is entirely appropriate) listed above therefore meet almost continually with some degree of frustration; a child daily endures trauma that would institutionalize most of us.

Imagine a perfectly normal 6-year-old, with no special privileges or deprivations, and with no more nor less than the average degree of energy, passion, and frustration. Now give this kid Binding status with a powerful, not-very-bright demon.

Scary, huh? The idea becomes more complex depending on the degree of complicity involved. Some options include:

▼ A normal child's point-of-view may actually be dangerous, given power or a focus. The family may be forced into artificial happiness and peacefulness; siblings who thwart the child may be terribly punished; and so on. Confront such a child with a problem that any child faces (school troubles, allowance shortages), and fireworks may result.

▼ A unilaterally wicked kid, given a demon, is more dangerous but perhaps less disturbing. Various low-budget movies concerning a psycho-child and eerily cunning and loyal rats come to mind...

DEMON-HUMAN HALFBREEDS

These come in two kinds: a human with a Humanity score but remarkably demon attributes, and a demon with a Power score and remarkably human attributes.

The first sort is best treated simply as a high-Lore sorcerer, and it's practically obligatory to consider the demon parent's interest in its offspring – whether to nurture or destroy. A bonus to all rituals when dealing with "relatives" seems appropriate.

The second sort is essentially a Passing Imminent demon, and may well be a good candidate for a Changeling type of story: replacing a fully human infant in a family. Such a character might be very sensitive to the concerns, expectations, and conflicts of its parents and surrounding people, ranging from being the perfect child to an evil, destructive cuckoo.

Denise Jones

Veronica V Jones

Chapter Three:

REBELLION AND REDEMPTION

HUMANITY AS SOUL

Well, it's not as if we're dealing with anyone's personal beliefs here or anything. I can only emphasize that it's all theory for the purposes of creating fiction. Even if the GM feels sure of

> Would you really want to meet an angel?
>
> —The Prophecy

what metaphysical hoo-ha is Out There in Store for all of us, then a character in his or her game is still in that same uncertain realm that we (the real people) are all in anyway. In other words, this section addresses souls and salvation and all that sort of thing as a topic for narrative role-playing – a dramatic story element, to be sure, but just a story element, nonetheless.

Casually speaking, a "soul" is that part of one's identity which interacts directly with the (not just "a") cosmic cause and purpose. Whatever "story" is being told by the events of the entire universe, one's soul expresses the extent to which one is a character in that story.

How about the game-mechanic uses of Humanity defined as Soul? Some of the many possibilities include:

▼ A resolution mechanic: perceiving the meaning of things, perceiving the

precise relationship among them that permits "right action" to be decipherable. Roll Humanity against difficulty dice determined by the GM.

▼ The "strength of ten": roll Humanity vs. a demon's Power for bonuses to be applied against it. This might also apply not just against demons but in any context that aligns the character's actions with the Universal Good, both as externally defined and internally adhered to. In that case, roll Humanity vs. an opposing character's Humanity.

Derek Stevens

The GM must consider two major aspects of including souls in a story.

Most importantly, there must be some kind of behavior or attitude that characterizes the healthy-souled from the diminished-souled. This is a here-and-now concern, with here-and-now consequences. What behaviors or attitudes are involved is a key question for the role-playing group.

▼ The easy way: just go back to Chapter One and deal with Soul as Humanity-by-any-other-name, e.g. ability to love, knowing God, empathy.

▼ The hard way: define Soul as rather different from any of the examples given in Chapter One, or from anything similar.

Optionally, ultimate consequences can be considered as well. Does damnation (in the narrow sense, meaning a punishment to your soul after your life is over) come into the picture at all? How mean is God?

▼ Classic/medieval: after death, if a person doesn't measure up to a specific set of moral standards, his or her soul is painfully and severely tortured forever.

▼ Here-and-now punishment: your kids go blind, your oxen die, etc.

▼ In Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Hell is defined as the inability to love. In other words, it is not some after-death punishment, but a state of mind here and now.

Supposing a medieval-theological context to one's game, and a fairly-traditional post-death moment of judgment, it is likely that a SORCERER character may anticipate the following conversation with God (of whatever description).

G: You utter skank. You broke so many rules I can't even count them. Would you prefer to fry eternally or burn painfully until the end of time?

PC: Hold on, there. Look what I accomplished! [Gives examples] You're gonna tell me that these were bad things to accomplish?

G: Well, OK, you did need to do those things. But the way you did them – ugh! No, it's off to the sulphurous torments for you, my lad.

PC: Hey! Hey! Look at the position I was in! Tell me, how could I have possibly accomplished [the examples] any other way?

And at this point, either the Almighty proves He's a short-sighted authoritarian and our hero goes to fry, albeit in a Promethean, one-last-raspberry sort of way; or the Almighty concedes the point and our hero is the one guy in existence who talked to God as an equal and told Him where to go and how to get off.

The above example is of course obnoxious and not entirely serious ... but again, the whole SORCERER paradigm posits a moral structure, and also suggests that the hero may operate heroically in the conceptual or practical cracks in that structure. (A sorcerer who just defies that structure is, of course, the typical villain character.)

In theological terms, there are several ways for a character to differ from the established and enforced path of virtue. They include:

▼ **Apostasy**: deliberately flouting and blaspheming against the established version.

▼ **Heresy**: professing a full and coherent version of the established moral system that deviates crucially, although perhaps only slightly.

▼ **Heathenism**: professing an alternative, unrelated moral system.

These options may seem a bit archaic and not especially twentieth-century; who, after all, sweats with fear for being thought a "heretic" today? In fact, though, quite a few people do, world-wide. The more post-modern approach, of course, is for the character simply to ignore established notions of morality because he or she doesn't perceive them, even as something to be flouted. Such an approach, though, might lose a bit of bite.

ANGELICS

First, a quick discussion of what "angel" does not mean in this section. Just because a character in the game-setting perceives another character to be an angel doesn't mean it is one. A human confused and boggled into madness by a demon might refer to it as "my angel," for instance.

Nor am I content simply to adopt a confused mishmash of movie conventions and pop mysticism which add up to a fairly boring "good winged-guys vs. bad pitchfork-guys" context. One could, I suppose, play an RPG in which angels and demons were pretty much equivalent beings on opposite sides of some kind of not-immediately-relevant conflict, and that could be fun, but it wouldn't need any special rules.

Instead, for SORCERER purposes, the term "angel" is taken to mean a being who really does have some kind of direct pipeline to, and even represents, a Higher Good. Therefore its actions are in fact immediately relevant to a character's own ethical concerns. However (and this is what makes it interesting), what "Higher Good" means from the human perspective is a tremendously customizable concept, across a wide range of story-affecting options.

▼ **Unequivocally good:** the capital-R-Right thing to do is also pleasant and immediately rewarding.

▼ **Downright unpleasant:** that same thing entails suffering, perhaps in exactly the way one would least prefer.

▼ **Simply unfathomable:** there just doesn't seem to be any consistent correlation between what the angel deems Right and how things turn out for the character involved.

Angels would by definition promote human welfare – and all of a sudden we're faced with every possible moral conundrum that implies.

▼ Whose welfare? What about situations in which benefit for one person or group necessitates harm to another?

▼ In what time scale? Now? Later in one's life? Generations later?

▼ Welfare in what sense? One's soul, or worldly goods, or happiness, or what?

Just how you and your role-playing group are most comfortable or intrigued with these options is of course up to you.

MAILING LIST ARCHIVE

Raven. *Let's examine the questions that the existence of an "opposing force" would bring into play, and the sorts of assumptions that practically go right along with it.*

First question that pops to mind: "Good" vs. "Evil" ... with the introduction of "opposing forces of light and darkness" one runs into the sticky mess that is moral absolutism. By stating that the demons are "bad" for you and the angels are "good" (or at least not as bad), one immediately sets up certain moral foundations in the gameworld that will forever dominate its destiny.

Why the heck are these two groups of beings opposed?

Philosophical differences? Moral enmity dictated by higher powers of the universe, to which mortals have no access except faith in the beings that they are telling the truth? Or did a demon accidentally piss in an angel's rose-bushes and tick it off, starting an eternal war between the two groups? Are they all "demons" (that is, both angels and demons are the same species)? All of the same "race" or "kind"?

However, I can see some ways in which it might work ... Completely giving up all personal power to achieve salvation: mind, body and soul ... an unthinking machine of the light ... the emptiness of salvation from everything, from yourself, from motivation, desire, will.

Todd Bennett *... demons, for the purposes of playing a role, will be hostile or indifferent to the welfare of humans. While angels, on the other hand, will promote the welfare of humans, although they would make demands upon humans that might make it just as easy to deal with the demons.*

Cosmologies and goals

Angels are much simpler than demons, really. What's complicated, or takes the most effort to conceive, is defining the cosmology and overall purpose the angels serve or represent. By definition, angels imply an organized cosmology.

For game purposes, this is just the same situation as with demons: the GM and role-playing group must invent a cosmology, use one that exists in literature or myth or theology, keep it vague, or make it deliberately opaque. This concept is axiomatic for any use of SORCERER and its supplements, but it bears repeating here because a lot of people, as soon as they hear the word "angel," assume all sorts of things. Again: it's up to you.

The term "goal" is used for the the angelic equivalents of demonic Desire and Need. All angels desire to serve people's good in the terms of the Higher Good (bearing in mind how complex an issue that is), but their individual Goals in doing so can be quite different, and in some cases could even come into conflict.

The Goal establishes the angel's reason for being in any scenario or situation, as well as its characteristic style of interacting with people.

- ▼ **Avenger/corrector**: the angel tends to show up after people have made decisions or committed crimes. It takes an active hand in delivering judgment and smiting the guilty. The human role is usually to ferret out or understand the truth of the matter, more or less activating the angel's role.
- ▼ **Facilitator:** the angel smooths over conflicts by encouraging compromise and empathy among all parties. Its over-riding assumption is that no one is ever completely wrong or bad, and all conflicts present a chance for everyone to become a better person.
- ▼ **Mentor/guardian**: the angel helps a specific person to change his or her behavior, not in regard to a specific conflict or problem, but rather in regard to how the person comes to handle any problem.
- ▼ **Warrior**: the angel is engaged in an ongoing campaign or project regarding a whole people, community, or area; its relations with specific individuals are focused on the larger-scale, longer-term problem.

MAILING LIST ARCHIVE

Raven. *The question: when the shit is chest-high, do you push forward and drown, or do the smart thing and turn back? Do you trust the angel, that there is a path through, knowing full well that it may let you drown for some plan, some "greater purpose," to come of your tragedy and betrayal (and there's the quandary ... you know full well that you can't trust it, and thus you can never be betrayed by it for it never promised anything ... yet it gives you everything). And your corpse become the solid ground for someone else: "Trust that all things I do, I do for a reason which serves all of humanity."*

And if everyone is drowned to achieve those plans ... Where is the line between selfishness and sacrifice? At what point does the light blind?

Angels by the rules

TYPES

Unlike demon Types, these don't mix very well. A GM should consider picking one for all the angels in the story and sticking with it during play.

▼ **The Good Visitor** (Passer). A saintly person with supernally accurate judgment, who drifts into situations and adjusts various details, usually through indirect action, with a given best outcome in mind. This is pretty much the Hollywood and TV version (e.g. *It's a Wonderful Life, Starman, Touched by an Angel*). Before you reject it as too treacly to consider seriously, note that it's not a bad way to articulate moral rules to the players, setting up for very powerful versions of the Big Four Outcomes.

▼ **The Unseen Observer** (Inconspicuous). A watcher and perhaps subtle encourager of humans, perhaps envious of the passion, change, and uncertainty of their lives. This Type is ready-made for conversion-to-human stories (e.g. Roberta MacAvoy's *Damiano* trilogy and the movie *Wings of Desire*).

▼ **The Vision** (Inconspicuous II). This type is only perceived as a bizarre vision or experience. A GM may even decree that the character make a Humanity vs. Will roll in order to recall it clearly, thus role-playing the encounter entirely through flashbacks. Physically, the angel may be nearly anything as long as it's tremendously strange (see Madeleine L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*).

ABILITIES

These abilities never confer to a user besides the angel.

▼ **Bless**. The angel rolls Power vs. the person's Humanity; if successful, the victory apply as a bonus to a given roll, specified by the angel. This roll could occur in the next moment, or it could be far in the future. (If the rules variant presented below is being employed, use Grace rather than Power.)

▼ **Enfold**. A person the angel is touching or near cannot be harmed by any means at all.

▼ **Perceive**. This ability is controlled by the angel, but it is a person's perception that is affected. There are many variants, but these are good examples.

– *Across distance:* the person can perceive what is happening anywhere and anywhen of the angel's choosing, for a few minutes' time

– *Alternative outcomes:* the person can see what would happen given a certain course of action.

– *Stop time:* from the person's point of view, time stops. He or she can-

not take any action; this is strictly an opportunity for perception, and the length of the effect is determined by the angel.

▼ **Replay**. This powerful ability literally cancels a scene, going back to the previous stated action of a human character. Everyone directly involved in the scene retains full knowledge of what "didn't happen," although no one else (e.g. across the world) perceives anything.

▼ **Restore**. Any object or individual may be brought to an undamaged, uninjured state.

▼ **Travel**. The angel may instantly be anywhere else, with or without bringing another person along.

SPECIAL RULES

The angelic abilities listed above always work, with no need for rolls. There is one major exception to this rule: a demon may always oppose an angel, matching Power against Grace, to negate any of these abilities. Note that angels have no such power against the abilities of demons. Also, optionally, a GM may permit a human character to oppose an angel's action with his or her Humanity.

Generally, angels cannot be killed or truly injured. They may be defeated, which is handled through their game mechanics just like those of other characters, but this has nothing to do with actually harming them.

Two very different rules options
Considering the myriad ways to define angels, up to and including their similarities to and differences from demons, two ways to do the game mechanics seem equally valid.

RULES OPTION 1

This way is simplest: just use the demon rules. This is the territory mined by the movie *The Prophecy*, in that the angels are pretty much demons going by the game-mechanics of SORCERER. Binding, Humanity loss, and so on would all be the same. The actual details of rituals regarding angels would differ tremendously from those for demons – a "special effects" difference, for those who recall the term from the role-playing game *Champions*; i.e., the mechanics are the same but the meaning and perception, to the characters, are as different as night and day. If the role-playing group is using this option, the thematic difference between angels and demons should be emphasized at every step, as the game mechanics won't do it.

The most important thematic twist is that Binding should be thought of in reverse, in that the angel Binds the person, and the relevant roll should be its

Power against the person's Humanity. One could even think in terms of human Needs …

A good story along these lines concerns characters who think they're in good shape because the angels are on their side, but their situation turns out to be very similar to that of the diabolists.

Also, in the context of this rules option, Humanity may be lost in the course of dealing with angels, and thus takes on a very disturbing meaning – that some degrees of "good" are just plain inhuman. Using the demon rules for angels implies that going off the human scale in either direction, angelic or demonic, arrives at similar results.

EXAMPLE: Genevieve is one of the thousands of children and teenagers to follow the call of the Children's Crusade in the early thirteenth century. She was in the first wave, following the call of Stephen in Vendôme; she was among the "privileged" few who were granted passage to the Holy Land in Marseilles. They were, of course, sold into slavery in Algeria and Alexandria, and Genevieve, like the others, was at first bewildered at what her piety had come to.

Sold to a sorcerer in Alexandria, she learned enough to master his demons herself; she visited horrible punishments upon her immediate masters and now searches for the merchants who had booked them passage (nearly a thousand innocent children) into slavery. But her Humanity's low, and she's wracked with a crisis of faith; on the one hand she fantasizes of finding and rending Stephen and Nicholas, the founders of the Crusade, and on the other she wants to remain true to the faith and love of Christ that initially inspired her. Now the angel Gabriel comes along and offers to help her in her darkest moments, and they enter into Binding.

Genevieve's Humanity is at this point a mere 2, and Gabriel's Power is 9; they roll, and Gabriel wins with 2 victories. He aids her in many things, and in time he engineers events so that she comes face-to-face with one of the two merchants who betrayed the children at Marseilles and booked them "passage" with the slavers.

RULES OPTION 2

More radically, one can introduce a full and separate set of angelics mechanics, by making use of a novel attribute called Grace.

Building an angel using this option requires just 3 scores.

▼ **Stamina**. Physical competence and how hard the angel is to defeat.

▼ **Lore**. As with demons, this score sets the number of the abilities.

▼ **Grace**. This score must be the highest of the three.

Note that by this option angels do not have a Will score. Will, to some extent, implies dominance, ego, deception, and passion, and according to this rules option, angels simply don't operate along those lines. They simply can't fool others or be fooled, intimidate or be intimidated, and so on.

Grace is "loaned" to humans, who may use it as Humanity (the angel does not lose this amount; its score remains unchanged). This act is not Binding at all; it's a direct gift. So an angel comes along to this hag-ridden, soul-burned Sorcerer, and says, "Hey buddy, use some of this. Looks like you need it." There is a Humanity vs. Grace roll, but only to determine how much Grace is added: if the angel wins, the Grace bestowed is equal the victories; if the person wins, only 1 Grace is bestowed. The character is now called the angel's Ward.

It is up to the individual role-playing group to decide whether the person has the option to refuse the bestowal of Grace.

What's Grace good for? One can add it for Humanity for purposes of Banishing, for Humanity checks, and for staving off Humanity 0 effects; it cannot be added to Humanity for Humanity gain rolls. Once bestowed, Grace is never lost. However, one can choose not to employ it – simply ignoring its value as if it were not there, and using one's own Humanity alone for the above purposes.

The angel has a special interest in its Ward and will take any and all actions to get the person into situations where they have the opportunity to do things that result in Humanity gain rolls. This is actually not necessarily fun for the Ward, upon consideration. Remember that Humanity gain cannot use Grace as a booster. If it so happens that the character does in fact increase Humanity, the angel's own Grace score increases by that amount (usually 1). However, if the character loses more Humanity, the angel loses that much, permanently, from its own Grace score.

Also, when a character operates on Grace alone (Humanity is 0), interesting things happen.

▼ He or she may avoid the usual effects of 0 Humanity, whatever they may be in that game, by successfully rolling Will vs. the Grace bestowed. This

roll must be made each time the character does something that would ordinarily call for a Humanity check, or else the effects of 0 Humanity occur, slowly or quickly according to the GM's judgment.

▼ He or she may can roll Grace against itself to get 1 Humanity – however, the actions that permit that roll have got to be as Humanity-increasing as all get-out, and they have to resolve the character's current Kicker. Furthermore, one cannot do this while Bound to any demons.

This rules-option is quite dangerous, as it permits a character with Grace to run around with effectively 0 Humanity, and act like it, and he or she may continue to do so without incurring the 0-Humanity effect anyone else has to incur. The Grace is acting as a buffer, but the person may in fact be abusing this privilege. Since angels never give up on a person, what's happened is that a very horrible person is now free to wreak all sorts of havoc without being taken out of the picture due to 0 Humanity.

> ... but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness ...
>
> —Romans 5:20–21

A couple of options make this whole angel-person thing a lot more harsh, and so they are recommended enthusiastically:

▼ one might decree that any use of an angel ability toward a character is automatically a bestowal of Grace and establishes Wardship;

▼ once a person has any Grace at all, and if he or she fails a Humanity check, then instead of just dropping 1 Humanity, he drops by an amount equal to the victories of the roll.

EXAMPLE: Consider the case of Muad bin-Aleph, an Arabian sorcerer in a story set around 1000 AD. This guy has lost some Humanity down to, say, a value of 1, through sorcery or other actions specifically associated with blasphemous activities that defy Islamic ideals. At one point, he's in a situation where some higher Humanity would be very helpful, such as Banishing a horrific demon (Djinni) who tricked him into a bad deal and has been tormenting him something fierce.

Brian Martinez

Muad is now visited by the angel Joshua, straight out of the Scriptures and thus associated with Islam, who offers him 5 Grace. Joshua has Stamina 6, Grace 6, and Lore 4; one of its abilities is Perceive (stop time), and it shows Muad some things that prove how much danger this demon really poses to him.

Muad accepts, and the Djinni is Banished on the first try (nothing like 5 extra dice, after all). From now on, though, Joshua takes some steps to get Muad into situations where pious and proper activities are the best way out of his troubles. One can imagine a certain amount of conflict here; Muad is a sorcerer and insists on continuing to explore the powers inherent in apostasy. Over time, given this insistence and some lousy rolls, Muad loses that last point of Humanity, so all he's got is the Grace.

Now there are two ways to go. The sorcerer might turn over a new leaf and really boost up the Humanity-positive actions and go for a Grace roll to get Humanity 1 and build up from there. That's the classic case of saving your soul. But conversely, he might throw it all to the winds: never mind getting Humanity back, and carry out all the awful things that come to mind anyway. Since he's got 5 Grace, and it can't be taken away, Muad will not suffer the usual effects of 0 Humanity. Such a character is an excellent candidate for a master villain, especially since Joshua, frustrated and sorrowful, might enlist some helpers in the form of the characters to help Muad change his ways.

Chapter Four:

CREATING HUMANITY-RELEVANT SCENARIOS

I have staunchly resisted providing "scenarios" for SORCERER in the usual sense of role-playing rules and supplements. Way back when the Earth was flat and *D&D* had just acquired its "A," the founding concept for such things was the tournament scenario, which takes as a given that all a player and/or character should care about are survival and speedy accomplishment of a given task. Later, in the 1980s, supplements were largely banks of ideas, characters, and tools such as maps that had grown directly out of various players' gaming experiences. Sometimes these included plots, sometimes not. The third, most recent type of supplement is that which I have criticized sharply in the SORCERER rules: extensive fiction dressed up in game mechanics.

Except for some of the intermediate type, most of these are meaningless in the

> He had to live out his time of trouble ... and there was no assurance that he would. He belonged to a generation whose elders had been poisoned, like the pelicans, with a kind of moral DDT that damaged the lives of their young.
>
> —R. MacDonald, The Underground Man

context of Narrativist role-playing. This supplement represents my approach, which is to discuss how scenarios may be built such that player choices and character actions lead to a powerful, unique story.

This material belongs in this supplement because building the most meaningful SORCERER scenarios depends entirely on the conceptual connections among Humanity and related terms in your own role-playing group. What can go "wrong" with Humanity and what happens to the Humanity of the various characters **are** the story.

So the #1 priority in preparing a scenario is a back-story that is composed of functional and dysfunctional human relationships, and therefore is ripe for including demonic elements. The toolbox has two elements:

▼ the huge bank of back-stories found in the American detective literary tradition;

▼ a scenario-prep technique called the relationship map.

You, the reader who bought this supplement, may be a little suspicious of delving into and pirating from all this literature. For one thing, it might seem strange considering how much I've criticized "fiction-type" supplements published by role-playing game companies. For another, most GMs are well aware of what happens when you try to shoehorn a bunch of players into a fixed sequence of events based on your favorite story – it simply never works, and no one ends up having much fun.

My approach differs from both of these because it focuses not on the events of the book's actual plot, but rather only on the back-story: those conditions and relationships which existed prior to any of the main characters' activities during the course of the book. In fact, part of the technique (described in full in the next section) includes eliminating the book's protagonist from the picture entirely.

TECHNIQUE: THE RELATIONSHIP MAP

While reading one of the works listed in the bibliography, you should be drawing a relationship map. It will probably have to go through several versions as you read and hidden alliances, dalliances, and other connections are revealed.

A relationship map lists all but the most minor characters in a story as little bubbles or symbols, with ties of (1) marriage, parentage, romance, and (2) employment or other obligations drawn to link them together. The lines do not represent actions, e.g., who kills whom is not depicted by a line. Nor do they represent feelings and intentions. In most of the novels and stories listed, the protagonist (Chandler's Philip Marlowe, MacDonald's Lew Archer,

Mosley's Easy Rawlins, etc) is not included in the relationship map.

The relationship map is only the foundation for your story; it does not dictate any actions or events once the action begins. The map shows the existing obligations and relationships. Something is going on that puts strain on any or all of the relationships. Often a "MacGuffin" is involved: an item that carries great significance, either overt (e.g. a letter explaining an important secret) or simply symbolic to many of the characters (practically anything). The role of the protagonist(s), that is, the player-characters, is to enter this maze of relationships and act as a catalyst to goad one or many of the other characters into further action.

Actions of NPCs either reinforce or violate any of the lines of relationship, and the dearest wish of any NPC is to get a player-character enlisted to support these efforts, whether by helping, hindering others, or taking the blame for something. The Collins quote illustrates this principle perfectly: simply by interacting with a certain group of interrelated people, the protagonist is involved with their concerns. They are not emotionally capable of ignoring him.

One of the finest thing about a relationship map is that it translates incredibly well across cultures and eras. Lying, marriage, parenting, betrayal, theft, sibling rivalry, travel, extortion, and fraud are always the same, regardless of method. So is the idea of recorded information: a "MacGuffin" might be a scroll of parchment, an encrypted computer file, an old book, or anything similar; adapting it to a given time period and culture is easy.

Here's the step-by-step process for preparing relationship maps in role-playing.

1. Make the map itself, which may entail several re-writes through the course of reading a novel.
2. Identify the specific moral crimes involved – these will almost certainly not correspond perfectly to the instances of law-breaking. Define Humanity for this story based on the moral crime.
3. Alter the map to taste: change the names and quite possibly the era and setting.
4. Demonize the story; identify sorcerers, demons, and sorcerous acts to

> Because it was all still nothing. Not a shred of actual proof of anything. All I had were unconnected crimes and facts. And a missing boy I was trying to find. Nothing more, except that someone else was also looking, for reasons unknown to me. I really knew nothing.
>
> No one was going to believe that. And there was my problem.
>
> I had asked questions. I seemed to be involved, and it is not what you are that counts, it is what you seem to be. It isn't reality that matters, it is what people think is real and act on. Not what is true, but what people believe is true.
>
> —M. Collins, Act of Fear
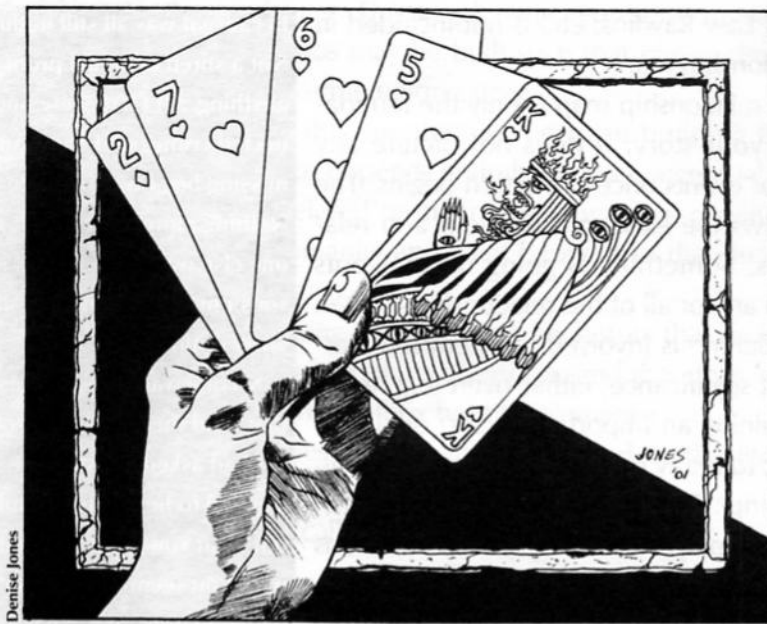
dramatize the moral point.

5. Include and introduce the player-characters: identify possible hooks, people or circumstances that will yield to investigation, and the just-buried information that will emerge.

6. Customize further: add, subtract, or combine characters; add or remove any plot elements you see fit.

The result may not resemble the source story very much, which is all to the better. Ideally, this method uses the fiction as a creative springboard, rather than an ironbound template.

THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

For the most part, the richest literary tradition to mine for relationship maps is the 20th century detective story. This is not the same as the mystery story, which focuses on the logistics of establishing guilt. The detective tradition is characterized instead by these elements:

▼ The topic swiftly moves beyond a given instance of law-breaking to issues of dehumanization, alienation, and human moral weakness.

▼ The protagonist is forced into the position of making a moral judgment entirely independent of legal or professional standards.

The stories generally insert the hero into an incredible welter of incest, murder, property grabs, hushed-up secrets, totally screwed-up on-the-surface-normal families, struggles to find fathers, confused and semi-psycho teenagers,

and more, usually with two or more generations of crime and secrets to uncover.

Bibliography

(This list of detective fiction is by no means complete; however, these are in my opinion among the best for the present purpose.)

RAYMOND CHANDLER

The Big Sleep, The Long Goodbye, The Little Sister, The High Window, Trouble is My Business, Farewell My Lovely, The Lady in the Lake, Playback, Pickup on Noon Street, Killer in the Rain

MICHAEL COLLINS

(real name: Dennis Lynds)
Act of Fear, Walk a Black Wind, Freak, Minnesota Strip

WILKIE COLLINS

The Woman in White, The Haunted Hotel

PETER CORRIS

The Dying Trade, White Meat, The Marvellous Boy, The Empty Beach, The Big Drop, Make Me Rich, The Greenwich Apartments, Heroin Annie, Deal Me Out

JAMES ELLROY

Brown's Requiem, L.A. Confidential, The Black Dahlia, The Big Nowhere

DASHIELL HAMMETT

The Thin Man, Red Harvest, The Dain Curse, The Glass Key, The Maltese Falcon, The Continental Op

ROSS MACDONALD

(real name: Kenneth Millar)
The Goodbye Look, The Underground Man, The Far Side of the Dollar, The Blue Hammer, The Way Some People Die, The Galton Case, The Drowning Pool, Black Money, The Moving Target, The Instant Enemy, The Barbarous Coast, The Chill, The Ivory Grin, The Wycherly Woman, Sleeping Beauty, The Doomsters, The Ferguson Affair, Find a Victim, The Zebra-Striped Hearse

SARA PARETSKY

Indemnity Only, Deadlock, Killing Orders, Bitter Medicine, Blood Shot, Burn Marks, Hard Time, Guardian Angel

WALTER MOSLEY

Devil in a Blue Dress, Black Betty, A Red Death, White Butterfly, A Little Yellow Dog

ROBERT VAN GULIK

The Chinese Lake Murders, The Chinese Gold Murders, The Chinese Bell Murders, The Chinese Nail Murders, The Chinese Maze Murders, The Haunted Monastery, The Red Pavilion, The Willow Pattern, Necklace and Calabash, The Monkey and the Tiger, Judge Dee at Work, The Emperor's Pearl, The Lacquer Screen, Murder in Canton, Poets and Murder

A BLOW-BY-BLOW EXAMPLE

The Goodbye Look, by Ross MacDonald

Here's how you might use one of MacDonald's best novels. The story is set in southern California around 1960. The actual plot of the novel isn't at all to the point here – as in most detective novels, the hero more or less wanders into a big mess after being hired by one of the participants. How he gets involved, the order in which he discovers var-

> There are men whom one hates until a certain moment when one sees, through a chink in their armor, the writhing of something nailed down and in torment.
>
> —G. Kersh, Busto is a Ghost, Too Mean to Give Us a Fright!

ious things, or the exact clues that lead him from place to place, are all irrelevant for our purposes. What matters is the content of the back-story.

As one reads the novel, piecing together the back-story becomes pretty involved, and I found myself having drawn the map in three steps.
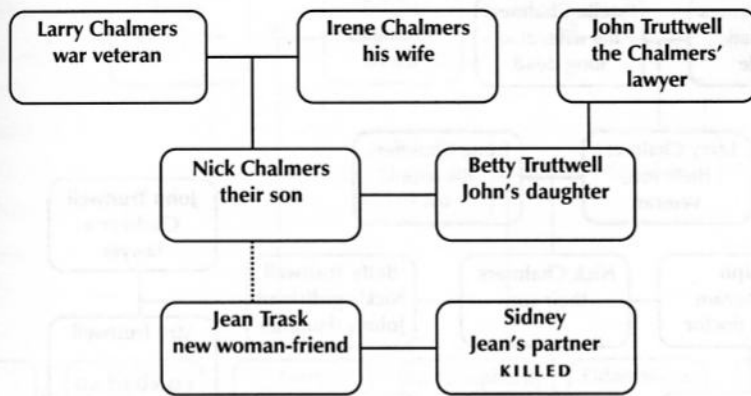
At first, upon encountering and interacting with these characters, the initial, overt relationship map shows two separate crimes with puzzling references and subtle inconsistencies.

▼ The Chalmers: it's claimed that someone swiped a jeweled case with some letters inside from the Chalmers' residence, and that the culprit may be Nick, their alienated, slightly unpredictable son. The Truttwells are their family friends; the daughter, Betty, is Nick's girlfriend.

▼ A mysterious woman, Jean Trask, has recently appeared and befriended Nick; her thuggish hireling, Sidney Harrow, has just been shot. Nick is a prime suspect, as he was near the scene, has an old pistol, and seems to be incoherent and raving about having shot someone.

Of course, this superficial, deceptive web overlying the actual relationships must break down as soon as the protagonist(s) put some pressure on it and start making observations. Weak points in the stories appear and the
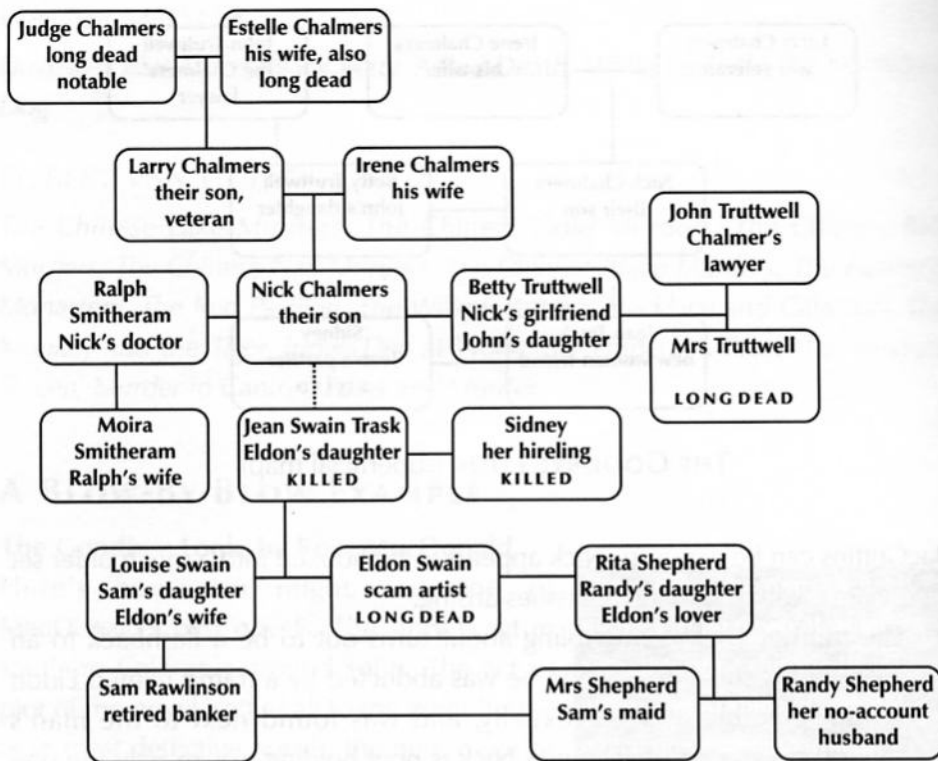
THE GOODBYE LOOK (superficial map)

MacGuffins can be exposed. Nick appears to be hooked into a much older set of concerns, with the following issues arising:

▼ The murder Nick is mumbling about turns out to be a flashback to an event in his childhood, when he was abducted by a tramp named Eldon Swain, possibly abused sexually, and was found next to the man's gunned-down corpse. The gun Nick is now holding was exactly the one used to kill Swain ten years ago.

▼ An aging drifter named Randy Shepherd appears, apparently Swain's old partner, talking about a horde of missing money that no one ever found.

▼ And to top it all off, Jean is also found dead (with Nick present and unconscious, again), and she turns out to be the daughter of Eldon Swain.

All this information gives rise to a new, intermediate map

▼ The Chalmers and their acquaintances are rounded out slightly: The family money derives from Larry's mother Estelle, who died about twenty years ago. Ralph Smitheram is the family doctor; Truttwell's wife died in a hit-and-run accident in front of the Chalmers' house twenty years ago.

▼ Investigation into Swain's death and past reveals a whole wealth of details. First of all, he was Jean Trask's father; his still-living wife is Louise Swain. Her father is also still alive, a retired banker named Sam Rawlinson who briefly employed Eldon. Connections abound: Rawlinson's housekeeper is the wife of Eldon's old partner, a three-time loser named Randy Shepherd; evidently Eldon abandoned Louise some twenty years ago to run off with the Shepherds' daughter, Rita. It goes farther than that; evidently they embezzled money from Sam's bank in doing so.
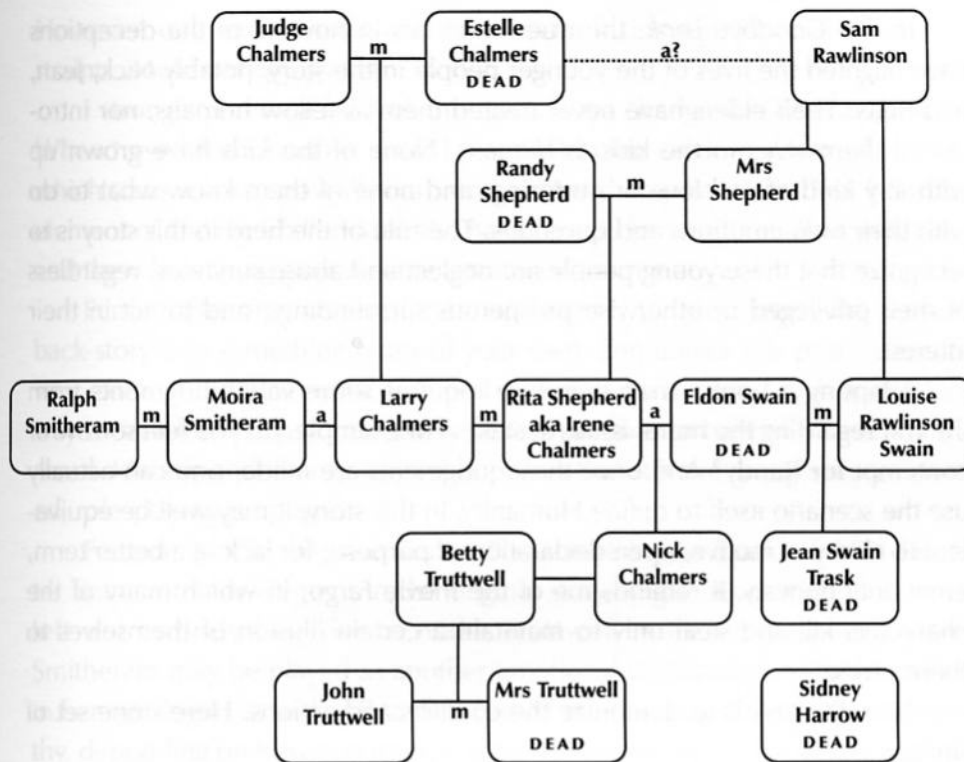
But the map still depicts two totally separate families, with the only connections or mysteries being Nick's recent partnership with Jean. The weak points,

Judge Chalmers long dead notable	Estelle Chalmers his wife, also long dead		
	Larry Chalmers their son, veteran	Irene Chalmers his wife	John Truttwell Chalmer's lawyer
Ralph Smitheram Nick's doctor	Nick Chalmers their son	Betty Truttwell Nick's girlfriend John's daughter	Mrs Truttwell LONG DEAD
Moira Smitheram Ralph's wife	Jean Swain Trask Eldon's daughter KILLED	Sidney her hireling KILLED	
Louise Swain Sam's daughter Eldon's wife	Eldon Swain scam artist LONG DEAD	Rita Shepherd Randy's daughter Eldon's lover	
Sam Rawlinson retired banker		Mrs Shepherd Sam's maid	Randy Shepherd her no-account husband

THE GOODBYE LOOK (intermediate map)

hinting at some still deeper connection or relationship of events, includes his weird participation in Eldon's death, Randy's ravings about money, the letters' implication about Nick's parentage, and the curious absence of Rita Shepherd. Doping it out requires learning the following secrets:

▼ Nick's illegitimacy: the jeweled case turns out to be irrelevant to everyone in favor of its contents, a group of wartime letters whose dates reveal that Larry was overseas at war when Nick was supposed to be conceived. Nick's father was Eldon Swain.

▼ Larry never served in the military; he worked right here in town at the Post Office during the war, falsifying letters to make it look as if he were overseas and carrying on an affair with Moira Smitheram, whose new husband Ralph was in fact serving overseas.

▼ Irene Chalmers is Rita Shepherd. She and Larry stole the money from his mother, who'd received it from Rawlinson, and ran down Mrs Truttwell in their getaway car as she happened upon their activities.

▼ Larry killed Eldon ten years ago, and recently Jean and Sidney as well, as they were all threatening to reveal and disrupt the careful fantasy he'd made of his life. In each case, he had no concern about any consequences to Nick.

```
┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐                          ┌──────────┐
│  Judge   │  m   │ Estelle  │..........a?.............│   Sam    │
│ Chalmers │──────│ Chalmers │                          │Rawlinson │
└──────────┘      │  DEAD    │                          └──────────┘
                  └──────────┘

                  ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
                  │  Randy   │  m   │   Mrs    │
                  │ Shepherd │──────│ Shepherd │
                  │  DEAD    │      └──────────┘
                  └──────────┘

┌────────┐  ┌────────┐  ┌────────┐  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐  ┌──────────┐
│ Ralph  │m │ Moira  │a │ Larry  │m │  Rita    │a │  Eldon   │m │  Louise  │
│Smither-│──│Smither-│──│Chalmers│──│ Shepherd │──│  Swain   │──│Rawlinson │
│  am    │  │  am    │  │        │  │aka Irene │  │  DEAD    │  │  Swain   │
└────────┘  └────────┘  └────────┘  │ Chalmers │  └──────────┘  └──────────┘
                                    └──────────┘

              ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
              │  Betty   │      │  Nick    │      │  Jean    │
              │ Truttwell│──────│ Chalmers │      │  Swain   │
              └──────────┘      └──────────┘      │  Trask   │
                                                  │  DEAD    │
                                                  └──────────┘

       ┌────────┐      ┌──────────┐            ┌──────────┐
       │  John  │  m   │   Mrs    │            │ Sidney   │
       │Truttwell│─────│ Truttwell│            │ Harrow   │
       └────────┘      │  DEAD    │            │  DEAD    │
                       └──────────┘            └──────────┘
```

THE GOODBYE LOOK (actual relationship map)

m = married

a = affair (new or old)

The final map results from revealing the crimes and injustices that permitted all the various secrets to exist. Larry and Moira were lovers even as she prepared to marry Ralph; Eldon is Nick's father, and he had abandoned Louise to be with Rita; Larry and Rita were lovers and conspirers against her lover, Eldon; furthermore, Larry and Rita had stolen money from his grandmother (originally from Sam Rawlinson) and killed John's wife. (If all this seems excessively convoluted and neurotic, be warned that *The Goodbye Look* represents the **typical** degree of complexity in a Ross MacDonald novel – more extreme versions, complicated enough to make your eyes bleed, can be found in *The Instant Enemy* or *The Zebra-Striped Hearse*.)

So now, how to use such a gold mine of back-story plot and passion in a SORCERER role-playing scenario? It all rests on identifying the human villainies, and assigning demons to some of them is a secondary step. Granted, the demons and oogly-boogly are what turn it into a SORCERER story, but the structure of the problems originates out of human drives, conflicts, deceptions, and self-deceptions. What are the crimes committed, and specifically, against what are they committed?

65

In *The Goodbye Look*, the true crime lies in how all of the deceptions have blighted the lives of the younger people in the story, notably Nick, Jean, and Betty. Their elders have never treated them as fellow humans, nor introduced themselves to the kids as humans. None of the kids have grown up with any kind of real love or nurturing, and none of them know what to do with their own emotions and questions. The role of the hero in this story is to recognize that these young people are neglect and abuse survivors, regardless of their privileged or otherwise prosperous surroundings, and to act in their interest.

Adapting a book's map therefore requires some value-judgments from the GM regarding the moral issues at stake. For example, do you feel sorrow or contempt for Randy? And once those judgments are made, one can actually use the scenario itself to define Humanity. In this story, it may well be equivalent to clarity of motive, open declaration of purpose; for lack of a better term, emotional honesty. It reminds me of the movie *Fargo*, in which many of the characters kill and steal only to maintain a certain illusion of themselves to themselves.

Now the task is to demonize the conflicts and actions. Here's one set of options:

▼ Eldon was a powerful, amoral sorcerer
▼ Rita learned a fair amount of sorcerous ritual from him, although she doesn't practice it except to keep the demon in Larry's body in check
▼ Larry is the host to a Possessor demon with the Hop ability; the complicity element discussed in Chapter 2 applies in full blast, in that Larry wants to keep living in this dream-world where he has the perfect wife and family and he's a war veteran

The crucial moment in the back-story is when Eldon Swain returned from his travels, much decayed, accosting and possibly molesting his son Nick. In the novel, Larry showed up, shot Eldon and burned off his face and hands, and left Nick sitting in the trainyard next to the body. In SORCERER-demonic terms, this event can be re-written slightly by having it introduce the Possessor demon – it was possessing Eldon, then jumped to Nick, and finally ended up in Larry, where it's been ever since. It now shares precisely Larry's need to keep his false life real.

There are very few plot constraints the GM must monitor during play, assuming that the classic whodunit aspect of the original plot is to be maintained. First, it must be at least possible that Nick could be guilty of killing Jean and Sidney. Second, Larry must be in fact logistically capable of the killings – this last is easily accomplished given that the demon has Hop and actually possessed Nick in order to carry out the killings, with Larry's consent.

However, one could throw out the whodunit side entirely and these constraints would not apply at all.

I strongly recommend that the GM always change the time and locale. When I used *The Goodbye Look*, I placed it in the modern day (early 1990s), which turns it into a post-Vietnam story, rather than post-WWII. That brings an element of *The Big Chill* to Moira's character and her wartime affair with Larry, and the whole thing gained some resonance, for me anyway.

Further alter any details of the map in order to transmogrify the author's back-story into something more of your own. Sometimes this process can be very extreme. I definitely recommend changing the names, which goes a long way to free the GM psychologically from what "has to happen" based on the novel. Identify and change any other details that suit the group's story-oriented, role-playing purpose.

For example, in this case, Truttwell's protectiveness-fixation for his daughter Betty, a minor element in the original story, might become central, or be left out entirely in order to make Truttwell more sympathetic. Moira Smitheram may be played as another emotional victim of Larry, or as a villain in her own right, as bad as Rita. Rita herself may be given more or less sympathy, depending on how one interprets her protectiveness of Nick. Any of these details, and more, can be expanded by the GM into a central issue, or even changed entirely.

The final steps in preparing a relationship map as the basis for a Sorcerer story include figuring out how the player-characters get involved. Almost certainly, the private-eye style of being hired into it is too familiar and insufficiently engaging for role-playing purposes. Fortunately, it is extremely easy to adapt existing Kickers into attachments to or associations with parts of the map. Any of the characters can be a friend or other contact for a player-character, or even a relative. A character might know of Eldon's sorcerous reputation already, and be hunting for any of his legacy – in fact, a previous adventure might have encountered a demon loosed by his death or its aftermath, and that might have alerted a character to the possibility of more such. Or a character might have known Jean Trask and become worried about her recent suspicious behavior.

The entire scenario could easily start well before or after the start-point of the novel (i.e., just before Harrow is killed), and the GM should add in bits of his or her own devising. Characters may be eliminated, or actually substituted for by a play-character. If the GM decides to stick with the literary tradition and have the player-characters be complete outsiders, he or she must take care to ensure that the personal hooks are really interesting and absorbing.

Denise Jones

Chapter Five:

SCENARIOS

This chapter provides three SORCERER scenarios, each defined by a specific brand of Humanity and crimes against it. They differ from many published RPG scenarios in that there are no specific scenes or details that get the player-characters involved ("You receive a letter from an old acquaintance…"), or specific tasks for them to accomplish ("The Nizawa corporation hires you to infiltrate their rival…"), or specific rewards awaiting them ("A powerful source of raw magical energy has gone missing…"). Here, you will only find back-stories, and using the raw material they offer to construct Kickers, or developing existing Kickers as hooks into the situation, is left to individual role-playing groups.

The relationship maps for all three are taken from specific sources, although in each case the map has been altered considerably. In no sense should the GM feel a constraint to

> It was as if I had been looking for the criminal and came upon myself along the way.
>
> —W. Mosley, A Little Yellow Dog
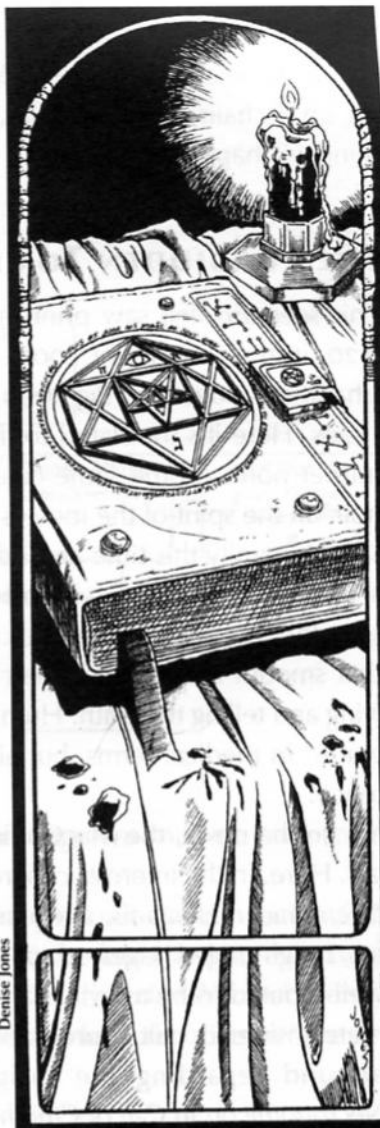
follow the events of the published stories, in fact, to the contrary. Rather than set up a chain of fixed events, these scenarios simply guarantee that something will happen.

THE FORBIDDEN TOME

This scenario first saw print in slightly different form in *Serendipity's Circle* #20, in the summer of 2000. The relationship map is taken from Raymond Chandler's novel *The Big Sleep*, which is set in southern California during the 1940s. Here it's translated to the near-modern-day Monterey Peninsula a bit further north on the same coast, and might be thought of as "sun-bleached noir" in the spirit of the movies *L.A. Confidential, Chinatown,* or *Palmetto*.

Humanity this time around is a form of social empathy, in a rather broad sense. Here, a person with 0 Humanity is specifically sociopathic: they can't see others as being "real," they can't even perceive social institutions or habits that smooth the way between people, and they cannot distinguish between lying and telling the truth. Humanity therefore carries with it not only a "sanity grade" in medical terms, but also a sense of social responsibility and competence.

In the novel, the MacGuffin is a compromising photograph of a teen-age girl. Here, in the interests of sorcery and so on, the MacGuffin is a piece of the *Daemonicon Humanis,* a legendary occult tome – it's got sinister leather covers, rough-edged pages, straps and buckles, bloodstains; you get the idea. It is well-reputed to be as evil as all get-out, but one must get into the more legitimate insider occult sources even to find people willing to discuss it. Tales abound regarding the insights contained in its pages. Unlike the *Necronomicon* in *Call of Cthulhu,* for instance, it is not available in libraries or cellars nationwide. In fact, no complete copies are known to exist. The "official" copy at the British Museum is an empty pair of covers with a title page and a couple of fragments; as for the actual contents, various sections or bits of text are highly prized possessions among the most secret, most transgressive occultists. Even a complete section would be a major discovery.

The map depicts the Hawthorne family, or what remains of it, and the various people involved with them. It breaks down into three groups:

▼ Colonel William Hawthorne and his daughters, Ashley and Michele. Ashley's husband, Matt Killian, disappeared two months ago – he was a powerful sorcerer who owned a piece of the Daemonicon. He was actually killed by Michele, who's a psychopath; furthermore, she got her hands on some of the text.

▼ Peter Llewellyn Greene, a nasty corrupt fellow who gives Michele the opportunity for various shocking escapades, and several of his acquain-

THE FORBIDDEN TOME

Col. Hawthorne
dying, honorable
old man

Brett Stevenson
Michele's stalker
4

Ashley Hawthorne Killian
the Colonel's stabler
daughter, Matt's widow

Michele Hawthorne
the Col's psychopathic
daughter, Matt's killer
2

Francis Hall
Greene's lover
5

Matt Killian
Sorcerer
1

Peter Llewellyn Greene
artsy scumbag
3

Dianne Atkins
Greene's secretary
7

Ned Dunphy
grifter, Dianne's
second ally
8

Winona Sharpe
Mickey's reluctant wife

Mickey Sharpe
crook about town

Jack Holland
Greene's ex-partner,
Dianne's first ally
6

tances. Greene received the *Daemonicon* fragment Michele took from Killian, which sets off a chain of murder.

▼ Mickey Sharpe, a tough crook-about-town. He's put about a rumor that Matt Killian ran off with his wife Winona, but he knows what really happened and has a nefarious scheme to acquire the Hawthornes' money and Ashley's compliance in a sorcerous ritual. He is also Greene's secret boss.

Killian had two demons Bound to him when he died, Sipe and Vetchka. They are both still lurking around the Peninsula and Sipe has another part of the *Daemonicon* text, well hidden. (That's right, there are two fragments to hunt for.) Another demon in the story is the powerful Celine, about whom see more below.

The relationship map is also numbered to show the progress, so to speak, of the stolen portion of the *Daemonicon*, which is now, murder by murder, changing hands across the map. Starting with the moment of a character's involvement, one fragment of the book starts to change hands. It goes:

1. From Michele to Greene – she is a member of his little occult group and passes him the fragment in a moment of drugged abandon.
2. From Greene to Brett – Brett is obsessed with Michele and kills Greene when he spies on a private "ritual" between the two; he simply takes the fragment.

3. From Brett to Francis (who kills Brett) – Francis kills Brett in revenge and retrieves the fragment.
4. From Francis to Jack (who kills Francis) – Jack, aware of Greene's mysterious dealings with Sharpe and his relationship with Francis, kills Francis to acquire the fragment.
5. From Jack to Dianne – he gives it to her, but is then killed by Sharpe. She then teams up with Ned.

The people of the piece (and how they die)

▼ **Colonel William Hawthorne**. Stamina 1 (0), Will 6. Dying old man. Lives in Pebble Beach, recently returned home from the hospital. Stamina 0 represents his illness, indicating that he must succeed with Will rolls in order to perform physical tasks. Hawthorne is an honorable man; he liked Killian and is ignorant regarding his death.

▼ **Ashley Hawthorne Killian**. Stamina 2, Will 5. Scared, driven, bitter daughter. Sharpe is blackmailing her with his knowledge of Michele, and she is very close to becoming his personal toy and financial backer. She sees no way out of the trap, as she fears news of the murder would kill her weakened father.

▼ **Matt Killian**. Dead sorcerer, married to Ashley. Shot and killed by Michele two months ago, buried by Mickey Sharpe under the recently-renovated ninth hole on Spyglass.

▼ **Michele Hawthorne**. Stamina 3, Will 6, Humanity 0. Psycho, vicious, shoe-button-eyed daughter.

▼ **Mickey Sharpe**. Stamina 4 (scrapper), Will 6 (self-esteem), Lore 1. Local scummy developer/criminal sort; lives in Monterey and is building a dream home on the slopes of Carmel Valley. Getting into sorcery with Celine's help. Sharpe has several extensive, completely mundane semi-criminal scams going and connections with various city government, real-estate, and construction company individuals.

▼ **Winona Sharpe**. Stamina 1, Will 4. His wife, newly decided to put aside the bimbo life; she is currently kept in almost total seclusion, guarded by thug friends/lackeys of Sharpe. If he gets his hands on Greene's fragment, he will have her killed.

▼ **Brett Stevenson**. Stamina 2, Will 4, Humanity 1. Michele's stalker: wild-eyed, self-pitying, twitchy. Currently lives in a Monterey apartment. He is knifed inexpertly, although indeed fatally, by Francis Hall.

▼ **Peter Llewellyn Greene**. Stamina 2, Will 4. Associate of Sharpe's, pornographer, exploiter of Michele. Lives and works in Carmel. A learned occultist (although wholly ignorant of true sorcery) with a group of syco-

phants, mostly older teens. He is shot and the body bludgeoned by Brett Stevenson.

▼ **Francis Hall**. Stamina 2, Will 4. Greene's high-strung youthful lover, lives with him in Carmel. He is run down by Jack Holland's car.

▼ **Jack Holland**. Stamina 4, Will 4. Greene's partner, now ex-partner. Hot-tempered and stupid enough to think he's smart. Currently living at the Monterey-Seaside border, associates with tough biker guys. He is taken (like a tasty morsel) by Celine; his body is drained of blood and is covered with expert ritual incisions.

▼ **Dianne Atkins**. Stamina 2, Will 4. Greene's secretary, now ex-secretary; Jack's sometime girlfriend, and most recently Ned's. A cynical, man-using moll. She may end up dying like Jack.

▼ **Ned Dunphy**. Stamina 4, Will 4. Hard-nosed little guy who deserves better than Dianne. He hates Sharpe, having been drummed off the Monterey police force for investigating certain real estate deals too closely. Lives in Monterey, has an office in Sand City. He also may well be slated for Celine's dinner.

The demons of the piece

The big picture here is that Killian has been duelling with Celine for decades. (Exactly why and for how long is left to the GM, but it is recommended that the duel play a major role in the story's long-term history and have at least one connection to a character's own story.) He arrived on the Peninsula some years ago, with his faithful demon servitors Sipe and Vetchka, and did what no sorcerer should do – he fell in love and married into a family, the Hawthornes. Celine, of course, possessed Michele (who was well over the psychotic line anyway) by exploiting her jealousy of her sister, and shot him. Since then, Sipe and Vetchka have lain low, and Celine has continued to weave her influence over the Hawthornes and associated individuals.

Note that Sipe and Vetchka are still Bound to Killian, even though he's dead, with a Binding strength of 4 dice each.

▼ **Sipe** – Parasite, Desire for Fun, Need to eat bugs; Telltale is that host never blinks. Stamina 3, Will 7, Lore 5, Power 7. Abilities: Hint, Taint, Travel, Cloak, Vitality. Little Kenny Badke, of Pacific Grove, died when a car struck him and his bike about six months ago. About two months ago, the kids of the neighborhood noted that he was, you know, still hanging around. Parents and older kids never seem to notice. But it's him, all right; he knows all the old hiding places and secrets and so on, even if he does seem a little too prone to playing "Dare" type games, and gets annoyed if you don't dare him to eat bugs. The Hint and Taint abilities are

Derek Stevens

used as consequences of the games. All the kids in the neighborhood are starting to know a lot of stuff they shouldn't, and starting to act funny too... The horrid thing is that Sipe's not a Possessor; it hasn't "taken over" but rather merely permits this dead kid to continue to function. It may communicate verbally using Kenny's voice, but only if commanded to do so by a sorcerer. Sipe would greatly appreciate some ideas about what to do with this very scary page thing he's buried under the playground.

▼ **Vetchka** – Passer (black-haired woman, Telltale: eyes under her breasts). Stamina 2, Will 3, Lore 2, Power 3. Abilities: Perception and Travel. Now successfully Passing as a member of a clueless occult group who are attempting to summon up a demon using tantric rituals. Details about this group are left up to the GM; feel free to create a sinister sophisticated cabal, or to caricature all aspects of groovy, fashionable occultism, or whatever.

▼ **Celine** – Possessor (host is a tall, beautiful Scandinavian woman), Telltale is occasional blood-beading on her skin). Stamina 9, Will 10, Lore 9, Power 10. Abilities: Perception and Warp (useful for forgery), and any others the GM chooses except Hop; all her abilities derive from blood rites.

Note that without Hop, switching bodies is a very formal and specific affair, requiring a complicit host. Celine is a powerful demon who delights in "damning with praise;" that is, she likes masters who have vain, petty, abusive desires. She gives them what they want until they meet some grisly end as a consequence of their own actions.

❧ THE DÆMONICON HUMANIS

Does the name of this forbidden tome sound a bit cheesy to you? It should. The damn thing's a fake! That's right, it never existed, and the scattered bits of fact, hearsay, and hints are only held together by lies and the self-fulfilling expectations of those who would fancy themselves masters of the occult. Celine forged the few fragments centuries ago and has occasionally reinforced the myth, although to her delight it has taken very little effort on her part, considering how eager people are to add a tissue of lies to anything that makes them feel important.

The discovery of the hoax is left strictly up to the players' own initiative; there is no set point in this adventure for the revelation to occur. Don't force the revelation; conversely, don't invent bogus ways to prevent them from figuring it out either. If they do so at any point, great. If they fail entirely to do so, Celine will reveal it during the climactic ritual. The GM's only responsibility is to present the *Daemonicon* as a bona fide scary-occult-thing from the standpoint of whomever the characters interact with.

The minor demons in this adventure, probably including those Bound to the player-characters, are as ignorant as anyone else regarding the book's authenticity. Vetchka, for example, is unfamiliar with the name and only acts scared about it to impress listeners, and Sipe believes in the book's authenticity. Celine, of course, thinks the whole thing is hilarious and reinforces the hoax to gain influence over Sharpe.

Researching the book's "history" should provide a lot of interesting work for the players. The GM is encouraged to include all sorts of legendry, including awful practices, feuds, and terrifying occult hints, nearly all of which are contradictory or, upon scrutiny, simply stupid. Useful RPG sources for additional occult babble include *Nephilim*, *Ars Magica* (especially the supplement, *The Maleficum*), *Kult*, and *Mage*.

Running the scenario

Hooking the characters in: there are lots of possible ways. One could be looking for Killian, whether to help or hinder him; one could be a friend of the Hawthornes; one could be a business associate of Sharpe or any of the other scumbags, or an investigator of same; one could be looking for the *Daemonicon* itself with no idea of the people involved. At this phase, the point is to attract the attention of Sharpe once a character or two is meddling with his business (e.g. intercepting the fragment Greene stole).

The order of dealing with the NPCs is totally up to the players. The GM should stay loose! They can hunt for Killian (or his body), search for Killian's demons (possibly finding Sipe's fragment), track Greene's fragment and possibly find it, come into confrontation with Sharpe, or whatever. All along the GM should drop hints of Celine's shadowy presence and influence upon nearly all the major characters.

If the characters fail to intercept Greene's fragment, Sharpe will track down Diane; she will inform on Ned to save herself, and Ned will die horribly when Sharpe catches up to him. At this point, text fragment in hand, Sharpe will be approached by Celine and encouraged to develop an abominable ritual, central to which is her gaining Ashley's body as a new host.

As the characters get more and more involved in the lives of all these people, and depending on the group, and the GM's approach to the story, it may take weeks of game-time, NPCs will start to get proactive on them. Fun events include:

▼ Michele shows up in a character's bed. This may be played for horror (in realizing just how bonkers this girl really is), for pathos (in that she's reaching out for help), or even for romance (yikes!).

▼ Sharpe tries to suborn a character to his interests; some players may find it to their taste to approach the scenario from inside the enemy's organization.

▼ The characters find and Bind Sipe and/or Vetchka. Each demon is in a situation that lends itself to an entire sub-scenario, to be left up to the individual GM.

▼ Any number of goons show up for physical confrontations (crooks, occultists, Jack's biker friends, Pebble Beach security).

Endgame

Sooner or later, the two fragments of the *Daemonicon* will be accounted for. What happens if the characters accomplish absolutely nothing? Sharpe will kill Ned and Bind Sipe to gain both fragments of the text and become a Lore 2 sorcerer, with Celine as his demon (and just guess who has the upper hand in that arrangement). He'll suborn Ashley entirely and take the Hawthorne for-

tune, Michele runs loose to kill and kill again until she is captured by the authorities, Winona is killed to keep her silent, Celine gets to use Ashley's blood to Possess her, and Col. Hawthorne dies of a broken heart. Oh yes, and all the characters' demons will rebel against their Binding at +3 dice, as they decide that throwing in their lot with Celine and Sharpe is safer than sticking with their current masters, who at this point might as well be wearing bullseyes on their foreheads.

Avoiding this grim outcome depends on having the characters care about some of the people in question. For instance, Killian was a decent guy, Michele desperately needs to be institutionalized, Ashley is in serious danger, it might be nice to let the Colonel die happy, Winona has a good shot at exposing Sharpe's criminal activities and making a decent life for herself, and Ned really didn't deserve to die like that. There's a lot of human tragedy to exploit or avert here, and Celine is enjoying every minute of it.

And this issue, of course, is where the Humanity challenges come in. Here are the following actions that net them Humanity gain rolls:

- ▼ getting Michele some professional help
- ▼ preventing any of the murders from occurring without simply killing the potential killer
- ▼ saving Winona from Sharpe, including revealing that she did not have an affair with Killian
- ▼ exposing Sharpe's criminal activities (including accessory to Killian's murder)
- ▼ preventing Ashley from being possessed

Directly failing to do any of the above (i.e., when given the chance) results in Humanity loss rolls, as well as the following:

- ▼ joining Sharpe in any way, even temporarily
- ▼ covering up Killian's murder

If the characters are indeed hooked deeply into the story, there are two climaxes that may ensue:

▼ Sharpe runs the Awful Ritual described in the fragment(s) of the *Daemonicon*. Its only results are to bind Celine to Sharpe and that Ashley will be possessed by Celine.

▼ The characters run the Awful Ritual in order to control Celine. If they have the fragment(s) and seem disinclined to do this, the GM should have Celine simply take it from them, subtly or otherwise, and give it to Sharpe for outcome #1.

☙ THE AWFUL RITUAL

What's actually on the pages of the *Daemonicon*? Pieced together and interpreted with Lore rolls, the ritual described concerns breeding with a demon. As stated above, it's completely fraudulent.

Now for the fun part: if the Ritual is interpreted and run by a player-character sorcerer, it will work. As you might imagine, this will be quite a shock for Celine. Optionally, the GM may permit this to happen even if Sharpe runs the ritual, especially if a player-character is helping or hindering him at the time.

Furthermore, the ritual itself will be successful; it cannot be "failed" through die rolls. The outcome of the various rolls described will simply determine the details. Here's what to do in game terms.

Either fragment permits the ritual itself to be run. Celine and the person in question do indeed have to have physical intercourse, which requires the human parent to make a Stamina roll vs. Celine's Stamina. Regardless of the winner, this roll provides a number of victories. The sorcerer then rolls Lore vs. this number of victories. If this roll fails, all of Celine's subsequent rolls in the ritual will have the victories as a bonus; if it succeeds, the human parent's next rolls in the ritual will have the victories as a bonus.

Greene's fragment (without it, all of the choices in Sipe's fragment are automatically resolved in Celine's favor)

≈ Avoiding being possessed by Celine during mating (she'd love to be both parents, so to speak). This is a Will vs. Will roll between the human parent and Celine. For simplicity's sake, assume that her old host is left a vegetable.

☙ Imbuing the child with demonic abilities. Roll Celine's Power vs. the human parent's Humanity; the victories give the child's Lore score. (If the parent wins this roll; the child will have to develop Lore like a human sorcerer.) This step also includes a Humanity check.

Sipe's fragment (without it, all of the choices in Greene's fragment are automatically resolved in Celine's favor)

☙ Does the child have Humanity? Roll the human parent's Humanity vs. Celine's Will; if the person wins, the victories give the child's Humanity score, but if Celine wins, the victories give the child's Power score. One cannot have both Humanity and Power.

☙ How is the child to be carried? Roll the human parent's Will vs. Celine's Will; if the person wins, it is the character's choice who becomes pregnant, but if Celine wins, she will carry the child and birth it in circumstances of her choosing. Note that if the human parent carries the child, he or she will have to acquire whatever is necessary for its Need.

Some ideas for where the ritual might occur include:

▼ out on Lover's Point in Pacific Grove, or Point Pinos in Pebble Beach. These are the two tippy-tips of the Peninsula – very dramatic, with crashing waves and stunning night skies

▼ Del Monte Park, a former beatnik community high up on the ridge in Pacific Grove, full of extremely old, pre-building-code houses and many twisting, dark streets

▼ an abandoned-looking, hangar-like warehouse in Sand City, surrounded by huge dunes of sand and cracked parking lots

⚑ THE MONTEREY PENINSULA

Situated on the California coast, about 120 miles south of San Francisco and over 400 miles north of Los Angeles, the Peninsula is neither the sunny, smog-laden fantasy-land of Southern California nor the hip, liberal culture of the forested northern coast. Until the 1980s, it was relatively obscure and isolated from the rest of the state. Its densely-populated communities are neither city, suburb, nor rural, but share features of all three. Zoning makes no sense: residential tracts, shopping centers (not malls),

downtowns (with no skyscrapers or any large shiny buildings), curving highways, parks and forests (some extensive and wild), all jostle together.

The Peninsula is extremely mountainous and there is almost no flat terrain except all around the shore; all the roads wind furiously and directions are never given by the compass. The ocean is almost always visible from any roof on the Peninsula, or around the next bend of road. The rocky coastline is almost entirely untouched in P.G., Pebble Beach, and Carmel: seashore wildlife includes honking sea lions, flocks of terns and gulls, sea otters, kelp beds, tide pools, and wandering tourists.

∂ Monterey is the largest town and commands the most commercial waterfront along the north Peninsula and the inner curve of the bay, including the tourist-based Fisherman's Wharf, Cannery Row, and the Monterey Aquarium, the extensive sailing and fishing trade, and the Navy Pier. It also boasts community and military colleges, a convention center, many seafood and Mexican restaurants, and active nightlife. Monterey is a little gritty, a little noisy, more like a small city than a town.

∂ Pacific Grove abuts Monterey, as it shares the tip and the southern half of the Peninsula. P.G. residents are decidedly quieter and more residentially-oriented and to some extent prefer to be the least notorious of all the Peninsulans. Quite a few artists and activists live there.

∂ Pebble Beach is an entire gated town on the central ridge and south edge of the Peninsula. It is heavily wooded and has an extensive border with P.G. that no one ever sees, as no roads lead to or follow that border. It is strictly residential: no shopping, one small market, no downtown at all. There are only three gates: one in Carmel, two in P.G. Tourists must pay to traverse the famous 17-Mile Drive, which includes some of the most spectacular and costly real estate in the country.

∂ Carmel is just south of the Peninsula, primarily on steep wooded slopes overlooking the Pacific Ocean, including miles of sunny beach. Were it not for Pebble Beach, Carmel would easily be the ritziest and most beautiful community in the area. Shopping is the name of the game there. Carmel is the last word in tourist-quaint, including rituals such as the annual sand-castle contest.

- Carmel Valley extends east from Carmel into the mainland of the state. It begins as shopping-center hell, but quickly becomes rural, dusty, and actually rather classic-western. Communities there include (on the slopes of the sides of the valley) incredibly expensive dream-homes and (on the floor) slow-talking, narrow-eyed "you ain't from around here" little country one-stop towns.

- Seaside is just north of Monterey and includes the inner curve of the Bay. It's the largest and poorest community in the area, providing nearly all of the laborers and service personnel that make others' life-styles possible. It has a real problem with drugs and youth gangs and is politically ignored by the rest of the Peninsula. North and inland of Seaside includes Sand City, a strange mixture of heavy sand-based industry (concrete, glass) and shopping centers; and Marina, a small, rather shabby town inhabited until recently by military and service personnel from the nearby Fort Ord.

- Nearby communities and areas: to the south along the coast is Big Sur; inland is the small agricultural city of Salinas; to the north along the coast is the college city of Santa Cruz. All of these areas are subtly part of the outside, non-Peninsula world and are rarely discussed or acknowledged.

NOTE: the above descriptions and comments regarding the Peninsula are most appropriate to two to three decades ago, when the author last lived there.

THE DAY OF DUPES

This scenario represents quite a bit of literary hybridization. The relationship map is taken in part from *The Lacquer Screen* by Robert Van Gulik, which is set in early medieval China, but here the setting is 17th century France after the manner of Alexandre Dumas' Musketeers novels. It's meant to be a taut, violent actioner with lots of huzzahs and have-at-yous.

This scenario's definition of Humanity is highly specific: the 17th century concept of Honor, at least as presented in such adventure fiction as Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*, *Twenty Years After*, and *The Man in the Iron Mask*, Rafael Sabatini's *Scaramouche* and *Captain Blood*, Anthony Hope's *The Prisoner of Zenda*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Master of Ballantrae*, and Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*. Please note that in most cases, the actual literature differs significantly from its presentation in cinema.

Honor in this context is tightly bound up with the social rank of gentleman; anyone below this rank is not expected to be honorable, whereas anyone in it (which goes all the way up to the King), is held rigidly accountable.

A gentleman's virtues are the following:

▼ respect the social order, with the highest loyalty to one's king
▼ never tolerate being insulted or mocked
▼ never offer violence or discourtesy toward a woman of gentle rank
▼ keep your word (really)
▼ keep secrets (really)
▼ pay debts when you can; until you do so, give favors freely to the person owed
▼ always do your utmost with great courage and ingenuity
▼ advance yourself upward in social rank as far and hard as you can

Many of these are decidedly not Victorian virtues. In Victorian times, one would reveal a secret if it helped others to do so, and an initial degree of meekness is encouraged in the face of derision or threat. However, in the Musketeers period, these behaviors would be deemed unmanly and dishonorable. Furthermore, fair play is not especially well regarded for any intrinsic reason, such that lying, chicanery, and outright backstabbing are occasionally tolerated, especially if directed at dishonorable targets. Physical lusts are not regarded with shame, but rather as pleasant and rather wonderful aspects of life; virginity isn't revered, and extra-marital affairs, although not openly talked about, aren't grounds for vapors and suicide either.

¶ LIFE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

Fortunately for the role-player, there already exist some excellent source materials and role-playing games based on this genre. I strongly recommend the games *Swashbuckler, Flashing Blades, Lace & Steel*, the *AD&D* supplement *A Mighty Fortress*, the *Rolemaster* supplement *At Rapier's Point*, and the GURPS supplement *Swashbucklers*.

SOCIAL RANK

In this setting, "Cover" refers specifically to one's social standing, and the rankings are very, very well defined in everyone's minds. This is a pyramidal society, with the head-count for each successive level being a small fraction of the one beneath it. Religious and military rank parallel these levels as well; e.g. a Bishop ranks about with a Baron; the Cardinal ranks just under the King.

- The common man: peasants, laborers
- The bourgeoisie: merchants, bankers, lawyers
- Gentlemen (income derives from land-ownership)
- Nobles (in ascending order): Chevalier, Baron, Vicomte, Comte, Marquis, Duke, Archduke, Grand Duke
- Royal (in ascending order): Princes, Grand Prince, the Queen
- the King

Within a social level, ranking is highly personal and involves military valor, wealth, extent of one's lands, connections of all kinds, and just plain dash and style, called panache. Some of the higher social levels are sub-categories; i.e., the King is Royal, all Royalty are Nobles, and all Nobles are Gentlemen.

The funny thing is that you are born into your social level, but you're also free to move. Social climbing is the main motive for adventure. The usual methods include:

- Coming into a lot of money. As long as you get it far from France, no one cares how. Lots of pirates became gentlemen this way.
- Marrying into a higher rank. Very, very popular, and one of the main reasons richer tradesmen did their best to act like gentlemen.

- Getting commended and officially raised in rank (titled) by the Court or other noble group.
- Gaining rank in a Club, Order, the clergy, or the military. Thus one might remain a "gentleman" on paper but effectively have rank a level or two higher.

Nobly-born individuals rarely actually pay for anything themselves during the course of "noble-type" activities (keeping up the estates, vacations, visiting the Court at Paris, etc). All that gets handled by underlings.

WOMEN

This is a seriously chauvinistic society: men fight wars and hold public office; men are philosophers, warriors, scientists, artists, explorers, and merchants. Women get to be maids, scullions, prizes in intricate political games, and wives. Except... female courtiers are as powerful as men, up to and including the rule of nations. Except... colonial women were not sheltered and could conceivably be quite good at arms. Except... a few women successfully disguised themselves as men and pursued military careers.

FENCING STYLES

- Spanish: keep the opponent at a distance, attack with slashes
- Italian: stay sideways, use linear attacks (e.g. lunge); the Florentine variant uses left-hand dagger
- French: parry and riposte, linear attacks; circling, crouching movements; left-hand dagger, or cloak, hat, washtub, etc
- Cavalry: parry and slash attacks; this is the origin of modern saber fencing
- old-school broadsword: hacking, shoulder blocking, and sweep attacks

BEING FRENCH

France is good. It is the biggest country, it has the most culturally sophisticated people, its army beats anyone else's army. Paris is the cultural center of the world. If you're not French, you act as if you were. It's good to be French. Everyone has to speak your language and they are jealous of you. It's especially good to conde-

scend to them in small ways and thereby show that you're nice about being superior.

Modes of address: plain old "mister" is monsieur, anyone above you socially is monseigneur; "missus" is madame, "miss" is mademoiselle. Good curses include *Peste, Mon Dieu, Sacre Bleu,* and *Morbleu.* But cursing is for soldiers; everyone else prefers polite, deadly sarcasm. In a surprising parallel to 20th century American slang, the paramount social virtue is "coolness," that is, always being ready with a comeback and never being upset ("hot").

The story

The relationship map depicts the connections among the following characters:

THE LEFEBVRES

▼ **Antoine LeFebvre de Racieux,** an energetic banker, barrel-shaped and porcinely serious, in his early 30s. Stamina 4, Will 5.

▼ **François LeFebvre,** an artist of some talent (dead).

THE VEILLOTS

▼ **la Comtesse de Veillot** (dead).

▼ **Alexandre Doremieux de Charabie le Comte de Veillot,** a noble of some standing, lean and relaxedly elegant, about 45. Stamina 6 (a good duellist), Will 6.

THE CARRIERES

▼ **René Carrières** (dead).

▼ **Madame Carrières,** a bold and forthright petit-bourgeois wife, not quite able to conceal the intense lusts and hates that drive her actions, about 30. A little research into her past shows that her first husband was poisoned by her. Stamina 5, Will 7.

THE LOW-LIFES

▼ **Duprés,** a vicious man, about 22, with that unfortunate appeal for the ladies that the worst sort of man sometimes has. Stamina 3, Will 4.

▼ **Fanche,** a prostitute, about 19, friendly toward Duprés until recently. Stamina 3, Will 5.

▼ **The Corporal,** head of a ruffian gang, a former Musketeer (lost his position through scandal) and rather decent considering his station in life, about 25. Stamina 5, Will 4.

Comte Doremieux de Charabie de Veillot, magistrate — **Comtesse de Veillot** *DEAD* — *affair* — **LeFebvre, duellist & dandy** *DEAD*

Killed & raped

brothers

The Corporal — **Lukos** — *Tormenting* → **LeFebvre de Racieux, banker**

Took letter from

in gang

partners

Fanche, whore — *in gang* — **Duprés, "the student"** — *affair* — **Mme Carrières, his wife** — **Carrières, banker** *DEAD*

Her first husband *DEAD*
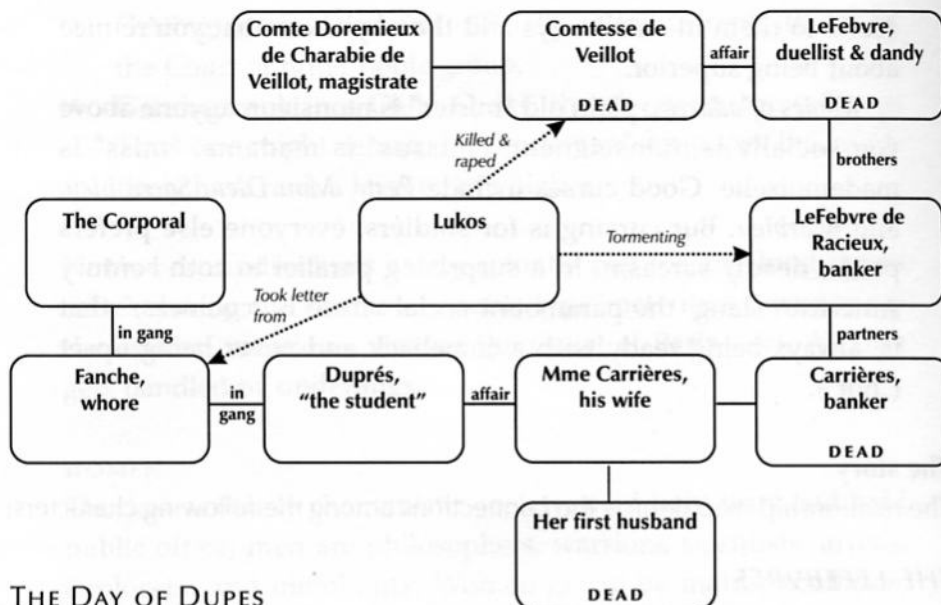
THE DAY OF DUPES

All of these people have Cover scores of at least 6. The relatively high scores across the board should convey the idea that SORCERER characters cannot simply ride roughshod over "lesser mortals" in order to get their way.

As the map shows, the story centers on a demon, Lukos, who's been loosed from a Contain, and who's now taking advantage of a whole slew of human frailties and crimes to wreak all kinds of havoc (which is sufficiently complicated to require the dotted lines representing its actions).

Its master was François LeFebvre the artist/painter, who recently died from a long-lingering illness. His secret lover was the equally artistic la Comtesse de Veillot, the wife of a nobleman magistrate. This fellow, Alexandre Doremieux de Charabie le Comte de Veillot, plots to kill his wife, not because she is unfaithful, of which he is ignorant, but because she opposes his political allegiance to the Queen Dowager. However, just after he had drugged his wife preparatory to smothering her, she disappeared from her room and indeed from the whole estate. Her body has just been found dead and post-humously raped; unbeknownst to the extremely puzzled Comte, the culprit is Lukos.

The painter's older brother, a banker named Antoine LeFebvre de Racieux, plays a small but crucial role in the cabal of nobles who seek to topple Richelieu from power. He possesses a crucial letter which, although in code, lists their names. The contents of the letter specifically reveal, to the educated eye, that a whole cabal of nobles has entered into financial cahoots, using de Racieux as their go-between. The list of their names is of immense importance to French court politics, as explained in the History is Fun box, below.

De Racieux's current troubles arise from having inadvertently allowed M.

René Carrières, a merchant, to walk off with a book that had that same letter stuffed in its pages; even worse, Carrières has just died in what looks like a messy suicide. De Racieux is terrified (1) that one of the Cardinal's many agents will come upon the letter and blow the plot wide open, and (2) because an unknown someone has contacted him and threatened to expose him personally. That someone is Lukos.

In fact, Carrières was killed by his wife and her lover, a vicious young thug named Duprés whose bookish looks give him the nickname, "the Student." They did recover the letter in question, but were unable to read it; the Student gave it into the safe-keeping of Fanche, a prostitute he knows. Fanche is part of a ring of ruffians led by the Corporal, an ex-military, not-too-bad sort of fellow. The letter has been stolen from Fanche, causing a rift between her and Duprés; it was stolen, of course, by Lukos.

Some more details

The Cardinal has agents everywhere, engaged in everything from local law enforcement to frequent illegal duels with the King's Musketeers, to general information-gathering regarding commerce and court plots.

The body of la Comtesse was discovered very publicly, hung head down *en déshabillé* from the entrance of the Louvre. A physician or herbalist could determine that she was drugged into a coma prior to being raped and killed.

Currently the letter is kept in one of two places: either on Lukos' person, as the demon likes to take it out and peruse it occasionally (it comprehends literally nothing of its contents, only knowing that de Racieux reacts to them with fear); or tucked behind the canvas of the painting that served as Lukos' Containment for so long (see below).

Lukos is a Passing demon who's taken on the form of a contemporary dandy-duellist, complete with plumed hat and musketeer-style boots. It is essentially a purely malevolent demon. It hated both its master's brother and his lover. Now, it torments de Racieux and plays on his fears of discovery. It killed and raped Mme. de Veillot. It is not trying to avenge its master; LeFebvre's death is the only innocent one in the bunch, nor did anyone commit any crime against him. The demon is simply out of control, it's had a bellyful of art after who-knows-how-long trapped in the painting, and it's slaking its Need for mayhem.

Lukos: Stamina 7, Will 8, Lore 6, Power 8. Type Passer, Desire Art, Need for Mayhem.
Abilities: Perception, Craft (artsy), Fast, Sp. Damage (use with fencing), Travel, Cloak
Appears as sinister courtly duellist, vicious, ruthless, obsessive.

The whole point is that Lukos can get away with all this because of the human characters' flaws in Humanity, i.e., their dishonorable behavior. De Racieux's fear of the letter's contents keeps him quiet, the Comte's intended murder of his wife keeps him quiet, Mme. Carrières' and Duprés' murder of Carrières and theft of the letter keeps them quiet. All these people will get even worse trying to cover up their own actions. Even though none of them is the most egregious villain of the piece, they will respond savagely and misleadingly to any investigation.

▼ De Racieux uses his considerable financial means to mobilize a veritable army of footpads and toughs to harass and assault those who bother him.

▼ The Comte de Veillot is more subtle, and will work through his financial and gentlemanly contacts to destroy his enemies' credit and social lives.

▼ Mme. Carrières and Duprés will set up a male enemy with the old badger game; she will attempt to seduce him, and at exactly the least convenient moment, Duprés will attack him.

Until LeFebvre's death, Lukos had been Contained in his paintings, each of which depicted a wolf somewhere, often well-hidden (**ho lukos** is ancient Greek for "wolf"). Examining his paintings, one can see they become blacker, blacker, and blacker over time, to the degree that the later ones are so obscure as to be incomprehensible. And the latest one is nothing but the blackest pigment, fully covering the canvas ... except for the silhouette of a wolf, who has clearly stepped off of it and into reality.

Combat with Lukos should be a real genre treat. It uses pistols just like a human character, which in this era pretty much means point, shoot, and drop the weapon. However, the GM should try to engineer a classic Musketeers rapier battle. The demon is an extraordinary duellist, perfectly capable of multiple actions and defense; in game terms, simply ignore any close-combat tactical bonuses due to characters' ganging-up or calling clever moves, by decreeing that Lukos is too good to fall for them. It can easily parry, riposte, and disarm several opponents

Jeremy McHugh

at once, simultaneously lashing out with elbows, back-kicks, and sweeps in any direction. If it so happens that its opponents fall back in disarray, do a John Woo freeze-frame moment, with Lukos' cloak going "pop" in the perfectly-timed breeze.

Of course, in any combat scene involving sword-work, the fighting tricks and tactics outlined in SORCERER & SWORD are a must, translated into appropriate fencing terms. The serviceable rapier used at that time was a far cry from today's light fencing gear; it was just under a yard long and, although a bit slender, quite capable of rough treatment and of skewering a human body.

In this scenario, that letter of de Racieux' has done a lot of wandering: Carrières took it from de Racieux by accident (he never read it), Mme. Carrières discovered and took it from her dead husband and gave it to Duprés, Duprés gave it to Fanche to hold on to, and Lukos took it from Fanche.

The ruffian gang with which Fanche and Duprés are associated is included to give the characters some allies, if necessary. Their leader, the Corporal, is actually a fairly decent sort who'd be willing to give up Duprés if his crimes were revealed. Fanche, too, is a good candidate for the "hooker with a heart of gold," as this scenario desperately needs a character or two whom the players can actually like. She and the Corporal are clever enough to decipher the letter's code, and they know some of the Cardinal's agents who work the streets and taverns.

There are all sorts of interesting entry points for characters. One might be a friend or rival of any of the NPCs, or need one of them for a crucial detail in one's social advancement. A gentlemanly character might be an associate of de Racieux, or a rough-edged character might be part of the Corporal's gang. A character might happen upon the book where Lukos hid it, or stumble upon the body of Mme. de Veillot, or be an associate of the band of ruffians. Perhaps the most functional option, although it's somewhat arbitrary, is for one or more of the characters to be agents of the Cardinal's already.

❡ HISTORY IS FUN

RELIGION

The primary religion in France is Catholicism, but it includes an extremely vocal and political Protestant population called Huguenots. They were essentially fundamentalists, but politically radical – that is, middle-class, business-oriented, and generally opposed to the landed gentry.

France was torn apart by religious civil war from 1560 to 1598, insofar as religious controversy usually reflected the resident

nobles' bids for power. In 1598, Henry IV took the throne and issued the Edict of Nantes, which permitted Huguenots political freedom. The Edict was minimized during Louis XIII's reign and revoked by Louis XIV in the 1640s.

At the time of this story, the Huguenots are in a pitiful state, mostly due to the powerful influence of Cardinal Richelieu and the military defeat of the rebellious city, La Rochelle, in 1925. It is not illegal to be one, but it is illegal to be one and own weapons. At the gentlemanly level and above, Huguenot sympathies are unfashionable.

KINGS, QUEENS, AND MINISTERS

- The Hapsburgs. A royal family which dominated Europe for over two centuries. During the period of this story, its members ruled Spain, Austria, and the Holy Roman Empire.
- Henry IV. The first "real" king of France, in the modern sense. Widely considered to be nearly a saint for bringing the religious civil wars to a close in 1598.
- Marie d'Medici. Wife of Henry IV, mother of Louis XIII, the real ruler of France from 1610 through 1625 or so. She made Cardinal Richelieu the First Minister in 1616. Louis and she quarreled constantly and at one point he exiled her to the provinces. By 1630, she and Richelieu had fallen out and she attempted to oust him from power.
- Cardinal Richelieu. The effective ruler of France, which he held in an iron grip from 1630 until his death in 1643.
- Louis XIII. King of France from 1610 until 1643 (he died right after Richelieu). Not one of the great kings of Europe, just king of the greatest nation of Europe, served by its most ruthless practitioner of practical politics.
- Anne of Austria. A Spanish Hapsburg princess and wife of Louis XIII. They were married at 14 years old and widely recognized to be romantically entirely uninterested in one another.

THE DAY OF DUPES

In early 1630, the long-standing alliance between Queen Dowager Marie d'Medici and Cardinal Richelieu broke down for good. Marie made a power play, essentially commanding King Louis to banish the Cardinal, leaving her in complete control. However, much to her surprise, the king supported Richelieu and banished

her instead. In this scenario, the crucial letter lists the nobles that have enlisted in the Queen Dowager's cabal against Richelieu. To hook the story into history in the grand tradition of swashbuckler literature, make sure the Cardinal gets a gander at this book, thus empowering him to negate the Queen's bid to oust him.

Fans of Dumas' fiction will find it hard to resist including Cardinal Richelieu as an NPC, although it might be wise to let a little on-stage time go a long way. His Will should certainly be in the 7–9 range, his Cover likewise. At this time he's still a vigorous, physically active man (not the old fellow depicted in most history books). It's also easy to imagine him as a powerful sorcerer, although even more appropriately, perhaps, as a non-sorcerer with 0 Humanity, sustained only by Grace. The aid of demons or a powerful angel also gives him the story edge necessary to have the letter end up in his hands, freeing the GM from being too grossly managerial about it.

That last concept illustrates an important point about relationship-map based play. In a traditional scenario, the letter would be the "objective." The first half of play would concern learning that it is the objective, and the last half would be getting it. All the people would be either allies or obstacles regarding the learning and the getting. However, this entire supplement offers a different foundational approach – that it is the NPCs' **moral actions** and their **emotional content to the players** that drives the story, as expressed through the players' decisions about their own characters' actions. Where the letter ends up is no big deal, insofar as the group may enjoy the superficial fun of linking the adventure to history. What matters is whether the players came to care about the issues at stake among the people involved, and how they involved their characters on that basis.

THE ENCHANTED POOL

This scenario makes use of the rules and ideas from SORCERER & SWORD, specifically the Black Forest setting based on the original versions of the classic German fairy tales, as well as Mervyn Peake's gorgeous and unsettling *Gormenghast* trilogy. I haven't made any effort to be linguistically or historically accurate to the folklore. The relationship map comes from *The Underground Man* by Ross MacDonald, with a few major modifications.

Humanity in this setting is defined as child-like innocence, not in the sense of some Romantic state of ignorance, but rather safety from abuse, the security of honest love and family, and the opportunity to learn. An adult loses Humanity simply by maturing, but may regain it by acting to preserve and

value the innocence of children. Rolls for Humanity loss can be incurred passively, simply by not performing such acts. Therefore high Humanity for an adult in this setting is a responsibility; it requires active effort.

The culture is roughly 15th century central European, in broad agricultural valleys separated by low mountains and thick forests. The people tend to the tall and beefy in build, with round faces and fair skin. Most people live close to the land, relying on travelling merchants, acting troupes, and tax-men for news; villages and towns have a few cobbled streets and a common building that serves as meeting-house and inn. The government may be described as loose feudal, with vague references to a central authority, but "King" refers to local nobles. The middle class is here to stay, towns are beginning to rely on trade rather than local subsistence, and well-fed burghers are surprising local gentry everywhere with their newly-discovered clout.

Technologically, the culture sees plenty of excellent woodworking, occasional printing with movable type, but metal is still pretty much pig iron. For the war-like, the common weapons are the musket and the more reliable crossbow. Militia-men wear pointy breastplates (for deflecting musket balls) and clunky-looking helmets.

Away from the communities, however, and especially once in the Forest, all notions of civility and safety are put aside. The GM should pull out all the stops of surreal nightmare for all scenes in there. It's full of scary witches, psychotic bandits, and boggles of all descriptions, and any game-boy attempts at "mapping" are just asking for trouble.

❡ DEMONS AND SORCERY

Most demons in this scenario are Imminents; they do not have to be Summoned into existence and they would rather Pact than Bind. They come in two types.

- The Nildren are Inconspicuous demons who live near or among people. They tend to be small, associated with a given area or family. They do conform or adapt to human concerns, usually in slightly twisted ways.
- The Huldren live in the Forest, and they are bigger, badder, and more dangerous. A lot of them are anthropomorphic animals, and most are outright malevolent, with Taint as a common ability. They are ruled by a Goblin King.

The whole theme for demons and sorcery is childhood. Demons are oddly sympathetic to children, and interested in their con-

cerns, but they are almost always harmful in the long run, tending to over-infantilize them, hurt them accidentally, or lose them in the Forest.

A sorcerer does well to avoid maturing, especially in the sense of caring for and nurturing other kids. Thus a kind of twisted-child's outlook is most typical for high-Lore characters. Rituals often look like macabre versions of children's games, especially if they include risks and rules-breaking. Note that abusing or frightening a child as part of a sorcerous ritual is very effective, but it can backfire really badly, as the demon may well transfer its interest and allegiance to the child.

The kingdom in question (more like a province or principality, historically speaking, but this is a fairy tale, so it takes place in the "kingdom") consists of about twenty villages connected by roads, quite a few small isolated hamlets, a couple of towns worthy of the name, and one big town that includes the estate of House Kolkenn, the "ruling" noble family. About five similar estates are found at geographically strategic locations throughout the kingdom, including those of Houses Marburg and Novene.

The most significant element in the setting is the Black Pool, on the mountainous border of the Kolkenn estate and the Forest. It's a semi-sacred, scary place well-known but never-mentioned to all the populace, and in fact the Pool is the site of all meetings and negotiations between the people's King and the Goblin King of the Huldren-folk. In fact, there is something of a "lease" reinforced by rituals there every nine years.

The Enchanted Pool
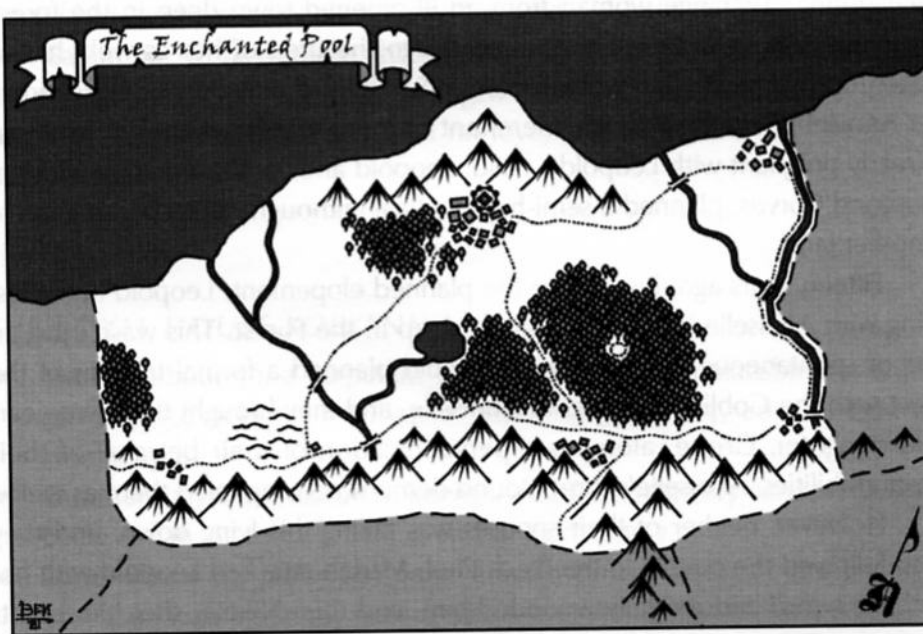
The back-story

Venturing into this kingdom sets up a problem for characters because there's a curse on it, and the curse will affect them – it's unsubtle, but it's a concrete problem that works fine to kick characters into action. The most obvious effect is to render all characters infertile, and in fact, to reduce all sex drives. In game terms, the curse operates as follows:

▼ Everyone must succeed in a Humanity roll (as for a check) in order even to begin any physical intimacy with another person.

▼ A sorcerer must roll Lore vs. his or her own Humanity prior to any ritual, and the resulting victories are used as a modifier for the ritual. This is experienced as a sudden vision or hallucination of childhood memories during the beginning of the ritual.

▼ All demons demand their Needs about twice as often.

These effects begin as soon as a sorcerer sets foot in the kingdom, and they will persist, no matter whether the sorcerer leaves the area.

Gunther, the prince of House Kolkenn, is questing to break the curse in the classic fairy tale manner. He's convinced that finding his long-lost father, King Leopold, will solve everything, because he'll make everything all right. His elders either agree in a lukewarm way or passionately assert that Gunther ought to put all this behind him and get on with ruling.

The tragedy is that nearly everyone close to Gunther knows the truth of the matter and keeps it from him. Three decades past, King Leopold ruled the kingdom, and he was a selfish, life-seizing man. He married Mariah for political reasons, but despised her and ignored his little son. His real lover was Belladonna, a strange woman from an ill-omened town deep in the forest. Eventually, though, almost twenty years ago, he tired of her as well, having taken up with a married woman named Sarah, and Belladonna, now known as Anniselle, married a rich merchant named Nikolas, although she was already pregnant with Leopold's child. Leopold and Sarah, unhappy with her husband Corvus, planned a semi-hypothetical (although not to her) escape to another land.

Fifteen years ago, just before the planned elopement, Leopold had a last fling with Anniselle in a secret cottage deep in the Forest. This wasn't just an act of spontaneous lust, however; Leopold planned a formal transfer of the Pact with the Goblin King over to Anniselle, and they brought their two-year-old daughter, Grette, along as a personification of their betrayal of their responsibilities. Anniselle's three Bound demons accompanied them as well.

However, neither of their spouses was taking this lying down, and they had followed the couple to the Black Pool. Mariah attacked Leopold with her father's sword and mortally wounded him, and then Nikolas shot him point-

blank with a musket. They ordered the demons to bury his body in the Black Pool, and struck a terrible Pact with them to keep the incident secret.

Anniselle begged them to spare her life and her child's, and she swore to be a dutiful wife to Nikolas. They permitted her to live, mainly as Nikolas refused to admit to any loss of face that might occur. Grette was terribly traumatized, first by the sorcery her parents had begun, and then by witnessing the murder and subsequent threats to her mother.

Sarah, meanwhile, had waited to meet Leopold, and learned just in time that her life was in danger (Nikolas and Mariah were determined to restore their lives to what they considered "normal," at whatever cost). She fled into the Forest, leaving Corvus to believe she indeed eloped with Leopold. Her abandonment of her son was of great interest to the creatures in the Forest, and now, fifteen years later, she is a powerful sorceress allied with the Goblin King.

All of this activity of course took on powerful necromantic meaning, centered on the Black Pool. The details may be found above, in the description of the curse on the land, and below, in the description of the necromancy itself and its potential outcome.

Since then, things have become a bit strange. Mariah has only become more dictatorial and temperamental, and Gunther, always obsessed with his father, has since married lovelessly; his little son Kerl is similarly ill-raised. Nikolas has gained tremendous political power via his hold on Mariah; Anniselle lives in a semi-hysterical haze of insistence that everything is really all right, although her daughter, Grette, is still traumatized by what she witnessed when she was very small. Karl, son to Sarah by Leopold, has grown up to rebel against his "father," Corvus. Everyone stays rigidly close-mouthed on the subject, and most people assume Leopold did indeed flee the kingdom with Sarah. So we have three children: two by Leopold, in their teens, and one by Leopold's son, ten years younger. All three were born into a horrid tangle of demons and murder, with no love, and they have no idea about what to do.

The characters

THE ROYAL HOUSE KOLKENN

▼ **Mariah:** about 50, a corpulent woman, outwardly implacable but easily rattled into action or collapse. Stamina 3, Will 3, Lore 1, Past 4, Humanity 1.

▼ **Gunther:** 27, sharp-featured, intense, a bad listener, very concerned with being a man. Stamina 5, Will 4, Past 4, Humanity 2.

▼ **Lotte:** about 25, pretty but pensive and worried, resentful of Gunther's obsession with his family history. Stamina 3, Will 4, Past 3, Humanity 4.

▼ **Kerl**: 7, grave and sensitive little boy. Stamina 2, Will 4, Past 4, Humanity 5.

HOUSE MARBURG

▼ **Nikolas**: about 60, bald with a fringe of long gray hair, spectacles, officious manner. Stamina 3, Will 5, Lore 2, Past 6, Humanity 3.

▼ **Anniselle**: about 38. Halfbreed demon. Demure, lots of presence, girlishly pretty. Stamina 4, Will 4, Lore 5, Past 4, Humanity 2.

▼ **Grette**: 17. A spooky, flighty girl, given to cruel tricks. Stamina 3, Will 3, Lore 1, Past 4, Humanity 4.

HOUSE NOVENE

(Arrived from a faraway southern land about fifty years ago)

▼ **Corvus**: about 55, stringy but with jet black hair and eyebrows. A good example of the new breed of merchant who can call the shots with nobles. Stamina 4, Will 5, Past 6, Humanity 3.

▼ **Sarah**: about 45, an angry, restless, evasive woman turned a little odd by her years in the Forest. Stamina 3, Will 4, Lore 2, Past 4, Humanity 3.

▼ **Marcus**: about 15. Cross, frustrated, rebellious; surprisingly combat-ready and competent for his age. Stamina 5, Will 4, Past 4, Humanity 4.

The "Past" score is a version of Cover, as described in SORCERER AND SWORD, which is quite inclusive. It may be considered fairly composite in most cases, including such things as social etiquette, finances, military matters, and anything else appropriate to one's standing and role in a particular society. A character may roll his or her Past against another character's to discern whether the target is native to that location or in that company.

THE DEMONS

These three Nildren are all currently Pacted to Nikolas, although to varying degrees. Remember to pronounce "W" as "V," and vice versa.

▼ **Wicketschkulke**. Stamina 5, Will 6, Lore 5, Power 6. Desire for Ruin, Need is for bowls of milk. A twisted, wizened brownie type, small, lurking, alternately perky or sullen. It helped to kill Gunther, will serve Mariah and Nikolas well and independently, silencing Vulp if necessary, bullying Matz. Abilities: Confuse, Cover (servant), Travel (pops up unexpectedly this way), Special Damage (poisons), Perceive (confers on another, used by looking in a mirror and seeing oneself as others do, specifically in terms of frailty and hatreds).

▼ **Matzlinspiel**. Stamina 4, Will 5, Lore 4, Power 5. Desire for Sensation, Need to cuddle cute things (which is often hard on them). Ogrish, lump-

Jeremy McHugh

ish, slow, and rather pathetically good-hearted. It is easily tagged as the scapegoat for both murders, tends to take on the outlook of whoever bullies it. Abilities: Big, Special Damage (club), Cover (heavy laborer), Armor.

▼ **Vulpenspilpen**. Stamina 4, Will 5, Lore 3, Power 6. A wild-haired, rubbery-looking goblin type, malevolent and wild, only talks in scraps of rhyme and riddles, easily provoked, doesn't really distinguish among people except by Humanity score, hates all adults. Abilities: Hold, Fast, Travel (can run on air), Hint.

The action

A catalyst has entered the picture, due to Grette's habit of wandering into the Forest and talking to whomever and whatever she finds there. Recently she's encountered Vulpe, who, seeing a way to escape from its onerous Pact, has puzzled and intrigued her with snippets of information. She approached Marcus, and the two of them have set off on a quest to find the truth of their parentage and of Leopold's fate. About then, Gunther and his wife Lotte quarrel badly, and the prince sets off on his own quest, in addition essentially to kidnapping his own son, Kerl. The various searchers have just enough information to bring them all to the Black Pool.

Only one more plot element is involved – Gunther's body is found half-submerged in the Pool, and the three younger characters have fled into the Forest. What happened? Wicket and Matz waylaid the little troop, and the Pact ensured they protect the Pool's secret. Gunther defended himself well, at least until Leopold's moldering evil corpse surged out of the Pool and dragged his son under.

The land's curse intensifies sharply from this act, and all characters with

any Humanity loss at all from sorcerous acts will cease to age. Furthermore, if anyone has any occasion to make a Humanity check, regardless of its outcome, he or she will physically become a year younger.

This situation (i.e. role-playing scenario) cannot sit still; all player-character activity will occur in a whirl of actions by the other characters.

▼ The children will eventually make their way to Sarah, who will in turn bring matters to the attention of the Goblin King. This worthy will be most irked with the violations done upon the Pool, and may consider a horrible vengeance on the whole human community, against which the curse will seem like pattycakes.

▼ The demons will also keep going. Wicket will dispose of whoever threatens the Pact, up to and including Matz, who might succeed in rebelling against it to help the children. Vulpe, on the other hand, will harass any adult who comes close to finding them.

▼ Nikolas takes two actions: (1) to send out squads of provost riders out to capture the children, and (2) to begin the Summoning rituals described below. He has every intention of raising Leopold and ruling the land directly, with the demon as his slave.

The sorcery at hand

Again, the key to sorcerous acts and outcomes is Humanity. In the terms of this scenario, nearly every adult characters is seriously at fault. Leopold, Muriah, and Nikolas in particular have failed badly to nurture, and Anniselle too (in fact, she now uses her childhood name in direct abnegation of her adult responsibilities). Given these acts and Leopold's violent death, who could wonder that necromancy is involved?

⚔ THE NECROMANCY

The original murder of Leopold has produced a token, specifically, Mariah's father's sword. Its Power is based on his Humanity at the time (4) and Grette's Humanity loss due to the events of that day (2), for a total of 6.

Therefore when the three Nildren were Pacted by Nikolas, his roll used 6 extra dice as a bonus. The Pact was specifically to conceal the circumstances of Leopold's death. The roll was variably successful:

- ᴥ Wicket wholly at +4
- ᴥ Matz barely at +1
- ᴥ Vulp not at all at −3

Of course, Gunther is wielding this same sword on the day Leopold's lich murders him, which adds his Humanity (5) and the amount Marcus lost from witnessing this gruesome event (1), which yields a total Power of 12 for the Token.

Even more importantly, that's also the number of dice a person would use to Summon Leopold as a full-blown lich demon. These dice would be rolled against whatever Power the summoner states; if successful, that's Leopold's Power. Furthermore, these dice may be added to by way of sacrifice (i.e. the victim's Humanity), and if that sacrifice is Kerl, that value is doubled to be 10 more dice – a total of 22.

The risen lich is a terrible thing; given 22 dice for Summoning, it could have phenomenal Power. Its Desire is Power, and its Need is for women's adulation. Just a start on its abilities would certainly be Armor, Protection, Vitality, Travel, Taint, and various degrees of Perceive.

Lest anyone think of merely Binding this formidable demon and ordering it around, Leopold will certainly pull the favorite trick of big nasties by striking a favorable Binding with a sorcerer, then killing him or her. Such an act presents it with additional bonus dice against Banishing, after all.

The ending

As with the other scenarios, most of the NPCs are determined to safeguard their individual interests at the expense of others, and anyone seeking to uncover sensitive information is first misled, then lied to, and finally treated as a threat. Everyone, even the demons, will attempt to divine how much a character knows, then tell as self-protective a lie as possible while sticking to the known facts, misrepresenting the unknown ones as much as possible. Some examples of this almost-true misinformation includes:

▼ Anniselle admits that she was pregnant when she married Nikolas, but claims that she rejected Leopold's advances and hints that Grette's father is the Goblin king.

▼ Corvus admits that his wife left him, and even that she was having an affair with Leopold, but claims ignorance regarding her whereabouts.

▼ Mariah admits that Wicket and Matz are associated with House Kolkenn, but claims that they were Bound by her father, as part of a generations-old Pact with the Goblin King.

▼ No one acknowledges that the round-heeled, mysterious witch who really captured Leopold's heart is Anniselle. In fact, characters might be led to believe that Sarah played that role.

This scenario's outcome depends fully on the fate of the children. If any of them come to harm, their Humanity acts as a bonus to the lich-Summons, permitting Leopold more Power. Such a fate might be averted by getting one or more of the demons (not Wicket) on the kids' side, by breaking Nikolas' hold on Mariah, by reaching Anniselle and convincing her to break her Pact for her daughter's sake (such an argument would rest on her Humanity check), by finding Sarah and learning the truth of the events fifteen years ago, as well as many other ways. With Leopold and the Goblin King involved, with Nikolas determined to dominate the land, and with as many different permutations on the curse as the GM sees fit, the stage is set for plenty of grim, symbolic action.

Jeremy McHugh

APPENDIXES

KICKERS AND RELATIONSHIP MAPS

The following is excerpted from discussions on The Forge about playing
SORCERER. Many thanks to Tor Erickson for his permission!

Tor. *I met with my three players and an observer to play our first session of
SORCERER. Things that were included in the game which none of us
had ever tried out before included:*

– A relationship map drawn from a novel

*– A bandolier of bangs to be used in conjunction with the relationship
map*

*– Kickers that determined the starting scenes and tied into the rela-
tionship map*

*– A setting and background that grew for the most part out of discus-
sion, character back stories and actual play (including many of the
NPCS, many of the physical locations in the game, and the definition of
sorcery itself)*

– *An explicitly stated premise, established in our very first meeting (How far will you go to conceal a secret? Or, at what point will you reveal your secrets?)*
– *Explicit use of author-stance by all the players involved*
– *The extensive use of out-of-character knowledge to heighten the overall impact of in-game events*

One stumbling block that I came across lay in the player's Kickers and back-stories. I found that it was deceptively difficult to tie Kickers into the Map. Also, the Kickers themselves seemed lightweight. They presented situations where something just happened to the character, and the character had nothing to do with it.

Ron. *Not every Kicker must be linked solidly to the relationship map. At least one Kicker may be run as a subplot, rather than as an element of the main back-story. This works best when the player-characters are already interested in one another's lives.*

If the characters begin utterly disconnected, then yes, the relationship map is all you've got. You can still run one character's Kicker as a subplot, just establish the character as knowing someone in the map and thus he keeps being affected by this other stuff going on, in addition to dealing with the Kicker.

As far as relatively boring Kickers go, the GM has a choice. Either there are no Kickers at all, which puts the players floating in space and gazing expectantly at the GM to situate the characters; or we have Kickers that only bump the characters a little into action. My call is that a little is better than nothing.

The prize in the box is when a player gives you a Kicker like "After returning from a painful scene at my ex-wife's funeral, I find that she's sitting at my kitchen table, looking perfectly hale and hearty, smoking one of those damn cigs and gazing at me coolly."

But if it's something like, "A guy tried to kill me with a hatchet on the bus today," and if you (rightly) do not want to spend time filling it with content, then the solution is clear. Just "spike it" during the first run. In other words, have the written Kicker simply be the opening scene for an in-play Kicker that blows the player's socks off. Perhaps, "You then come home to find all your stuff hacked up with hatchets, and your neighbors, smiling very widely, invite you to stay with them tonight for ... um, for safety. Yeah, safety. What do you do?"

Tor. *I was worried that the characters wouldn't have enough emotional*

investment to get involved in the backstory unless they were really tied in to it. In retrospect, I think I was worrying too much, and perhaps not giving the players enough author credit to keep their characters involved in interesting ways.

I was also worried that writing an "escalation" Kicker would be infringing on player authorship. But now I realize that a player with a light Kicker is really asking for it, and you always give the players what they want, right?

So how did it go? It was one of my best role-playing experiences ever. The players felt the same way. I think they came into it with some skepticism that their authoring power would make a difference, and they left stunned at the extent to which it did. For me, it was a total pleasure to push things as hard as I could and watch the players respond. One of the surprising things that genuinely comedic moments arose without breaking the mood or interrupting the flow at all. If anything, these moments served to heighten the more serious parts, to make the game more believable overall, and to provide for breaks in the tension.

The biggest improvement I'm looking for in the future is more of a spontaneous feel. You know when you're role-playing and everybody is calling out things, regardless of whether it's their character taking action, and people are leaning over the table to see what the dice came up with and climbing around on chairs because they're so excited. The game on Saturday was so focused that I think some of that got edged out. I suspect, however, that as we all relax into the new roles we're filling, that will come naturally.

Ron. *Well, you're doin' the dance now. (1) Give direction and guidance with Bangs, (2) let'em run the show and you facilitate, (3) give direction and guidance with Bangs, (4) let'em run the show and you facilitate, (5) and so on.*

And for your next trick, you'll discover that they are guiding you! If the group is into this sort of play, then very quickly, you'll be astounded by the solos and duets that your bass-playing is making possible.

MINI-SUPPLEMENTS AND HUMANITY

The mini-supplements offer SORCERER settings and play ideas. So far they've been hugely successful, both in terms of enthusiastic participants and sales alike. Every one is strongly based on a unique interpretation of Humanity and its integration with setting, character score descriptions, and possible story content.

▼ In HELLBOUND, by Dav Harnish, Humanity represents a character's actual immortal, i.e. damnable, soul. Its value is practically a celestial account balance, and one may even invest, borrow, or steal Humanity just as if it were money. Humanity 0 is simply another kind of position to bargain from, and not necessarily a bad one at that.

▼ In SCHISM, by Jared A. Sorensen, Humanity's loss represents the dissolution of the body and mind due to the practice of psychic powers, which for all intents and purposes are like Parasite demons. Humanity 0 is the signal to perform the most powerful statement possible for the character, during his or her death-scene.

▼ In URGE, by Clinton R. Nixon, Humanity represents one's degree of control over bestial, overwhelming desires and anger, which may either be channeled for ethical purposes or provoked into sudden outbursts. Humanity 0 is the most fearful fate imaginable, the inability to distinguish between justice and vengeance.

▼ In ELECTRIC GHOSTS, by Raven, Humanity represents the distinction between users of technology fom the technology itself, even as thought and purpose emerges from the developing technology. Humanity 0 indicates that one has become, even to oneself, a thing of use rather than a user of things.

▼ In DEMON COPS, by none other than myself, Humanity represents the duty and responsibilities of police service. Humanity 0, for player-characters, does not represent any kind of dissolution or psychosis, but rather the simple decision no longer to live on the thin blue line.

▼ In SORCERER AND SPACE, by Mike Holmes, Humanity is the act of constructing meaning in the face of evidence to the contrary. The cosmos is known – its fundamentals laid bare – and they are a yawning, awful void. Humanity 0 indicates the inability to see meaning, and an attendant inability to care.

Ultimately, one does not "play SORCERER." One plays one's **own** SORCERER, with most insights or limitations being inherent to the artists rather than to the medium. The mini-supplement program is an invitation to explore the style, Humanity definitions, and high-potential scenario designs of others – but also an invitation to present yours as well.

INDEX

THE SORCERER'S SOUL

Bring your Sorcerer game into the most terrible realm of all: the human heart.

The basic game asks, "How far will you go to get what you want? This supplement is all about the answers, and about role-playing to make them matter.

Rules expansions and guidelines for:

· Understanding, customizing, and making the most of the central game mechanic: *Humanity*.
· Possessor and Parasite demons, human-demon transformations, human-demon hybrids, and all manner of other confusions.
· Angels. You thought the demons were scary?

Innovative role-playing methods

Ever wonder how to generate powerful stories through role-playing? Does it ever seem like what characters do and what stories are about just never get together? The *relationship map* method of scenario preparation offers a solution.

Three scenario examples illustrate both the relationship map technique and how to apply it to a wide range of Humanity definitions and settings: The Forbidden Tome (modern California), The Day of Dupes (17th century Paris), and The Enchanted Pool (fairy-tale medieval Europe).