

urban legends

the World of Darkness





urban legends

By Alan Alexander, Russell Bailey, Rick Chittot, Will Hindmarch,
Luke Johnson, Amber E. Scott and Malcolm Sheppard

EGGS

ANNUNCIATION —
“My son is dead, Mr. Carpenter,” she replied calmly, almost casually, as she regarded Joseph from across her desk. He detected just the faintest trace of her Italian accent.

“Uh, ah, I’m sorry, I didn’t...” Joseph hoped he wasn’t visibly sweating. He should have known about her son. And now, after making it to this second interview, his hopes of landing the job might be wrecked by a clumsy faux pas.

“Be at ease,” she sighed, as if reading his mind. “Publicly, my husband is who’s credited with the success of Deva International. But my son was the one who pointed the way. My husband used to get throat infections, bouts of laryngitis... he smoked too much. He once lost his voice for months on end, but it returned on the day my Marco was born. And that’s how I knew he would be an extraordinary person.”

“I imagine there are no ‘ordinary’ people in your family, Ms. Singe.”

She smiled a Mona Lisa smile. “Gabriella, please, Joseph.” She glanced at her wristwatch. “Our meeting will be brief; I’m on a plane back to India later today. Have you ever been?”

“I haven’t had the pleasure.”

“Warm rain, monkeys on the rooftops, the cacophony of wed-



ding parties at all hours of the night... all the dreadful, miraculous things I would have missed if I hadn’t fallen for a man from India. Are you married, Joseph? Have you children?”

“One wife,” he answered, “no kids. Yet.” Joseph realized then that he liked Gabriella Singe, liked her warmth, her confidence. She seemed like someone with whom he could share secrets. He had an urge to tell about his and Mara’s ordeal trying to conceive, and the tearful decision that it was time to stop the hormone injections and the ovary calendars and the scheduled sex.

“I’m sorry, Joseph,” she said, again seeming to reply to his thoughts and not his words. “I’m wasting the little time we have by getting off the subject. You know, of course, about the product line we’re

introducing in your country.”

He nodded. “Black Butterfly Gourmet Tea already has a good reputation here in the States, among the few who know of it.” He’d unconsciously lapsed into a segment of the presentation he’d given to her underling at the first interview. “I think there’s an excellent chance for boosting your share among a target market —”

“That’s what I want to speak of,” she interrupted. “Our reputation. You see, it’s in jeopardy. There is a... a story going around, a rumor. A, what-you-call-it — urban legend.”

“Yes... I think I came across that. But it’s not a big deal. I wouldn’t worry. If you take me on, I can come up with a PR and marketing plan that will —”

“I see I haven’t been clear,” she interjected again. “The reason

for this meeting —the announcement I wanted to make — I'm ruining it by not being clear." She stood, extended a hand. "You're the one we want, Joseph, the one we've chosen. We expect great things of you."

When he recounted the story to Mara that evening, over Chinese takeout and Black Butterfly's Mangalam Blend #7, her reaction was so muted that he was certain he'd failed to capture the drama. "It was like a dream," he said to her. "I was trying to convince her to hire me, and she'd already decided." He passed her a carton of fried rice; she took it but didn't scoop any onto her plate. "Anyway, I've already got a ton of work to do."

She smiled. But her eyes weren't in it.

"It's about insects," he continued. "There are these stories floating around, see. About the tea. That it's not really made from tea leaves, but ground-up insect parts. One version claims it's full of tiny insect eggs, and the eggs hatch inside you and —"

"Joseph —"

"I know, I'm sorry. It's gross and stupid, really. Trivial. The thing to do is let it die a natural death, not feed the flames with denials and counterclaims. But, you know, they're not paying me to do nothing." He slurped up a forkful of lo mein. "I figure I'll try to find out how the whole story got started. Could be interesting..."

"Joseph—" She slumped in her chair.

"I know. You love the tea, you drink it every day, and you hate bugs. You don't want to be thinking about bugs every time you drink it. I promise, I won't go on and on, I just wanted to —"

"Joseph, I'm pregnant." She smiled again, weakly.

NATIVITY — It has not been a good day, Joseph told himself as he rode a creaking elevator toward the top of an apartment building that smelled like cabbage. He yawned. He'd spent most of the previous night lying wide awake, eventually switching on a lamp and staring at Mara as she twitched in her sleep. About three months into it, and she was clearly showing. An intimate relation had begun within her body, and he was excluded by biology. It wasn't fair that he was left out of this, the event he'd been waiting for all these years.

Finally, he'd fallen asleep, only to be plagued with a bizarre dream. Black shapes falling from the night sky, and burrowing into the ground. An ant colony that lived beneath his

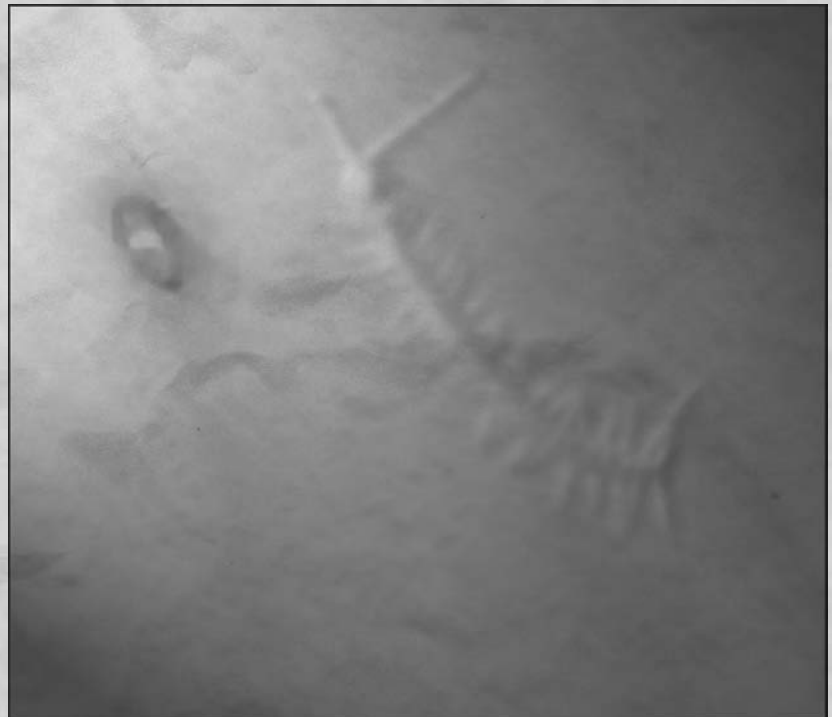
skin, its foragers coming and going through his ears and eyes. They walked across his forearm and left trails that looked like the lines on a map. A humming sound that rose and fell like music. When he woke, it seemed for a minute or so as if he could still hear the music, or rather feel it, like vibrations traveling up his arm and into the core of his body. Then his mind cleared, and he realized he was lying with his hand on Mara's abdomen.

After his morning shower, he'd found Mara sitting at the kitchen table with two cups of White Bliss Blend #3 and a large knife laid out before her.

"I was going to cut us some cantaloupe," she told him. "But I'm so tired."

"It's okay." He kissed her on the forehead, picked up the knife. "I'll just take the tea and grab a bagel on my way to the office."

"Joseph..." Her tone made him lay the knife in the sink and walk back to face her. "Joseph," she said. "Are you sure we're doing the right thing?"



"Honey..." He sat across the table from her.

"I mean, I know you've got this job now, but can we really afford a baby? I mean, daycare's expensive and if I can't go back to work, how will we..." She bit her bottom lip.

He leaned forward, took her hands and rubbed them. "Babe, come on. I thought we put this argument behind us. Remember how hard we tried, and nothing? This is like a miracle."

"I guess... I suppose I got used to the idea that I would never be pregnant. To be honest it... it scares me... I mean, you know my sister almost bled to death."

"Whoa, Mara, whoa. That's not going to happen to you, and you know it. That was a high-risk pregnancy, and you know her doctor warned her against a live birth. I know you feel a little freaked, but it's just nerves..." He gave her fingers a final squeeze, then released them.

"Nerves and bones and fingers and toes," she said. "And eyes. Somebody else's. Growing inside my body." She placed her hands on her belly, just beginning to show beneath her shirt. "I don't know if I like it. I'm sick all the time and tired, and... it's not too late to change our minds —"

"No," he said. "No way. We're not doing that." He immediately regretted his harsh tone. "I'll call that doctor," he added, in a near-whisper. "The specialist on the company's HMO. They said we get unlimited visits. We'll see about getting you something for the nausea, okay? It'll be all right."

The elevator doors shook open, interrupting Joseph's recollections and reminding him why he was here.

He stepped out and made his way down a dingy hallway,

checking the door numbers. He hoped this meeting would be more useful than the three hours he'd just wasted on the phone with that entomologist from the University — Casper? Yes, Frank Casper, PhD. Joseph had hoped to gather expert opinions on the impossibility of insect eggs hatching inside the human stomach. Instead, Casper refused to rule it out and then wandered from the point. "The bot fly, for example," he'd said, "is a well-known horse parasite; its eggs hatch in the horse's stomach. And of course the tapeworm, though not an insect, leaves eggs that when ingested by animals — humans included — hatch and thrive in the gastrointestinal track." At least Casper agreed to test some samples of tea for insect parts. Perhaps the packages could be labeled with some sort of authoritative statement that they contained tea leaves and only tea leaves. He'd talk to the design team tomorrow about a mockup, and at the same time they could get those weird Indian astrology symbols off the labels.

He found apartment 25-D. The door was half-open. Joseph knocked on the door frame. "Hello? Ms. Ball? Myrna Ball?" There was some kind of shuffling noise inside. "I'm Joseph Carpenter. Mel Gold, you know, the guy who runs the urban legends website? He said you'd agreed..."

At first he could hear nothing but the rattling of an old refrigerator, and the traffic noise outside. Then he realized someone was talking. "Come in," the voice repeated, wearily. "Come in." He entered. Myrna was seated on a cot; there wasn't much else in the tiny room.

"I, uh, wanted to thank you for seeing me," Joseph told her, taking the seat she indicated, a metal

folding chair. She gestured with her left arm, and Joseph saw that her right arm ended at the elbow, where the purple T-shirt she wore was pinned closed. As he sat, he realized she was young, no more than 20, though her haggard face had made her seem older at first.

"You work for Black Butterfly, huh?" she asked. She awkwardly slipped her left hand into the right-side pocket of her jeans, took out a cigarette from her pocket. The cigarette slipped from her fingers and landed on the floor between her feet. She ignored it, saying, "Sorry I couldn't talk to you on the phone, but they shut off my cell last week."

"I don't know how much Mr. Gold told you, but we've been seeing these rumors about, you know, the bug thing. And, uh..." He was having trouble not thinking about the cigarette on the floor. "Anyway, Mr. Gold — he said he first heard about it in that post you made. And since you were an intern at, the, uh, our company last year, I thought that was significant, and, well..." He glanced at the cigarette. Was he supposed to pick it up?"

"Mmm hmm." She brushed some stray bangs from her eyes. Joseph could see now that they weren't just tired, they were glazed over. Medicated, he thought. "I wasn't going to see you, at first," she was saying. "But I can't sleep, and, well, you can't fight the stars."

"The stars? You mean, like astrology?"

"I mean the stars. They came from the stars..."

"I don't... what do you mean?" He'd balanced a notebook on his lap, but wasn't sure what to write.

"At night, I could hear them. They'd hatched in me. They were humming, and after awhile the humming sounded like words."

She shook her head — more accurately, her neck twitched and threw her head briefly to the side. “That’s when they told me. They’ve been waiting a long time to be reborn. This was supposed to be their planet, see, but they were betrayed... they made me draw a map on my arm.”

“A... a what?” He closed the notebook.

“I had to get rid of them. Now I regret it, of course.”

Joseph was standing now.

“Wait,” she said. She bent over, and Joseph had the idea that she was reaching for the cigarette. Instead, she reached beneath the cot and retrieved a cylindrical bundle wrapped in newspaper. “No one can stop it, Mr. Carpenter. It’s foretold. I regret what I did.” She placed the bundle on her lap. It was perhaps two feet long. “I saved it. Take it to them, as my gift.” She began to scratch at the tape that held the wrapping together.

He walked backward to the door, one leg bumping against chair, tipping it over. “Thank you for your time,” he told her. “We — I don’t think I have any more questions. If I do, I’ll...” He was fumbling behind him for the door-knob. She jumped to her feet, gripping the bundle in her left hand.

“Wait,” she said. “Tell them to take me back! Tell them!” She reached for him, but with her truncated arm. By the time she recovered her balance he was out the door.

“I’m not... what is it you’re asking me?” Joseph glanced around the brightly lit waiting room. Several clusters of people were within earshot, but they seemed too wrapped up in their own tragedies to be eavesdropping.

“Mr. Carpenter,” the doctor

answered, her voice not as hushed as it had been a few moments ago. “Your wife’s going to be fine. A miscarriage at this stage of the game is upsetting, but it’s not usually a health threat to the mother. Some bed rest and she’ll be back on her feet. But when we examined her... we found, well... what I’m asking is, did she really want this baby?”

“What? Of course she did! What are you talking about?” He wanted to sit back down in the squared-off hospital chair and rest his head in his hands.

“When some women don’t want to be pregnant,” the ER doc was saying, “there are things they try. And your wife shows certain signs, bruising, torn tissue —”

“My wife woke me up at four A.M., screaming in pain,” he interrupted. “There was blood gushing from between her legs. Blood and something that looked like black jelly. She was crying so loudly the 911 operator could barely hear me. And I don’t have anything else to say to you. I’d like to go and see her now.”

It was nearly noon when Joseph returned home, wearily mumbling the list of items Mara had asked him to bring back. Her voice had been so weak and hoarse, as if she were talking from the far end of some long, long tunnel. He shuffled into the kitchen, made himself a cup of tea, drank it while leaning against the counter. Then he steeled himself and approached the bedroom.

The event had been so sudden, so chaotic, that visual memories came only in brief flashes. A torrent of the blood on the bed, looking black in the dim light of the bedside lamp. A mass of some mucous-like effluence spread

across the carpet, like syrup dotted with rounded, glistening lumps. Mara had crawled through some of it, moaning, and then collapsed in the hallway while he was fumbling for the phone. He’d helped her to the couch, the paramedics were pounding on the door...

He walked into the room. The bed had been made, the bedcovers were as pristine as the day they’d been purchased. The carpet was spotless, impeccable. He walked gingerly to the far side of the bed. There were no stains anywhere, no bloody handprints or trail of gore, not a fleck of discolor. No evidence that matched his horrific memories.

He sat at the small computer desk near the window. How was this possible? None of the neighbors had a key. Had he called someone in his panic, then forgotten? Or maybe a neighbor heard the commotion and called Mara’s family.

He rubbed his eyes. He stretched, yawned. His left foot connected with something under the desk, something solid but yielding, like semi-ripe fruit. He held his foot against it, wondering if he should nap before returning to the hospital. After a minute, he felt warmth through the toe of his shoe. Warmth and a faint vibration. He bent to look beneath the desk. When his fingers touched the thing’s smooth surface, it seemed to quiver.

Joseph sat on the bed. He held a dark object about the size and volume of a large chicken egg, but oval rather than truly egg-shaped. It was black, smooth like polished glass, and as he slowly rocked it he could feel there was fluid inside that shifted as it moved. The thing seemed to be getting warmer as he held it. Its dark surface looked firm, but it deformed like thick

rubber when he pressed his thumb against it.

He had an urge to smash the thing beneath his heel, or hurl it from the window, but he also had an urge to hide it, secure it, protect it at all costs. He might have heeded the first instinct in those early moments, before the thing's beauty and symmetry entranced him. But then he had to put it aside to answer the phone, which was how he found out that Mara was dead.

FLIGHT — Joseph spent the morning deleting messages from his email inbox. It felt like the first time since Mara's suicide that he had time to himself, free of well-wishers and sad-eyed visitors. He lingered over the last message in the folder: a jargon-laden dispatch from Dr. Casper, saying the tea samples were free of insect parts but seemed contaminated with "an unknown fungus" possibly related to "ergot." Then he shut down the computer.

With the monitor's light gone, the bedroom was lit only by faint sunlight that found its way through the heavy window shades and curtains. He walked to the bed, coaxed the blankets aside. The egg was the size of a football now. He cradled it. He leaned close enough to see faintly visible shadows, areas of blacker black, drifting slowly beneath the egg's dark surface. As he watched, he became aware of a change inside the egg. Something pushed its way from the depths of the thing and then, in an instant, became clearly visible.

It was an eye.



The eye was large, as wide as Joseph's fist, taking up nearly the width of the egg, but otherwise structured like an ordinary, human eye, with a dark pupil surrounded by a lighter iris. Joseph could even make out the folds of a soft eyelid, the lashes clearly visible. Then the eye receded, its lid closing, the swirling liquids swallowing it up. No colors had been evident — the egg's translucent shell yielded only shads of gray — but the shape, the proportions, gave Joseph a shudder of familiarity. It had been, without a doubt, Mara's eye.

The doorbell rang.

Gabriella was dressed casually, and for a moment Joseph didn't recognize her. "Joseph," she said to him, "I'm so sorry it took this long for me to hear of what happened." He stepped aside as she entered. She slipped off her jacket and handed it to him. "Ah, I think I smell our Red Harmony Blend Number Six," she continued. "Always my choice in times of stress. I hope it's helping you."

He draped her jacket across a wall hook, turned to see her rum-

maging through her purse. "I... Thank you for coming, but I..."

"Instead of tea, I thought we might try this," she said, showing him a smallish wine bottle. "You'll find it quite soothing." She stepped toward him.

"Thank you, I'm not much for... I'm not..." He squinted. There was no liquid in the bottle, just a jagged shape at the bottom. It seemed to be moving. It seemed to have small legs.

"Oh, Mr. Carpenter," she sighed, working open the cork. "Such a disappointment." Her words seemed out of sync with the movement of her lips. "Our oracles were so sure that you and your wife would bring forth the miracle we've been trying so hard to engender." She dropped the cork on the floor. "But none of the eggs we retrieved from here were viable. Not one." The shape in the bottle had clambered up to the neck, and was squeezing itself out the top. "Ah, well, at least our US product line is ready to launch. Material success must count for something, yes?"

Joseph backed away. The shape that crouched on top of the wine bottle was unfolding an array of stingers, pincers and spikes. "We'll use this prototype to work out what went wrong with you, from the inside out," she said. "Try to get away if you like, this one is very fast and already has your scent."

Joseph could not take his eyes off the thing. It launched itself from the bottle, landing at his feet in the time it took him to blink. It was making clicks and whirrs, and dripping bitter-smelling fluid. Joseph took a step backward. Then he heard the bottle crash. Gabriella was on the floor; she pushed herself upright and Joseph saw a black shape wrapped tight around her neck. She clawed at it, gasping, red-faced.

A high-pitched whine flooded the room. The insect-thing on the floor backed away from Joseph, then shattered to dust.

Joseph had to press his hands to his ears. When the noise cycled off, he saw Gabriella lying on her back, moaning, blood running from her nostrils. Something slithered away from her, a worm-like shape three feet long and thicker than a garden hose. It was segmented, black, glistening. A trio of antennae extended from one end, thin as piano wire and almost as long as its body. Gabriella moaned softly. Joseph felt his legs weakening; he knelt. The worm-thing turned toward him, whipping its antennae, then raised a third of its length off the ground. It shivered. Joseph could see, now, a trail of broken black eggshell in the hallway.

The creature reared into the air like a cobra, its blind head waving slowly. And then, with the sound of metal scraping on metal, a pair of appendages unfolded from either side of the thing's tubular body. The wings were wide and smooth,

and they shone like black mirrors. Their edges were as fine and cruel as razors. They unfurled until their spread was greater than the width of a man's shoulders.

Joseph tried, but could not speak. At the two outside corners of the wings, near the uppermost tips, were bulges that ripped open and became bright, wet, vividly human eyes. Eyes as big as saucers, but human, with hazel irises just like Mara's, and delicate lashes and wrinkled eyelids. The eyes widened, blinked at the same time, one at the far tip of each wing, and they stared at him.

He heard humming in the back of his ears. "I understand," he said, rising. "They will seek you out to destroy you. We have to leave. A place has been prepared..." A rattle of breath escaped from Gabriella's unconscious form. Joseph went into the kitchen to find a knife.



Credits

Written by: Alan Alexander, Russell Bailey, Rick Chillot, Will Hindmarch, Luke Johnson, Amber E. Scott and Malcolm Sheppard

World of Darkness created by Mark Rein • Hagen.

The Storytelling System is based on the Storyteller System designed by Mark Rein • Hagen.

Developer: Luke Johnson

Editor: Scribendi.com

Art Director: Mike Chaney with matt millberger

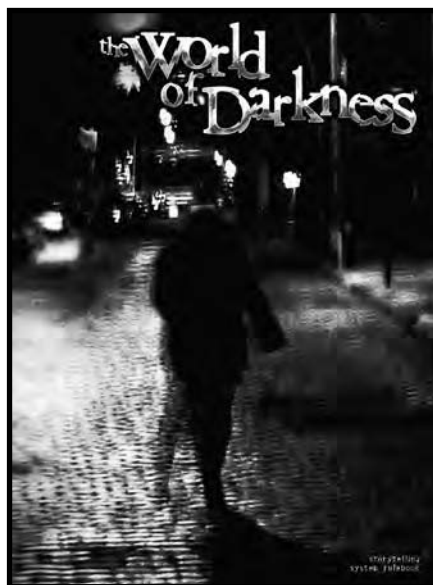
Layout & Typesetting: Craig S Grant

Interior Art: Heather Kreiter, Avery Butterworth, Glen Osterberger, James Stowe, Alexander Dunnigan, Travis Ingram, Jeremy McHugh, Leif Jones, Jim Pavelec, Andrew Trabbold, Doug Dabbs, John Goldsack, Diana J Bedell, Eunsuk Jang, Hung Le, Mike Chaney &

Front Cover Art: Becky Jollensten

Front & Back Cover Design: Craig S Grant

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For use with the
World of Darkness Rulebook



1554 LITTON DR
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA
30083
USA

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urban legends

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t.r.u.t.h.

AMT

STAY AWAY FROM EARWIGS!!!

CHOPPER MONTY

BEWARE!

(AFTER HALE)

Introduction

EARWIGS LAY EGGS IN YOUR BRAIN.

Drugged innocents wake up in bathtubs of ice, their kidneys cut out.

A woman in New Jersey gave birth to a devil.

HUMAN-EATING ALLIGATORS LIVE IN THE SEWERS.

WHISPER BLOODY MARY INTO A MIRROR, AND SHE APPEARS.

IF YOU SEE YOUR DOUBLE, YOU ARE ABOUT TO DIE – OR GO INSANE.

These are urban legends. In the real world, these stories are (hopefully and thankfully) untrue. In the **World of Darkness**, though, they are true. In fact, they are more than true: the truth behind each legend is weirder, darker, more sinister, more horrifying and/or hides more secrets than it would if it were true in the real world.... As you will see in the following chapters.

Organization

The chapters in this book fall into several types, depending on how the authors felt the urban legend could best serve your needs.

Some urban legends are presented as scenarios, giving you the background, key characters and other important information about a certain event or location. The scenarios also provide ideas for stories involving that scenario. Use these scenarios to tell whatever sorts of stories you like – or perhaps a series of stories.

Some urban legends are presented as stories rather than scenarios, broken into acts and scenes. These offer a concrete story you can tell, though of course you are welcome to alter them as you see fit.

The third option is a combination of a scenario and story, in which the first part of the chapter consists of a scenario, and the second part fleshes out a story idea in more detail.

These scenarios and stories are designed for mortal **World of Darkness** characters. However, you can alter them to challenge supernatural characters such as vampires, werewolves or mages, and easily tie them into the societies of these creatures. When doing so is particularly pertinent, suggestions appear.

Storyteller Aids

One way in which this book differs from some similar **World of Darkness** books is that it provides more help for the Storyteller. Obviously you, as the Storyteller, must be able to ad-lib, to improvise and allow the story to unfold fluidly – and, since you chose to be your troupe's Storyteller, you probably enjoy doing so. But that doesn't mean we can't help you out! Therefore, you'll find that some sections in this book are written with the idea that Storytellers might read them directly to the players, or paraphrase them as appropriate. This text is often enclosed in a box. Also, the "Description" sections of Storyteller characters appear in a style that allows Storytellers to read them directly, should Storytellers wish to do so.

Other helpful bits appear throughout. For example, the descriptions of the sewers in Chapter 4 include bullet points of features characters might notice. In

"Superstition belongs to the essence of mankind and takes refuge, when one thinks one has suppressed it completely, in the strangest nooks and crannies; once it is safely ensconced there, it suddenly reappears."

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

many cases, the legends appear as if Storyteller characters were relating them to the troupe's characters, or as documents that the characters might discover.

Legends Across the World

Occasionally, the legends refer to something that depends on the story taking place in America ("call 911") or assumes other information about the countries involved ("The Mexican Pet" assumes that Mexico is a popular, foreign tourist destination). These references are included to preserve the nature of the urban legends. However, you can easily alter these references to suit the needs of your chronicle (replace "911" with the local emergency number; tell a story about "The Guatemalan Pet" instead).

Using Urban Legends in Your Chronicle

World of Darkness stories, whether they follow people touched by the otherworldly or people who become it, walk the line between the known and the unknown, the encouraged and the unacceptable. Urban legends are about the price paid for crossing that line, about the terrors waiting on either side. Legends make excellent bases for one-shots or for stories in an ongoing chronicle. However, legends also present a unique set of challenges.

Forewarned and Forearmed

When planning a story based on an urban legend, be prepared for your players to recognize the legend.

A familiar story can help the Storyteller and her players stay on the same page. For example, a familiar device such as a hook-handed lunatic on the loose tells everyone that the danger to the characters is immediate and violent. Knowing a little about what to expect can also give players more opportunity to explore their *characters'* reactions, rather than the players' own. Also, familiar aspects of a legend can reinforce one of the themes shared by urban legends and **World of Darkness** chronicles: that common fears come true more often than people would like to believe.

At the same time, **World of Darkness** stories often involve investigation and discovery. Players might feel cheated when they already know what they're going to discover. To

avoid this dissatisfaction, the legends in this book provide secrets to uncover and characters with whom to interact that are not part of the legend we all know.

Adapting the Legends

Urban legends, as we know them, are often complete stories. They begin with a mundane setup, such as "a woman adopts a stray dog," and build toward a simple punch line, such as "the dog was really a rat!" Badda-bing, end of story – but not in a **World of Darkness** chronicle. This book expands and complicates those stories, revealing hidden truths and sinister plots.

Two strategies are particularly useful in adapting urban legends as **World of Darkness** stories. Use these strategies to create your own stories from urban legends not included in this book, or to alter these chapters as you like.

Living the Legend

The troupe's characters take the place of the protagonists (or antagonists) in the traditional legend. One of them adopts a Mexican rat-dog, or receives a piece of Halloween candy holding a razor blade. Most urban legends end when the twist is revealed, but most roleplaying stories continue until the characters find some resolution, so stories following this pattern go further than the original. For example, "The Hook" traditionally ends with the teenagers discovering that they unwittingly encountered an escaped lunatic, whereas a Storytelling game would probably continue until the protagonists confront, capture or escape him.

Picking Up the Pieces

An event in the legend draws the attention of the characters. Since many urban legends involve murders, the discovery of a body is an obvious way to involve professional investigators such as police. Similarly, evidence of occult rituals or strange phenomena could attract monster hunters or other paranormal investigators. In these stories, the troupe's characters step in to uncover the truth or end the danger, often protecting or thwarting the characters in the original story.

Local Color

As legends travel from one friend of a friend to another, they acquire characteristics particular to the teller, and to the area where they are told. You can do the same with the material in this book, adapting the legend to the city in which the story is set. You can replace many of the Storyteller characters with characters established earlier in your chronicle. The cor-

rupt bureaucrats in “Alligators in the Sewers,” for example, may have talked to or stymied the characters in an earlier story. The elementary school in “The Maker’s Mark” could be the same one attended by a character’s children. In any story, the victim can be someone the characters already know.

If your story or chronicle is set in a real place, such as your troupe’s home town, local versions of the legend may already exist. In Maryland, for example, versions of “The Hook” feature a man in a rabbit costume. Versions of “The Vanishing Hitchhiker” are told everywhere, and she often appears at specific intersections or landmarks. A little research into local variations can add to the atmosphere and draw the troupe further into the story.

The Urban Legend Chronicle

In the *World of Darkness*, urban legends tell the truth more faithfully than in the real world. Every scary story told over a campfire, gory tale told in a locker room, or mass-emailed warning probably has some basis in fact — and the facts are worse than the story believes. Exploring urban legends can form the basis for an entire chronicle. A group of characters might come together specifically to unearth the strange truths in their city, or simply keep stumbling into extraordinary events.

Children

Urban legend chronicles are particularly well suited to young protagonists. Many urban legends circulate mainly among kids, for example, “Bloody Mary,” or reflect the way in which adults interact with children, such as “Bad Candy.” The events in some stories also specifically target children, as in “The Jersey Devil.” Children are curious, imaginative and often have a lot of free time. The limitations imposed upon children can also tax the problem-solving skills of the troupe and their characters. All of these make children ideal characters with which to explore urban mythology.

Chapters

The following chapters appear in this book:

“Eggs” by Rick Chillot. This piece of fiction opens the book and sets the tone.

Chapter 1: Unwilling Organ Donors by Will Hindmarch. Stories say that if you’re unlucky at a hotel bar, you are liable to awake in an ice-filled bathtub, bereft of certain organs — especially the important kidney. Why do people take these organs? To sell them to underground doctors, perhaps — at least, that’s the legend in the real world. How much more terrifying is the truth in the *World of Darkness*?

Chapter 2: The Jersey Devil by Amber E. Scott. Ever wonder how the Jersey Devils ice hockey team got its name? Legend says that a young woman became pregnant with an unwanted child. “Oh, let it be a devil!” she cried in despair. Be careful what you wish for.

Chapter 3: Bloody Mary by Malcolm Sheppard. Bloody Mary, they say, haunts mirrors. Look into one and speak her name, and her reflection wavers into existence. Perhaps she’ll do your bidding and curse your enemies; perhaps she’ll kill you. The legends are unclear.

Chapter 4: Alligators in the Sewers by Luke Johnson. They say tourists bring back baby alligators from Florida and flush them down the toilets. The reptiles wind up in the sewers. They grow large on a diet of rats and raw sewage. Maybe they’re blind. Maybe they’re albinos. Either way, they seek to return to the surface.

Chapter 5: Doppelgängers by Alan Alexander. Rumors of these strange beings — if that’s what they are — circulate like sharks around a lifeboat. Some say that if you see your doppelgänger — someone who looks just like you — your death will shortly follow. Others say that your doppelgänger is like an evil twin, committing heinous deeds in your name. In the *World of Darkness*, the truth is more horrible still.

Chapter 6: Somebody Told Me by Russell Bailey. The preceding five urban legends are those we decided make for the most interesting stories in the *World of Darkness*. Lots of cool urban legends are out there, though, and maybe you think we were wrong.

Chapter 6 is a grab bag of additional urban legends, each with a history and description and ideas of how you might use and pervert the legend in the *World of Darkness*. This chapter includes everything from poison apples on Halloween to circles in crop fields.

Enjoy!



Unwilling Organ Donors

The Legend

"Here's one for you. You've heard this one, I'm sure, but there's a twist on it, so pay attention.

"A guy's sitting in a crappy hotel bar, right — like this one, okay, but worse.

(To the bartender) "Hey, honey, can I get another? And, hang on—

(To you) "You want another one? Come on, one more. Yeah, there you go.

(To the bartender) "And one more for him, huh? Thank you, dear.

(Back to you) "Okay, so. He's a traveler, maybe, like a salesman or a business guy on a trip for work, and he meets this lady at the bar. Red dress, legs, the whole thing. Improbably, she looks at him. She digs a cigarette out of her bag, sets it on the bar. Then she looks at him again. She wants him to offer her a light, right? So he does, he leans over with a lighter, but she says how there's no smoking in bars anymore.

(To the bartender) "Thanks, sweetie.

(To you) "But she's like 'Hey, I've got to smoke this thing, let's go up to my room so I can smoke this cigarette.' And this guy, he's no idiot, so he says yes, right?

"This is good scotch, huh? I mean for, well, scotch, it's not shit.

"They go upstairs and she lets him into her room, but he's pretty dizzy, right? He didn't have that much to drink, but he's getting all, like, spacey. You know.

"And he passes out. There in her room. They haven't done anything, he hasn't laid a finger her. But out he goes.

"The next morning, he wakes up in the bathroom, in the tub, right, and it's full of ice, half-melted, packed in there with him. He hurts, like, he's sore, and he notices that the water's all pink with like little cloudy swirls of red in it. As his eyes focus, he sees the chair from out in the room is set next to the tub, and the phone's on it, stretched to end of its cord. A little hand-written sign is set next to it, on a folded bit of hotel stationary, and it says, DON'T MOVE. TOOK KIDNEY. CALL 911.

"He calls. And they're all like, 'Stay in the tub, sir, don't touch the stitches,' yadda yadda. And the paramedics arrive, and they're all like business-like about it. No big deal. 'Yeah, buddy, they took your kidney. Be glad they didn't take both.' They see this shit all the time, but people play it off like it's a myth, right, 'cause nobody wants to be afraid to talk to people in a hotel bar. Nobody wants to think that they're just parts to somebody else.

"Anyway, here's the thing about that story: the woman doesn't matter. Turns out most guys will go upstairs just for the cigarette. Or drink down any two ounces with ice bought for him by a stranger. Trust me on this. I've done this a few times.

"So finish your drink, buddy. It'll be easier on everybody."

Telling a Story About Stolen Kidneys

To adapt this legend into a great **World of Darkness** story, you have to do only two things:

- Add a dose of the supernatural — or the appearance of it, and
- Make the story personally dramatic for the players and their characters.

The goal of this story isn't to discover who has committed this bloody robbery — the victim probably already saw the face of his attacker, anyway. The goal

"The vanity of the sciences. Physical science will not console me for the ignorance of morality in the time of affliction."

— Blaise Pascal

Blaise Pascal

of this story is to find the kidney thief and... then what? Get revenge? Understand his motives? That's the decision the characters make at the end of this tale.

"Unwilling Organ Donors" stories are about the choices the characters make in the climactic scenes when they finally come face-to-face with their attackers, whether or not the characters already knew who their attackers were.

Don't worry about constructing a precise trail of evidence or a slew of obtuse clues that challenge the players and their characters to "solve" the crime. A kidney-thief story is best when it is not a mystery. A mystery ends when the protagonists piece a puzzle together and solve it, but what if the characters (or the players!) fail to put the pieces together? The story rolls to a stop like a car out of gas.

A story about unwilling organ donors plays best as a thriller. A thriller ends when the protagonists confront and, presumably, foil the antagonists. Arguably, a thriller is a mystery in which the reader already knows who the bad guy is. That works here. The characters already know who the villain is. They know because one of them has already seen his face.

They know because they're the victims.

Building a Story Out of Stolen Kidneys

An "Unwilling Organ Donors" story is too personal to be laid out in prefabricated scenes that hopefully match the motives, Vices and Virtues of your players' characters. In this chapter is the framework for a story for you to build especially for your troupe. At the center of that story is the character (or characters?) whose kidney is stolen before the tale begins.

Your goal is to dramatize and react to the characters' successes and failures, increasing the tension as they approach the climax. Your goal is to make sure the drama is as high as it can go when the characters arrive at the final scene, whether that takes them one game session or three. The question isn't whether or not they reach the end of the puzzle, necessarily, but what shape they're in when they get there — and if the characters change along the way.

No matter how the story ends, be sure it feels like an ending. Real-life investigations peter out all the time, but a story about an investigation shouldn't. The story might end badly for the players' characters because of bad luck, but you can still find a dramatic resolution in that: in the end, this might be a story about characters who ruined their lives in pursuit of revenge, even if that's not the story you expected to tell.

Theme

Is it better to know the truth? Is safety an illusion? What's to stop someone from just walking away with a part of you? In a world where we can collide with random violence without warning and be forever hurt by it, how do we feel safe?

Is revenge worth it? Is revenge even real, or do we only hurt ourselves more by chasing after it? Would you risk your morality for peace of mind? Would you risk it for flesh?

The farther you go to reclaim what you've lost, the farther you must walk back to get it back home again.

Mood

The mood of this story is classic World of Darkness: disorientation in a city rendered unfamiliar by revealed secrets. From the brutal opening scene in a hotel bathroom to the dramatic confrontation at the end, the atmosphere of this story is one of peculiarity and dissonance — of strange things happening in normal places.

Summary

One of the characters wakes up in a tub of ice, his kidney stolen. The characters then go on the trail of the thief, though exactly what the encounter entails depends on the story you wish to tell.

History

People have been stealing organs for a long while, and kidneys perform important roles in the body. They filter toxins from the blood, and adrenal glands sit on top. You might want to do some research on the history of organ harvesting and the biological importance of kidneys. However, verisimilitude is better than reality. The medicine in your story doesn't have to be genuinely authentic. It should feel realistic, but it doesn't have to be real.

If you do some research, use your kidney knowledge to give your story the ring of truth. Name-drop a few medical terms to make a character sound informed and create a vaguely medical atmosphere, but don't forget what your story is really about: random violence and revenge, and a journey into a ghoulish subculture that contacts the surface world of normalcy only through cruelty, cunning and dehumanizing crimes.

Some factual kidney and organ-harvesting information has thematic value to your story and/or can serve some mechanical purpose to the plot. The symbolic and practical roles of the kidneys as filters are vital to the motives of the demonologists and secret surgeons described later in this chapter, while the presence and purpose of the adrenal glands are essential to the goals of the junkies.

System-Flashbacks

"Unwilling Organ Donors" is great for flashbacks, because the victim can't remember much about what happened on the night of the attack. Flashbacks are helpful whether you use them to deliver essential clues at dramatically appropriate moments or to give the players a chance to exert some retroactive influence over the actions that precede your story's first scene.

Flashbacks can happen in any act of this story, as you see fit. You might use them in the second or third act to subtly influence the dramatic choices the characters make. (Will the victim murder his attacker if he gets a flashback of himself under the knife?) You might also use flashbacks in the first act to get the ball rolling.

Flashbacks as Exposition

This method is the simplest way to use flashbacks. Whenever the players or their characters need a vital clue to move the story forward or clarify some of the information they've uncovered during their investigation, you might flashback to the night of the attack and offer some tantalizing detail that helps guide the characters.

Consider carefully how much information you reveal via flashbacks, though. You don't want the players just waiting around for the next filmstrip telling them what to do. Flashbacks may be unreliable, colored by the victim's spite or grief. A flashback might provide nothing more than a snippet of dialogue or a tiny tactile detail — enough to motivate the characters but not enough to close the case. For example, a character might cut his thumb on a knife or piece of paper and recall an instant when his attacker did the same thing — giving the character a flashback glimpse of the attacker's hand, and maybe a couple of telling details.

Playable Flashbacks

Playable flashbacks serve essentially the same purpose as expositional flashbacks in this story; the difference is that a playable flashback gives the player real influence over the backstory, diminishing his sense that he and his character were helplessly victimized. A playable flashback is simply an action that occurs in flashback — an action in which you do not predetermine the outcome, even though it happens before the actual beginning of the scenario.

The key to these flashbacks work is to keep them short and potent. You want each flashback to focus on a single important choice (e.g., lash out at the kidney thieves or not?), represented by a single action. Remember, the outcome of the attack is a foregone conclusion — the victim gets victimized. These playable flashbacks give the player a sense of agency despite his character's victimization.

For a playable flashback to have any use in the story, the consequences of the action in the flashback must help or hinder the characters later on in the story. You should devise playable flashbacks to match the circumstances of your story, but here are a few to get you started:

- **Fighting Back:** Strength + Weaponry — the kidney thief's Defense. The character flashes back to the night of the attack, when he managed to get his hands on something solid, such as an ashtray or a scalpel, and strike out at his attacker once before the anesthetic reclaimed him. If the kidney thief suffers damage from this attack, he may still be hurt when the characters find him — maybe they'll recognize him by his wounds or bruises. Whether the victim manages to hurt the

thief or not, just lashing out may make the thief more wary of (or pissed off at) the victim when they meet later.

- **Memorize an Important Detail:** Wits + Stamina. In this flashback, the character has a chance to commit some essential details to memory while fighting the effects of anesthetic. Maybe the character came up with some mnemonic to jog his memory and gradually recalls it as he recovers. (Is the song "Corpus Christi Bay" stuck in the character's head because he's trying to remind himself of his attacker's hometown?) Each success scored on this action grants the character one bonus die to add to any other dice pool during the second act's investigation. These bonus dice may be spent all at once or broken up over several actions.

- **Connect with the Attacker:** Manipulation + Empathy — Composure. Either during a break in the anesthetic or during the conversation at the bar beforehand, the victim has a chance to make an emotional impact on his attackers. If he succeeds on this action, he gains a +3 dice bonus on one Social action against his attacker during the confrontation in the third act. If he fails, the victim confuses his emotions in the final act, suffering a -2 dice penalty on rolls to resist the antagonist's Intimidation, Persuasion or Empathy Skills — the presence of the attacker makes the victim feel small and weak all over again.

Motivations

In this story, one or more of the characters wakes up inside the urban legend.

When the story opens, the character you've chosen to be the tale's victim wakes up in a hotel bathtub full of ice water. Next to him is a phone. Next to the phone is a note. What happens next is up to the player. Hopefully, the characters investigate the perpetrators.

If need be, you can choose to target one of the characters' Retainers, Mentors or Allies instead. Some players may find the unavoidable victimization of their character to be something other than frightening; they might be frustrated. Some players don't find the fun in this kind of horror. You know your players best, but no opening to this story is more memorable than the one that hurts their characters personally.

Having your kidney stolen is scary, and going after the perpetrators might be just as frightening. Characters might recoil from their attackers and choose to avoid the rest of the tale — for the moment. Below are a few ways you can inspire the players to get back on the playing field:

- **They're on Their Own.** What the EMTs, doctors, family members, Retainers and other Storyteller characters say during the early scenes of this story is important. You want to send your players this clear signal: it's up to them to investigate what happened. Don't play up the fatalistic, nothing-we-can-do attitude of paramedics and police if you think the players will read too much into it. Don't provide them with an eager detective if you think the players will expect him to do all of the work for them. Where the players go, their characters follow, so use dialogue to inspire the players to take action.

Long thin slices - not lik meat
More like bacon or roast beef.

DON'T GLAND

Rub in one
pound of su
pounds of fl
spoon full of
with cream,
six or eight
and half
butter -- g
chicken or me

APPLY
LEFT GLOVE
HERE

Weight?

No Fatties, kidneys
would have way
too much fat -
fry up to nothing

PINCH WITH
CLAMP FIRST!

AT LEAST 1"..
MAKE 1.5" to be
SAFE.

★ LEFT
FIRST?
HIS LEFT
OR MINE?
CALL CHUCK
FIND OUT!

SHAVE THE ARE
NO CONTAMIN

• **Let Them Heal First.** The characters might not feel up to the task of investigating the attack if they're still reeling from their injuries. That's fair. On the one hand, you want them going wounded into the dark for the sake of drama, but on the other hand, the story can't happen without them. Go ahead and fast-forward a few weeks for the sake of playability, if that helps. Yet don't forget to play up the lingering soreness and scars from the night that set this story in motion — those things don't need to affect a character's game mechanics to affect the drama.

• **Follow-Up Dangers.** The detective on the case quietly sweeps it under the rug. One of the paramedics who helped at the hospital goes missing. The hotel clerk who was the cops' big lead turns up dead. For whatever reason, depending on the antagonist you've chosen, the attack wasn't the end of the case; it was the beginning. Unless the characters do something, more people suffer or die.

• **Nightmares.** This method is heavy-handed, but it works: nightmares plague the characters until they find some answers and make some sense out of what happened to them. Are these nightmares echoes of some occult witchcraft being performed with the missing kidney, or is the character simply psychologically scarred from his ordeal? Either way, the characters can't run away forever. (To give this option real teeth, give the victim or a character close to him a derangement representing his hindering fear.)

• **Chance Meeting.** Weeks or months after the attack, the characters run into someone from the night of the attack, just by chance. At first, the character might not be sure it's the same person — but it is. Answers are just within reach. What does he do to get them? (This option might even be a red herring, a symptom of the "Nightmares" option above. What if the character hurts an innocent stranger because the character thinks the person is the kidney thief?)

Act 1

The story begins where the urban legend ends: in a hotel bathtub full of ice, next to a phone and a handwritten sign. The victim(s) wake up hurt and confused. What happens next is a blurry tangle of drug-fogged memories that carry the characters through a brief first act and into the second.

This act is punctuated by a few key decision points, but the characters have little freedom at this point. This first act railroads the players a bit, something like an interactive cut-scene in a video game, so don't linger here. Use this first act to set up the scenario, establish your mood and then get on with the second act.

Despite all that advice, the first act is the most thoroughly described herein. Hopefully, the detail helps you adapt the story for your players. You'll probably use bits of this information throughout all three acts. The first act should take up only 10% or 20% of the story, though the information here reverberates through everything that follows.

Scene 1: Waking Up

The victim wakes up in the hotel bathtub, an urban legend come to life. If you don't wish to improvise a description, read any or all of the following passages:

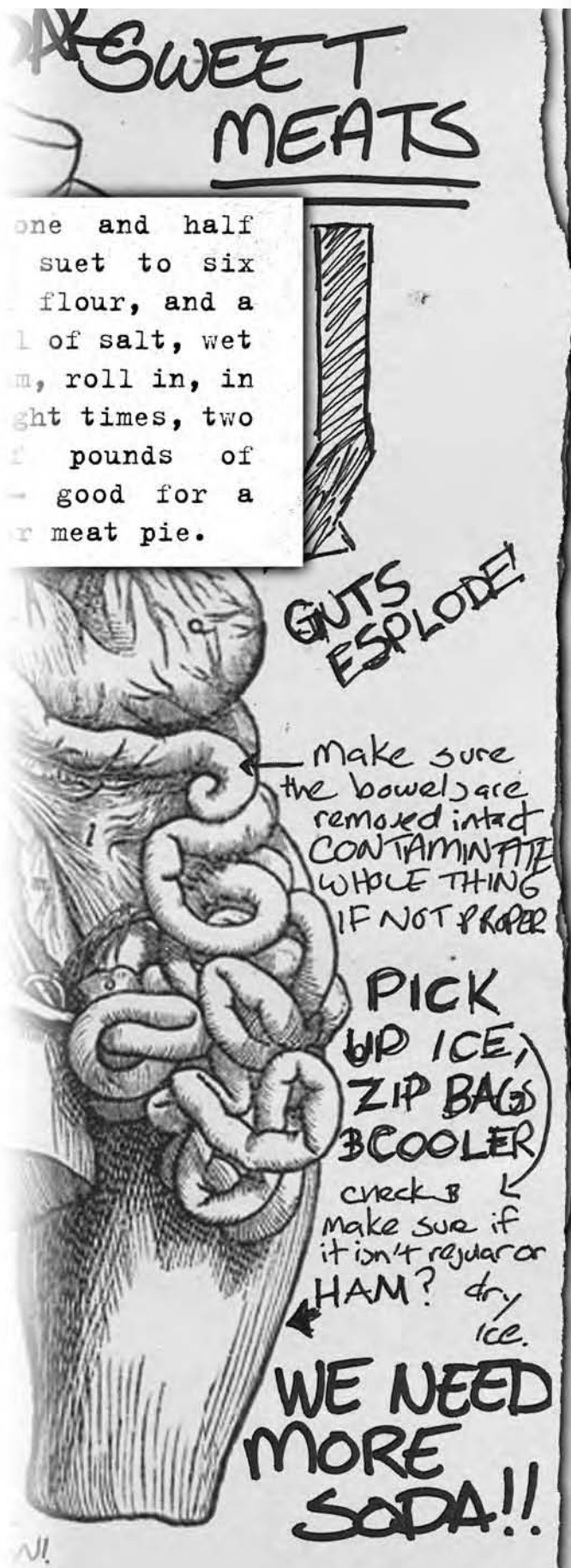
"Ice. Ice clinking. The slosh of melted cubes, like a tub of cold beers slowly warming in the sun. The ache of your freezing toes rises to the surface of your sleeping mind, followed immediately by the need to pee, as if you were a plastic bag filled with piss, about to burst at a weak seam. You smell alcohol and soap.

"Your eyes flutter open and find a hotel bathtub. Your right arm is a dead weight, lashed to the tub's metal rail by a plastic zip tie. You're naked in a pink ice bath, smoky curls of blood snaking around your legs. You ache. You ache with the stiffened bones of a night spent in a bathtub, with the dull swell of bruises, the cocooning pressure on your head of a hangover and the sore protest of a gash in your side.

"It feels like you've been taped to the bottom of the tub, and every move yanks the adhesive across your screaming skin.

"But it's not tape. You can feel the prickly, cactus-like texture of stiff sutures under your fingers. That tug is the pull of tight stitches holding your body shut around a C-shaped scar beneath your ribs.

"The floor is littered with discarded plastic packages and spent rubber gloves. Bloody tissues and ejected cardboard tubes from roll after roll of paper towels lie at the feet of a wooden chair. Sitting on the chair's floral-patterned seat is a white hotel-room phone at the edge of its cord. A piece of folded hotel stationary stands on the seat. Thick, black magic-marker letters read, CALL 911."



Call and Response

The victim's first real choice is what to do with the phone. Lashed to the tub as he is, he's mostly helpless until his rescue arrives. (You might have the other characters arrive before the victim gets too far into the story without them.) Whatever phone calls the victim makes, remember the pace and tone of this act: vague, dreamlike, horrific. Rather than play out the specific dialogue, give the victim just patches of words that he can recollect. For example, "You remember the 911 operator asking you your room number. 'Is it on the front of the phone, sir?' she asks, and it is."

Presumably, paramedics and police eventually arrive. If not (maybe the characters are the kind of people who avoid police contact), adapt the action to reflect the course the characters choose. Substitute the victim's friends or Allies for the paramedics, swap out the ER or ICU for a cheap motel room. Whatever you do, however, avoid the temptation to use the 911 operators, paramedics or other responders for comic relief. Use sketches of dialogue and a cold, professional demeanor to remind the victim of the seriousness of the situation. For example:

"Sir, you need to lie still right now. We need to keep those sutures intact, all right?"

"All right, let's get him onto the board. Careful with those legs, he's oozing pretty good right now."

"Man, another half-hour or so and he might not have come out of a dose like that."

The time between the response and the recovery (see "Scene 2: Recovery") is not meant to be a playable experience — the characters should take the controls at the beginning of Act Two. To add interactivity and depth to this sequence, though, you can experiment with playable flashbacks (see below) that end with the player finally regaining full control over his character when he awakens during "Scene 2: Recovery."

If you roll dice for any of the actions in this scene (remembering that you might be better off using this time to set up the story and let the victim characterize the scene), keep the character's injuries in mind, as described under "The Damage Done," later in this chapter.

What Came Before

How did the victim end up in a hotel bathtub? How did he encounter his attacker? Why didn't the victim escape the attack? The answers to these questions depend on the victim — not everyone talks to strangers in hotel bars — and are part of the mystery that pulls the story forward. If the characters want answers to these questions, they must find their attackers and ask them.

The immediate answer, however, is that the victim doesn't remember much. The anesthetic his attackers used (and a dose of dramatic license) has dug a hole in his memory. All he can recall are flashes of frightening imagery — bloody hands pressing him against cold porcelain, the metallic smell of anesthetic squirted from a syringe, the snap of rubber gloves, the stink of a burnt match.

Meaningful details surface only when you need them, either to propel the characters deeper into the story, to satisfy the players' interest or to scare them. These details come in the form of flashbacks, as described earlier in the chapter.

Below are two examples of the attack you can use to inspire your own version of events:

- The night happens just as the opening of this chapter suggests, with a drugged drink at a hotel bar leading to the victim upstairs in a stupor and hit with a more severe dose of a medical anesthetic. This event leaves the character with an obvious lead: the bartender must remember something, and may even have been the one who spiked the victim's drink. This is a good fit for Social-oriented victims or characters with the Barfly Merit.

- The attack is random. The victim is ambushed while getting into his car (or waiting for a bus or the subway) in a lonely parking lot and wakes up in the hotel room, with no sense of how he got there — he was either struck unconscious or grabbed around the mouth with a dosed handkerchief. This version of the night doesn't leave the character with any leads outside those provided by flashbacks or the default clues at the hotel but explains how virtually any character got attacked, regardless of his or her sociability.

Scene 2: Recovery

The victim presumably travels by ambulance to a local hospital where he gradually recovers from his injuries (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 62–63). You may want to suspend strict realism for the sake of drama. Even if a person in the victim's position would not be allowed to check himself out of a hospital in the real world, the victim should be allowed to leave at a dramatically appropriate time so you can move on to the second act.

If it adds believability or suspense, you might have a nurse help the characters sneak the victim out so he can get even (such a nurse could make a great future Ally or Contact). This opportunity could be a great one for the characters to make use of Stealth, Persuasion or even Resources (for bribes).

Whether the victim spends a day recovering or a month, this part of the story should pass quickly at the game table. Rather than having every player except the victim's running around doing things while the victim lays in bed, let each character perform one action in the time that passes. Boil it down to one abstract dice pool that describes how the intervening time is spent — Intelligence + Academics for time spent researching, Manipulation + Medicine for time spent interviewing doctors, for example. If this time-lapse action is

a success, give the character a clue or a lead on the next part of the story; if the action fails, the time simply doesn't yield anything noteworthy. Use the background information on kidneys and organ theft earlier in this chapter as your source for clues. Think of this as a movie montage that summarizes the recovery time in a few minutes of screen time, or just jump ahead outright ("A week later, when you step out of the hospital and into the sticky summer air...").

This recovery period is also where you reveal the long-term consequences of the attack. Just how bad things get for the victim is for you to decide. If the character has lost one or both kidneys, he now suffers from the appropriate Flaw (see the sidebar).

New Physical Flaws: Lost Kidneys

Solitary Kidney: Your character is short one kidney, whether from birth or as the result of some trauma in her life (such as forceful organ harvesting). In general, an individual with a single kidney can live an ordinary life unless circumstances conspire to threaten her remaining kidney. This Flaw is only dramatically meaningful when the Storyteller devises stories that specifically address the character's condition or as a counterpart to a Flaw such as Addiction for alcohol. Any Stamina tests made to determine the character's resistance to toxins or renal effects do not gain the benefits of the 10 again rule.

Acute Renal Failure: Your character has no functioning kidneys, perhaps as the result of disease or assault. Your character must undergo three- to five-hour hemodialysis treatments every three days to cleanse her blood of wastes and water. If she is unable to undergo these treatments, which require her to sit still in a room while her blood is pumped through a dialysis machine, she suffers one point of lethal damage every 12 hours. This damage cannot be healed through simple first aid or stabilization; this damage requires special medical attention and equipment.

Whether she receives regular treatments or not, the character suffers a -2 dice penalty on Stamina rolls to resist blood toxins or renal effects and does not use the 10 again rule on these rolls. Her diet is also affected (salt, potassium, phosphorus and water must be carefully controlled), providing you with simple details to roleplay.

You might let the character off easy:

"You're in luck, strangely," the doctor says. "For whatever reason, they didn't take your kidney. They certainly poked around in there, but maybe they got cold feet. Whatever happened, in time you'll be fine."

In the World of Darkness, this might be more unnerving than having an organ stolen. Did the attackers take something else from the victim? (A rare third kidney?) Did they leave something behind? If you choose to go this route with the story, you have to answer that question yourself, but the simplest answer is that the victim was, for whatever reason, unsuitable for the antagonist's needs.

The obvious risk, here, is that the characters may not pursue an investigation (or revenge) if they get off this lightly. Don't let them count their blessings and move on — you know how much it takes to compel your characters. Do what's necessary.

The Damage Done

The exact damage done to the victim is up to you, based on your needs for the story, but here are some guidelines:

Base Damage: The victim should have suffered at least three to five points of lethal damage from the surgery itself, with the rest of his Health boxes filled in with bashing damage from both the surgery and the ice bath (see "Temperature Extremes," p. 181 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

Time Factor: Increase or diminish the damage dealt to the victim to control the pacing or realism of the first act. More damage keeps the victim in the hospital longer or makes it harder for him to escape. Less damage explains his easy release from the ICU. More damage might add tension later in the story, as the characters worry about exposing the victim to more harm, but might also make them too timid to take risks.

Clues: The nature of the victim's injuries should say something about his attackers. Precise, clean cuts imply a trained hand, while ugly sutures and clumsy incisions imply an amateur or a rush job. In general, the more dots in Medicine the attacker has, the less damage she dealt to the victim. (This is the sort of clue you can impart to an investigator who's knowledgeable in Medicine.)

Scene 3: Victims and the Law

In as little time as possible, make it clear to the players and their characters that the police will be of little help to them. (This might already be obvious if the characters are criminals or fugitives or otherwise unwilling to solicit official help.) You can get this across when you summarize the time spent in recovery:

The next few days pass in a painkiller haze of half-hearted detectives and distracted doctors, all of whom regard you as a case number or a clipboard rather than a person. You overhear one detective say to his partner, "Stolen property's almost never recovered intact, anyway. Our time is better spent on cases we can win." That was the last you saw of them.

You can get this information across with dialogue from a police Contact, Ally or other supporting character, as well.

"The fact is that this kind of thing isn't as rare as you might think. But it's rare enough that we don't have any experience solving cases like these. This shit keeps happening because they get away with it. You're going to have to come to terms with this: closure probably isn't going to happen anytime soon unless you go out and get it yourself."

If any of the characters are cops, be prepared to make the same exceptions from reality you made at the hospital. Police officers are never formally allowed to investigate cases in which they or their loved ones are the victim, but people bend the rules for each other (or call in favors) all the time.

Act 2: The Investigation

At the start of the second act, the characters step out into the World of Darkness to investigate the attack. On the surface, this act is about the characters' search for information — the driving question for them is, "Who are the kidney thieves, and why do they do it?" Yet for you, the Storyteller, and the players steering those characters, the actual dramatic question in this act is, "What will it cost the characters to find the answers?"

The characters succeed — eventually, barely, bravely, shamefully, immorally or however the players' choices determine — but whatever happens, the characters succeed. If the story ends in anticlimax at the end of Act 3, that's fine; but if the story simply peters out during Act 2, the story fails as a thriller.

Being stymied by the impenetrable secrets of a shadowy underworld is not thrilling. Your characters don't want to be locked out of a hidden culture of organ thieves; your characters want to venture into that underground society and be shocked by what they find. You've got to take them there.

Don't let the characters lose the trail. The consequence for failure in any scene cannot be an unsolved mystery.

The consequence for failure should be a worsened, more challenging or costly situation when they arrive at the next scene. The consequence for failure should be lost resources as the characters spend time, money or favors salvaging interviews or loosening tongues. The consequence for failure should be the risk of moral decay and degeneration as the characters trespass, steal, terrorize or assault in pursuit of justice or revenge.

Remember that your goal isn't the same as the antagonists'. You're not here to keep the characters from discovering the truth; you're here to bring the World of Darkness to life for your players.

Following Leads

The characters' investigation should seem complex, but it's actually simple. You present the characters with clear leads to pursue, and the players decide in what order to follow them and how to behave when they do. Each investigative scene ends with one or more leads revealed to the characters, until finally they reach the climactic antagonist.

To determine how these leads unfold, you have to understand what it is the characters want. Are they out to punish everyone involved in the attack, even peripherally? Are they saving their vengeance for the catalytic antagonist who led to the attack, or are they interested only in the thief who did the actual cutting? Are they out to locate the final recipient of the victim's kidney, to see who benefited?

The easiest way to determine what the characters want is to ask the players, "What do your characters hope to achieve?" Do they want answers, vengeance, closure, power or something else? Whatever it is that they want, you should make them think that their goal is at the end of the next lead — the next thief has the kidney, the next target is the guilty one, the next fence is the one with all the answers. The chain of leads doesn't have to be long, but each lead should be interesting, casting new light on the hidden subculture the characters explore.

To create this chain, string together some of the antagonists from the "The Truths," later in this chapter, by creating links between them. All of these characters are tangentially related to the victimization, even if they took no part in the attack. Depending on the chain of leads you wish to construct, various antagonists may be casual acquaintances, business rivals, ideological opponents, business contacts, estranged lovers or anyone else who keeps your players intrigued, surprised and delving deeper.

Below are three example chains of leads, all starting at the site of the attack and all linking the antagonists in different ways:

- This street-level chain is based on business relationships and is a good model for characters who want to know the final destination of the stolen organ.

- The hotel bartender or desk clerk knows an organ broker as a semi-regular at the bar and knows he has front-row, season tickets to a local sports team.

- The broker reveals that he didn't do the cutting, he was just on hand to drug the target and package the organ for the real cutters, the Adrenal Junkies, who deal drugs out of a dance club downtown.

- The Adrenal Junkies kept the adrenal gland and sold the kidney via a black-market website to a local buyer; all they have is an address.

- The investigators visit that address and find the lair of the Gourmand.

- This chain is based on manipulation and exploitation by a powerful behind-the-scenes figure, pulling strings from afar, and is a good model for characters who want to uncover conspiracies.

- The hotel clerk was in cahoots with the Adrenal Junkies, who cut him a deal on drugs in exchange for his help and silence.

- For months, the Adrenal Junkies have been working for an organ broker, who caught wind of their operation and uses them for cheap manpower.

- The organ broker got his start in the organ trade when the Demon-Handlers first hired him to steal a kidney for them; they've been in business ever since.

- The Demon-Handlers' motivation is bullshit, though — the "demon" is just something the Immortal Alchemist uses to keep them motivated and quiet.

- One of the Demon-Handlers knows that the Alchemist takes kidneys for himself, here and there, and suspects he's using them for something else. If the characters reveal the Immortal Alchemist's lie, the Demon-Handlers turn on him.

- This twisted chain is based on debt, greed and crime. It's a good model for a sordid, complex net of weird happenstance, suitable for characters who want an elaborate tale or lots of vengeance.

- The hotel clerk received a hefty bribe from an organ broker to keep quiet.

- The organ broker planned to sell the kidney to the Demon-Handlers, but he got robbed at gunpoint by an Adrenal Junky, to whom the organ broker's sold in the past. The broker gladly sends the investigators at the Junky, to get revenge and keep his hands clean.

- The Junky gave up the organ to pay off the Immortal Alchemist, the creator of the Junky's drug.

- The Immortal Alchemist's trailer-park lab has been ransacked, and the Alchemist is dead. His kidneys (including the victim's) have been plundered by a neighbor — the Gourmand — who has been watching the Alchemist for weeks.

- A blood trail and the smell of frying butter and garlic leads the investigators to the Gourmand's apartment across the parking lot, where the victim's kidney is about to be cooked.

Dramatic Cost

The drama in each investigative scene comes from the potential personal price each interview costs the characters. Each lead in the investigation should put something at stake for the investigators. The dramatic question underlying each scene is, "What will it cost to get the next lead?"

Each of the antagonists behaves differently based on what the investigators put on the line. You can easily change each antagonist's behaviors, depending on the needs of your troupe and story, to suit the costs that are most important to your players and their characters.

Here are some ideas for you to think about:

- **Willpower:** Willpower is a useful resource in any scene. To goad a player into using Willpower, set your scenes in hostile environments and unfavorable circumstances — in the dark, in the rain, on an antagonist's home turf — to subtly encourage Willpower use to even the odds. Contested actions are another good way to provoke Willpower expenditure. Don't let Willpower be a merely mechanical expenditure, either. Dramatize the use of Willpower; a character with fewer Willpower points left is tired, potentially frustrated and possibly prone to indulge her Vices. If a character turns to drinking or violence in a scene as a means of recovering Willpower, that's a dramatic cost.

- **Morality:** How badly do the characters treat the antagonists? What sins do the characters commit to get what they want? Remember that it doesn't matter if the Junky ran or an organ broker called a character's mother a slut, these things don't morally justify theft, violence or murder on the characters' part. Will they risk moral degeneration to accomplish their goals?

- **Favor:** As the characters plunge into the black-market subculture of organ thievery, they may develop a reputation. If they befriend an organ broker early, they may find it easier to talk to the Demon-Handlers later. Alternatively, if the characters play nice with the Junky, the Immortal Alchemist may not take them seriously. How they interact with each antagonist earns or costs the characters favor and respect elsewhere. If the characters call in favors from Contacts or Allies, those favors might be gone later.

- **Resources:** Mundane and material resources such as money, time and ammunition can also be taxed. Getting arrested for assaulting the hotel clerk costs the characters time and bond money. Every lead they pursue potentially gives their final antagonist time to escape or prepare. One simple cost to add into any scene is a deadline: if the characters don't get from one lead to another in so many minutes, for example, they find the next lead complicated by a forewarning of the characters' arrival, discarded evidence or thugs waiting to beat the characters into giving up the case. If they don't get to the final antagonist in time, the victim's kidney is unrecoverable.

Act 3: Confrontation

How does the story end? What's the moral? Ultimately that's up to the players to decide for their characters. Your job is to create a dramatic situation in which no one action is obviously morally right, and then provoke the players to make a tough choice.

The moral of the story, if any, emerges naturally from that tough choice and its consequences for the characters. (Don't confuse the moral of the story with its theme, which you should strive to evoke in every scene.)

Act 3 begins when the characters find the final antagonist in your chain of leads. This antagonist is probably the Storyteller character who attacked the victim, the final recipient of the stolen kidney or the person who put the whole chain of events into motion and ultimately benefited from the crime. The third act might consist of a single scene in which the characters confront the story's main antagonist and choose how to deal with him, or the act might involve several scenes as the characters chase him down, capture him and deliver him to the authorities. This act is where the characters have real freedom, so you'll have to be ready to use any of the systems in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** in case the action leads to a foot chase, combat, interrogation or something else.

Whatever action unfolds, keep your eye on the tough choice. Each antagonist brings with him a dramatic choice that the characters must confront and resolve. The consequences of their decision should ripple outward into later stories in the chronicle.

The Tough Choice

The decisions the characters make at the climax shouldn't be simple. Ideally, they face a moral dilemma complicated enough to spur a debate (but not necessarily an argument) among the players about what choice to make.

The crux of a classic dilemma is the choice between two evils. For example, do the characters commit murder, or do they run the risk of letting more people be hurt in the future? In this final act, you should make the two outcomes clear to the players and their characters. You can do this through an antagonist's dialogue ("Go ahead and arrest me. I'll be out on bond by Wednesday.") or by just telling the players something their characters should be able to realize, such as, "If she's telling the truth, you'll be unleashing a monster if you let her go."

This process doesn't have to be long and shouldn't be frustrating, but it must be dramatic. It has to be meaningful. If the characters choose to put a bullet in the Gourmand, for example, the act of pulling that trigger shouldn't be a simple instant action such as a turn of combat.

Instead, slow the action down, linger on the hammer as it clicks back and snaps down. Dwell on the way the barrel shakes (or doesn't shake) just before the round goes off. Smell the cordite. Make it the loudest gunshot of the story.

Consequences

The consequences of the characters' choice in this act are what give their confrontation dramatic weight. The outcomes of the characters' actions should affect them in future stories, whether they are altered emotionally or through game mechanics. The **World of Darkness** has plenty of meaningful consequences built in for you to use: the characters might lose a Contact or Ally, they might gain a police record and jeopardize their Status in the city, they might change their Morality or develop a derangement.

Some consequences can be just as meaningful, even without immediate mechanical changes. The characters might make terrible new enemies or change their relationships with friends or comrades. Maybe a character's Retainer acts differently toward him now that he's a killer. Maybe the police keep tabs on the characters after they bring in an organ thief who claims to be doing battle with the devil.

The Flaws on p. 217 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** can give weight to the outcomes of the choices made in this act. For some players, simply surrendering a chance to get vengeance is dreadful enough. If it's not, a more tangible consequence waits in the wings: another player's character suffers from a new Flaw.

Rewards

Regardless of the nastiness of the unwanted consequences that you use to give this act's tough choice its teeth, don't stop the players and their characters from benefiting from their participation in this story. Don't punish them for participating. They have to make a difficult choice to succeed, but they can succeed.

In addition to regular experience awards, the characters might earn new Contacts or Allies through their dealings with the hospital staff, the police or the black market. The characters might find and keep a suitcase full of cash that once belonged to an organ broker. They might end up with a stash of the adrenaline drug, Rush. They might save lives by recovering kidneys meant for transplant patients.

Though this is the **World of Darkness** and this story is undeniably bleak for at least one of the characters, rewards still exist, even if they must be pried from dead fingers or pulled slick and bloody from someone's body.

Sequels

The core story is about the characters' chance discovery of an occulted world of organ harvesters, brokers and buyers. This story can be just the first part of a larger story, or even a whole chronicle, spent getting to know and be a part of this underground society. Over time, all the antagonists presented below might make an appearance in the characters' lives, possibly becoming Contacts, Allies or Retainers.

Depending on how the characters deal with the crime committed against them in the first story, their entry into the

big pond might be quiet and cautious or noisy and rough. Do they slip into the waters and observe the local wildlife? Or do they come splashing in, sending waves through the whole pond and attracting the big fish?

Whatever they do, their lives are altered by their victimization. The ramifications of the crime may be personal — the victim returns to his ordinary life of teaching or monster-hunting, knowing that the kidney-thief legends are true but, feeling powerless to make a larger difference, and spends the rest of his life hoping it doesn't happen to him again. Alternatively, the ramifications might be larger, but not rooted in the supernatural and, thus, maybe not a major feature in the rest of your chronicle. Or the characters' confrontations with flesh-harvesters might dominate the rest of their lives and the stories you tell about them.

The key question is whether or not the characters have reached the bottom of the organ-stealing underground in your World of Darkness when they find the people who attacked them.

The Truths

To create the sense of a tangled subculture of underground kidney traffickers, you need a variety of distinctive characters to play the parts of strangers on the road to the truth. Ideally, you'll cast several of these characters (or others of their type) into small roles that help the characters follow leads from the scene of the crime, through intermediaries and middle-man, past side-line characters and witnesses, and finally to the antagonists who ended up with the victim's kidney. (See "Following Leads" in "Act 2: The Investigation" for hints as to how to use these characters.) You are, of course, more than welcome to create your own characters as well. (See "Other Truths," at the end of this section, for some ideas.)

Each of these antagonists can serve you as a witness and informant or as a nemesis in the story's climax. Suggestions follow on how to use each of these characters in either role, as well as how your choice of final antagonist can be used to tailor and add meaning to the rest of the story.

Using the Antagonists

The antagonists presented in each of the following options are described only in partial game terms. The rest of their Traits are left for you to define relative to the players' characters, to match the power level and thematic focus of your chronicle. This chapter doesn't spend space on the antagonist's Skills and Merits, but rather focuses on background information and Storytelling hints.

If you like, you can fill in the blanks using one of the two archetypal organ thief descriptions at the end of this chapter, building the right antagonist for your version of the story out of the parts provided.

Adrenal Junky

You've got it all wrong. They're not after kidneys; it's the adrenal glands they want. The Adrenal Junkies make a sort of mystic drug out of human adrenaline. To feed their addiction, they need more adrenaline, which means more adrenal glands. Artificial epinephrine won't cut it — something about the human source gives the drug its exceptional quality. They call it Rush, not just because its high is so potent (and potentially lethal), but because it boosts physical power and finesse.

The Adrenal Junkies give you another layer of conspiratorial craziness for your World of Darkness — even the idea that they're stealing kidneys isn't what it seems. If these are the prime antagonists in your story, the story is about vicariousness and the grotesque excess of modern consumption in the name of entertainment and vanity. The Adrenal Junkies are so desperate to feel alive in the anonymous throng of urban noise that they've chased their addiction deep into human guts.

On the Trail

The Adrenal Junky is found at warehouse raves and in touristy, expensive dance clubs where convention-goers and suburbanites pay too much for lousy drinks. Catching him could be difficult, however, if a foot chase breaks out and the Junky is high on Rush (see below).

Because he's a loudmouth and hanger-on, any of the other antagonists can easily have heard of him. Because he's a selfish, petty coward, he can believably give up a lead on anyone else. He is well connected and informed, though he isn't respected. The Adrenal Junky has lots of information and few strings to pull. He's a good lead for the characters to push around.

- **Resources:** The Junky makes decent money selling his drug, but he's also materialistic, so his information can be bought with fashionable objects worth Resources •••• or more. This should be a test of the bribing character's fashion sense and connections as much as his money, though. The Junky wants chic stuff.

- **Morality:** The Junky isn't much loved, and every lead pointing at him should show that. If he gets roughed up, nobody will cry over him. The characters, however, can't find much moral solace in the fact that they assaulted an unpopular person.

- **Favor:** The Junky's wide connections and loose lips mean that whatever the characters do for him or to him is sure to get around. Hurting him makes other leads nervous and distrustful. Helping him makes the characters look like suckers.

Confrontation

Tough Choice: Stop the victimization of innocent people and get a dangerous drug off the streets, or gain access to a uniquely beneficial resource?

It's a simple question of greed: the Junky is eager to cut people in on his action if it means he gets spared pain or prison. For some players, ethics pale in the face of power-ups. Are they willing to let strangers get hurt for the sake of the players' own power? If they try to tread a middle ground by overseeing the Junky's operation, they've basically gotten into the business of illegal drugs.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa! Hold up! There's no way to get this shit made without fresh flesh, man. Uh, new glands. If you're gonna put this stuff to good use, isn't that worth a little anonymous harm? Here, take it. Do something good with it and even out the cost of doing business, huh?"

Rush: Mystic Adrenaline

The drug, Rush, is a bitter yellow fluid taken as drops through the nose. To make it, a character needs one human adrenal gland, chemicals and equipment about on par with a trailer-park meth lab (Resources ••), and the recipe. Concocting Rush is an extended Intelligence + Medicine action with a -2 dice penalty (for the drug's complexity); each roll represents four hours of work. Two rolls may be made for each adrenal gland, and each success yields two doses of Rush.

Each dose of Rush a user takes grants him a +1 die bonus to Strength and Stamina for about an hour. Additional doses increase the bonus but not the duration. Each dose deals two points of bashing damage to the user, which do not begin to heal until the drug's duration passes. When the drug wears off, terrible shakes impose a -2 dice penalty on the user's Finesse Attributes for a number of hours equal to the doses taken. Attributes cannot be reduced below 0 in this way.

A number of doses equal to the user's Stamina dots is enough to OD. Users overdosing on Rush must resist the drug's effects with a reflexive, contested Stamina + Resolve roll opposed by a dice pool made of the user's own Rush-boosted Strength +3 dice bonus. If the drug wins, each success causes the user a point of lethal damage as his cardiovascular system shakes itself to pieces and his kidneys struggle to manage the body's excess adrenaline.

The original recipe for Rush is as much alchemical as it is pharmaceutical. Devising a similar recipe requires at least three dots in Occult, but simply following the written instructions doesn't require any Occult knowledge.

Adrenal Junky. Ben Hernandez

Quotes: "It's good shit. You just, you, you don't understand it because you haven't really felt it. You don't know what a rush is. If you knew, you'd understand how good this shit is."

"Do you want a hit? Do you want to know? 'Cause when you know you won't be able to blame us, man. You can't deny this. You don't even know what fucking pissed feels like. This is fucking angry, right here, in here, in this bottle."

"Think! Think about this! You want to be the user or the used?"

Background: Ben's a savvy guy diluted by drugs. Back when he was supposedly attending classes at the state college, he spent his nights with a crew of insidious, soft-handed drug dealers peddling to suburban partygoers, club chicks and frat boys. Ben met all of these people through his love of skateboarding and dancing, and he got in good with the dealers by being smart and loyal but witless.

At first Ben was just a delivery guy, taking cardboard boxes full of single-hit bags to this underground warehouse rave or that. By the end of that first summer, he was also helping them mix up some new stuff, a steroid designed to



appeal to the all-night party crowd. A year later, Ben was following a recipe to make his own stuff, and his beloved designer-drug crew had moved on to another city without him (he thinks they're in Tokyo). Ben was heartbroken, but he thinks of himself as having "made it" since he's really one of them, now. He's the guy they chose to take on their mantle in this town, and he's sure that, one day, they'll come back and see him — if only because he's stopped sending them their share of his profits from Rush.

Description: His hair's styled almost to death, bleached and blackened and bleached again into a striped mess. He pinches at the air with his fingers like a senile smoker chasing after a phantom cigarette. His vaguely glam-rock faux-British cadence gives him a sort of Velvet Underground vibe. His skin looks smoke-dried and rough-worn like a sofa. His body language feels worn out despite his crisp hip-hop pants and striped, angular shirt. Red rims ring his eyes. His fingers are nicotine yellow.

Storytelling Hints: Eager, connected and pathetic. Ben's a guy without the wherewithal to rise out of the ranks of poseurdom. He wants people to think he's cool, but he's not the type to lord it over them. Instead, he drops names of people with whom he's been drunk and clubs where he's seen popular DJs. He tells people about the girls he's almost screwed and how hot everyone was "at this party I was at last night." He desperately wants to be happy, and he's convinced himself that he is. For sure, he can be happy if he can just get enough people to think he's great.

Demon-Handlers

The Demon-Handlers believe that kidneys are symbolic filters, sympathetically and magically able to dampen and strain the wicked forces of Hell on Earth. They can tap the functions of mortal kidneys through symbolic mysticism and raise a spiritual screen between demonic forces and human-kind. A painted ring of arcane glyphs dotted with wet, human kidneys can hold a demon prisoner... and allows the jailers to let only certain words and influence leak into the world.

Demon-Handlers dramatize one of the classic ethical dilemmas: the choice between two evils. Isn't it worth the victim's suffering if his stolen kidney goes to protect the world from a hellish fiend? Or are the stolen kidneys just keeping the fiend here on earth — if the magic circle is broken, will the demon return to Hell?

On the Trail

As second-act antagonists, the Demon-Handlers are civil, rational and comfortably justified in their own minds. The characters are likely to find a Demon-Handler at her posh townhouse, at the country club or coming out of the hospital in a designer coat and \$500 scarf. If the characters are polite, so is she. If the characters harass her, she responds with arrogance and defiance. If they physically hurt her, she does whatever she has to do to survive, escape and get revenge. She's not afraid to go to the police, because her occult activities are hidden.

An organ broker might have sold her a kidney in the past, but she gets kidneys through other avenues, too. An EMT could have heard rumors about an occult society that steals organs through the hospital and other channels. The Adrenal Junky may have worked as an orderly at the hospital to steal meds and heard similar rumors, or he could have sold the Demon-Handlers kidneys in the past.

Getting a lead from a Demon-Handler requires grace and discretion:

- **Favor:** Characters who come to the Demon-Handler with reputations in the medical or occult communities may already have some pull with her — if they're willing to help her in the future, she helps them now. Alternatively, if the characters harass or threaten her, she helps them now but gets revenge through cold, bureaucratic channels — by hurting their reputations with the city, the medical board or the police. (See below.)

- **Resources:** The Demon-Handler's secret society doesn't need money — the society has that — but the Demon-Handlers are always on the lookout for items of occult significance. If the characters have something of mystic value, for example, an occult tome, they can trade it for a lead.

Confrontation

Tough Choice: Make enemies of potentially insane cultists with followers throughout the medical community, or let them go on hurting people?

Do the characters even believe the Demon-Handler's story? Even if they do, are they willing to risk the chance that her society is correct if doing so means putting a dent in the black-market organ trade? Shutting down the Demon-Handlers' mystic operation means becoming the enemy of her secret society — will the characters ever feel safe in the hands of a doctor again? Who knows how far the Demon-Handlers' tendrils extend.

To end this story with the Demon-Handlers, the characters arrive at the demon-cage the Handlers keep in a rundown hospital and meet the Handler there. The Demon-Handler is savvy. She pleads her case:

"We know that we're doing something important here. Vital. Whether you believe me or not, whether or not you accept that what we're doing is real, consider what this means for you. I can understand that you don't trust my motives. What you can trust, though, is that we take this seriously and we'll hurt anyone who gets in our way. You're only human. You need us. Some day, you'll all need us, in the ER, for surgery, at a clinic. Fuck with us, and you'll never be safe in another hospital in this city."

Whether or not the demon truly exists (see below), the Handler is right when she says the Handlers have influence over medical institutions. If the characters interfere with the Handlers, cash in this consequence the next time they need medical attention, at whatever level of severity with which you're comfortable. The Handlers are willing to kill.

If the characters let the Handlers keep operating, the characters have to make peace with the secret they're keeping.

Coming out of the hospital, the people on the street look different somehow. Instead of people, you imagine them as she must see them: like unpicked vegetables. The lit-up sign at the ER gate, the building's sterile-white lights, feel like swords hanging over the heads of pedestrians. They're all at the mercy of the doctors above them, living in a silent ultimatum — live as we say you should, or we'll let you die. Tonight, your heart doesn't beat; it ticks like a clock.

Filter of Flesh

The Demon-Handlers harness the sympathetic qualities of human kidneys to filter the power of a captive demon they store in the basement of a city hospital. The mystic principle is simple: kidneys are the filtration systems for human bodies, so they can be tapped to serve as filtration systems for the human plane of existence as well. A so-called wizard in the employ of Queen Elizabeth supposedly developed the process in the 16th century.

The demon-cage is a mix of mystic symbols, painted in a circle on the linoleum floor of a defunct basement locker room, and a circle of five human kidneys, each nailed in place with a silver spike. Once each month, when the moon is waning, the Handlers replace the kidneys. If ever fewer than four kidneys hold the mystic circle, the cage collapses.

As the Demon-Handlers explain it, the demon is a kind of malicious disease dispatched from Hell, a Black Plague for the 21st century. But the inside the mystic ring appears empty except for stiff, bubbled linoleum and a gritty, fishy stink. The air near the ring is palpably hot (about 90

degrees), humid and sweaty. Is a demon really trapped within?

The characters shouldn't be sure of the answer unless they ruin the Demon-Handler's operation. If they know that five kidneys are necessary to contain a demon, their choice loses its teeth. If you decide the demon is real, you might not reveal the truth for two or three stories and leave the players and their characters wondering in fear.

If the demon is real, it can be anything you like. It might be a trapped spirit from **Werewolf: Predators**, a unique being modeled on something in **World of Darkness: Antagonists** or a monster with access to powers such as those of the Morbus bloodline in **Vampire: The Requiem**. The demon could be a ghost. Perhaps most insidious of all, you could suddenly plague your city with some fatal disease and let the characters wonder if the outbreak is related to their decision. (See p. 176 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for more on disease.)

Demon-Handler, Catherine Call

Quotes: "Be glad that you've got the time left that you do. When the rest of them come, they'll feast on us raw and writhing in their mouths. The fact that you're still alive is a gift. A gift we gave you. Be thankful."

"We're doing more with your flesh than you were. We're changing the world and you want to change it back?"

"Kill me and you suffered for no reason at all."

Background: She's always been too smart for her own good — or anyone else's. Her father said she was brilliant; her mother said she was a slut who should learn how to act like a lady. It's no wonder she ended up sticking with dad and learning to play with the Old Boys' Club. She attended an Ivy League college, went to med school, became a surgeon and left jealous men and her resentful mother in her wake. After that, she got bored. What other mountains were there for her to climb?

That's how she got involved in demonology. Her country club had a few white-haired coots who held secret meetings in the library basement. They didn't let her in, so she became obsessed with getting in. It took her a few months of reading quasi-occult books and studying to earn their respect. When that wasn't enough, she eavesdropped, got them drunk and talking and went through their things until she learned enough to intimidate them. What she discovered was that these old men were keeping a demon locked up in an area hospital — had been for 20 years — and struggled to keep it under wraps.

She had a new plan. Once she had gotten inside their private club-within-the-club, she read through their books on demonology and occult medicine and devised a new way not only



to imprison the demon, but to channel and diminish its power. To do it, though, they'd need kidneys — human kidneys.

Description: She has a poise that suggests she might settle into any pose for the rest of the night. When you talk, she makes eye contact with the kind of withering confidence that says, “You just don’t get it, do you?” When you’re done talking, she exhales and looks away for a second, as if she’s thinking how to boil her thoughts down into something you could understand. Her eyes are the same brown as cigarette burns. Her eyebrows are black, pruned swooshes. She barely has any lips — they’re the pink you imagine raw flesh must be, like her mouth is just a gash cut in her face so she can talk through it. Her manicured fingers remind you that she makes surgeon money.

Storytelling Hints: Catherine has seen the insides of people. She sees them all the time. She’s probably seen inside the character she’s talking to. She knows how his kidney works, both medically and mystically, and he doesn’t. People who get mad about things they don’t understand are just holding up the works. Is it even worth explaining the truth to them? Even if they believe it, will they understand?

Gourmand

The Gourmand is a human monster. He’s the pet that eats the other pets when Mommy never comes home after her fatal car wreck. He’s a cannibal, a man-eating predator without any supernatural curse. He steals organs to eat them. He eats them because he enjoys it.

If the Gourmand is your story’s climactic antagonist, then it becomes a tale about freakish insanity — about how inhumanity isn’t a feature of monsters and special powers but something people become through their actions. The gap between humans and monsters isn’t so great. Some of those monsters are us.

On the Trail

The Gourmand primarily as a third-act character — he’s too creepy and one-sided to be much of a middle-man — but you might use him for a dose of horror and potential violence in the second act by positioning him as a dead-end lead, a former buyer from an organ broker who ends up not being the behind-the-scenes mastermind the investigators were after. (So they have to go back to the broker for a new lead.)

A broker or the Adrenal Junky might lead to the Gourmand if these characters have been selling him organs without realizing that he’s an insane cannibal. The Demon-Handlers or the Alchemist might lead to the Gourmand if these characters don’t realize that their associate is an insane cannibal who’s been stealing from them.

The Gourmand doesn’t lead to many places, though the investigators might find a phone number, note or answering machine message in his apartment that points them at the next lead.

Dealing with the Gourmand can cost the characters in three major ways:

- **Health:** The Gourmand is a homicidal lunatic and the most blatantly violent of all the antagonists. If he’s not the last antagonist they face, they’ll probably visit the next lead bruised and bloodied from this one.
- **Morality:** However justified the characters might feel doing something violent to the Gourmand, they’re still human beings who have to live with their actions.
- **Favor:** It’ll be hard to keep a figure like the Gourmand out of the papers. Whatever happens with him, it’ll get around. The characters may find themselves favored, feared or hated among people they’d rather not know.

The Confrontation

Tough Choice: Are you slaying a monster or murdering a person?

The question isn’t whether the Gourmand is insane — he is. The question isn’t if he must be stopped — he must. The question is, how far should the characters go? Whether they hurt or kill him in the heat of combat or execute him in cold blood, make them feel it. Make them consider the tough question.

A cold-blooded example:

His face twists, as if he’s about to tell you to fuck off, but he starts trembling. His face goes red, and tears rush down his cheeks. He sinks his face in his hands and shakes. When



he inhales, it's a high shriek. When he sobs out, it's a strained silence. You smell piss.

A hot-blooded example:

He lurches back, blood rushing out of him as if he were a punctured bag. Curling on the floor, drooling out his last breath, looking up at nothing like a beat dog, he looks more like an abused child than a human-eating monster. He lets out one stuttering breath, as if he's about to start crying, but never gets another breath in.

A Taste of You

The Gourmand is assumed to be insane. His diet of human organs doesn't give him any special powers. He has no edge beyond his terrifying insanity.

Maybe that's not what you want. Maybe the Gourmand has tapped into the gross consumption of power that cannibals are after. To keep it simple, give the Gourmand a +1 die bonus to Strength and Stamina for every kidney he's eaten during the past 30 days (your call as to the number). In addition, grant him a +3 dice bonus on Social actions against subjects whose kidneys he's eaten, to reflect a twisted mystic intimacy with his victims. If you want his cannibalism to unlock more grandiose powers, look to **World of Darkness: Second Sight** for inspiration.

Gourmand. Norman Stafford

Quotes: "It's not degenerate. It's animal and base, but it's not unnatural."

"Some are exquisite. Yours was pedestrian."

"I can't undo it. I can't give it back to you. What do you want me to do?"

Background: Norman sat in the back of the class and grew up on the edge of town. He lived in one of those peeling farmhouses with collectible plates on the walls and porcelain roosters on the shelves. His parents were God-fearing, church-going folk who trusted that their boy would get a fine education through high school, then work with them on the farm. They figured a library card and a few summers

with the Boy Scouts would be enough for Normy to find out what interested him and do that on the side, between harvests. His parents didn't demand that he think like they did, as long as he didn't "sit on that floor like a lump in front of the television."

Norman burned his parents to death in the fire that destroyed their house. The insurance money paid his tuition at the state college. His diploma got him a job as a factory manager, until the plant closed. Since then he's had a series of lusterless jobs with short sleeves and neckties: movie theater manager, hotel staff supervisor, county clerk.

Norman passes his nights with library books and TV dinners. He lives alone in a small apartment in a complex not worth robbing and is still a virgin. He had a cat, but wondered what would happen if he stopped feeding it. He passes the years feeling superior to people who don't notice him.

Description: You're looking right at him, but there's hardly anything to see. He's a spindly, bad-skinned nobody in a short-sleeved shirt and clip-on tie. His haircut was boring in the '50s, and his teeth are a mouthful of pebbles. His hands keep wandering — he touches his belt, his zipper, his ear, the screw on the light-switch, inside his nose. He looks at you, looks away and then sneaks his eyes back to you.

Storytelling Hints: Norman doesn't believe things are "wrong just 'cause folk says they are." He'll get around to trying out other sins in time, but he's not willing to risk capture just yet. He's got to fill the rest of his life with things to do, so he's working his way up to the biggest sins. Kill somebody, and the authorities keep looking for you. Drug people, hurt them and take their things, and the crime eventually gets lost in the background noise.



Norman is a monster. His goals and methods aren't supernatural, but they're undeniably monstrous. Use him to create an atmosphere of human terror and grotesquerie, similar to a pathetic low-rent Hannibal Lector. In a way, Norman's behavior is also something of a relief for the characters, because a creature of his sick tastes can seem rare enough that they just might feel safe again when they're done with him. At the same time, Norman's just an ordinary human being — he knows what he's doing is wrong, but he simply enjoys doing it. He feels superior for knowing how to cut out a kidney and for liking the taste when other people would be repulsed. For Norman, being contrary and rarefied is the same as being precious.

Norman is your classic Hollywood sociopath. He uses big words, and he uses lots of words when you could use two. He finds others simple and boring and vaguely offensive while he eats his scabs. The characters should loathe to be in the same room with him.

The Immortal Alchemist

He's 700 years old, but his work isn't finished. The Immortal Alchemist is conducting a clandestine experiment on himself, keeping his body free of withering pollutants by replacing and alchemically augmenting his kidneys. So far, the process works only inasmuch as it grants him long life, but it's a failure in terms of practicality — dozens of kidneys are necessary to prolong the life of a single person.

The Immortal Alchemist is a figure of greed and charity. One day, if he makes a real breakthrough, he may be able to improve the lives of regular folk. Until then, he must hurt a few for the potential benefit of the many. A story focusing on the Immortal Alchemist can seem to be about defeating a mad scientist, but it is also a story about looking past disgust and ire to find something wondrous.

On the Trail

The Immortal Alchemist is a destination for stolen kidneys. His experience and connections could also put him into the second act of your story by placing him at an ideal position in the underground marketplace — the Alchemist might not be the one behind the attack on the victim, but the Alchemist could know who was. Maybe an organ broker or the Junky has sold the Alchemist kidneys in the past, or maybe an EMT works as the Alchemist's assistant and procurer, believing that his research can cure humanity's ills.

The Alchemist is found in arty and academic settings, such as university libraries and glossy wine bars. He withholds the truth of his age and the nature of his work unless he thinks it might save him. The Alchemist is quite sure that he's smarter than any other living person, due to his age and experience, and believes others should know their place. Investigators who massage the Alchemist's ego are rewarded. Those who threaten his work get immediate results, followed weeks later by ruthless vengeance; the Alchemist can't afford to have hundreds of years of work ruined by impulsive upstarts.

• **Morality:** Hurting the Alchemist and his work is a sure way to get him to cooperate, if the characters are willing to risk degeneration. For some characters, however, simply agreeing to help the Alchemist — or just keep his secret — may be against their Morality.

• **Willpower:** Appeasing the Alchemist requires characters to win him over with Persuade or Subterfuge actions contested by his Empathy or Subterfuge. Willpower is their best edge in that contest.

Confrontation

Tough Choice: Let a leeching egomaniac continue to hurt people for the sake of future benefit, or stop him, ruin centuries of work and render his past victims' suffering meaningless?

In the final act, the Alchemist is in his lab, combining outdated wooden and glass equipment with modern plastic aprons and chemical gauges. He maintains an environment based in equal parts on secrecy and functionality, sacrificing cleanliness for either. A burnt-out warehouse, oily garage or dank and rusted boiler room is a fine choice provided the site is dressed up with framed artwork, decorative antiques and warm linen curtains. The hum of a commercial-grade refrigerator is an essential detail.

The Alchemist raises the classic question of ends versus means.

"My certainty is absolute after all these years. The ends do justify the means. All of these people who have suffered to prolong my life are sure to die anyway. All those who will live centuries longer in future times gain something that yesterday's wounded had no chance to achieve. I have taken so little from the victims for the promise of giving so much to us all. Think of it. If you put an end to my work, they've suffered for naught."

If the characters help the Alchemist, they may gain access to unnaturally long life, but at the risk of their own Morality — though his success to date has been a fluke, an unrepeatable result of the experiment. If they put a stop to the Alchemist, they close the door on his possible success and make an enemy of him.

The Alchemical Lifestyle

The benefits of the Alchemist's work are not immediately applicable to your chronicle unless one

of the characters suffers from an ongoing illness. The life-extending properties of the Alchemist's mystically endowed kidneys are not a video-game power-up; they stave off old age, not bullets. Unless your chronicle spans decades, the choice to make use of the Alchemist's work speaks to the character's ethics and goals rather than making any major change to their game statistics.

The Alchemist, Arnau de Villanova

Quotes: "You suffer so that I live. I can't afford the luxury of your refusal. If you fear, I die. And of course you'd be afraid."

"I should die rather than we both should live?"

"Everyone's survival hurts someone else. The lessers always suffer for the betters. Ugly, but true."

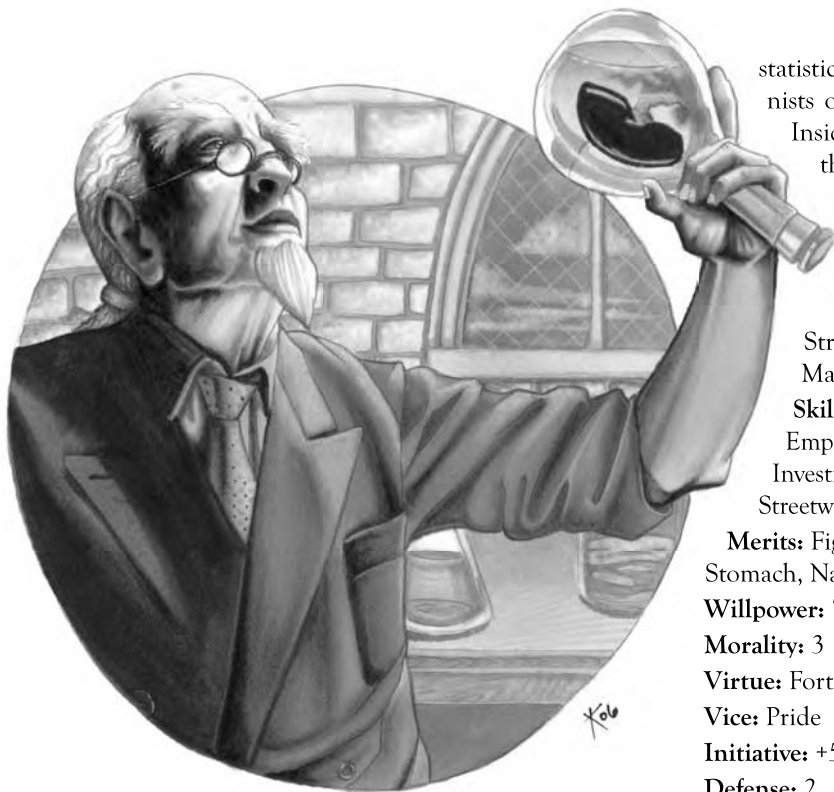
Background: Arnau de Villanova is a Catalan alchemist and physician who lived, publicly, in the 13th and 14th centuries. He was a well-known Arab philosopher and surgeon who authored dozens of pamphlets and guides on human anatomy and the functions of the human body. His writings were collected and published well into the 17th century. According to some texts, he attempted to create an artificial human kidney that could operate above and beyond the abilities of the natural human kidney.

In 1313, after being driven out of mainland Europe by ecclesiastic thinkers and so-called scientists, Pope Clement V summoned Villanova to Avignon. The Pope was ill, and supposedly called out to Villanova for aid, but Villanova knew better — it was a lure by the Church to draw Villanova back into their reach so they could stop him and his work. Villanova boarded a ship bound to Avignon from Sicily anyway, knowing it was a trap, but died on the voyage.

So says history. Villanova is in fact alive to this day, still attempting to perfect his artificial kidney, now and again. However, he spends much of his time traveling and examining the ever-changing world, as well as seeking out human kidneys to use in his life-extending alchemical work.

Description: This guy is maybe 60 years old. His brittle-looking gray hair is tied back in a ponytail, and his delicate beard is fashioned to a careful point. Little spectacles cling to his liver-spotted nose. His face has a youthful quality, though: quick to smile or frown, reacting eagerly to whatever he hears. His old-man ears have grown to frame his face. When we talks, he reveals the kind of mesmerizing Spanish accent that you might associate with a cartoon Don Juan, but with none of the sleaze. Everything about his demeanor says "academic," though he has the gentle manner of a man from a more polite time.

Storytelling Hints: Years of life have not spiced and expanded Villanova's personality; they've filtered it. He has been reduced to a watered-down version of the brilliant, fearless scientist he once was, and on some level, he knows it. He finds himself thinking he's made a breakthrough,



statistics can fill out a thuggish version of the antagonists or to portray one of their cohorts, while the Insidious Organ Thief can put a different spin on the same antagonist or fill in for a geeky helper or wily fence.

Brutal Organ Thief

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 4, Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Skills: Academics 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Drive 2, Empathy (Smell Fear) 2, Firearms 1, Intimidation 3, Investigation 1, Larceny 3, Medicine 1, Socialize 1, Streetwise (Black Market, Organs) 2, Weaponry 1

Merits: Fighting Style: Kung Fu 1, Iron Stamina 2, Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity

Willpower: 7

Morality: 3

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Pride

Initiative: +5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 8

Derangement: Narcissism (mild)

Equipment: Medical text (+2), cast-off surgical kit (+1)

but discovers in his notes that it is the same idea he wrote down 300 years earlier. He's like a thin gruel made from the ambitions of a greater man.

Other Truths

The characters above are only a few possibilities. The players' characters might also run into organ brokers in the trade purely for the money, fences who see all manner of goods come and go, desperate parents driven to desperate measures, corrupt police officers who look the other way or occult-minded EMTs who think they're working to save the world from alien plagues. You are more than welcome to create your own characters, or incorporate already existing characters from your chronicle into your "Unwilling Organ Donors" story. For added creep factor, the characters could discover an unpleasant and illicit truth about a character they already knew — perhaps someone they knew well. "Unwilling Organ Donors" is about revealing gruesome secrets, after all.

Cast

You can combine following character sketches with the antagonists described above. The Brutal Organ Thief's

Insidious Organ Thief

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Skills: Academics (Law) 2, Athletics (Run) 1, Computer (Internet) 1, Drive 1, Empathy 2, Investigation 1, Larceny (Palming) 3, Medicine (Anatomy) 2, Persuasion (Con) 3, Politics 1, Science 2, Socialize (Breaking the Ice) 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise (Black Market) 2, Subterfuge (Lie) 2

Merits: Contacts (Hotels, Taxis, Hospitals) 3, Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes, Language: Spanish

Willpower: 5

Morality: 4

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Sloth

Initiative: +7

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Health: 7

Equipment: Medical text (+2), decent surgical kit (+2)



LEIF JONES

The Jersey Devil

The Legend

"I can't believe her," Jake said into his pint. "Here I am, already busting my butt working fifty hours a week at my crappy job, just to make ends meet. Does she care? Hell no, she just keeps on babbling about turning the half-bathroom into a nursery. Where's her head? I wish she'd see reason and do the right thing."

"Careful what you wish for," the drunk on the next barstool said. "There was a woman lived here, couple hundred years ago now. Had herself a dozen kids, then found out one more was on the way. Got so pissed she wished the child would be a devil, so she wouldn't have to take care of it." The drunk paused, weaving on his perch. "And it *was*. Big, skinny thing with wings and legs like a crane, but with hooves. Some say it let out an awful shriek and flew up the chimney, but others say the woman locked the devil up in her attic and never let it see light of day."

Jake snorted. "I wouldn't mind if this kid never saw light of day."

"Careful," the drunk said again. "They say the Jersey Devil takes care of the children here. It knows what it's like to not be wanted, hey?"

Jake gulped down some more draft and turned to respond. But the stool beside him was empty.

Summary

The Jersey Devil, an old creature with the body of a monster and the mind of a child, lives in the Pine Barrens near the town of Tuckerton. The Jersey Devil watches out for Tuckerton's children, but he also craves a companion. To this end, he convinces a young girl to run away with him, which sparks the events in this story. The players' characters become involved as they track the missing Linny Boyce. Over the course of the story, the characters confront Linny's abusive father, meet the Jersey Devil's mentor, contend with an angry mob and peel back the layers of the mystery of the Devil.

Dramatis Personae

Jake DuBois: Local landscaper and borderline alcoholic, married to Patricia.

Patricia DuBois: Door-to-door cosmetic salesperson and expectant mother, married to Jake.

Murray Holbrook: A retired high-school teacher and sports hunter, whose only child died in a hunting accident.

Linny Boyce: A fifth-grade student at Tuckerton Elementary.

Jehrameel Leeds: The Jersey Devil.

History

The Birth of the Jersey Devil

In 1824, Mrs. Leeds of Pine Barrens became pregnant with her 13th child. The exhausted and angry woman exclaimed, "I tire of children. Let this one be the devil's."

"We are each our own devil, and we make this world our hell."

— Oscar Wilde

Popular legend tells that Mrs. Leeds then gave birth to a winged monstrosity of hideous appearance. The legends disagree on what happened next; some claim the child ate the other children and then vanished, while other legends state that the devil disappeared up the chimney. Only one reflects the truth. The monstrous child lay before its mother, helpless as any other infant, and Mrs. Leeds hid it away in her attic.

Mrs. Leeds named the child Jehrameel and, for the next 14 years, he lived a solitary existence in the attic. His mother visited on occasion to teach the boy basic arithmetic and literacy, but for the most part she left him alone. Mrs. Leeds entrusted the local priest with her secret, and he agreed the boy should be kept locked up. The Leeds told their friends and neighbors that the child had died.

At first, the priest tried several rituals designed to cast Jehrameel back into Hell. When none worked, he decided that Jehrameel's appearance was punishment for his sinful soul. Once a week, the priest and Mrs. Leeds visited Jehrameel in his attic prison. They exhorted him to meditate on his sins, on whatever wickedness that had caused him to be born in such a state. The young boy lived a life of neglect and loneliness, interspersed with reminders of how he had brought such a fate on himself.

Mr. Leeds, a sawmill employee, was never much present in the household, and now found more excuses to be away from home. When Jehrameel was 14, Mr. Leeds slipped on a drunken walk home. He tumbled down a bank into the river, broke his neck and drowned.

Deprived of her husband's salary, Mrs. Leeds was unable to support her family. Kindly relatives took in the remaining children. Mrs. Leeds could not send Jehrameel away, though, and desperation set in as she contemplated a lifetime of caring for Jehrameel.

After many discussions with her priest, Mrs. Leeds decided to try one final exorcism. The priest warned that, if the ritual was unsuccessful, Jehrameel would likely die. Mrs. Leeds declared she was willing to take that chance.

Jehrameel was not. The child had developed unusual powers during his time in isolation. Believing them the devil's gifts, he never used them, but after overhearing his mother's conversation with the priest, Jehrameel snapped. He used his considerable strength to break out of the attic-prison. The priest commanded the boy to stop, but Jehrameel refused. Mrs. Leeds implored her boy to return to his room. Jehrameel responded with only a hateful glare. Mrs. Leeds grabbed her husband's shotgun from where it hung over the door and fired at her child.

Jehrameel recoiled from the impact, but his wound seemed minor and did not hamper him. He grabbed his mother and flung her aside. She crashed into the wall, shattering her hip, and lay screaming on the floor while Jehrameel strode out the front door. The priest ran outside but could not see the boy.

Looking up, though, he saw a black form, like a large bird, winging away.

What is the Jersey Devil?

The Jersey Devil's true nature can vary depending on your needs. Jehrameel might be the only creature of his kind, but you might also have the characters encounter another creature like him. Doing so adds extra drama in Act 3, when Jehrameel defends his desire for companionship.

Jehrameel's appearance and strange powers might be mundane in nature: a result of genetic mutation combined with a rare disease. Dark powers could also have created the Devil; perhaps Mrs. Leeds unknowingly (or knowingly) shared her bed with a true demon.

Another mortal creature, such as a powerful (and possibly insane) mage could have created Jehrameel as an experiment or a sick practical joke on Jehrameel's mother. He could be the manifestation of a literal demon, or of a powerful spirit. The Jersey Devil's true origin is the one that works best for your campaign.

Forty Years of Solitude

Jehrameel fled into the dense forest that covers Pine Barrens. For three years he lived in solitude, but it was a more pleasant solitude than that of his home. He learned to hunt animals for food, and found he could eat almost any plant. His powers continued to develop, though Jehrameel still felt guilty when he used his devil's gifts.

A broken-down wagon gave Jehrameel relief from his boredom when he discovered a box of books within. The tomes, a collection of Shakespeare's works, developed Jehrameel's vocabulary and captured his imagination. He read and re-read *The Tempest*, sympathizing with the outcast Caliban.

Despite the peace of his new life, Jehrameel was lonely. His childhood had been spent in solitude, listening to the sounds of his parents and siblings living normal lives below him. He craved companionship and a real home.

In 1840, Pine Barrens locals reported that a monster had attacked and killed livestock. Similar reports surfaced in 1841. Jehrameel hadn't meant to kill the animals; he simply wanted a pet. Every time he approached an ordinary creature, though, it became agitated and violent. Jehrameel became agitated and violent in return, and then fled from the scene of slaughter.

As the years passed, Jehrameel learned exactly how odd he was. His powers granted him unnatural strength and endurance. He could not fly, but his wings allowed him to glide for hundreds of yards. Several times, he encountered a

dangerous animal or frightened townspeople, but claws and gunshots only scratched his thick hide. Most importantly, Jehrameel aged slowly, if at all. Though his growth from birth to puberty had been normal, Jehrameel remained a young adult for the next 60 years. Now called the Jersey Devil, Jehrameel began to wonder if he would — or could — ever die.

Week of Terror

In January of 1909, Jehrameel claimed his first human victim.

The murder was unintentional. The victim was a child. Since Jehrameel's flight from his home so long ago, he had longed for a companion. His attempts to capture a pet to live with him had all ended disastrously. Jehrameel now resolved to find a brother.

His unusual upbringing and solitary existence had twisted Jehrameel. He did not think like other people, and his intellect still hovered at a child's level. He believed that, if he could get a child to come into the woods with him, he could convince the boy to become his brother. Jehrameel also hoped that he would not have the same effect on humans that he did on animals.

One evening Jehrameel crept up on a homestead on the edge of Woodbury, New Jersey. He had spied on this family before, a large and rambunctious one, and concluded that they would not miss one child. The youngest boy, a lad of 10, left the house at dusk and ran to the well to draw a bucket of water.

Jehrameel hid himself near the well. He knew his appearance would frighten the child, and so he leapt forward and clapped a hand over the boy's mouth before he could scream. The boy fought back, and Jehrameel held on tightly. Too tightly: he broke the child's wrist, eliciting a muffled shriek of pain. Horrified, Jehrameel loosened his grip, and the boy slid out of his grasp. Jehrameel lunged after him, and, in the confusion, the boy toppled into the well. Jehrameel heard the scream and the splash, and then he turned and raced back into the woods before anyone could see him.

At first, Jehrameel's grief overwhelmed him. Then rage replaced the grief. The childlike Jehrameel sought someone else to blame, but all his rationalizations could not ease his guilt.

The Jersey Devil went on his first rampage that week. He soared through a number of towns, terrorizing people and livestock. Eventually, the towns formed posses of men with guns and dogs to chase away the Jersey Devil, but to no avail.

Jehrameel grew bolder. He slaughtered chickens. He attacked a trolley car in Haddon Heights and then fled into darkness. Towns in the area mobilized guard patrols, while the young and the elderly locked themselves in basements. Jehrameel walked onto an electric rail in Clayton, but while the discharge knocked him back a dozen yards and made his skin smoke, it didn't kill him. A telegraph worker shot him in Atlantic City, and the well-placed shot did more damage to Jehrameel than most attacks. He limped off and spent several hours sulking in hiding.

Businesses and schools closed. Jehrameel's anger faded, and he realized that, if he kept up this behavior, someone would kill him. His wrath eased, and Jehrameel returned to the impenetrable woods of Pine Barrens. He left behind confused, conflicting reports from dozens of people who had seen something, though none could say exactly what. It was at this time that the story of the Jersey Devil firmly established itself in local legend.

Enter Murray Holbrook

For the next several decades, Jehrameel lived alone in the woods, emerging only occasionally to try to capture a pet or make human contact. All these attempts failed miserably. Jehrameel could not accept that this was his fate, but his monstrous figure and stunted emotional development made friendship impossible. Even those he approached peacefully recoiled at his horrific appearance. He remained locked in a cycle of failure.

Then, in July of 1968, a high school history teacher named Murray Holbrook took his young son hunting. Holbrook lost track of his son as they stalked a deer. A stray branch snatched the orange hat off the boy's head. A fellow hunter saw movement and fired. Murray heard the shot and saw his son fall, but could do nothing for the boy.

Grief-stricken, Holbrook retreated into himself. His marriage fell apart, and he became a recluse. He worked at odd jobs and spent most of his time in the woods, talking to his dead son. He wrote the boy letters and left them on rocks. From the shadows, Jehrameel watched.

As months went by, Jehrameel grew to understand Holbrook. Jehrameel fixated on the man as a surrogate father, one who was grieving over the wrong he had done to his son. In Holbrook's words, Jehrameel heard the message he had never received from his own parents. The weight of his failure and loneliness eased, allowing Jehrameel to develop a touch of restraint and maturity.

Jehrameel tried once more to gain a new family. He spoke to Holbrook from the concealment of the trees. He told Holbrook that his own parents had wronged him, and that he liked listening to the man talk. Holbrook responded with questions: Who was the hidden figure who spoke in an archaic fashion? What was his name? Where did he come from? Jehrameel fled without answering.

Several days later, Jehrameel caught Holbrook in the woods and again struck up a conversation. Over the next few weeks, the two men became used to each other, even felt a friendship develop. Jehrameel had found a father who was sorry for his actions, and Holbrook had found a son who could forgive him. The day came when Jehrameel revealed his true form to Holbrook. Holbrook was shocked, but adapted. He had been through so much turmoil that year that a devil in the flesh seemed manageable.

Jehrameel was delighted to have someone to talk to. The two became odd friends. Holbrook taught Jehrameel about society and culture, and Jehrameel related the things he'd seen over the last 100 years. For a time, all was well.

The Protector

Holbrook satisfied Jehrameel's longing for companionship and a family, but Jehrameel knew Holbrook would age and die well before Jehrameel did. The interaction also bolstered Jehrameel's confidence; surely with this new experience he would be able to coax a pet or sibling to come live with him. Despite his long life, Jehrameel still thought of himself as a child, and often wished for a playmate his own age.

Holbrook knew of Jehrameel's longings and did his best to explain why Jehrameel was unlikely to ever find a sibling. Disappointed but not entirely convinced, Jehrameel instead set himself up as protector of the children of the Pine Barrens area.

Unfortunately, Jehrameel still possessed the mentality and emotional control of a child. He did not differentiate between ordinary childhood spats and genuine abuse. Jehrameel delighted in frightening bad parents and bullies. He sometimes tried to rescue a child by carrying off the terrified youngster. Holbrook always got the child home or back to school within a few hours, and the children instinctively knew no one would believe their story of a monster in the wood. Some told their tales regardless, adding to the mystery and interest surrounding the Jersey Devil legend. Jehrameel's existence is thus known to several children in various New Jersey towns, who either keep their knowledge hidden or treat it as an open secret with other children.

On occasion, a report surfaces of a sighting of the Jersey Devil. Holbrook does his best to squelch such rumors, and works to undo the damage done by Jehrameel's crusade. Holbrook remains a recluse, and his odd ways and his involvement with Jehrameel's activities cause some townspeople to look on him with suspicion.

Discovering the History

Learning the history of the Jersey Devil allows the players and characters to feel more involved in the story. The easiest way for the characters to learn Jehrameel's history is for Murray Holbrook or Jehrameel to relate the story. Other options exist, though.

- **The Letters.** Holbrook has a cache of letters that tell the Jersey Devil's story. Information on uncovering the letters appears in Act 2, Scene 3. You might lead the characters to the letters earlier in the story.

- **Old Newspaper Articles.** Jehrameel could have come close to success once before, and convinced a child to come away with him for more than an hour or two. That child, now grown up, still lives in Tuckerton. The characters come across a newspaper article regarding the child's abduction and mysterious return, as well as

his stories of a monster that lives in the woods. Diplomatic and persuasive characters could convince the now-grown child to tell them about the Jersey Devil.

- **Visions.** A character with three or more dots in Empathy, or a character who has displayed psychic powers in the past, could have fragmented dreams and visions of Jehrameel's history (consider combining this with the "Home Sweet Home" background appearing in the "Motivations" chapter). At first the visions make no sense, but gradually the characters piece them together to assemble Jehrameel's story.

Recent Events

At long last, Jehrameel has found what he's been looking for. Linny Boyce, a 12-year-old girl, lives a life of neglect and suffering. Just as when he first spoke with Holbrook, Jehrameel has been talking to Linny by whispering outside her window at night and leaving notes for her. Linny was delighted to find someone who seemed to care for her, and Jehrameel's descriptions of living in the wilderness were both romantic and enchanting. She agreed to leave home and become Jehrameel's sister.

Her disappearance has caused a stir in the town. Holbrook suspected Jehrameel of the abduction, but was unable to locate the Devil. Aware that Holbrook will disapprove of his actions, Jehrameel has hidden himself and Linny away. He did send Holbrook a note; now the old man is torn by the knowledge that he knows who took Linny, but cannot tell anyone without betraying his friend.

Linny's Story

Linny Boyce grew up in the care of an uninvolved and hostile father. Her mother died when Linny was quite young, and the child has never understood the circumstances surrounding her mother's death. The police report says her mother was stabbed in a mugging, but little things have led Linny to suspect that something unnatural killed her mother. She has spent the last few years studying the occult, mostly on the Internet.

When Linny agreed to come live with Jehrameel, she made a few preparations. She selected a few favorite books, some toiletries and several changes of clothes and packed them in an old suitcase she found in the basement. The police asked Linny's father if any of her personal effects were missing, and he said no. Dan Boyce is not the kind of man who keeps track of his daughter's wardrobe. The police

did determine that her toothbrush, hairbrush and sneakers were missing, and this confirms their suspicion that Linny ran off with a boyfriend.

Linny is an intelligent child, and her research into the occult has prepared her for Jehrameel's quirks. She looks forward to her life as his sister, and may even help Jehrameel develop mental and emotional maturity.

Motivations

This story requires the characters to enter the town of Tuckerton, New Jersey, but you can change the setting to any small town near a wooded area. Suggested motivations appear in this section. You are encouraged to tailor these motivations, perhaps laying groundwork for the story while the characters are engaged in another chronicle. For example, a character interested in the paranormal may receive an invitation to the yearly Devil Hunt while in the midst of another investigation.

- **Devil Hunt.** Once a year, Tuckerton sponsors a Devil Hunt. This is a town-wide fair that includes a farmer's market, homemade craft sale, giant barbecue and carnival rides. Packs of "hunters" form to scour the nearby woods

for stuffed devil dolls. People interested in the supernatural sometimes form genuine hunting parties to search for the Jersey Devil at this time. The characters could come to Tuckerton to participate in the Devil Hunt, either with a genuine interest in finding the Jersey Devil or simply for fun. Once they arrive, they hear of Linny Boyce's disappearance.

- **Little Girl Lost.** One of the characters is related to Linny Boyce, perhaps a cousin, aunt or uncle. Linny might also be the relative or friend of an Ally, Contact or Mentor. The character hears of Linny's disappearance through a TV or newspaper report or a phone call. The reports emphasize the mysterious circumstances of Linny's abduction, the police's lack of clues and Linny's proximity to the Pine Barrens "of Jersey Devil fame."

- **Home Sweet Home.** The characters have cause to investigate Jehrameel's old house. Perhaps one character inherits the property. Perhaps the characters are interested in the Jersey Devil legend and take a tour to see its birthplace. While inside the house, one character enters the attic and receives an intense vision of a weeping Jehrameel Leeds. The vision is accompanied by a feeling of rage and sorrow so visceral that the character may faint (Stamina + Resolve to avoid passing out). From then on, the character is gripped with nightmares and visions of Jehrameel's life, along with sporadic glimpses of Linny Boyce stumbling through the forest, a dark creature on her heels. The visions end once the characters uncover the truth of the situation.



Act 1

Cast: Linda and Cass Baxter: A mother and daughter enjoying the Devil Hunt festivities.

Jake DuBois: Local landscaper. (See his description under “Cast,” at the end of this chapter).

Patricia DuBois: Jake’s wife. For social interaction, give her Subterfuge (dice pool two).

In this act, the characters hear rumors about Linny Boyce’s disappearance and witness interactions between some of the Tuckerton people. If the characters have a contact in town, such as the person who alerted them to Linny’s disappearance, they might find their contact wandering Main Street during the festivities.

Both the characters and the players are likely to be alert for clues and important interactions. You may wish to mix these encounters with unimportant ones to keep the characters and players guessing about what’s really going on. For instance:

- The Ferris wheel could break down, stranding children atop it.
- A character who eats a hot dog could be struck with food poisoning.
- A dog could break its leash and growl ferociously at nothing, scaring pedestrians.

Scene 1: Jake and Patricia

When the characters arrive in Tuckerton, they find the town in the midst of the Devil Hunt festival. Wooden sawhorses festooned with red emergency tape block off Main Street, and crowds of people wander down the asphalt stretch. Vendors selling balloons, cotton candy and cheap Jersey Devil souvenirs stand in wooden booths along the street. At the north end of Main Street, an old Ferris wheel, octopus and children’s airplane ride fill the Shop-n-Save parking lot.

The Devil Hunt

Ordinarily, the Devil Hunt is an exciting time of year. Children look forward to the rides, adults look forward to the beer garden and everyone enjoys scouring the woods for the “Jersey Devil” — stuffed felt dolls that can be exchanged for prizes.

This year, though, the atmosphere of the Devil Hunt is different. With Linny Boyce’s fate on everyone’s mind, celebrations are subdued. The sky is gray and full of clouds, and no wind stirs the pennants that hang limply from booths. People cluster in small groups and parents keep a close watch on their children. The rides move sluggishly, with a protesting creak of gears as they spin. Even the soda pop tastes flat.

You might try to make the fair seem festive and exciting at first, but the longer the characters hang around, the more they sense the oppressive, grim air that mars the fun.

Jake and Patricia DuBois have come to the Devil Hunt to take their minds off their troubles. Patricia can’t help but be excited about her new pregnancy, while Jake is haunted by images of financial ruin.

Patricia hoped that the festive air of the Devil Hunt would calm Jake, but the opposite has proved true. Packs of screaming children, noisy crowds and cheap beer have made Jake surly and uncommunicative.

As the characters pass by, Patricia makes a comment about the baby and sets Jake off. The characters might choose to intervene, or they may decide it is none of their business. Either way, they probably recall the altercation when they hear word of a monster attacking Jake.

If you don’t wish to improvise the scene, consider reading or paraphrasing the following:

A young man with tanned skin and dirt-smudged, calloused hands grabs the arm of the woman he walks with. Her powdered face turns pale.

“I don’t want to hear another word about the goddamned baby,” the man spits.

“You can’t keep pretending this isn’t real,” the woman replies. “Sooner or later you’re going to have to talk about it.”

“I don’t care,” the man says. “I don’t have to listen to it now. Shut your mouth and get your damned cotton candy. We’re going home.” He crushes an empty beer cup and tosses it in the gutter.

Jake enjoys a good fistfight or bar brawl, but he would never hurt Patricia. The watching characters don’t know that, though. If a stranger intervenes, Jake gets hostile. Patricia’s pleadings for Jake to “just stop it” inflame him further. Unless a character is incredibly diplomatic, he finds himself in a fistfight. Jake does not attack a woman without great provocation, however.

If a character tussles with Jake, a small crowd forms. Two of Jake’s friends arrive and pull the swearing, struggling man away. If the character pursues, or attacks Jake’s friends, the police arrive within minutes. Disrespectful characters find themselves jailed for an evening, or charged with assault.

Scene 2:

Linda and Cass Baxter

Linda is a supermarket clerk at the Wawa Food Market. Cass, her daughter, is eight years old. During the Devil Hunt fun, Cass and Linda get separated. At some point during the festival, Linda runs up to the characters. You may wish to read or paraphrase the following exchange at the appropriate time, or use it to inspire improvised dialogue.

A woman in a red and white checked blouse and a pair of jeans almost bumps into you. Strands of sandy hair dangle from her ponytail and stick to her sweaty face. "Oh excuse me," she gasps, "but my daughter — I only looked away for a minute — I was buying a hot dog." She holds up a limp hot dog in a paper tray. "When I turned back around, she was gone. Have you seen her? She's eight years old. Blonde hair, she was wearing a purple top and a denim skirt. Pink flip-flops."

With Linny Boyce's disappearance so recent, Linda is distraught. Cass has been gone almost 15 minutes. Linda is on the verge of tears.

Cass strayed to watch a clown make balloon animals and lost track of her mother. She wandered for a few minutes before drifting away from the festivities. Jehrameel, who always keeps an eye on the Devil Hunt celebration, noticed Cass and sent her back into the crowd with a toy to calm her and instructions to find a police officer (instructions that Cass promptly forgot).

If the characters volunteer to help look for Cass, the players should roll Wits + Composure. (If the characters come up with a strategic plan to search for Cass, or if they question the festival attendees, you may allow Wits + Investigation rolls instead.)

Searching for Cass is an extended action. Each roll represents 30 minutes of searching. Linda grows more and more hysterical as time passes. The characters should feel desperate and worried as they work to find Cass, especially as they realize how many children are at the festival and how easy they are to overlook.

With a collective total of 10 successes, the characters locate Cass. If any player rolls a dramatic failure, she spots a child who looks like Cass. A brief chase ensues, after which the characters realize they've been tracking the wrong child. An angry parent might berate the characters, or scream for help.

After the players accumulate a total of 10 successes, the characters spot Cass sitting on a curb, chattering to

a doll. Linda is overwhelmed with gratitude. Cass seems untroubled, and makes an offhand comment that nothing bad could happen to her, "because my friend looks out for me." She is referring to Jehrameel, as many children in Tuckerton know that the creature in the woods likes children and protects them. If the characters press Cass about her friend, she tries to pass him off as make-believe. Cass knows that Jehrameel doesn't want the adults to know about him. She has a dice pool of two with such attempts (Manipulation + Subterfuge).

The doll Cass holds is one of the stuffed devils hidden in the woods for the Devil Hunt. Cass could have gotten the toy only by entering the woods — or if someone brought it out of the woods and gave it to her. If asked, Cass claims she found the doll on the ground. Players may roll Wits + Subterfuge or Empathy to detect the lie. A character may also press Cass gently to reveal the truth. In that case, the player rolls Manipulation + Persuasion. Cass is more receptive to women, and so female characters gain a +1 die bonus to their dice pools. If the roll succeeds, Cass admits that her "imaginary friend" gave her the doll, then immediately reverts to her old story of having found the doll.

Trying to bully Cass or press her for more details upsets Linda, and she carries Cass off with a brief thank-you.

If the characters fail to find Cass after an hour of searching, a police officer approaches Linda. He tells Linda that her daughter has been found and is waiting with another officer by the South Street blockade. Linda thanks the characters for their help and then leaves with the officer.

Act 2

Once the characters arrive in Tuckerton and learn of Linny Boyce's disappearance, the next logical step is to conduct investigations. The following scenes represent the most likely avenues of investigation. You can interpose these scenes with events in Act 1, or run them in order. However, for dramatic and plot continuity purposes, the characters should witness Jake and Patricia's fight soon after arriving in Tuckerton, before the attack on Jake in Scene 2, and they should visit Murray Holbrook near the end of this act, just before the true Devil Hunt starts in Act 3.

Cast: Dan Boyce: Linny Boyce's father. For social interactions, give him Intimidate (dice pool four) and Subterfuge (dice pool three).

Jake and Patricia DuBois: As in Act 1.

Murray Holbrook: Retired teacher (see his description under "Cast," at the end of this chapter).

Caroleen Simmons: Dan Boyce's neighbor.

Scene 1: Linny's House

At some point, the characters might wish to visit the scene of the crime. All reports indicate that Linny Boyce disappeared from her bedroom one night. It's easy enough to find the Boyce house; it's been shown on news channels,

and Dan Boyce's address is in the phone book. When the characters approach the house, you might wish to read or paraphrase the following description.

A one-story house with white siding squats between two identical neighbors. Though the same shape and size as the other houses on the block, this house's dusty siding, weedy lawn and oil-stained driveway give it an air of neglect. Countless foot-steps have trampled the lawn, and a yellow ribbon trails from a window around the left side of the house. Further inspection reveals the ribbon to be crime-scene tape.

Dan Boyce, Linny's father, is an abrasive man, his irritating personality made worse by his daughter's disappearance. Similar to many abusers, great rage and sorrow fuel his behavior. Dan Boyce is not a well man, and he is a terrible father. Since Linny vanished, Dan Boyce has grown angrier and more sullen. Part of him misses his daughter, while part of him is glad she is gone.

After days of talking to police and reporters, Dan Boyce feels uncommunicative. He answers the door if the characters knock but responds tersely to their questions. You can use the following descriptions and lines of dialogue to during the conversation with Dan Boyce, or use them as inspiration to improvise the exchange.

•In the doorway stands a short, slight man with thinning hair. He has ruddy skin and glasses that sit slightly askew on his angular face. "What do you want?" he demands.

•"Can't you people leave me alone?" Boyce huffs. "I spend half my time talking to the police. I don't have to chat with amateur detectives, too."

•Boyce rolls his eyes. "No, I didn't notice anything strange about Linny's behavior. No, she hadn't been talking to strangers. No, she didn't have a boyfriend on the Internet. God, don't you think I've been over this a hundred times already? She's gone, I don't know where, I hope the police can find her. Go bother them if you have more questions."

•"That's it, we're done with this. Get off my property." Boyce steps back and slams the door shut.

The characters can wheedle or threaten Dan Boyce as much as they like, but he knows nothing useful about Linny's disappearance. However, the characters should come away from the interaction with an understanding of how difficult Linny's life must have been. Boyce displays no compassion or fear for his daughter. The characters might enquire about Linny's mom, which elicits a perfunctory, "She's dead," from Boyce.

If the characters get rough or refuse to leave, Boyce calls the police. A sufficiently persuasive or intimidating character might convince Boyce to let the characters inspect Linny's room, but Boyce is stubborn. Social interactions made with Boyce suffer a -2 dice penalty. Few clues exist in Linny's room, but alert characters (and successful Intelligence + Investigation rolls) may notice gaps in the bookshelf and dust on the floor, from the old suitcase Linny brought up from the basement. They also notice that many of Linny's books deal with ghosts, demons and other occult matters.

The Neighbor

As the characters leave Boyce's house, his neighbor, Caroleen Simmons, waves at them. She sits on her front steps drinking coffee. "Hi there," she calls. "No luck with the old codger?" If Boyce is within hearing range, he scowls at her before slamming his door.

If the characters respond in the affirmative (or even if they politely deny the implication), Caroleen nods. "I could have told you you wouldn't get anywhere with him," she says. "I've lived next to Dan Boyce for fifteen years. He's always been a grump."

The characters might wish to chat longer with Caroleen. She invites them to sit on the steps with her. Caroleen is garrulous and gossipy and is happy to have an attentive audience. If the characters display the least amount of interest, Caroleen can relate any of the following pieces of information.

•"I've known Linny since she was born. Nice girl, but a bit too brainy for her own good. She thinks too much. She'd come over now and then, complaining that her dad didn't understand her and said mean things to her. Sure, Dan's a yeller. But all parents yell at their kids, don't they? Linny just took it too hard."

•"Abuse? Everyone today talks so much about abuse. When I was a girl, if I misbehaved, my daddy would get out the strap. I knew

right from wrong, let me tell you. I remember telling Linny one time, 'You think your dad is tough on you? At least he doesn't hit you.' And she said, 'I wish he would. Then people would see that I'm hurt.' That's what I mean by thinking too much. I think they call it being morbid. I guess it was tough, though, with her mother gone and all."

"Dan Boyce may think Linny didn't have a boyfriend. Me, I'm not so sure. Just a few nights before she vanished, I heard voices from next door. I peeked out the kitchen window and saw someone under Linny's window, talking to her. I couldn't see him very well, but his voice was manly enough. He seemed tall and skinny, and he wore a big backpack. I bet you a hundred dollars she ran off with some teenage hitch-hiker. She'll probably turn up in a few weeks in Philly, pregnant more likely than not."

"Of course I told the police!"

Caroleen has no other relevant knowledge. The characters should end this scene with the concept that Dan Boyce is a singularly unpleasant fellow, and that Linny may have gone willingly with her captor.

Scene 2: The Attack

While escorting Cass Baxter back to the Devil Hunt festival, Jehrameel witnessed an argument between Jake and Patricia DuBois. Patricia hasn't given birth yet, but Jehrameel still feels protective of her child.

That evening, Jehrameel creeps up on the DuBois house with the intent of scaring Jake. Jehrameel has a history of peeking in people's windows and frightening them. When it's fully dark out, and Patricia has gone to bed, Jehrameel takes the opportunity to loom at the windows.

The characters may be passing near the DuBois house at the time of the attack, or their hotel might be close by. Alternatively, they could overhear someone talking loudly on a cellphone, "I just heard that something attacked Jake DuBois. I know, right at his house! Tammy said he was thrown through a window."

When Jake sees the Jersey Devil, he first freezes in shock. He considers that he might be hallucinating. However, Jake has never hallucinated in the past, no matter how much he drank. He progresses to terror as the Jersey Devil lifts its arms and grimaces in a menacing manner. "I'm watching you," hisses the monster.

Jake's terror overcomes his shock as he realizes his life might be in danger. He grabs the nearest item, a heavy ceramic ashtray, and throws it at Jehrameel. The ashtray crashes through the window but merely bounces off the Devil. Patricia wakes up and calls for Jake. Jake backs up, looking around for the phone or another weapon, and Jehrameel vanishes into the night.

If the characters are close by, the players may make Wits + Composure rolls to hear Jake's window breaking and Patricia shouting. The characters almost certainly arrive too late to see anything, though if they are very close (or keeping the DuBois house under surveillance), or if you want them to see something, you can allow Wits + Composure rolls (with penalties at your discretion) to spot Jehrameel flying away. Even then, the characters only catch a glimpse of what looks like an oversized bird before it disappears against the night sky.

Jake challenges characters wandering around on his property, but Manipulation + Persuasion rolls get Jake to answer a few questions. Jake simply says he saw someone standing outside his window. He might claim the figure had a knife, to explain why he threw the ashtray. Jake's Manipulation + Subterfuge dice pool is two. The players can roll Wits + Subterfuge or Empathy to discern that Jake is lying, but even if the characters press him, Jake refuses to change his story. Characters may be able to pressure the truth out of him, but Jake's shock and stubbornness make him difficult to intimidate; all such efforts receive a -3 dice penalty. Even on a success, Jake only admits that the figure "looked funny."

If the characters inspect the broken window and surrounding area, have the players make an Intelligence + Investigation roll. Success reveals that the window was broken from the inside, by the thrown ashtray, and also uncovers footprints around the window. The footprints are small and badly formed, making them look like small hoof prints. The prints appear in pairs of two and extend to the back of Jake's yard, then vanish. A successful Wits + Survival roll reveals that the prints space out and grow deeper just before they vanish, indicating that the individual ran to the edge of the yard and then jumped up — and never came down.

After 15 minutes, the police arrive. They take Jake's statement, investigate the scene and shoo away amateur investigators. See the "Tuckerton PD" sidebar for more information on dealing with the police.

Tuckerton PD

Characters with police Allies or Contacts might attempt to gain information from the local constabulary. Characters who engage in fights, larceny or other dubious activities might unwillingly come into contact with the police department, too. Characters who get involved in brawls or

commit misdemeanors likely wind up jailed for an evening, or perhaps released with a warning. Characters caught committing serious crimes are naturally prosecuted.

When dealing with the Tuckerton police force, characters are most likely to talk to Patrol Officer Eloise Vaughn. While the police chief personally oversees the Linny Boyce case, Patrol Officer Vaughn is also assigned to the case. The police chief cannot deal with every reporter or investigator who wants information on the case, so he dispatches Vaughn to handle those matters.

Vaughn is a taciturn officer. She doesn't willingly hand out information on the Boyce case, but persuasive characters with a solid cover story (or appropriate social skills or Merits) can acquire information. Unfortunately, the police know little. Linny Boyce disappeared from her bedroom several nights ago. No one heard or saw anything, save a neighbor who claimed that a boy had been talking to Linny at her window. The police found no fingerprints other than Linny's in her bedroom. A few strange, hoof-shaped footprints showed up in the yard, but the police could not find a trail. No one has demanded a ransom. It appears that some of Linny's personal items were missing, but no bus drivers or taxi drivers recall seeing Linny that night, or in the following days.

If the characters prove especially persuasive (through excellent roleplaying, or a Manipulation + Persuasion roll with a -1 die penalty), Vaughn also reveals that the police suspect Murray Holbrook behind the disappearance, although they have no evidence to support it. Holbrook has been on the scene at several missing children cases in the past decade. In each case, the police determined the child had simply wandered off, crossed Holbrook's path and the old man had seen the child home. At first this made him a local hero, but his repeated involvement with missing children aroused the suspicion of the police. "How is it that he's always in the right place at the right time?" asks Vaughn.

Scene 3: Sins of the Father

In this scene, the characters interview Murray Holbrook. The interrogation and subsequent investigations could lead to a greater understanding of the situation and Linny Boyce's fate.

Hunting Murray Holbrook

You can nudge the characters toward Holbrook's house, without leading them by the nose, by using one or more of the following hooks.

- Holbrook is known as a local expert on the Pine Barrens, as he is an ex-sports hunter and hiker. Locals guide characters looking for maps of Pine Barrens or geographical information to Holbrook.
- An investigation into past Jersey Devil activity turns up numerous newspaper and magazine articles. Half a dozen contain interviews with or references to Holbrook, as he is usually in the area when the Devil acts up.
- Research into previous missing children cases in Tuckerton reveal seven in the last 15 years — the most recent a mere nine months ago — in which a child was thought to have been abducted, but later was found unharmed. Each article notes that the child was discovered by local teacher Murray Holbrook.
- Characters with police Allies or Contacts might use them to gain information on Linny Boyce's disappearance. The police have few leads, but one officer confides that Holbrook is widely regarded as a "weird old man" with an unhealthy fixation on children. The police strongly suspect him, but have no evidence linking him to Linny's case.
- If the characters have a reputation as problem-solvers who deal with the supernatural, Holbrook might contact them in an effort to gain allies who will understand Jehraameel's dilemma. This option takes away much of the mystery, though; you should allow the characters to unravel the truth on their own.

Murray Holbrook lives in a weathered house on the edge of Pine Barrens. Heaps of dead brown pine needles choke his gutters.

Depending on how the characters approach this interrogation, Holbrook could be helpful or aggressive. If the characters display open minds and a willingness to listen to the truth (particularly if they talk about past encounters with the supernatural), Holbrook is more likely to trust them. If the characters are hunting the Jersey Devil or try to intimidate Holbrook, he clams up. He may even try to throw suspicion on himself to thwart the characters' investigations. (More information on Holbrook's personality and tactics appears in his description under "Cast," at the end of this chapter.)

If you feel a verbal exchange works best, the characters arrive at Holbrook's house to find him in the backyard, shouting at the wall of trees. You may paraphrase or read the following exchange, or use it for inspiration.

You round the corner of the house to see an elderly man standing in the barren backyard. He faces the shadowed tree line of the Pine Barrens, his back to you.

"I know you're in there!" the man shouts. "Can you hear me? You're in real trouble now and I can't help you! Talk to me, for God's sake. At least send me a letter!"

The man stops shouting and turns to face you with an angry expression. "Hey! What are you doing here? Don't you know this is private property?"

Holbrook, wanting to protect Jehrameel, doesn't order the characters away. Holbrook wants to learn what they know, and get an idea of what problems Jehrameel might face in the future. Some responses to common questions the characters might ask Holbrook appear below.

- **What's your involvement with the other missing children?** "I was in the right place at the right time. Nothing more than that."

- **Do you think the Jersey Devil really exists?** "The Jersey Devil is just a myth. Human beings love inventing devils to explain away our own sins."

- **How well did you know Linny?** "Not well at all; I only saw her around town now and then. But she always struck me as a sensible girl, not the type to get into a car with a stranger or wander off alone at the mall. A good head on her shoulders, if you know what I mean. Sad that her father wasn't a nicer fellow. Seems to me that, what with living in a house like hers, Linny would have learned to take care of herself."

- **Do you think the Jersey Devil took Linny?** "There's no such creature. If someone took Linny, it's a human monster we'd be looking for."

If the characters are persuasive and act genuinely interested in resolving this situation peacefully, Holbrook thaws a little. The players can roll Manipulation + Persuasion, and you may assign appropriate modifiers based on their roleplaying. In this case, he might communicate the following information.

- **Do you think the Jersey Devil really exists?** "People here have always seen the Jersey Devil from time to time," he says. "Some say it's three feet tall, some six. Some say it has a dog's face, or wings or hooves instead of feet. I don't pretend to understand everything in this world. Maybe there is something out there in those woods."

- **Do you think the Jersey Devil took Linny?** "The motives of such a creature are beyond my understanding. But it's interesting that the Devil has supposedly been around for so long, but has done so little damage. Sure it's attacked people and animals, but four, five, maybe six times in two hundred years. The rest of the time it keeps to itself and doesn't bother anyone. Most of the sightings have been of it peeking through windows. Makes you wonder what life's like for a creature like that."

The characters might press for more information, particularly if they suspect Holbrook is lying, but right now Holbrook doesn't think Jehrameel is in immediate danger. Not until Act 3 does Holbrook panic and possibly ask the characters for help.

Antagonizing Holbrook

Antagonistic characters might not gain even these small morsels of knowledge. If the characters seem unlikely to pursue a diplomatic course of action in regards to Holbrook, they may get into a shouting match with the old man. During the confrontation, Holbrook shoves a character and demands they leave his property at once. A folded piece of paper falls from Holbrook's pocket as he pushes the character. A player can roll Dexterity + Larceny opposed by Holbrook's Wits + Composure to grab the paper without alerting Holbrook. Holbrook suffers a -2 dice penalty due to his upset. (Total dice pool four.) If Holbrook's roll succeeds, he notices the character's efforts and tries to get the paper back, resorting to violence if necessary. On a dramatic failure on either part, Holbrook grabs for the paper as the character does, and it rips in half.

The folded paper is the most recent letter Jehrameel sent Holbrook.

The letter is written on plain white paper with a black ballpoint pen (Holbrook supplies both to Jehrameel). You can photocopy the letter printed here to hand to the players.

The characters may confront Holbrook with the letter. If they act concerned and willing to help, have the players roll Manipulation + Persuasion again, this time with a +1 die bonus. Intimidate checks also receive a +1 die bonus, as the letter appears incriminating. Success results in Holbrook breaking down and entrusting characters with most of the truth.

- **Do you think the Jersey Devil really exists?** "Yes. I've heard it, out there in the woods. It talks to me sometimes, and it sent me this letter. I didn't think anyone would believe me, and it never did any real harm, so I've kept quiet."

- **Do you think the Jersey Devil took Linny?** "The letter certainly implies that he did. He says I won't be able to find him, but I intend to look anyway. I'll be leaving in the morning – I suppose you'll want to come with me?"

Shady Investigations

If the characters try more larcenous methods of investigating Holbrook, you might have the characters find

Murray,

By now you know what steps I have taken, down this path designed to break my heart from its loneliness. She is a rare gem, and together we shall make these verdant boughs our home. I did not inform you earlier, as I knew you would protest. This time my path runs true, though, and all will be well. We will not hide where you might find us, so pursuit is futile. You know better than anyone how generous the forest has been to me. I will come see you again after the interest in me fades. Stay well, and be happy for us.

-J.L.

Holbrook's house vacant. Holbrook can be in the Pine Barrens, searching for Jehrameel, or at the Devil Hunt. Holbrook has no complicated security systems. His house looks ordinary and contains ordinary items; the characters find nothing suspicious or incriminating in their search.

Holbrook keeps a toolshed on his property locked at all times. If Holbrook tries to cast suspicion on himself, to protect Jehrameel, he adds additional heavy chains and padlocks to the toolshed. In truth, the shed contains a significant secret: all of Jehrameel's letters. Holbrook intends to destroy or move the letters if he uses the shed as a decoy, and so the characters have only a day to discover them.

If Holbrook reinforces the locks on the toolshed, Dexterity + Larceny rolls receive a -1 die penalty. Players may roll Intelligence + Investigation to uncover a strongbox buried in the dirt floor. The letters within require time and effort to decipher. Some are nearly 40 years old. In his early correspondence, Jehrameel imitated Shakespeare, but in later years he has grown more clear.

The Letters

Reading and piecing together the story the letters reveal takes several hours. Have the players make an extended Intelligence + Investigation roll. Each roll represents one hour, and the characters need to accumulate six successes to succeed. If they do, the characters learn the history of the Jersey Devil (paraphrase the information found in the "Legend" section of this chapter). If they give up before they accumulate six successes, they come away with the impression that the Devil is a lonely and misunderstood creature, but they lack details. On a dramatic failure, they cannot make heads or tails of the archaic speech, and uncover only a few damning details, such as Jehrameel's first murder and his obsession with kidnapping children.

Act 3

Cast: Linny Boyce: Kidnapped girl, now living in the woods as Jehrameel's sister (see her description under "Cast," at the end of this chapter).

Jake DuBois: As in Act 1.

Jehrameel Leeds: The Jersey Devil (see his description under "Cast," at the end of this chapter).

Mob of Townspeople: A group of barflies and manual laborers who know Jake as a good guy and are willing to help him hunt the devil.

Murray Holbrook: As in Act 2.

Scene 1: The Hunt Is On

Jake DuBois was stunned when he saw the Jersey Devil looming at his window, but now that moment has passed. Jake knows what he saw was real. He's never had hallucinations before, and he wasn't drinking that night. Well all right, he'd had a beer or two, but he knows what he saw. And what he saw was a way out of his miserable life.

Jake thinks that capturing or killing the Jersey Devil could be his ticket to fame and fortune. He disregarded the stories as myth before, but now he knows the truth. The day after the sighting, Jake goes down to his favorite bars and whips up the men with a story of what he saw. He blames Linny's disappearance on the Devil (accurately, though he doesn't know that) and implores his buddies to take action. A handful are drunk, or crazy or fun-loving enough to sign on, and by sunset, Jake has eight men with hunting rifles, shotguns and a net.

As the characters conduct their investigations, they spot Jake and his posse leaving town.

A group of men, shouting and laughing, swagger down the street toward the line of trees on the edge of town. Jake DuBois leads them, a shotgun held prominently in his hands. As they near the woods, Jake points his gun at the trees and yells, "We're coming for you, Devil. You hear me? You can't hide any longer!" The men cheer and press on toward the forest line.

The characters might wish to accompany Jake's team, or the characters might strike out on their own, hoping to warn (or kill) Jehrameel before Jake reaches him. If the characters forged a good bond with Murray Holbrook in Act 2, he approaches them now.

Murray Holbrook, flushed and out of breath, hurries up to you. His thin hair is uncombed, and his shirt hangs untucked. "They're going to kill him," he gasps. "Jehrameel — I mean the Jersey Devil. They're hunting him. I know he can take care of himself, but this time — I don't know. I'm going to go look for him, if you want to come along."

Holbrook tells the characters about Jehrameel's past as they prepare to search; he explains whatever details you think are appropriate. Holbrook admits that Jehrameel likely enticed Linny away, but swears that he looks only for friendship.

Jehrameel is ordinarily almost impossible to track. He has lived in the forest for more than a century, and has evaded many of these hunts before. Now, however, he has Linny, and that makes hiding much harder. Jehrameel is unwilling to leave Linny alone and hidden; he's afraid it might not be safe (and is also afraid Linny might run off).

The players can use the teamwork rules (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 134) to track Jehrameel. If one of the characters possesses excellent survival skills, she may function as the primary actor. Otherwise, if the characters allied with Holbrook, they may ask him to track Jehrameel. In this case, Holbrook is the primary actor, and the other characters can assist him if they desire.

The Hunt

You should not reduce the hunt to a simple die roll, followed by, "After searching for a few hours, you find the Jersey Devil." Create drama and tension by describing the terrain. Lead the characters into creepy areas, or put them in conflict with wild animals. For example:

- The characters track Jehrameel to a 20-foot deep ravine, eight feet across. A shallow river with a stiff current rushes below. Jehrameel used his wings to flit over the ravine, carrying Linny, but the characters must find their own way across. Climbing checks receive a +1 die bonus due to abundant handholds, but jumping checks take a -1 die penalty due to loose soil around the edge of the ravine. Characters might also use Crafts to build a crude log bridge. Going around the ravine costs time, and imposes a -1 die penalty to the players' next tracking roll.
- The characters enter an area where the trees grow so closely together they must squeeze

individually through the mass. Branches scrape along the characters' faces and tangle in their clothes. Shadows dart at the edge of their vision. You might have the characters encounter a wild animal, such as a rabid dog or even a black bear. Combat dice pools take a -2 dice penalty, and all characters' Defense ratings drop by one due to the crowding trees.

- An exceptionally drunken member of Jake's hunting party gets separated from the group. He stumbles across the characters' path and demands to know what they are doing here and if they are allied with the Devil. He may get into a fight with Holbrook, physically assault the characters or simply beg to follow along until the characters return to town.

- The characters pass under an archway formed by heavily entwined trees and disturb a colony of bats. The bats descend on the characters, wheeling and chittering, but do no real damage.

Scene 2: Final Confrontation

This scene contains the story's climax.

Tracking

Tracking Jehrameel is an extended action, with each check representing 30 minutes of tracking. Jake DuBois is not an expert woodsman, but just as many of the men in Tuckerton, he goes hunting on occasion and has basic survival skills. Jake has a dice pool of three (Intelligence + Survival) to track Jehrameel, but using the teamwork rules (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 134) he has an excellent chance of discovering Jehrameel within a few hours. His eight followers each have a dice pool of two.

The number of successes the trackers must accumulate varies depending on Jehrameel's Dexterity + Stealth check. Ordinarily, Jehrameel has a dice pool of six (with a +1 die bonus) when sneaking through the Pine Barrens. With Linny in tow, however, he suffers a -2 dice penalty (total dice pool four).

If Jehrameel makes a successful check, the trackers require a total of 15 successes to find him. If Jehrameel fails, trackers require 10 successes. If Jehrameel suffers a dramatic failure, the trackers require only five successes.

You can also simplify the tracking by having the players roll Intelligence + Survival. On a success, they find Jehrameel just before Jake does. On a failure, they arrive on the scene at the same time as Jake. On a dramatic failure, they arrive minutes after Jake does. You may also require the players to accumulate the appropriate number of successes, but assign Jake a flat time in which he finds the Jersey Devil (for example, after two hours of searching).



Finding the Devil First

If the characters are the first on the scene, they find Jehrameel leading Linny through the woods. Holbrook calls to Jehrameel, and the Devil halts. The characters may use this time to speak to Linny and Jehrameel, but for every 10 minutes the characters keep Jehrameel from leaving, Jake Dubois's next tracking roll gains a +1 die bonus.

The characters might also decide to remain behind and delay Jake while Jehrameel and Linny escape. If the characters demand that Linny remain with them, Jehrameel becomes verbally hostile. Characters who attack Jehrameel or who try to take Linny by force provoke the Devil's wrath, and instigate a physical confrontation. Holbrook does his best to prevent such an occurrence by reminding the characters of Jake's imminent arrival, and by pointing out that Linny is unharmed and apparently willing.

Whatever the characters decide to do, they must decide quickly.

Tie with Jake

The characters might arrive on the scene just as Jake does. Convincing Jake to step down requires exceptional social skills and is unlikely. Jake and his posse probably attack, Jehrameel retaliates and Linny hides.

The hunters are terrified to see the Jersey Devil in the flesh. Three of them break and run immediately, heading back to town at top speed. (You may wish to have one of the hunters attacked by a wild animal on the way home, to either corroborate his story of a monster in the woods or so

that the characters can later blame the stories on a bear or other animal). The remaining hunters follow Jake's orders, but they are confused and disorganized. Jehrameel keeps moving, jumping from flashlight-beam to shadow, and no one is certain of what they see.

Jake, however, knows that he has found the Devil. His desire for fame overrides his fear, and he takes charge. He shouts orders to his men and does his utmost to take the Devil alive, but his men are frightened and shoot to kill. If Jake dies or becomes incapacitated, the rest of the hunters flee.

The characters could take either side. Jehrameel is difficult to kill, but the men are armed with hunting rifles and shotguns, and one has a net with which to entangle Jehrameel's wings. (On a successful Dexterity + Weaponry roll, Jehrameel's wings tangle in the net. He must take a turn to untangle his wings if he desires.) Give Jake's comrades each a Dexterity + Firearms dice pool of three (total dice pool seven with the damage from their old rifles).

Too Late

The characters might arrive on the scene just in time to see Jehrameel fall. Jehrameel doesn't retreat, as he is now protecting Linny. Holbrook screams in anguish at seeing his friend fall and launches himself at Jake. The characters might try to subdue Holbrook, retrieve Linny and possibly stabilize Jehrameel before he dies. Medicine rolls made to help Jehrameel suffer a -2 dice penalty due to his strange anatomy.

If you prefer to let the dice determine the outcome of a conflict between Jake's party and Jehrameel, consider rolling

the dice before the session. Perhaps the characters arrive just in time to see Jehrameel slaughter the last of Jake's men. In this case, the characters might formulate a plan to bring him to justice, or help engineer a cover-up.

Once the confrontation is over, the characters must decide what to do with Jake, Linny and, most importantly, Jehrameel.

Aftermath

At the end of the story, the characters have either protected the Jersey Devil from his hunters, or seen him killed or captured by Jake DuBois. The question of what to do with Linny Boyce remains. By law, she should be returned to her father, but Linny doesn't want to go home. She wants to stay in the woods with Jehrameel.

Linny's Choice

The characters must decide on the right thing to do. Sending Linny home is shortsighted at best, cruel at worst. Yet, can a 12-year-old girl really make an educated decision to leave home and live in the woods? The characters might wonder about her prospects for education and relationships, and might also wonder what will happen if Linny decides she's tired of living with Jehrameel. How would the Jersey Devil react if his new sister said she was leaving?

A compromise would be for Linny to live with someone who knows of Jehrameel's existence and would support maintaining the friendship. Holbrook is an obvious choice, but he is over 70 and probably won't live much longer. Persuasive characters could get Holbrook to agree to look after Linny, though; in six years she will be able to live on her own.

If you suspect the players would be receptive to making Linny a permanent part of their chronicle, Linny might suggest going to live with one of the characters. She's intelligent and has a rudimentary grasp of the occult, and might be an asset to the characters (as well as a liability — she's only a little girl, after all). As a last resort, Linny might ask to be put in foster care, but it's unlikely such a request would accomplish anything. Dan is her legal guardian, Linny displays no evidence of physical abuse and the foster system is overwhelmed as it is.

Linny's father claims to be happy that his daughter is alive. However, in the time she was gone, he realized how much better things were when they were apart. He consents to letting her live with Holbrook or a character. If the players enjoy stories based around intense familial relationships, you might have Linny's father object, and the characters could become embroiled in a battle over Linny's fate.

Jehrameel wants Linny to stay with him, but if Linny decides she'd rather live elsewhere and visit Jehrameel regularly, he concedes to the plan. He would rather have Linny occasionally than risk never having her at all. If the characters live far away from New Jersey, Holbrook is willing to facilitate Linny's visitations.

Jake's Future

Jake DuBois is ecstatic if he successfully slays or captures the Jersey Devil, angry and depressed if he fails. If he succeeds and returns to civilization with the Devil's body, he becomes an instant celebrity as he makes the talk television rounds, writes an autobiography and perhaps even stars in a made-for-TV movie. If he fails, he becomes bitter and blames the characters for interfering and costing him the hunt. Jake might keep tabs on the characters (easily done if they take in Linny), perhaps resurfacing as a villain in the future. Jake also might approach the characters for help if he ever encounters the supernatural again. On the other hand, if he captures or guns down Jehrameel, *something* might happen to him — and to other people involved — before he can publicize his success. The dark forces of the world seem to have an interest in maintaining their secrecy.

Jehrameel's Fate

If Jehrameel accomplishes his goal, he lives happily in the woods with Linny for years to come. She is a good influence on the Devil, teaching him restraint and maturity. The Devil is good for Linny, too, displaying to her the unconditional love of a family member.

If Linny does not come to live with Jehrameel, but visits him, her effect on him is slower and not as pronounced. Still, Jehrameel is grateful for her companionship. He may become dissatisfied with her infrequent visits and concoct a new plan for acquiring a sibling in the future. This time he learns from his previous mistakes, and ensures the characters are otherwise occupied when he sets his plan in motion.

Jehrameel would rather die than live in captivity, but if Jake DuBois does somehow capture Jehrameel, he faces a life of indignity and suffering, on display or in a laboratory.

Sequels

The events in "The Jersey Devil" can lead to other stories, such as the following:

- Linny Boyce comes to live with one of the characters, and after several weeks or months, strange incidents occur. Doors fly open and shut, lights flicker on and off and everyone in the house has disturbing dreams. Linny is convinced the spirit of her dead mother is trying to communicate with her. If Linny stays in Tuckerton, she might contact the characters for help after the strange events begin. The spirit could be Linny's mother's, or it could be another ghost attempting to get a message across. (This story could tie in with several of the scenarios presented in **World of Darkness: Ghost Stories**, particularly "No Way Out" and "Roots and Branches.")

- When Patricia DuBois's baby is born, something goes horribly wrong. The child might look like Jehrameel, or it might look perfectly normal. Either way, Patricia is positive that all is not right with her baby, and she contacts the characters for help.

• Jehrameel, and possibly Linny, lives a peaceful existence deep in the Pine Barrens. Some time later, though, a new predator enters the woods. The creature matches or eclipses Jehrameel in strength and ability, suggesting something supernatural (possibly a werewolf, or a Gangrel vampire). Jehrameel, realizing that he is out of his league, sends word to the characters via Linny or Holbrook that he needs help.

Variations

You can adapt “The Jersey Devil” to suit the needs of your chronicle and the wants of your players.

Red Right Hand

In this variation, Jehrameel Leeds is more like a classic devil. He despises ordinary people and seeks to unravel Tuckerton. He persuades Linny Boyce to run away, leading her into the hands of a human predator (perhaps a modified Murray Holbrook). Jehrameel inflames Jake DuBois’s anger, egging him on to “keep Patricia in line” through violence. Jehrameel promises to back up the other children if they rebel against their parents, and a wave of disobedience sweeps over the town. As the characters track Linny, they sense a malevolent guiding force behind the town’s troubles.

No Devil But Those We Create

It’s possible the Jersey Devil doesn’t really exist. He could be a hoax, created by children seeking attention (perhaps led by Linny Boyce, determined to find a way out of her miserable home life). The Devil could also be a supernatural creature, but one more common to the World of Darkness, such as a werewolf. Jake DuBois could even orchestrate Linny’s kidnapping with a friend who poses as the Jersey Devil, so that Jake can be a hero when he rescues Linny.

Cast

Jehrameel Leeds

Quotes: “The forest has been both kith and kin to me, yet I long to hear a true human voice.”

“The strong have an obligation to protect the weak, and I therefore watch over our most precious, most helpless wards.”

Background: The “Legend” section of this chapter outlines Jehrameel’s history. A mutated creature of supernatural



powers, Jehrameel Leeds fled his home to live in the Pine Barrens and became the Jersey Devil.

Description: The figure stands just five feet tall, so thin it seems it could hide behind a telephone pole. Baggy clothes cover a lanky frame, and the exposed hands and neck look rough, like pale crocodile skin. Above the stalk-like neck sits an unnaturally long face with a pug nose and a long mane of albino-white hair, giving the impression of a dog’s face. Jehrameel stands on two misshapen bony stubs, resembling a horse’s hoofs. The figure straightens and unfurls two gossamer-thin, bat-like wings from its back.

Storytelling Hints: Jehrameel is a creature of strong emotions and an unbalanced mind. While not as crazy as he used to be, Jehrameel still sees the world as a child would. He doesn’t understand why things must be a certain way, and sees no harm in taking what he wants.

Jehrameel possesses unusual strength, tough skin and wings. His Attributes reflect these powers, but you can modify his Abilities to better reflect the story you wish to tell. For example, you might lower his Physical Attributes to make him seem a fragile victim.

Above all, Jehrameel wants to remain safe. After that, he desires companionship. The two desires are so strong that Jehrameel isn’t sure which one he would sacrifice for the other. He doesn’t want to be captured or revealed, but he doesn’t want to lose his “sister” either. If the characters can talk to Jehrameel, particularly if Holbrook backs them up, they may be able to convince Jehrameel to follow a reasonable course

of action. Social interactions with Jehrameel receive a -2 dice penalty due to his childlike nature. The penalty lessens to -1 die if the characters have Holbrook on their side. The penalty disappears entirely if Linny agrees with the characters.

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 5, Resolve 4, Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Crafts (Jury-Rigging) 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 1, Stealth (Moving in Woods) 4, Subterfuge 1, Survival (Foraging) 3

Merits Fast Reflexes 1, Iron Stomach

Willpower: 7

Morality: 4

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 12

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Strike	1 (B)	9

Armor:

Type	Rating	Defense Penalty
Natural	2/3	0

Health: 11

Monstrous Strength: Jehrameel possesses five dots in Strength, but treat him as having 12 dots in Strength for purposes of lifting/moving objects (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 47, for the lifting/moving objects chart). Jehrameel has a +2 dice bonus to all other non-combat, Strength-related dice rolls.

Wings: Jehrameel's wings are functional but flimsy. He can fly for up to 300 yards on his own, or up to 50 yards while carrying up to 100 pounds. If he carries more than 100 pounds, he cannot fly. He must touch down for at least a minute between flights, and he rises to a maximum of 50 feet in the air while in flight. This Ability assists Jehrameel in eluding pursuit, but does him less good while trying to hide Linny in the tangled Pine Barrens.

Linny Boyce

Quotes: "You should be able to pick your family, just like you pick your friends. Family is people who care about you."

"No one wanted me before. Why's everyone looking for me now?"

Background: Linny was a bright and happy child until her mother died. Then her father changed into a monster in human form. While not physically abusive, his neglect and verbal attacks left Linny feeling alone and worthless. Linny's intelligence and fortitude allowed her to realize her situation wasn't normal, and she withdrew from her father, forming a support network among the children at school. It was from the other children she first heard stories of how

the Jersey Devil protects children. When Jehrameel began talking to Linny, she was happy to have made a new friend. When he asked if she wanted to come live with him as his sister, she didn't think twice.

Description: Linny is a slender child with the look of a little girl about her. She has thin, fawn-colored hair and sky blue eyes. She has paired faded blue jeans and scuffed sneakers with a frilly burgundy blouse buttoned all the way up. The chiffon bow around the collar gives her a pretty, old-fashioned look.

Storytelling Hints: Linny is sensible child with a straightforward logic, and sees no reason why she shouldn't live with Jehrameel. Considering that a life with Jehrameel is arguably better than one with Linny's father, the characters may have a difficult time persuading Linny that her chosen life is a poor one. Linny is aware that living in the woods means giving up many things, particularly an education. She's most receptive to offers that allow her to escape her father's house, maintain her friendship with Jehrameel and take advantage of school and other comforts of civilization.

Abilities:

Empathy (dice pool 3) — Similar to many children, Linny has the knack for reading people's emotions and sensing the atmosphere in a room.

Occult (dice pool 3) — Linny has always been fascinated by the occult. Odd dreams and fragments of memory have led her to theorize that her mother's death might not have been natural.

Persuasion (dice pool 4) — Linny's rational mind and impeccable logic make it difficult to argue with her.



Jake DuBois

Quotes: “I spend all day sweating for a few bucks. I’m just having a drink to unwind.”

“The last thing I need right now is more problems. I’m barely making it by as is.”

“When the whole world’s against you, there ain’t no limit in what you’ll do to keep going.”

Background: Jake DuBois has lived an unimportant life. He graduated from high school, got a job at a landscaping company and married Patricia. That was eight years ago, and now Jake is still working as a landscaper, still married, with a car, a house, debt and a drinking problem.

Description: Lean, ropy muscles show beneath this man’s tanned arms, indicating a history of outdoor labor. His plaid shirt, worn over a white T-shirt, blue jeans and work boots could have been taken from a hardware store commercial. He wears his brown hair clipped short and sports stubble along his jaw. He would look perfectly natural with a cigarette tucked behind his ear.

Storytelling Hints: Jake is not an evil man, just one who knows how meaningless his life is. He knows hundreds of thousands of Jakes live across the country, each one with a dream, each one destined for nothingness. Jake feels trapped, angry and desperate. He jumps at a chance to get out of debt or make himself known.



That the characters could offer Jake enough money to make him forget his plan of capturing the Jersey Devil is unlikely. He might budge for a million dollars, or if one of the characters could offer him comparable fame. Otherwise, Jake sees the Jersey Devil as a way out of his loser life, and pursues his goal with fanatical zeal.

Jake’s one weak spot may be that he genuinely loves Patricia. He would be excited about her pregnancy if it weren’t for the tight money situation and his general depression. If the characters claim that Jake’s plans put Patricia at risk, he is more likely to listen to them (they gain a +2 dice bonus on Social Skill rolls).

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2, Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 1

Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Craft (Landscaping) 2, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Intimidation 1, Survival 1

Merits Allies (Bar Friends) 2

Willpower: 3

Morality: 6

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 3

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Shots	Special	Dice Pool
Strike	0 (B)	—	—	—	6
Grapple	0 (B)	—	—	—	6
Shotgun	4	20/40/80	5+1	9 again	4

Health: 8

Murray Holbrook

Quotes: “I’m just an old man, with nothing to contribute and no one who’ll miss me when I’m gone. I’ve no reason to cause any trouble.”

“People are too quick to judge in this town. If you’re even a little bit different, they look at you sideways and cross the street to avoid talking to you. Me, I think everyone has a good side.”

Background: Murray Holbrook was a high school history teacher and sport hunter when his son died in a hunting accident. Holbrook has since become a recluse. His only true friend is Jehrameel Leeds, and Holbrook protects his friend’s secrets.

Description: This elderly man seems a series of sloped angles, from his narrow and somewhat pointed bald head to the sharp bones of his slanted shoulders to the arrow-like toes of his wingtip shoes. He wears a chestnut-brown tweed suit in the style of teachers 20 years ago. His white shirt holds a tint of yellow, and his green striped tie looks threadbare.

Storytelling Hints: Holbrook has little to live for. His



friendship with Jehrameel is the most important thing in Holbrook's life right now. Holbrook doesn't want to go to jail, and he knows no evidence exists to connect him to Linny Boyce's disappearance (because he honestly had nothing

to do with it). Holbrook might deliberately make suspicious comments to keep the characters' attention focused on him. He might wax nostalgic about his lost son, and remark on how nice it would be to have a second chance as a father. He could also place several shiny, high-quality locks on his toolshed to arouse suspicion, or dig up his garden and put in some bushes, to suggest a buried body. The longer the police and characters focus on Holbrook, the more time Jehrameel has to hide Linny.

Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Skills: Academics (History) 4, Firearms 3, Stealth (Camouflage, Moving in Woods) 2, Subterfuge 2, Survival 3

Merits: Direction Sense

Willpower: 6

Morality: 5

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 8

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Shots	Dice Pool
Hunting rifle	5	200/400/800	5+1	5

Health: 7



Bloody Mary

The Legend

From “Fallen Saints,”
by Louise VanDergraaf

Bloody Mary is a terrifying spirit: a ghost who erupts from mirrors to hunt children. Children — especially kids from the ghetto — know her well. Some say that you can find her face behind any mirror. But if you see her face, she’s seen yours. Kids who know Bloody Mary know that you definitely don’t want that to happen.

Some of the kids say Bloody Mary was a witch. They even have her full name: Mary Miller. Even though she was young and beautiful, people scorned her for her strange behavior. She talked to herself, but said she was speaking to spirits in the air. She lived alone in a small house behind a large hedge. Then a terrible thing happened: Mary fell in love.

Nobody agrees on the man’s name; the kids just call him Mary’s “Darling,” so that’s what we’ll call him. But they all agree that he was rich: a son of the city’s elite. It was a secret love; Darling’s father would never let him marry a poor girl with a dark reputation. Still, Mary and Darling shared dozens of nights in Mary’s ramshackle house.

Mary’s fall sprouted from two seeds: her pregnancy and Darling’s engagement to another woman — a “proper” fiancée. Some of the stories say that Mary’s lover went to his marriage unwillingly, but that his father threatened to disown him, even kill Mary. Cynical Saint James Town kids say Darling used Mary for sex and — what an educated grownup might call bohemian freedom. Once he was older and more willing to take up the family’s inheritance, he was quick to leave her behind.

Mary was her own midwife, giving birth to twins alone, between the rotting beams of her house. Afterward, Darling would leave his silk sheets, his new wife and his father’s mansion to visit Mary in secret, paying her just enough to keep her quiet and his bastards alive. Mary’s twins had their father’s green eyes and distinctive features. For a time, she let them leave the house only at night, hiding them to keep their Darling’s money coming. But after they learned to walk, people would catch them out during the day, wandering past the witch’s hedge. They began to talk.

Darling heard the rumors and responded with a plan. He visited with a final payment and a demand: Mary would give him the children, and she would leave town, never to return. His wife would claim them as her own. Mary promised to give him “all the children that were his.”

That night, she took the twins to a bend in the river and drowned them. She kept her word after a fashion. By messenger, she sent her old lover what was his: the children’s faces and green eyes. They were her Darling’s distinctive features, shorn from their small bodies.

*“It never shall be said
that I have left my chil-
dren for my foes to tram-
ple on.”*

— Euripides, *Medea*

Darling's grief turned to rage; he gathered a posse to find and kill her. They torched Mary's home and chased her to that same bend in the river, where she drowned herself instead of facing the torch. It was daytime; when she slid beneath the waters to die, she vanished under the reflections of the sun and the sheltering trees.

The Kingdom of Mirrors

If the story ended with Mary's death, it would be little more than a tragedy. But she was a witch. Magic fills a witch's every act, including her death, and around a campfire or on the streets, the storytellers know that witches never pass into the next world gently.

Some people say that God asked, "Mary, where are your children?" and she couldn't find them among the throngs of Heaven. Without faces, God's angels couldn't find them to lift them into His mercy. God denied her his grace until she found the faces of her children. Another version says that Satan stole the children away, and refused to let them go until Mary killed enough additional children to pay a special toll in unbaptized souls.

With no room in Heaven or Hell, Mary's spirit was forced to wander the places *between* worlds, in lands with no flesh or mercy or any other sensation but the guilt and hate in her heart.

Everyone's seen this place. All they have to do is look in the mirror.

Most people have moments when they look into the mirror and, instead of seeing their familiar face, see something alien. Maybe it's just in the corners of their eyes, or maybe it's only for a split second, but they see *another* face, distorted and not quite human, where theirs should be.

This is where Bloody Mary lives.

Nobody knows who discovered the ritual, but anyone — especially children — can use it. Turn the lights out, light a single candle and call "Bloody Mary" 13 times, and she becomes the face in the mirror. She's crying, and has a hideous, pale face. If you're a child, she'll snatch out your eyes and rip off *your* face to cheat God or pay the Devil.

Roots of the Legend

Where did Bloody Mary come from? The story of a woman who, wronged by society (or the gods, though that's often the same thing) dates back at least as far as the play *Medea*. When Jason, the father of Medea's children, marries

Author's Note: Inspiring Journalism

In 1997, The *Miami New Times* published an article by Lynda Edwards called "Myths Over Miami." The presentation style of the legend here is based on the idea that Storyteller character Louise VanDergraaf is writing an article much like real life author Lynda Edwards' original article.

"Myths Over Miami" is a classic example of urban mythology. You can use it to flesh out VanDergraaf's writing style and motives or you can use the article itself to discuss Bloody Mary in the context of a larger street mythology. "Myths Over Miami" is largely about Bloody Mary and could be considered required reading for this section. As of the date this chapter was written, you could find the original article at: <http://www.miaminewtimes.com/issues/1997-06-05/feature.html>.

Glauce, daughter of Creon, the witch-queen Medea kills her children in revenge. Another version of the myth say that she released her children to Jason's care, but that Creon and Glauce had the children murdered.

Some folklorists say Bloody Mary's name comes from Mary I, the 16th-century English Catholic monarch who had thousands of Protestants killed in an attempt to destroy the Church of England that sprung up under her father, Henry VIII. Some versions of the tale say that Bloody Mary is the queen's ghost, driven to madness by fanaticism and grief over the miscarriages that plagued her life.

Superstitions about mirrors have existed for as long as mirrors have. Centuries of folk magic traditions tell young women to look for their husbands in a reflecting pool (but if they will never marry, they might see death instead). Elizabeth's court magus employed a "skrying" mirror; his assistant went into the mystic's trance to monitor this window to the other world. In the World of Darkness, cults, would-be sorcerers and occultists with bloody or wild ways all use reflecting surfaces to touch strange realms.

Aside from use in black magic, mirrors were thought to trap the souls of the dead. When someone died, family members would cover household mirrors to keep the deceased's spirit from wandering into a restless existence on the other side.

Of course, most people remember that you mustn't break a mirror for fear of seven years' bad luck.

Summary

People — especially children — who know the rite can summon a vengeful spirit called Bloody Mary. Mary itches to

take the faces from children, but they can divert her by suggesting other victims. The first part of this chapter describes this process, as well as Bloody Mary's tragic history and origin.

The second part of this chapter presents a scenario and loose story structure focused on the impoverished ghetto of Saint James Town. Here, teenage drug dealers create gangs and flash their colors. When one kid summons Bloody Mary to slay a rival, the gangs are thrown into turmoil, and reporters, cops and other characters arrive to investigate the mystery of the faceless corpse.

History: Bloody Mary Around the World

Bloody Mary is an old urban legend. People have claimed to have seen her in many guises, all over the world. We're assuming that *your* Bloody Mary is the genuine article: the ghost of a child-killer whose sadness and rage can endanger children today. Perhaps her tale resonates so deeply with the human psyche that it's spread from your city to the rest of the world. And maybe Bloody Mary is more than an angry ghost. She might be a global, malevolent force, waiting for events to bring her to life in the shells of dead women. Ultimately, the answer is up to you, but no matter what you choose, Mary is a local threat, personally significant to the people and places she haunts.

The version of Bloody Mary in this chapter enhances the basic legend with elements from similar counterparts. The mother who kills her own children and the woman wronged by her lover are common mythic figures. Similar to Bloody Mary, the surviving ghosts and creatures in these legends tend to target children. The following are some examples:

Kuchisake Onna: Kuchisake Onna ("Slit-Mouth Woman") is a ghost in Japanese folklore. She was the beautiful, vain wife of a samurai about 1,000 years ago. Her husband, driven mad by thoughts of her infidelity, slit her face from ear to ear, asking, "Who will think you're pretty now?" Myth-tellers say she walks the streets wearing a surgical mask. When she meets a boy or girl, she asks, "Am I pretty?" while revealing her torn face. If the victim says yes, Kuchisake Onna *might* let the child be. Otherwise, Kuchisake Onna uses a knife to kill boys and turn girls into additional Kuchisake Onnas. She usually hunts children, but some versions of the legend say she also stalks beautiful young adults.

La Llorona: La Llorona ("The Crying Woman") is a legend from Mexico and the Southwest United States, but has spread to wherever Hispanic communities thrive. La Llorona is much like Bloody Mary and may be one of the roots of the modern legend. Tale-tellers say that she drowned her children to spare them lives of poverty, and that she drifts through empty places, crying "¡O hijos míos!" or "¡Ay mis hijos!" ("Oh, my children!") Her young victims die of drown-

ing. La Llorona's influence is such that in many places, her legend and Bloody Mary's are one and the same.

Lamia: Lamia was a Libyan princess who Zeus loved. In jealousy, Hera killed all of their children except for the monster Scylla. Grief turned Lamia into a monster. Her legs turned into serpents. Hera cursed Lamia's eyes to remain open throughout her children's deaths, and they remain open still, with the image of that horror burned upon them. Lamia strangles children and lairs in damp caves. Later, her name was associated with vampires, witchcraft and prostitution, and some legends say that she can pluck out her eyes to see the future.

Systems

Get in front of a mirror, light a candle and say the name.

Even though summoning Bloody Mary hardly requires the complexity of high ritual magic, it requires a certain amount of willpower and true belief.

Summoning Mary

It's easy to *try* to summon Mary. Lots of children do it. It's a common dare at sleepovers. Yet most of the time, would-be summoners get the details wrong. They call "Bloody Mary" five or six times, they leave the lights on or they don't light a candle. Even young children can be skeptics; they don't really believe that they can summon her.

Among the minority who know the correct ritual and truly believe, only a few have the ability to focus their minds upon a genuine vision of Bloody Mary. They lack the discipline and their minds wander to more healthy diversions, or they don't know enough of the legend to truly imagine Bloody Mary, crying, sinking beneath the shining waves of the river.

One or several people can call Bloody Mary. Multiple participants use the rules for teamwork on p. 134 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. At least one person in any attempt to summon Bloody Mary must fulfill the following requirements:

- She must have at least one dot in Occult, and this dot must reflect (among other things), a familiarity with the legend of Bloody Mary. Characters who already have the Occult Skill and learn the legend qualify as well, since learning the Skill is a part of their acquired knowledge.
- She must have an unconditional belief in Bloody Mary. If multiple people work together to summon Bloody Mary, at least half of them (rounded up) must share an unconditional belief in the ghost.
- She must perform the correct ritual (saying "Bloody Mary" 13 times, in a dark room with a single candle, staring in a mirror). She can do this alone or in a group. In a group, all participants chant "Bloody Mary" in unison. Everyone in the room must participate.
- None of the participants can wear a mask or anything else that substantially conceals her face. Bloody Mary *wants* their faces.

Children find it easiest to summon Bloody Mary. Children must accumulate eight successes on an extended



Resolve + Occult roll. Anyone who has entered puberty requires 10 successes. Adults (anyone with an Intelligence of at least 2 and age 18 or older) require 12 successes. Anyone over the age of 40 requires 14 successes. Among multiple participants, use the highest age.

Each roll represents 10 minutes. During this time, participants must chant “Bloody Mary” 13 times. Even though the chant itself doesn’t take 10 minutes, the additional time is required so that all the participants can focus their efforts in unison.

Even though 13 is the “magic number,” accumulating successes may involve running through the cycle several times. This has given rise to the myth that a summoner has to call “Bloody Mary,” dozens or hundreds of times. It’s true to an extent, but only because children rarely have the esoteric knowledge and concentration to get it right the first time.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: If one of more the summoners roll a dramatic failure at any point during the ritual, each participant sees some kind of *thing* where her own face should be. The player must make a Resolve + Composure roll. If she fails, the terrifying image overwhelms her for the scene. She may flee or cower, but do nothing else. Unaffected participants may, if they choose, continue the ritual.

If a dramatic failure occurs and *none* of the participants roll a success, Bloody Mary comes out of the mirror (see her description under “Cast,” at the end of this chapter) and attacks each participant who suffered a dramatic failure. Averting one’s face doesn’t stay her wrath. Bloody Mary only

manifests for a brief scene, so potential victims might escape their fate by running out of the house (or other summoning location) or hiding for a few minutes. The ritual ends.

Failure: The participants make no headway in summoning Bloody Mary.

Success: Bloody Mary comes forth and claims a price: the face of one summoner. Fortunately, summoners can avert her attack by hiding their own faces. See below for details.

Exceptional Success: Bloody Mary appears without attacking anyone (though she might use her Terrify Numen; see her description under “Cast,” at the end of this chapter). Summoners can communicate with her if they choose. Unless they offer her a young victim, she departs at the end of the scene.

Out of the Mirror

If the participants in the ritual successfully call Bloody Mary, you might read aloud or paraphrase the following:

One of the reflections in the mirror twists into her: a pale, weeping woman with a hideously distorted face, wearing a ragged white dress. She flows out of the mirror like a liquid into the room.

Her tears flow like the bitter water that drips to the floor from

her rags and pale, bare feet. She takes a light step as if treading on a river's bottom. Her unblinking gaze fixes on your faces.

Mary answers the call for many reasons, but with only one prize in mind. Although the energy of the summoners' thoughts and the raw tradition behind the ritual are important, her primary temptation is the participants' faces.

Unless the summoners achieve an exceptional success, Bloody Mary tries to harvest at least one face then and there. Fortunately, Mary's perceptions of the living world are hazy, and she suffers from the madness of all ghosts, whose strong emotions cloud their reason. Summoners can hide their faces to escape her mutilating grasp, but only at the moment of the summoning. They might use their hands or even turn away. If Mary can't see a single face in the first turn of her arrival, participants can reason with her — but not for long. If those present cannot either offer another victim or convince her to depart, she strikes, leaving only after she's torn away one face, hidden or not.

Banishing Bloody Mary

Dismissing Bloody Mary requires an abjuration or exorcism (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, pp. 213–214). Abjurations drive Bloody Mary from the immediate area, but she is free to stalk the world until she claims a child's face. Exorcisms drive her “back through the mirror”; she cannot return until someone summons her again.

In addition, Bloody Mary has a special weakness. She killed her own children with an act of deception and takes faces from fearful, fleeing children, but children who *stand up to her* are not only unusual, but bring forth her deeply buried guilt and compassion.

Children (those who haven't yet entered puberty) do not suffer the usual penalties for having fewer than three dots in Academics or Occult. The children just need to *believe* that they can banish her (a difficult thing when one is actually in Mary's terrifying presence). Furthermore, children can use teamwork, adding dice to the most competent child's roll. The drawback is that all participants suffer the effects of a dramatic failure.

Offering a Face

A summoner might offer Bloody Mary a substitute victim. Mary responds best to descriptions, drawings and photos of the intended target's face. Her strange, ghostly perceptions need these images and descriptions to navigate, but once they're aroused, she's very, very good at tracking down the target and claiming her due. Once she does, she returns to her native realm, unable to affect the living until someone summons her again.

Diverting Bloody Mary to another victim requires a Manipulation + Expression roll at a –2 dice penalty. For-

tunately, characters can improve their chances with certain props and tactics (see below). Working as a group brings no benefit; only the first to appeal to Mary gets a hearing.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Bloody Mary grows impatient with talk and tries to take the speaker's face, whether or not she can see it.

Failure: Bloody Mary ignores the speaker and tries to get one of the participants (or someone else nearby) to show his face. She normally uses her Terrify Numen to get victims to ignore any precautions they've taken. If he does, she attacks him to take it.

Success: Bloody Mary agrees and leaves in search of the victim, but has not been sufficiently inspired or instructed to track him down immediately. Instead, she wanders around near the victim, where she attacks lone children. If Bloody Mary's summoners live nearby, they may become her victims despite their attempts to divert her.

Exceptional Success: Bloody Mary flies right to the target to dispatch him and then leaves the material realm.

Possible Bonuses: The target's full name (+1), a drawing of the target (+1 to +2, depending on its artistic skill), Mary told that the target has green eyes (+1), photograph or video of the target (+3).

Possible Penalties: Target is a teenager (–1), target is in his 20s or 30s (–2), target is 40+ (–3).

Mary's Children

Bloody Mary is a vicious legend with a strange twist: the legend is commonly expressed in the form of a children's game. Children have passed down the legend over the years, garbling the details as they go, until it has become a game that tests the bravery of children at sleepovers and other unsupervised situations. Girls seem to have a better grasp of the legend than boys, and play the game more often.

Most of the kids don't know they're playing with fire — and most of them will never know. The requirements are specific enough and have a high enough failure rate that most boys and girls come through the experience with nothing more than a headache and a bit of embarrassment for being frightened without any cause. For some children, it's a rite of passage into reason. Mary doesn't appear, and thereby kills their remaining childhood superstitions and fantasies.

Those are the *lucky* children.

Pareidolia and Confabulations

If you peer into a mirror long enough, the face in front of you might look like a stranger's. Psychologists have documented the various ways that mirrors can trick human perceptions. In a shadowy room, the mirror can serve as a conduit for pareidolia: the phenomenon wherein people see illusory patterns and objects in shapes and shadows. Faces are especially common; people seem to be hardwired to



see them in almost anything. Add enough concentration, a light trance state and a vivid mental image of Bloody Mary, and you'll have a number of children who claim to see her. Given that children who play the game are already looking at their own faces in the mirror, the chance of imagining another, frightening face grows to the point where everyone knows *someone* who "really saw" Bloody Mary.

On the other side of the coin, children are often willing to go along with the statements of a peer leader or an authority figure, even if it means stretching the truth of their own experiences. This kind of suggestibility can affect the imagination and even cause children to claim it as genuine memory. This phenomenon is called confabulation.

An infamous example of this was the McMartin Preschool trial. In 1983, a sexual abuse investigation at the preschool led to bizarre testimony from children, including claims of seeing witches in flight, secret tunnels under McMartin Preschool, and bizarre Satanic rituals that would have required an impossible amount of sophistication to perform, much less conceal.

By 1990, authorities had stopped investigating the allegations. They dropped all charges under mounting evidence that the McMartin children had merely answered leading questions in the way they thought adult investigators wanted to hear. As far as Bloody Mary is concerned, children might confuse a fantasy that might please their peers with their real memories. As authority figures, adults who ask leading questions are likely to get the answers children think they want to hear.

Between pareidolia and confabulations, it might be difficult to tell the difference between Mary's genuine manifestations and children's fantasies. Such phenomena conceal the ghost from anyone that might confront her and leave a healthy contingent of children who've passed through the game unscathed. This keeps the game going from home to home, year to year.



False Positives

Tracking down Bloody Mary is harder than it seems. Characters with more experience with the supernatural might encounter even bigger problems than those who enter the story with a skeptical perspective. If the characters are interested in stories about Mary manifesting, children tell the characters what they want to hear.

In the World of Darkness, it's easy to confuse real supernatural phenomena with confabulations. A powerful supernatural conspiracy could perform vile acts comparable to the impossible stories from the McMartin Preschool trial. Lone horrors such as Bloody Mary use the confusion as camouflage. In fact, all the errant belief and imagination might even give Mary a measure of metaphysical power.



Stories in Saint James Town

Bloody Mary's legend often manifests in the form of errant fantasies and optical illusions, but the legend hides real horror. She can appear anywhere children play the Bloody Mary game, but the following section provides specific events, places and people related to Bloody Mary.

In the impoverished public housing project called Saint James Town, poor children find in Mary a way to seize power that is rarely theirs. While Saint James Town's children have good reasons to be angry, they aren't necessarily pure-hearted or even just. Their motives are as simple and powerful as a child's anger, fanned by experiences no child should have to endure. Anna Sandoval, Trevon Winn and others hide their faces when Bloody Mary comes. They know what she wants, and have other prey for her to hunt.

The following sections describe details around a specific location where Bloody Mary appears: Saint James Town. Included is a trigger event that can lead to many different stories. Saint James Town is the brutal stage upon which you can tell the story of your choice, with common characters but any number of unique events.

Dramatis Personae

For more details on these characters, see their descriptions in the "Cast" section (at the end of this chapter) to better understand their motives and actions.

Bloody Mary: Ghost or demon, Bloody Mary is the mother who hates, the wife who kills and a spectral presence whom children can summon with a mirror. She killed Eastside gang member Shawn Wilson.

Jamie Baines: Young Jamie is an abused little boy with the power to see ghosts and spirits. He knows how to call Bloody Mary. He also happens to be P'Centage's bastard son.

Mark Thèrriot: Mark's an older boy who wants to join the Big Saint Crips. He said he'd take care of one of the rival Eastside Bloods to prove himself. He did it by helping Anna Sandoval call Bloody Mary. Shawn Wilson was an Eastsider, so he paid the price. Mark said an unknown gang called the "Face Boys" did the deed for him.

Anna Sandoval: Anna Sandoval is a little girl with a growing taste for blood. Together, she and Mark called Bloody Mary to kill Shawn Wilson.

Trevon Winn: Trevon is the smartest teenager in the Big Saint Crips. He's a pragmatic crack dealer with something of a conscience who suspects Mark Thèrriot has done something terrible.

Malik Baines: Jamie's half-brother and the monster running the Eastside Bloods. He wants revenge for Shawn's death and wants to take Trevon down a notch. Malik believes in the occult and is willing to use his own family to get that power in his court.

Marla Baines: Marla is a crackhead who abused both Jamie and Malik. She has been a hooker and a thief, but now she's mostly a gossip who can point characters to people with stories to tell.

Louise VanDergraaf: Louise is a journalist who wants to write an in-depth article about Saint James Town, using Shawn Wilson's murder as a starting point. She's kind but has no street instincts.

Gary Braund: Braund is a lone cop who's smart enough to know something's wrong with the facts in the Wilson murder. Almost nobody cares about death in the projects, but he's still determined to get to the bottom of things using his considerable wits and any allies he can muster.

P'Centage: P'Centage belongs to the Iron Devils outlaw motorcycle gang. He's the ultimate source of the drugs sold by both the Eastsiders and the Big Saint Crips. P'Centage is an amoral sociopath who would sell out his own son to keep his hand in the projects' drug trade.

Gangs and Groups

Big Saint Crips: Many of the young people in Saint James Town belong to one of two "gangs"; the Big Saint Crips is one of them. Despite the name, the gang has no connection to the actual Crips gang — it's an affectation by kids trying to be tough. The Big Saint Crips oppose the Eastside Bloods. Seventeen-year-old Trevon Winn is the nominal leader of the Big Saint Crips.

Eastside Bloods: This group is the counterpart to the Big Saint Crips and, similar to the Saints, has no connection with the real Bloods gang. Members of this gang are also called Eastsiders. Malik Baines runs the Eastsiders.

Face Boys: Mark Thérriot invented this gang in the wake of Bloody Mary's attack. This gang does not actually exist.

Iron Devils: Unlike the Big Saint Crips and the Eastside Bloods, this motorcycle gang is the real thing. Its members have little interaction with Saint James Town, aside from injecting drugs into the mix.

History

Back in the '60s, Saint James Town enjoyed a brief life as a cluster of deluxe apartment complexes: big beige and cream towers reaching for the sky. They were designed to attract "swinging singles" with lot of money and few commitments, but the gamble didn't pan out. Saint James Town's developers bet on being able to forcibly gentrify the surrounding working-class neighborhood, but a few diehard bungalow owners and small-scale landlords refused to budge from some key sites. By the time speculators found people who would sell, the expense and delay ruined the neighborhood's appeal to the target demographic. By that time, though, the project was unstoppable, leaving behind huge high rises and high vacancies.

The developers recouped their losses by selling what they could to public housing authorities. The layout of the



buildings conformed to popular notions of the time that held that public housing should be built as a closed “village” with limited car traffic. Instead, paths, small parks and courtyards linked the buildings.

Of course, this kind of planning combined with impoverished tenants led to the same disasters that struck virtually every public housing project built using this model. In exchange for cheap rent, Saint James Town inhabitants suffered rampant crime and indifference from the authorities. The “village” paths gave drug dealers a place to sell and keep police cruisers out. Saint James tenants complained, of course, but they didn’t have the political pull to get foot patrols into the area. And when hating the poor could build political capital, politicians were happy to paint area residents as cheats and hoods, slashing maintenance budgets and leaving the whole place to corrode.



Author’s Note: The Real Saint James Town

Saint James Town has been designed to add to the city where you center your games, but it’s based on its real-life counterpart. The real St. James Town (note the spelling difference) is a neighborhood on the east side of Toronto. St. James Town is the most densely populated area in Canada — and one of the poorest in Toronto. This chapter has exaggerated and elaborated on aspects of the area.

St. James Town has a complex and interesting history, and this section isn’t meant to disparage the real people who live and work there. If you want to borrow more information about the real neighborhood for your game, you can find a number of web pages devoted to the area, including an extensive Wikipedia entry.

The illegal drug market casts a long shadow in the fictional Saint James Town. You’ll want to research it if you run an extended game in the projects. To get you started, I recommend David Simon and Edward Burns’ *The Corner*; it was made into an HBO miniseries in 2000, but the book is readable.



Bloody Towers

Saint James Town outlasted the street crime panics of the ’80s and ’90s without benefiting. Once pushed, the cops kicked the high-profile gangs out, but didn’t care if replacements came rolling in. Now, Saint James Town isn’t even infamous as a “project,” but crackheads’ cars still creep down bordering streets every night. The only remaining legacies of the ’60s’ high hopes are the towers. Twenty floors or more, these build-

ings showcase the worst of that period’s architecture. The steel struts of the balconies are rusted red, and half the panels are missing, making the exteriors look like nests of rotting plastic teeth. The parks are overgrown with weeds, and the concrete is cracked. The only vibrant color comes from the graffiti that crawls up the first 10 feet of every building. Beautiful artwork stands out beside the spidery layers of gang tags.

Business

Contrary to popular belief, outsiders are the ultimate source of much of the area’s crime. The Iron Devils motorcycle gang controls Saint James Town’s drug market. P’Centage (see “Cast,” at the end of this chapter) is the club’s representative here. He believes in “opportunity,” so the Iron Devils let local gangs take care of most of the actual street sales. He’s happy to let Saint James Town kids flash gang signs and shoot the hell out of each other as long as the product always comes from the Iron Devils. If it doesn’t, the offender takes what locals call a “holy dive” off the top floor of one of the apartment buildings.

When things run smoothly, the cops can swarm in every once and a while and scoop up some kids calling themselves Crips, Bloods or Latin Kings, letting the Iron Devils quiet supply flow on to the next taker. By and large, the public (and mostly powerless) face of the drug market in Saint James Town is that of a bling-flashing 15 to 18 year old.

Desperation, a dozen personal fantasies about getting out of the projects, and the drugs fuel the kids’ activities. Half of the kids use their product full time, and most dealers are at least occasional users. Crack is the mainstay of the Saint James Town drug market, followed by crystal meth. Heroin is third, and anything with cannabis is what your neighbor grows in his closet as a sideline, not a “street drug.”

Even though the tenants don’t bring most of the drugs into the projects, the kids are selling them and in many cases, their parents and neighbors are using them. Saint James Town is rife with hardcore addicts — and addicts don’t take good care of their kids. That’s one reason why the older ones find their way into gangs and the younger ones deal with shootings, abuse and neglect.

Bloody Mary

Bloody Mary first makes herself known when Shawn Wilson dies. Shawn was a teenage gang member Mary killed after Anna Sandoval and Mark Thèrriot summoned her. The summoning is one link in a chain of poverty and revenge that threatens to lead Mary back again.

What Really Happened to Shawn Wilson

Shawn Wilson was one of Malik’s Eastsiders. He was a 14-year-old neophyte gang member with a big mouth: one of the more visible participants in fights between his gang and the Big Saint Crips.

Bloody Mary killed him, but Mark Thèrriot and Anna Sandoval are to blame. Mark’s been at the heels of the Big Saint

Murdered Teen in Saint James Town

Louise VanDergraaf, Saint James Town – Police have confirmed that the body found in a Saint James Town courtyard was local teenager Shawn Wilson. Wilson’s body was not initially identified because of its condition. Police said that the teen’s face was mutilated beyond recognition.

A source within the police department confirmed that the victim was carrying several vials of crack cocaine and about \$300 in cash. No witnesses have been found. Police had no comment on whether the killing was a drug-related slaying.

Area resident Marla Baines and a friend found the body last night. “It was weird,” said Baines. “I worked on a killing floor of a meat packing plant once. If you rip off skin like that it leaves a mess, but there was nothing there.”

Saint James Town has seen a rise in deaths over the past five years. Most have been suicides. According to police, the annual number has doubled since 2001.

Crips for months. He got Anna to help him call Bloody Mary to impress the gang. Shawn was just a convenient target who wore the wrong colors. Unfortunately, calling Bloody Mary to kill Shawn didn’t impress the Big Saints – she just scared the shit out of them. Mark said he knew a gang called the “Face Boys” who did it for him as a favor, but nobody believes him. The Big Saint Crips know that Mark is connected to *something* that’s too strong and brutal for some poser kid to control.

Otherwise, Shawn’s history is an open question, left for you to elaborate. At your discretion, he might be a ghost himself, faceless as he was in the moment of death. He might return as a ghost. His ghost might know something about Bloody Mary that he obtained from the mysteries of death, or he might have just seen Mary when she came for him. As a ghost, he might be anchored to Anna or Mark.

Motivations

Shawn Wilson’s death is designed to get the characters involved with the legend of Bloody Mary. One or more of the characters could have a personal tie to Saint James Town and its people. Shawn Wilson (or any of the characters in this chapter) might be a character’s friend or relative. Street-savvy characters might live in or near the projects.

- **The Reporter.** Louise VanDergraaf might ask characters to help her with her Saint James Town article. She knows that she’s out of her element in the projects. She wants informants, people familiar with urban culture, soci-

ologists and other experts. She’s not interested in conspiracy theorists and amateur occultists unless they pass themselves off as being interested in “urban folklore” or similar fields. She is looking for a cultural, even mythic angle for her piece and might see the characters’ stories as good sources.

- **Protectors.** If the characters have connections to the neighborhood and are known to be good people (characters with appropriate Status or Allies Merits might qualify), Trevon Winn might ask for their help. Shawn’s murder can convince Trevor to change his life. He doesn’t want to go without protecting himself from P’Centage and whatever killed Shawn Wilson. Trevor thinks Mark has a gang, and whatever killed Shawn is just as capable of hunting Trevor down.

- **Expert Witness.** If one of the characters has medical or forensic expertise, Gary Braund might come to her. At this point, the coroner’s office doesn’t have any more information and, thanks to the projects’ reputation, isn’t trying as hard as it might. On a related note, characters who know about cults and serial killers might get a call from Braund, too, since he thinks either one of them might be responsible for such a strange murder. At this point, Braund is even willing to discreetly look for a psychic. He can pay characters with credentials (for example, those with the Status Merit) for their time, but not unofficial experts.

- **Occult History.** Bloody Mary’s modus operandi is distinctive enough that a character might recognize it from a previous unsolved case (see below). The trigger might be something tied to the character’s past or something she came across in a professional capacity.

- **Visions.** Finally, characters with the Unseen Sense Merit (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 109–110) or other supernatural senses may have a premonition or vision of Shawn Wilson’s murder.

Act 1: Mary Walks

Saint James Town’s children have successfully called Bloody Mary once. During the course of the story, they should have a reason to do it again. The following are possible reasons:

- **Sins of the Mother.** Jamie Baines calls Bloody Mary. He might say her name 13 times after suffering a severe beating at the hands of his mother. His attempt is dangerous, because Bloody Mary doesn’t like older victims. Jamie is also using guesswork, since he didn’t participate in the first calling himself.

- **Don’t Mess with My Brothers.** Malik wants revenge for Shawn’s death. Malik didn’t care about the kid much, but it’s an assault on his gang that he has to answer. He forces Jamie to tell him more about Bloody Mary and deduces that he could force Anna to send Mary against Trevon or Mark. If Mark gets wind of it, the two might race to see who can summon Mary first. Then again, Anna might double-cross Malik and set Mary on him.

- **A New Weapon.** P’Centage pieces evidence of Bloody Mary together by pumping Marla and Jamie Baines

for information. The ghost offers P'Centage a supernatural edge. Unfortunately, Bloody Mary prefers to hunt children, so sending her against his enemies could backfire.

• **Try, Try Again.** Trevon doesn't initiate Mark into the Big Saints, but the kid is determined to prove himself as a "real gangsta." The other Big Saint Crips aggravate the situation by calling Mark out on the non-existence of the Face Boys. Mark might try to call on Bloody Mary to take out Malik, whom Trevon hates, or Mark might turn her against a Big Saint who mocks him.

• **Creating the Face Boys.** Anna Sandoval has big plans. Mark's "Face Boys" story has gotten back to her, and she figures that she could *make* the gang real. First, she has to get one of her friends working the drug market. Mark will do, but that means Trevon has to die. Then Bloody Mary will kill Malik and anyone else who opposes Mark's rise to power. Anna can use all the money they'll make to get her and the other children a better life. Once they have enough money to leave Saint James Town, she can have Mary get rid of P'Centage as a "parting gift," to the community. Anna knows that Bloody Mary is dangerous to call, so Anna recruits Jamie Baines and even teaches other children enough to help with the ritual.

• **Disseminating the Ritual.** Louise VanDergraaf writes the first part of her "Fallen Saints" report about Saint James Town. She centers her story on the lives of the projects' children, giving it a mythic feel by describing neighborhood life through their eyes. She writes quite a bit about their customs and superstitions. Thanks to Jamie Baines (whose visions make him the most interesting interview subject), she describes the effective Bloody Mary ritual. The news story becomes a manual for any precocious child who reads it. Louise might have a daughter who gets a sneak peak, or Louise might get the story published before characters can evaluate the situation and intervene.

She's Seen Your Face - Have You Seen Hers?

At some point in the first act of your story, the characters learn about Bloody Mary. They either hear the legend from one of the children or witness a fresh example of her work as events unfold. When that happens, your players (and their characters) will want to find out more.

Common Knowledge

Bloody Mary is an urban legend, not an obscure bit of occult lore. On the other hand, Bloody Mary has been a local kids' game for decades and as such, has suffered a severe case of "broken telephone." Players' characters may have fooled around with

the legend when they were younger, but so many versions exist that characters aren't likely to know all the ins and outs of the story. For example, one character might not know anything about the full legend but may have played the correct form of the game as a child. Another could know the legend well, but not know anything resembling the true ritual.

All kinds of variations exist. The characters may have the whole story among them, but need to delve into childhood fancy, local legends and old hearsay to bring it out.

Since Bloody Mary is somewhat common knowledge, avoid traditional plots that conceal the revelation of the legend. Instead, your goal should be to present the murder and legend as disparate, mundane elements at first. As characters investigate, draw these elements closer together and bring forth more hints of the supernatural truth until (assuming the characters are smart enough), they must come to the conclusion that Bloody Mary is real and stalking the projects.

This situation is a rare instance where you can break the barrier between player and character knowledge. In this type of story, you're justified in saying that the characters know what the *players* know about Bloody Mary, since the urban legend exists in real life. Players can even do research "in character" by visiting real websites and libraries. After they show you what they've found, you can make any modifications needed to nudge their characters closer to the version of the legend that dominates this chapter.

Research

Smart characters will want to investigate the history of the area, look for similar murders or research folklore about Bloody Mary. Characters investigating the legend can discover all of the information about Mary in this chapter — except for the correct way to summon her. The true ritual is hidden among dozens of useless variants, so no one version seems more legitimate than another — until Mary answers.

Old Murders

Bloody Mary has been around for a long time. Not all her killings have gone unnoticed. As a legend tied to children, the ghost has flown under the radar of the occult conspiracies and other organized secret-hunters. Even so, she has left bodies in her wake. Characters who intend to look for past killings must either go through media archives (where Louise VanDergraaf can help them) or old police reports (where they need Gary Braund, an appropriate Social Merit or some smooth talking).

Media

Characters can hunt through archival newspapers under glass and on microfiche, or, perhaps, talk to an expert on serial killers. Videotapes and online databases are too recent to record the “Orphanage Butcher.” These murders took place from 1926 to 1928, and the perpetrator was never found. Even though they were infamous in their day, the five Orphanage Butcher murders aren’t well-known anymore.

Wednesday, December 7, 1927

Police Vow to Catch Orphanage Butcher

by Stephen Sharpe, Crime Bureau

Today, the Police Commissioner’s office assured the public that the so-called Orphanage Butcher would soon be brought to justice despite no public disclosure of new evidence or leads.

Three days ago, citizens were shocked to learn that the killer had struck again. As we reported yesterday, this reporter learned that the murderer of Alfred Hansen committed the same barbarity upon his victim as in the previous two murders. Similar to the other victims, Hansen was connected to the Episcopal Sisterhood of Charity Orphanage. He taught the children arithmetic and sports until late last year, when he took what orphanage board members termed a mandatory sabbatical.

Orphanage director Arthur Dean said, “This has been a terrible time for our gentle institution. Losing a little girl, a boy on the cusp of leaving us for the wider world and now Alfred, has left an awful weight on all our hearts.

“The children are quite frightened,” said Dean. “They’ve turned to superstition because they think the Devil has come, and though I correct their beliefs, I’m sometimes inclined to agree.”

Three months later, Arthur Dean was one of the last two victims. The other was 11-year-old Eliza Barrett. The “barbarity” mentioned in the news story was the removal of the victim’s face in all cases but one. Barrett’s strangled corpse was found in the same room as Dean’s faceless body.

Police Reports

The police’s records show that investigators never found fingerprints or telltale fibers at the crime scenes. Profiling techniques in the ’20s theorized that the killer was a physically strong veterinarian or medical student.

The first two victims were Annabelle Black, age nine, and Tobias Wells, age 14.

The investigating officer filed the following report about the orphanage:

October 30th, 1926:

This is as miserable a place as you can imagine. The children are out of their wits with fright, and not just at the killer. Under Dean, the staff lay the cane hard; the children cringe as the staff walked by. I feel that Tobias was not well-liked by the younger children, but they would not say why.

I have heard some things about the arithmetic teacher that are unmentionable here. He’s a small, nervous man. I intend to take it up with the Captain tomorrow. Minutes after he walks by, the little girls run to the WC if they can. I heard them chant, “Bloody Mary full of grace,” giggling, several times. It was most peculiar, but one of the girls said it was a Catholic prayer for his health.

The key part of the report on the last murder is a section that was sealed by order of the Police Commissioner in 1929. Though it’s technically against regulations, there are no real consequences for breaking the seal, because the case is mostly forgotten.

January 5th, 1929

I’ve taken the liberty of intercepting and burning Det. Bott’s letter to headquarters. I’m sure we both feel that the details of the case are miserable enough without casting aspersions on the late Arthur Dean. The situation would be embarrassing for the precinct as a whole. While it does indeed appear that Dean’s hands could match the welts on the little girl’s neck, I reminded Bott that we supposed that the killer must be a similarly tall, strong man to remove the faces of victims with such alacrity. The killer must have been scared away before acting on his impulse fully.

The Truth

The truth behind the Orphanage Butcher murders is that Eliza Barrett and Annabelle Black called Bloody Mary after suffering abuse at the hands of Tobias Wells and Alfred Hansen. Eliza turned Mary on Annabelle after she threatened to tell Dean what had happened. Arthur Dean eventually linked the Bloody Mary game to the killings. He strangled Eliza for summoning Bloody Mary, but that didn’t save him from the ghost’s subsequent attack.

The Episcopal Sisters of Charity Orphanage is still standing, but it's boarded up and used for storage now. The boys' and girls' wings are both filled with junk, making it a maze to negotiate. Some of Bloody Mary's victims might haunt the place. They could be threats, but they could also provide characters with more information.

Act 2: Consequences

Once Bloody Mary kills again, the results depend on what happens to the victim's body.

Finding a Body

If the authorities find another body, they try their best to keep it quiet. The police are reluctant to reveal a possible serial killer because it makes them look incompetent and probably attracts the FBI. Braund reluctantly keeps journalists at arm's length, leading to possible tension (and determined reporting) from Louise VanDergraaf.

One way or another, the story eventually gets out. Wilson's death changes from an anonymous tragedy in a downtrodden part of town to the work of an unknown serial killer that the tabloids call the Saint James Slasher. One week after the revelation, the FBI gets involved. The crime is tied to gangs and children and practically begs for their expertise in killer profiling.

The case, however, defies easy answers. Bloody Mary is almost impossible to track or capture, and the authorities aren't looking for a supernatural problem. The FBI and police form a special task force that shuts Detective Braund out of the loop. Braund still has enough pull to find out that the case is going poorly, however. He is willing to work under the radar with the characters when they convince him they can solve the case or stop the killing.

Hidden Corpses

If P'Centage manipulates children to send the ghost against his rivals, he also takes care to hide the bodies. Malik Baines does it. Since Malik's juvenile record comments on his violent tendencies and the ghost doesn't leave forensic traces, investigators may pin the killing on him. If P'Centage thinks the police are on to him, he gladly lets Malik take the fall. Malik is stupidly loyal to the biker, so he keeps his mouth shut unless he sees proof that P'Centage is actively framing him.

Malik on the Run

If Malik knows the police hunt him, for whatever reason, he searches the projects for an explanation and for revenge — not necessarily in that order. Trevon Winn and Mark Thèriot are at the top of Malik's shit list. He also acts if Bloody Mary kills Marla Baines. The event reawakens conflicted feelings about his mother and, in a rare show of compassion, inspires him to do something to protect Jamie.

Malik takes Jamie to act as his guide around supernatural threats. Even if Marla lives, Jamie's disappearance might go unnoticed, because she lets Jamie wander around unsupervised all the time. Jamie in hand, Malik tries to get Bloody Mary to work for him by getting rid of anyone he hates or he thinks knows enough to threaten him. Enemies might include Gary Braund, Louise VanDergraaf and any obviously nosy characters. Of course, more deaths attract more attention, but by the time Malik resorts to this tactic, panic and drugs have killed his better judgment.

If Jamie killed Marla, Malik can't accept it. He gets it into his head that Trevon Winn is really the one responsible.

Mary's Operations

Bloody Mary's behavior depends on the circumstances under which she is summoned. If the summoners lose control (likely), she can enjoy an extended stay in the material realm. The ghost is smart enough to avoid other supernatural entities and realizes that if she gets too greedy, people might find a way to banish her. After killing one or two more victims she spaces them apart, hunting in an ever-wider circumference and biding her time for moments when parents leave young children alone.

Complications

You might complicate events in Act 2 in one or more of the following ways:

- FBI experts come up with profiles that match some or all of the players' characters. If the characters have been seen snooping around Saint James Town, they could be the targets of a manhunt.
- The desperate task force recruits unusual help in the form of a genuine psychic or other supernatural being (see **World of Darkness: Second Sight** for some low-powered possibilities). This individual helps the police for selfish purposes. His powers might be able to bind Bloody Mary, but he might deliberately lead the task force astray to attack his enemies.
- Blood Mary's victims become ghosts. Jamie Baines can see them. They clamor for revenge, but their anchors make it impossible for them to lash out at Bloody Mary. Mary is mobile; they are not.
- The Iron Devils motorcycle gang decides the situation is bad for business and appears in force to patrol Saint James Town. Gang members are willing to kill anyone who gets in their way, whether law enforcement or more important characters. This complication likely occurs in the event of P'Centage's death.

Act 3: Resolutions

You can resolve stories about Bloody Mary in one of two ways. In the first, Bloody Mary is an unusual, powerful ghost. Characters can find a way to permanently end her threat.

The other option is that Mary is something more: a twisted entity that characters cannot banish, but only hold at bay.

Laying Mary to Rest

Bloody Mary is a powerful, unusual ghost. Ghosts have certain drives and weaknesses detailed in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (pp. 208–216). Mary Miller’s ghost is driven by two drives: a twisted sense of motherhood and rage at being betrayed. Attempts to permanently lay her to rest focus on answering these motivations.

The Bend in the River

Bloody Mary has many temporary anchors, but her true, essential anchor is in a bend in the local river. Mary Miller’s skeleton is sunk deep in the riverbed. The flesh is long gone. The characters need permits, special equipment and expertise to dig a dozen feet below the riverbed. Smart characters can manipulate the police or FBI into doing this for them, perhaps by claiming the remains are those of a recent victim linked to the Saint James Town murders.

The Darlington (see Bloody Mary’s description under “Cast,” at the end of this chapter) family can tell characters where to find her body. This knowledge is part of the family history they inherited from their ancestors, including Mary’s lover, Martin Darlington. The Darlingsons consider the story trivial unless you’ve decided that the family has a more sinister agenda. Clever characters who research Bloody Mary’s myth can also track down the rough location and start digging.

Mary can manifest at the bend whenever she pleases, but normally does so only when small children approach. The ghost isn’t as angry and murderous this close to her body and looks more as Mary Miller did in life. She is maternal toward the young here. Therein lays the tragedy, for her kind nature is the reason why she teaches children to summon her. At the river’s edge, the ghost teaches the correct ritual, because in this calmer state, she believes that she comes to help children. The murderous aspect of her personality is subdued here, and she doesn’t remember the terrible things she does. This fact changes only if someone reminds her that she killed her own children. In this case, she reverts to her monstrous form.

If anyone disturbs her body, Mary appears in her wrathful form to terrify and attack intruders. Mary’s ability to materialize makes her dangerous. Still, characters who destroy Mary Miller’s bones or give them a proper resting place (a professional grave marker and a ceremony) rid the city of her scourge, and the Bloody Mary game becomes an innocent children’s pastime.

Ghost-hunters can also take the fight to Bloody Mary by using blessed items (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 214) against her.

Also, further digging down the river uncovers the bones of Mary’s children. No ghosts cling to them, but they have a powerful effect: presenting them to Bloody Mary confronts her with her crimes, adding a five-dice equipment bonus to exorcism attempts. Of course, finding the bones without dredging the river or using supernatural powers is nearly impossible.

Revenge

Characters can also fight Bloody Mary by confronting the tragedy at the root of her story. Mary’s murders are an act of rage against Martin Darlington. This obsession plays out every time she appears. Yet Martin Darlington is long dead, so the characters must turn elsewhere to satisfy her thirst for revenge.

The simplest solution is to convince Mary that Martin has long since turned to dust. Unfortunately, the ghost is not so easily convinced — especially by an adult. A child might be able to convince her, particularly at the bend in the river. Yet this solution requires the characters to endanger a child — a moral quandary.

The characters might summon Mary to the Darlington household so that she can see for herself that Martin is gone. The ancestral house is still there, but thanks to vestigial superstition on the part of the family, no child has ever played the Bloody Mary game there.

Redemption

Bloody Mary could also redeem herself by saving a child from harm. If she saves Jamie Baines from Marla (or later in the story, Malik or P’Centage) she finds a measure of peace. The trick is to confront Bloody Mary and make her realize what must be done. Again, the ideal situation is for the characters to get children to cooperate with them, as Mary has trouble perceiving, understanding and trusting adults.

If the characters can’t get Bloody Mary to help a single child, they might find a way for her to help all the children in Saint James Town. P’Centage and the Iron Devils are the most destructive influence on area children. The drug dealer and the gang motivate the kids to join gangs and turn them into criminals and addicts.

Simply killing P’Centage isn’t enough. Characters must ensure that the Iron Devils or other criminals don’t send anyone to take his place. Still, if Bloody Mary intentionally strikes a blow against the poison in Saint James Town, she finds a measure of redemption. In all likelihood, the characters must handle the details, because Mary Miller’s ghost can only kill and terrorize — not heal.

Mary Evermore

If Bloody Mary is the manifestation of a primordial evil or persistent archetype in the collective unconscious, the city may never be rid of her.

If you use this option, permanently destroying Bloody Mary is impossible. If she “dies,” her form crumbles into a bloody rot, and she loses all of her Essence. She then regains one point of Essence per day and cannot manifest, even if summoned, until she regains it all (see the rules for spirits in **Werewolf: The Forsaken** and **Mage: The Awakening** for a more detailed explanation of this process).

Characters can extend this process by finding Mary Miller’s bones and destroying them, depriving Bloody Mary of an anchor to the physical world. She can still appear, but she can’t use the Materialize Numen. So, Bloody Mary can’t kill her victims — for a time.

In the end, the act offers only a temporary respite, because the malevolent myth of Mary is virtually immortal. All it takes is another tragedy: a mother so hurt and enraged that she makes the choice that Mary Miller, La Llorona and Medea once made — and a choice that Marla Baines might make. If she or anyone else kills a child to lash out at the source of her suffering, Bloody Mary finds a voice, a vessel and a new portal to the world at the moment of her death.

Cast

This section includes detailed descriptions of the characters at the heart of Saint James Town. Consider each character’s description “time stamped” to a period immediately after Shawn Wilson’s murder. It’s a good idea to review each character before telling a story set in Saint James Town.

The Ghost

Bloody Mary is a ghost with unusual powers. Some students of the occult might believe that her legend has given her special traits, or that she is just one manifestation of a mythic archetype. As Storyteller, you can use any theory you prefer.

Bloody Mary

Background: Who is she really? The “Legend” section at the beginning of this chapter details a version of Bloody Mary — perhaps the one best known in your city. How close to the truth is it? That’s up to you, but a few suggestions appear below.

If Mary is merely an unusual ghost, she had the name Mary Miller. The events of the story are all true. Her lover was Martin Darlington — “Darling.” In your city, the Darlingtons are still an influential (if obscure) family. Bloody Mary’s story is one of the family’s secrets. Finding the connection might require an Intelligence + Occult roll and/or three dots of Status among your city’s old money families — enough to hear rumors about skeletons in the Darlingtons’ closets and connect them to the legend.

If Mary is something more than a ghost, the above information might still be true. Other possibilities exist, such as the following:



- Bloody Mary is a demon or an ancient, evil ghost that Mary Miller summoned to avenge herself on her lover, but it betrayed her by killing her children.

- A spirit of child murder subtly influenced Mary Miller’s life to feed off her actions and emotional anguish. As she died, the spirit found a way to take her place. This spirit uses Mary’s myth to better feed its dark appetites. (A spirit is a bit different from a ghost. All the necessary rules here appear here, but more detail can be found in **Werewolf: The Forsaken** and **Mage: The Awakening**.)

- As she died, Mary dedicated herself to an evil force — one responsible for legends such as hers around the world. Her ghost somehow fused with this force, giving it unusual powers.

- The Darlingtons are sorcerers. Martin sacrificed his own children in order to turn Mary Miller into a ghostly servant. However, a critical part of his ritual twisted out of his control or found its way to a few wealthy children, who perpetuated the legend.

Description: Bloody Mary is a gaunt woman with black hair, white, white skin and milky white eyes covered in a film of green algae. Her matted hair is drenched and long enough to weave through holes in the rotted remains of an old blue dress. She constantly cries; the tears have run for so long that they’ve left scarred furrows down her cheeks. The tips of her long fingers harden into rusty knives at the tips. These make a rasping noise as they twitch.

Storytelling Hints: Bloody Mary does not like to speak. When she appears, her chief goal is to kill her intended victim. As a supernatural being, Bloody Mary doesn’t perceive the world in the same way as human beings. Instead, people and things are easier or harder to see based on their relationship to her hunt.

This phenomenon is why children can redirect her by giving her an alternative face. If she commits to a target, that victim becomes easier to sense and compulsively attractive to her.

Attributes: Power 6, Finesse 4, Resistance 4

Essence: 10

Willpower: 10

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 8

Defense: 6

Speed: 20

Size: 5

Corpus: 10

Numina: Ghost Sign (10 dice), Ghost Speech (10 dice), Materialize (10 dice; see below), Terrify (10 dice).

Special: Unlike other ghosts, Bloody Mary is unable to move freely without being summoned. If Bloody Mary has not been summoned, she resides in whatever realm lies “behind the mirror,” be it some strange world of your own design or a realm detailed in books such as **Mage: The Awakening** or **Werewolf: The Forsaken**. Bloody Mary’s true home is a matter for you to decide.

Bloody Mary does not have an anchor in the traditional sense. Her “anchor” is any mirror that summons her. It remains her anchor for as long as she remains. Destroying the mirror banishes her to her home realm until someone summons her again. She *might* have a permanent anchor as well, which might banish her forever. See “Act 3: Resolutions” for possibilities. The mirror determines the maximum extent of her movements as if it were a normal anchor (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 209–210).

Materialize: The Materialize Numen allows Bloody Mary to fully enter the material world, but doing so is taxing. Spend three Essence and roll Bloody Mary’s Power + Finesse; Mary can remain material for a number of hours equal to her successes.

Bloody Mary can attack and be attacked in material form. Her attacks inflict lethal damage. Bloody Mary always aims for the faces of her victims; roll Power + Finesse for her attacks, but subtract three dice because of her specified target (in this case, the victim’s face; see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 165–166). In addition to injury, Bloody Mary’s talons can horribly disfigure a victim. If she kills her victim, Bloody Mary cuts off his face. Non-fatal attacks carry effects that are up to you, and might include penalties to appearance-based Social rolls that might be cured only with plastic surgery.

Ghost or Legend?

It’s up to you to decide whether or not Bloody Mary is a powerful local ghost or a manifestation of an enduring, mythic power. These options aren’t mutually exclusive. Perhaps dying in a certain way binds the ghost to a mythic archetype.

In the occult world, myths, ideas and feelings are natural laws of their own.

Ghosts are often focused on their former lives to the exclusion of all else, but spirits of nature and ideas can be greatly influenced by mythological forces. This power is called Resonance (see **Werewolf: The Forsaken** and **Mage: The Awakening**), and it can weaken, empower or mutate spirits. Ghosts aren’t usually affected this way, but it isn’t against the rules, either.

If Bloody Mary draws power from the legend, permanently defeating her is probably impossible. If you choose this approach, make sure that your players understand that you aren’t arbitrarily denying them victory over the forces of darkness. *The Ring* is an example of a horror story in which the antagonist can be only stalled and bargained with, never eradicated.

Guidelines for putting Mary to rest or resolving the story without eliminating her appear under “Act 3: Resolutions.”

Kids

Bloody Mary has a particular bond with the children of Saint James Town. Lots of kids call her, but few of them have the will, the knowledge and the sheer need to strike out. Bloody Mary hears a few of their requests and grants them. Shawn Wilson’s death is only the first symptom of a situation that threatens to spiral out of control.

The children below have either called Mary or felt her presence in their lives.

Jamie Baines

Quote: “I didn’t mean to be mad, Mommy.”

Background: Jamie is eight years old. Before he knew the name of the city in which he lives, he knew what a greenstick fracture was. That’s what the doctor said happened to his arm when his mom, Marla, twisted it too hard. Jamie said he saw a ghost; she wanted to shut him up.

Jamie is the younger of Marla’s two sons, born after she gave P’Centage a bit of sex in exchange for some crack and an inconstant stream of presents. After she broke Jamie’s arm, Marla lost him to foster parents for a while. P’Centage’s gifts stopped coming, and she fought to get her boy back. She treated Jamie better for a while, limiting her anger to slaps and pushes. Nevertheless, P’Centage’s money and drugs slowed to a trickle this year, Jamie’s brother Malik has abandoned the family and the punches, kicks and scratches have returned.

Jamie runs with Mark and Anna. They told him about Bloody Mary, but they wouldn’t let him help them call her because he was a “baby.” Still, they explained the ritual. He thinks

of it whenever his mother hits him. Every night, before he goes to bed, he whispers Bloody Mary's name 12 times in the bathroom mirror, giving that anger a little bit of power, but afraid to follow through. Plus, he thinks he *saw* Bloody Mary once, turning a corner to the place where Shawn Wilson died.

Every once in a while, he can see the frost from his breath when he calls the 12th name. That's when he has nightmares about ghosts and monsters roaming the night. Sometimes the dream-people even stick around when he's awake, crawling in the corner of his eye. He tells the other kids he's just pretending, but the fear is real. The anger is real. He gets closer to calling that 13th name every day.

Description: This boy is short. He is chubby, brown-eyed and has dirty blond hair cut into a rattail. His hands are a bit grubby, and his clothes are an odd mix of expensive pants and shoes (from P'Centage or Malik) and worn-out T-shirts (from local charities).

Abilities:

Hiding (dice pool 4): Jamie knows the all the places only kids can hide in and knows how to keep quiet.

Calling Bloody Mary (dice pool 4): Jamie's heard a lot of spooky stories. He knows ghosts are out there. Some of them are gangbangers taking the "holy dive" over and over again. Furthermore, he can see ghosts; he has the Unseen Sense Merit (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 109–110).

Mark Therriot

Quote: "You hear about the Face Boys? I can hook you up with that shit, for real. For real!"

Background: Mark's parents spent their way into the projects. His mom and dad were compulsive gamblers until therapy and support groups steered them back from the brink. Unfortunately, the bank and credit card companies aren't as forgiving as their therapists, so they landed in Saint James Town with a three-year-old son and a crushing debt.

Mark's parents love him, but they're mostly absent from his life. Both of them have full-time jobs and temp work to occupy their time as they pay their debts and try to bankroll a way out of the projects. That leaves Mark to fit in with the local kids. He made friends with Anna Sandoval and Trevon Winn. Around Anna, he can act like the 12-year-old boy he is, but Trevon's a different matter. To Mark, Trevon's a genuine gangsta. Mark wants to fit in with Trevon's Big Saint Crips and runs a few errands for them, picking up snacks and generally acting as Trevon's servant.

Last month, Mark took a big gamble. He heard that the Big Saints were going to jack up the rival Eastsiders over territory. Buzzed on weed, he told Trevon that he'd "take care of it." That earned a few laughs from his crew. The next day, looking for a way to back up his mouth, Mark pleaded to Anna Sandoval for help. He and Anna had been playing the Bloody Mary game for fun, but he wanted to play it "for real." They picked Eastsider Shawn Wilson because he'd called Anna a few nasty names before, and besides, they had an old picture of him from when Mark's mom and his were at a community picnic.

They lit a candle in Mark's bathroom and began. They didn't succeed right away, but they could *feel* power building in the room. After almost half an hour, they succeeded. Mark kept his face to the floor, and they both screamed Shawn's name, over and over again. Mark felt long, cold, wet nails caress the back of his head. Mark and Anna didn't look up again until Mark's dad got home.

Three days later, residents found Shawn's body in the northeast courtyard. They didn't know it was him at first, because his face was gone.

Since then, the Big Saint Crips treat Mark differently — not like a member, but like a scary freak. Mark nervously implied that he was responsible for Shawn's death, inventing a gang called the "Face Boys" to be his supposed allies. Trevon and the Big Saints are freaked out, but not enough to keep from testing what sounds like Mark's bullshit story. That's why Mark's looking for a new victim now: some irredeemably bad person on whom he can sic Bloody Mary. That way, he can get some real respect from Trevon's crew.

Description: The kid has straight, deep black hair, dark brown eyes and a lanky build. His clothes have a stylish cut, but most of them are off-brand.

Mark's folks don't waste money on what they call "hood apparel."

Abilities:

Streetwise (dice pool 4): Mark knows about the local gangs through Trevon and the other Big Saint Crips. Mark's also practiced breaking into a few abandoned cars and beaten up service doors to prove himself to his friends.

Calling Bloody Mary (dice pool 4): Mark knows how to call Bloody Mary by rote. He knows what words to say and to keep his face down. However, he's terrified of doing it alone. If he ever calls Bloody Mary again, he'll want Anna with him.

Anna Sandoval

Quote: "We don't like bad people. We want them to go away."

Background: Anna is 11 years old. She used to attend a private school on a special scholarship, but last year, her grades declined so sharply that she no longer qualified. Anna hated it there. The other kids teased her for being poor, even beat her up, and the teachers always treated her as if she didn't belong.

Last year, classmate Sandy Moorehead invited Anna to a sleepover at her parents' condo. Sandy and the other girls convinced Anna to play the Bloody Mary game. They told stories about Mary and her crimes through the night to prepare for it. It was a trick; Sandy's brother hid in the shower stall, and at the end of the chant, he jumped out and grabbed Anna, holding her down until she screamed. All the other girls laughed.

As Sandy's brother let go, it was as if a spark ignited something in Anna's mind. In seconds, she linked Bloody Mary with her aunt's stories about the "crying woman," La Llorona. She suddenly knew that the girls' chant was a silly, powerless thing, and the legends she heard as a young

girl melded with the tales of Bloody Mary to tell her exactly what Anna needed to do. She stood up and said the name 13 times. The candle in the bathroom blew out.

Sandy and her brother stopped going to school after that. Anna's teachers said they went to a "special hospital." That was good enough for Anna. The other girls soon "fell ill" as well, but they never told anyone else what they saw in the mirror. Nevertheless, rumors about what happened spread far enough to make the other children afraid of Anna. She turned into a bully and stopped doing her schoolwork.

Anna has called Bloody Mary twice since then. Once, she called Mary to help Mark Thérriot, sparking the event that killed Shawn Wilson. On a prior occasion, Anna called Mary to make one of her mother's boyfriends go away. That was hard; Bloody Mary didn't like grownups' faces as much.

Anna thinks that she might do better with more help, even if it's from little Jamie Baines. However, stupid Jamie told his brother Malik that Anna "knew magic," and the little gangsta seems to have put two and two together. Malik flashes a lot of cash though, and Anna knows that her mom could use a few new things. . . .

Description: Anna would be a pretty girl if it weren't for her sunken, tired eyes. Her black hair showers down in tight coils. Her olive skin is smooth and unblemished.

Abilities:

Bloody Mary Lore (dice pool 6): Anna's moment of inspiration played out into reading folktales and using her imagination to fully develop a theory of how to call and protect oneself from Bloody Mary. The other children may know how to chant and focus their attention, but Anna is capable of the intense visualization normally practiced by students of the occult. She can use her knowledge to ward off Bloody Mary and make educated guesses about her movements and motives.

Intimidation (dice pool 5): Anna is a practiced schoolyard bully, but her ability comes from an air of menace that can even cow adults.

Lying (dice pool 5): Anna is an excellent liar, avoiding the common pitfalls of suspiciously elaborating on a tale. She also has an unnatural amount of confidence for a child, allowing her to bluster through questions.

Trevon Winn

Quote: "I got one hundred and fifty-one in boulders, yo. You don't know what it is, you don't want it."

Background: Seventeen-year-old Trevon can act like a hard gangsta when he needs to, but he fell into the role. His parents left him in the care of his grandmother when he was five. Social workers tagged Trevon as a "high risk" child. That treated him to an earful of inspiring messages about how he could lift himself out of the ghetto and avoid gangs. It also taught him boxing. However, Trevon wasn't academically talented, and his little family always needed money. His grandmother's pension couldn't pay the bills, and all his friends were getting into gangs. He couldn't fight social isolation and poverty and drifted into the Big Saint Crips. Some Big Saints are older than Trevon, but



most of them are too impulsive or drug-addled to keep business going. That's why Trevon has become something of a leader.

Trevon tried to resolve the stupid rivalry between his gang and the Eastside Bloods. Hell, they weren't even real Crips and Bloods. The Iron Devils and the cops kicked the "Original Gangstas" out of Saint James Town years ago.

Trevon's attempts at conciliation were unsuccessful. Jockeying for space led to a few fistfights and a stabbing. Trevon still regrets the time he fired his gun into the air to break up one of the melées.

Trevon feels like he killed Shawn Wilson. Even though Trevon didn't get anybody with his gun, the episode led to a round of trash-talking around Mark Thérriot. Mark made *something* happen. Trevon doesn't believe the "Face Boys" bullshit. He's heard stories from the little kids about Bloody Mary. Maybe Mark has some crazy friend who'll cut up people to follow the legend, but maybe there really is a spirit around. Trevon's met Anna a few times and thinks there's something creepy about her.

Spooky or not, the situation threatens the bottom line. The Big Saints and the Eastsiders both got their supply from P'Centage. The biker doesn't like murder. It gets the cops on his case. If P'Centage blames the Big Saints for what happened to Shawn Wilson, he might cut them off. The Big Saint Crips would end up being nothing but a collection of crackheads and well-dressed posers.

Description: The teenager has dark skin and cornrows. He's a bit chubby and has large, expressive eyes. He dresses in a vintage East Coast style: big boots, loose fatigues and a denim jacket. His scarred knuckles are the mark of an accomplished street fighter.

Storytelling Hints: Trevon's not too smart, but he does have a measure of common sense and compassion. Some of it's starting to go as he smokes a little more rock in his spare time, but he's still good enough to look out for younger kids in the projects. He's afraid of whomever (or whatever) killed Shawn Wilson. He's currently torn between his fear and his desire to find out more. Other characters may tip the balance one way or another.

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Drive 1, Empathy 2, Firearms 1, Larceny (Drug-Related) 3

Merits: Allies 1, Fighting Style: Boxing 2, Status (Local Gangs) 2

Willpower: 4

Morality: 6

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Greed

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2 (3 with Boxing against Brawl attacks)

Speed: 10

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Dmg	Size	Range	Shots	Special	Dice Pool
Strike	0 (B)	0	—	—	Body Blow:	6
					Opponent loses	
					next action if	
					successes exceed	
					opponent's Size	
Glock 17 (light pistol)	2 (L)	—	20/40	17	—	5
			/80			

Health: 8

Malik Baines

Quote: "Bitch, do you think you can roll with this?"

Background: He's 17 and he's angry. Ever since Malik Baines left his mother's abuse, he's been dedicated to being the hardest roller in Saint James Town. A year in juvenile detention just gave him time to put on muscle. Additional years of weightlifting and a bit of steroid use increased his bulk to intimidating proportions. After he got strong enough to finally hit his mother back, he left home for good, holing up in an illegal sublet owned by a fellow gangbanger's uncle.

Malik eats, drinks, snorts and shits thug life. He reserves his lone soft spot for his brother Jamie. Malik brings Jamie presents every few weeks when Marla isn't around. Malik figures he owes his brother on a lot of counts. For example, Malik met P'Centage when the biker came around to visit Jamie. That's how Malik got into dealing. In some ways, P'Centage is a replacement for Malik's own, absent father.

Better yet, little Jamie seems to know how Shawn Wilson died. Malik heard a lot of crazy stories in juvie about blood-drinking OGs and witches. Jamie can see weird things, and he says Anna Sandoval has powers. Malik thinks he can get hold of this power himself, use it to burn the Big Saint Crips and get recognized as P'Centage's equal. Malik'll treat his brother sweetly until he can figure out how to make Anna use her powers for him.

Malik runs his Eastsiders with threats and beatings. He's dangled each of them off a roof at least once. One time, high out of his mind, he even treated an independent dealer to a "holy dive," but he barely remembers it. Malik thinks he has his coke habit under control, but to him that only means that he never deals while he's high.

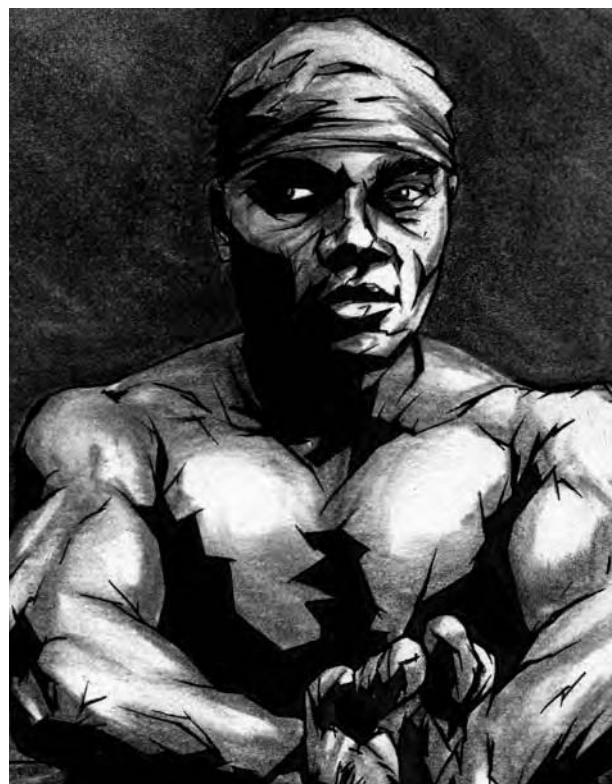
Description: He's huge. He must have 200 pounds — mostly muscle — packed onto his 5'10" frame. He wears a red do-rag over his shaved head. The light brown skin on his arms is tattooed with hip-hop lyrics in a gothic script.

Storytelling Hints: Malik is a monster in training: a borderline sociopath whose violence compensates for a childhood spent as a victim of terrible abuse. Despite his past, he's no nihilist. He considers himself a religion of one, determined to build himself into a rich mobster. His one weakness is that he trusts P'Centage too much, thinking he can break the barrier the biker imposes on criminal ambition within the projects.

Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 3, Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Intimidation (In Your Face) 3, Larceny 2, Weaponry 1

Merits: Allies 1, Status (Local Gangs) 2, Strong Back



Willpower: 4

Morality: 4

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Dmg	Size	Range	Shots	Dice Pool
Sharpened Screwdriver	1	1 (L)	—	—	6
Glock 17 (light pistol)	2 (L)	—	20/40 /80	17	5

Health: 8

Derangement: Narcissism (mild)

Adults

Shawn Wilson's death attracts some attention, but not enough to bring Saint James Town to the attention of the city's middle class. After a week, most people will have forgotten about the murder. Some people would call this situation a tragedy; men like P'Centage consider it a blessing.

Marla Baines

Quote: "I can tell you. Can't do it for free, though."

Background: Marla got pregnant when she was 16. That's when she moved to Saint James Town with Malik's father. Jon was 20 years old and a genuine Crips OG, living large during the rise of inner-city crack dealing. Three days after Malik's third birthday, Jon left at his usual time, but never came back. After that, Marla turned into a heavy user and stopped caring about her children. She knows she *should* love them and, for that reason, has kept off crack through both pregnancies, but she quickly returned to the pipe.

Marla found Shawn Wilson's body while she was on a "date" with a local; the discovery kept her from getting any money out of it. Jamie suffered for that after she turned her frustration on him. Gary Braund and Louise VanDergraaf both questioned her, but Marla didn't have much to say except to note there wasn't any mess around the body and that she didn't touch a thing at the crime scene.

Marla has listened to Jamie's babbling and is starting to piece together some strange ideas. One night, she heard Jamie whisper "Bloody Mary" a few times in the bathroom mirror before he went to bed. She remembers that childhood game and remembers that Bloody Mary is supposed to take kids' faces. But it's just a stupid kid's game, isn't it?

Description: She's a hard-faced, pale woman in her mid-30s. She dresses in old rock T-shirts and tights and keeps her straight, gray-blond hair in a ponytail.

Marla keeps her wallet, an old (but sharp) kitchen knife and her crack pipe in a black vinyl handbag.

Abilities:

Area Knowledge (dice pool 4): Marla gets around. Despite her crack habit and the way she treats her kids, she can be surprisingly genteel in a down-home kind of way. None of her neighbors would trust her with their possessions, but they do share local gossip. Marla's past association with P'Centage also gives her a bit of pull with local gangs. They front her crack every once in a while and trust her with stories that would incriminate them.

Street Dealing (dice pool 6): Marla has also learned how to scrounge, steal and cheat what she needs for her next rock and some living expenses. She has some basic breaking and entering skills, but for the most part, she gets what she needs from a combination of fraud, unpaid debts and casual prostitution.

Louise VanDergraaf

Quote: "Why do you want to know? Nobody wants to know."

Background: Louise wrote the newspaper story (at the beginning of this chapter) about Shawn Wilson's death. The police source she mentions is Gary Braund.

Ms. VanDergraaf, at 28 years old, is the junior of two reporters on her newspaper's crime beat. She spends most of her time writing articles from police press releases while her senior counterpart covers more newsworthy (or at least more lurid) crimes.

Louise is tired of covering the dull end of the crime beat. Exactly a week before Marla Baines found Shawn Wilson's body, Louise'd hit upon a theme to escape it: a long investigative piece she would call "Fallen Saints." (A rough draft of that article serves as the "Legend" entry at the beginning of this chapter.) Part of her job involves covering suicides. Over the past five years, she's noticed that the projects have more than their fair share of jumpers. Some of these have actually been "holy dives" the Iron Devils orchestrated to get rid of competition.

Shawn Wilson's murder gives her the idea that her story is somehow fated to be important. At the very least, it provides a thematic foundation for everything she intends to write about the drug culture, the poverty in the apartments and the city's neglect of the area. To that end, she makes overtures toward Trevon Winn (Malik told her to fuck off immediately) and local detective Gary Braund.

Unfortunately, Louise sticks out like a sore thumb. Her clothes and mannerisms scream "rich liberal" in a way that draws antipathy from many residents. Characters able to help her interview Saint James Town residents and keep her out of trouble earn her gratitude and assistance. She has extensive contacts with city police and the media. Unfortunately, with the exception of Braund, she has found few people who are actually interested in Saint James Town. Housing officials seem content to give her rote statistics and old press releases.

Description: Louise has short, red hair and a small, thin build. Her pastel wardrobe, hoop earrings and Blackberry mark her as a professional. Trendy cat's-eye glasses cover her blue eyes.



Abilities:

Research (dice pool 6): Louise is a solid reporter capable of using personal and professional resources to find information on a variety of subjects. She has been using her skills to track crime reports and social data for her Saint James Town story and is eager to supplement it from insights gleaned on the street.

Interviews (dice pool 6): Even though she doesn't get as many chances as she'd like to do it, Louise is remarkable good at detecting lies and subtle evasions. She can also draw out important information from reluctant sources and lead people to talk in a properly expressive manner.

Gary Braund

Quote: "Y'see, this is actually interesting."

Background: Gary reminds his sour and irrational boss of his good-for-nothing son, which almost led to a fistfight and *did* lead to a couple of stalls in Gary's career, but he eventually got his detective's badge. It wasn't in the nicest precinct and staffing shortages have left him without a partner, but he makes do with what he has.

Braund has wanted to nail P'Centage's ass to the wall for years, but nobody in the neighborhood wants to talk to Braund about any of the suspicious "suicides" that have come up from time to time. The Shawn Wilson case is a rare treat for Braund: an unambiguous murder. It's too bad that parts of it don't add up.

Braund can provide quite a bit of interesting information to the characters about the murder. For example, it's

unusual for gangs to leave the drugs and money behind. On the forensic scale, there's no evidence that the body was moved, but no mess from the mutilation. The face looks like it was removed by a medical student using a scalpel, but that would take time and expertise.

Description: The cop is a husky 40-year-old man with callused hands. He wears the obligatory trench coat over jeans, a plaid shirt and brown orthopedic shoes. His holster doesn't hit quite right, and he tends to shrug and fidget because of it. His hair is short and blond, and he has a thin moustache.

Storytelling Hints: Gary goes on first impressions and might trust the characters right away. That might seem foolhardy, but Gary has a good feel for people. The detective can use all the help he can get. He doesn't have a partner, and the precinct is treating the Saint James Town situation like any other hopeless, gang-related case. The only lead he's gotten was the surreal experience of Marla Baines' eight-year-old son saying, "Bloody Mary saw his face," before she dragged the kid away.

Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 3, Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Skills: Academics 3, Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Computer 2, Drive 2, Empathy 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 1, Investigation (Crime Scene) 4, Larceny 2, Medicine 1, Socialize 1, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Detecting Lies) 3, Weaponry 2

Merits: Allies (Police) 3, Eidetic Memory, Status (Law Enforcement) 3

Willpower: 6

Morality: 6

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Envy



Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Dmg	Size	Range	Shots	Dice Pool
Telescoping Baton	1 (B)	1	—	—	7
Colt M1911A (heavy pistol)	3 (L)	—	30/60 /120	7	9

Health: 7

P'Centage

Quote: “Do you really need to ask me about that? Do you *really* want to?”

Background: Born Peter Kent, P'Centage came up through the Iron Devils as a country prospect, running PCP through one of the motorcycle gang's compounds. Since that time he's been shot twice, stabbed three times and imprisoned four times, but he's never snitched and never cost the gang any significant amount of money.

P'Centage is a discreet visitor to Saint James Town. He knows the local kids like to act as if they run the place even though they all deal his drugs. That's been the case ever since the gang panic of the late '80s to mid-'90s drove the police to kick the hardcore Crips and Bloods out of the city without touching the Hell's Angels, Banditos or Iron Devils.

The kids called him “P'Centage” as a play on his role (he provides drugs and takes his “p'centage”) and his unacceptably WASPish real name, and he uses it himself whenever he's in the projects. He usually has one or two “girlfriends” (dstitute women who'll fuck him for money and drugs) in Saint James Town at any given time. He uses their apartments as his office. Marla Baines was one of these women until she got too crazy and attached.

P'Centage asked around about Shawn Wilson's death. Trevon told him about Mark and the “Face Boys,” but P'Centage agrees that it's bullshit. Still, he's worried that another major player is moving into the projects and is sending him a message. Apparently, Marla's kid said something strange, too. P'Centage means to get Malik busting heads about it if the cops look too closely.

Description: P'Centage is a fat 50-year-old with muscular arms. He wears jeans, an Iron Devils T-shirt and a leather vest with Iron Devils patches. P'Centage has a bushy beard shot with gray and a bald head decorated with scars he got coming up in his gang.

P'Centage is never far from his big black Indian touring motorcycle. If he wants to shoot someone, he wears a leather duster to hide his sawed-off shotgun.

Storytelling Hints: P'Centage is a ruthless, smart businessman with no moral compass to speak of. If he feels threatened, he can call on other bikers (use the gangbanger template in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 205, but remove the Fleet of Foot Merit and change Drive to 2 with a Specialty in Motorcycles) to act as muscle. If he thinks



he can make Bloody Mary work for him, he exploits Jamie mercilessly. If P'Centage thinks she's a threat and discovers some lore about her, he has no compunction about harming children who can call her or striking at them through their parents.

Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 4, Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Skills: Brawl 3, Drive (Motorcycles) 3, Empathy 2, Firearms 3, Intimidation 4, Investigation 1, Larceny 4, Socialize 1, Streetwise 4, Weaponry 3, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies (Iron Devils) 3, Status (Local Crime) 4

Willpower: 7

Morality: 3

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Dmg	Size	Range	Shots	Special	Dice Pool
Lead-weighted cane	2 (B)	2	—	—	—	8
Sawn-off Shotgun	4 (L)	—	10/20 /40	7	9 again	10

Health: 8

Derangement: Narcissism (mild)



Alligators in the Sewers

The Legend

"I heard something scarier than that. I heard there's alligators in the sewers.

"Yeah, I know some people think it's just an old wives' tale. But... I don't know. Did you see the news report about that guy who was killed over in Riverside? Torn all apart, they said. Serial killer. Mass murderer.

"I'm thinking not. I've heard some people. They've seen things. Movement, down in the storm drains, or a manhole cover sliding closed just as they round a corner.

"I heard you can buy baby alligators in Florida, as pets. That when kids get the gators back here, their moms get pissed and flush them down the toilet. That's how they get to the sewers. They eat the rats and the sewage until they get big enough to hunt the big guys. Us.

"I know. Scary. Look, let's talk about something else. There's a bug going around, I think; I hope I don't get it. Some kind of flu, maybe. Actually, you look like you might have got a piece of it. You should start taking some zinc. Vitamin C.

"Well, because you're staring off into space all the time. I think that's a symptom. Some of my buddies had this a week or two ago; I haven't had a chance to drop by since then, so I hope they're feeling better. And your eyes. They get... I don't know. Dark. The pupils get big.

"There — see how you're scratching your arm? I bet you got a rash there. Like a little patch of rough skin. I think that's part of it, too.

"Nah, don't get too worried about it.

"Oh, you're overreacting.

"Yeah, I know where the closest ER is, but I don't think you need... It's pouring rain!

"Okay, okay. I'll take you. But you better do something nice for me some time."

Summary

Urban development has caused an incarnation of an alligator-like spirit to form in the sewers of a city. The incarnation alters the sewers to provide a new habitat for alligators forced from the swamps. The spirit's presence affects nearby people, altering their psychology and, eventually, their physicality. They feel urges to descend into the sewers, where their transformation completes and they join their reptilian brethren. A small cult has arisen, revering the alligator incarnation and drawing power from the nameless being that gives it life. Corrupt bureaucrats and city planners suppress news of the alligators, even as the creatures emerge to devour the innocent.

Some aspects of this scenario use rules presented in **World of Darkness: Second Sight**, "Chapter 4: Reality-Bending Horrors." If you do not have access to the book, you can easily alter the pertinent sections as appropriate. Similarly, this scenario can take place almost anywhere. The "city" can be any city you desire, though through some oddity of the oral tradition, the city in the "alligators in the sewers" urban legend is always New York.

— H.P. Lovecraft,
The Shadow Over Innsmouth

Author's Note: Acknowledgements

I would like to claim all the weird ideas in this scenario as my own, but sadly cannot. I can, however, do the next best thing: acknowledge those who supplied them.

Thanks to Rick Chillot, Will Hindmarch and especially Alan Alexander for help resolving the central plot, including the Lizard Brain and Sobek.

Thanks to Rick Bright of Salt Lake City Public Utilities and to Sam Hong of the Salt Lake Water Reclamation Plant for answering my odd questions about sewers.

And of course, thanks to H.P. Lovecraft, who described the Innsmouth Look decades ago.

History

Beyond the dark between the stars, beyond the hairline cracks in reality exist maddening entities that are unknown and unknowable. Human minds glimpse the barest hints of these entities occasionally, but attempts to understand them lead to gibbering madness, to blood-soaked perversions, to filth and damning rites that call down the sun.

The ancient Egyptians knew a deity called Sobek: the crocodile-headed god of the Nile. Sobek was an ambiguous god. He represented bounty and fertility, which the Nile could bring, but also destruction and crocodiles, which were deadly predators in the ancient days. The Egyptians paid him respect and prayer, hoping that he would withhold his destruction and provide his bounty.

Did a being called Sobek exist? Perhaps. Perhaps not. However, while the god might never have existed, *something* did. The Egyptian consciousness had conceptualized a portion of an entity staggeringly ancient. It existed before humanity. Perhaps it existed before our world, before the solar system formed billions of years ago. It existed when the first microbe appeared somewhere in the cosmos. This entity represents the instinct to *survive* to the exclusion of all else. It is the Lizard Brain: eat, sleep, and procreate. Survive. Persist. It has no name; it simply is — but this chapter refers to it as the Lizard Brain.

Sobek was the Egyptians' attempts to provide human, animal and natural explanations to a being that was not human, not animal and not natural.

On Earth, alligators and crocodiles are the Lizard Brain's favored creatures, because they are very good at surviving. Alligators eat, sleep and procreate, and do all three pretty well, but most of all they survive. Alligators have remained evolu-

tionarily unchanged for millions of years, since the days of the dinosaurs. They survived the meteor impact. They survived the ice age. However, they may not survive *homo sapiens*.

Discovering the Lizard Brain

The odds that the characters discover the existence of the Lizard Brain entity are slim; it remains unknown, a force whose distant stirring set in motion the events in this scenario. However, you might wish the characters to catch a glimpse of the primal being. If they do so, the act should underscore humanity's puniness in the vast abyss that is space and time. Discovering the existence of the alien source of these occurrences is more likely if the characters possess supernatural traits themselves.

You might reveal bits about the Lizard Brain in the following ways.

- **Research.** Research (Academics + Intelligence with a -4 dice penalty) reveals that a group of Egyptians renounced Sobek as a false god. They believed he was an aspect of a deity foreign to the Egyptians and maybe to the world. Sobek's followers quelled the cult, but it was vocal for several decades.

- **The Cult.** Powerful members the Cult of the Nile (see "The Cultist," later in this chapter) may catch glimpses of a greater power as their minds travel down mad and gibbering paths. They may offer clues in their speech: "Sobek is a servant, as small as we." "Our master's master grants us favor." "We must survive. We must survive. Sobek is secondary." The characters might hear this information if they successfully infiltrate the cult (calling for numerous opposed rolls) or if they manage to get on a cultist's good side long enough for him to reveal something (perhaps with Manipulation + Persuasion or Socialize). Captured cultists might utter such statements in their mad ramblings, as well.

- **Hieroglyphics.** Some of the false hieroglyphics in the Crocodile Tunnels (see "The Crocodile Tunnels," later in this chapter) are obviously alien. Characters taking too much of an interest in these tunnels might be forced to make Resolve rolls. Failure indicates a vision, less than a second in length, that is horribly repellant but at the same time oddly compelling. Further investigation might necessitate degeneration rolls.

Urban Expansion

The city is expanding. Times have been good for it — new businesses move in, drawing more residents and increasing revenue. The city is, in fact, getting too large for its current borders — which is why, one year ago, the city council voted to expand into the neighboring wetlands to the southeast. The council planned to drain the wetlands and then raise highways and industrial parks in their place.

The wetlands — which the citizens also call “the swamp” or “the everglades” — were home to hundreds of species of plant and animal. Notable among them were dozens of species of birds, fishes and insects, but of most historical concern to the city were the alligators. These prehistoric killing machines normally do not bother humans, but in the two months before to the city council’s decision, citizens reported three alligator attacks against people. Thus, while environmentalists and some segments of the public decried the wetlands’ destruction, resistance was muted. People wanted revenge against those damn gators.

Stanley Construction received the contract to drain the swamp and build in its place. The company finished draining the swamp six months ago, and is currently laying an eight-lane highway to connect the city with a bedroom community to the southeast. The destruction of the habitat ousted and killed many animals, including the alligators.

Discovering the Urban Expansion

The characters probably discover the urban development, and the draining of the wetlands, in any story involving this scenario. Whether or not they decide it’s worth investigating in greater detail is up to them.

The construction is common knowledge. Characters who live in the city are undoubtedly aware of the construction already, as it made headlines and news broadcasts, particularly when the controversy arose about draining the wetlands. Characters can discover more specific information as follows:

- **Discovering Stanley.** Research or speaking with city officials, construction crew members or many others reveals that Stanley Construction received the contract.
- **Discovering the Alligators.** Similar research or socialization reveals that the wetlands were home to many species of animals (hundreds), including alligators.

Sabek’s Manifestation

As the wetlands alligators faced extermination, the distant and primal Lizard Brain stirred in some incomprehensible, instinctive fashion. The alligators were survivors, and survive they would. An incarnation of the Lizard Brain came into being in a suitable environment close to the old wetlands: the city’s sewer system. Due to its proximity to humans, the incarnation acquired the form and certain aspects with which humans had previously endowed the Lizard Brain. In appearance, the incarnation was an alligator-headed man. It resembled the Egyptians’ Sobek.

However, the avatar was not Sobek, any more than Sobek was the Lizard Brain. Thus, this chapter refers to the incarnation as Sabek.

Discovering Sabek

The players’ characters probably discover that *something* malignant is behind the alligator infestation, but how much they find out about Sabek is up to you and them and the needs of your story. Sabek is a powerful entity, and characters without supernatural help stand little chance of defeating him directly.

Characters might discover Sabek’s involvement in one of the following ways:

- **The Cult.** Characters can discover Sabek through the Cult of the Nile (see “The Cultist,” later in this chapter). Characters who infiltrate the cult (requiring numerous opposed rolls) or get a cultist talking (perhaps with Presence + Intimidate or Manipulation + Persuasion or Socialize) ascertain anything about the cult’s master you’d like to convey.
- **The Crocodile Tunnels.** The Crocodile Tunnels (see “The Crocodile Tunnels,” later in this chapter) offer clues as well. Characters might follow alligators, cultists or others into the sewers and discover these altered tunnels. A Wits + Academics roll or later research (Intelligence + Academics) reveals that some of the hieroglyphics depict the ancient Egyptian god Sobek.
- **Confrontation.** Characters with the means (vampires, mages or werewolves, for example) may face Sabek directly. He appears if the characters violate his sanctum, probably at the climactic end of a story or series of stories.

Sabek's Influence

Sabek is a being primarily of instinct, as it is born from the Lizard Brain, but mingled human characteristics lend Sabek a cunning sentience. When Sabek first appeared, it drew the remaining alligators to it. They traveled to the sewers via the river and storm drain systems, and Sabek assisted their migration by destroying obstacles in their paths. Sabek's presence imbued the alligators with supernatural power and resistance to sewage-born disease, allowing them to survive and thrive in the sewers. However, only a few gators had survived the wetlands' destruction. Not enough for a population to continue.

Sabek's alien presence was soon to rectify this problem.

The Corruption of Humanity

Human beings in proximity to Sabek or those things under Sabek's influence — the sewers or sewage — began to change. So far, Sabek's malign, metamorphosing presence affects mainly the people who dwell near the river, in an area called Riverside. The people here are poor, surrounded by warehouses and the thick waters of the river. The city planners care little for the people of Riverside, and thus public works are in shambles. Sewers back up constantly. Storm drains are clogged with detritus. Old garbage lies in sodden piles along the sidewalks and alleys. In such conditions, Sabek's influence rises. The people change.

The change starts with dreams. Dreams of muddy rivers in green valleys. Of pyramids. Of basking in the sun. Of lurking with your head and eyes above the water. Of feeling the snap of bones and spurt of blood between your teeth.

The change progresses into the wakeful mind. A victim thinks about her dreams even while awake; she experiences them again and again. She feels urges and tastes and instincts that she never felt before. She enjoys the feel of the sun and of water, and desires to spend the day basking in them. She develops a taste for raw, warm meat and wriggling, slimy fish.

Victims hide these urges for a time, but eventually they grow too great to resist. The third phase of the change is behavioral. Victims become torpid, but prone to sudden bursts of activity. They act upon their urges. They consume handfuls of ground beef, raw. They reach into the fishbowl, pluck out Goldie and swallow her whole. They lurk at the entrances to sushi restaurants, waiting for the coast to clear before snatching a koi from the pool with darting hands, raising the squirming fish to their mouths and ripping into it with strangely sharp teeth, revealing still-beating organs. Neighborhood cats and dogs are frustratingly large for human jaws (though afflicted people still make the attempt), but mice, rats, hamsters, guinea pigs, pigeons and parakeets are not.

As the victims' behavior degenerates, victims change physically as well. Their pupils are often dilated, and they blink but rarely. Patches of skin turn dark, leathery and scaly. Jaws jut. Eyes are too high. Hair falls out and becomes scraggly and patchy. Shoulders hunch, and they walk with a wide but quick gait.

The Riverside Look and Syndrome

While the victims may hide their thoughts and actions, concealing their physical changes is more difficult. Others see the changes. They are repulsed, due both to the victims' strange appearance and on some primal level at which their cells rebel against seeing these mutations. People call it the "Riverside Look."

Some people think the Look is a disease. Others believe it is a carcinogenic reaction to pollutants dumped nearby, or some kind of genetic deterioration caused by in-breeding. "You know how those *poor* people are. It was only a matter of time before their ways caught up with them." A righteous few see the Look as a punishment for some unspeakable sin.

The victims do not care. They may hide their devolving features for a time, trying to fit in, but they enjoy the changes. They feel natural.

"The Riverside Syndrome" is a term the medical community is beginning to use to describe the whole bag: disturbing thoughts and behaviors as well as physical symptoms. While the healthcare professionals recognize that something is wrong, they are nowhere close to discovering the truth.

Describing the Riverside Look

The characters encounter people with the Riverside Look in most stories involved in this scenario. Characters might notice the following when confronting one of the afflicted:

- His eyes seem to stare unceasingly.
- His pupils are large; dilated.
- His mouth looks wrong; perhaps it is deformed or the result of some old injury. It juts forward, and when he grins, the teeth are crooked, sharp and overlapping.
- His hairline is receding.
- His hair and beard are patchy. The hair is dry and straw-like.
- He scratches at his shoulder.
- A patch of skin on the back of hand is discolored, as if with a rash, and is scaly and tough-looking.

The Final Stage

Eventually, Sabek's otherworldly presence overcomes the victims' fragile humanity. They feel an urge to descend into the sewers. To do so feels *right*; that's where they *should* be. They resist this urge for a time, holding onto a vestige of their former lives, but they are no match for the diluted power of

the Lizard Brain. Sneaking in the dead of night, diving into the river, prying up manholes, sliding into storm drains, these people who are no longer people join their brethren in the depths, and it is here they complete their transformation. At the end, they are no different from the alligators Sabek drew from the wetlands — except perhaps, horribly and tauntingly, vestiges of their humanity still surface. Do flashes of memory pass through their altered brains? At some level, do they recognize the horrors they have become? Worst of all, do they hold to some dim and dancing hope that the change can be reversed? That they can again become human?

Perhaps.

Discovering the Corruption

Humanity's corruption by the force it sought to conquer (nature) is a central theme in this scenario, and protagonists undoubtedly discover the changes taking place in the people around Riverside. In most cases, the characters should discover the alterations as a slow progression of increasing horror. First they might hear that their friend's uncle is acting strangely. They might notice the lack of fish in the ornamental pond in the mall. Perhaps they encounter a pawn shop dealer whose eyes always seem open and

staring, and so forth. Eventually, the characters realize the scope of the changes — perhaps after they've already murdered some of the once-human alligators.

See “Act I, Scene I” and “Stories,” later in this chapter, for more ideas.

The Crocodile Tunnels

While Sabek has never manifested physically, his presence is strong in a certain, forgotten stretch of sewer tunnels. Decades ago, workers expanding the sewers blasted into a series of old basements and foundations. It was easier to install the new line in a different area than attempt to work around the foundations and health codes, so they boarded up the area and left. Here, in some immaterial way, Sabek dwells. His presence alters the rooms and tunnels.

While they were once sewer tunnels and human-made foundations, they are no longer. Now, they resemble the swamps and jungles that crocodiles and alligators call home. Egyptian architecture replaces masonry and tile; instead of graffiti, hieroglyphics predominate. The Crocodile Tunnels are beneath the Riverside district (see “The Corruption of Humanity,” earlier in this chapter), and are as extensive as your story requires.



Discovering the Crocodile Tunnels

The protagonists probably encounter the Crocodile Tunnels late in a story (or series of stories), or perhaps as an early clue that the problem is larger than they believed. They might journey into the sewers with shotguns and flamethrowers, intending to use violence to solve the gator problem, and discover the tunnels. They might follow or join cultists who make the journey. Alternatively, the Crocodile Tunnels might expand as Sabek's influence grows. Perhaps the characters descend via a manhole they've used once or twice before and find the once-familiar tunnel in the early stages of Egyptian change.

Describing the Crocodile Tunnels

The change from sewer to Sabek's domain is gradual — so gradual that exploring characters might not notice it at first. Characters who end up in the Crocodile Tunnels might experience the following progression:

- The sewer tunnels are warmer and more humid than normal. A Perception roll (Wits + Composure) might allow a character to detect this.
- One character notices (with a Perception roll) that the wall tiles are larger than they were.
- Patches of life grow on the walls: moss, mold, even pale toadstools. They are sparse at first, but increase in frequency.
- The mysterious bumps (common in sewers) against explorers' legs increase in frequency. (More fish.)
- An odd piece of graffiti is scrawled on the wall. Investigation reveals a vaguely humanoid figure turned in profile.
- A patch of cattails grows in one corner.
- A spur of stone encircles the upper half of the tunnel, like an archway. Strange designs are painted onto its surface. Investigation reveals a number of sun-like discs, humanoid figures and an alligator at the apex.
- The wall tiles are quite large now — perhaps two feet by two feet — and look rough. Examination reveals that they are not tiles at all — they are stone. (Intelligence + Science allows a character to realize they are sandstone.) Exactly where the change takes place is unclear.

- Dark, log-like shapes bob in the current at the end of the characters' light. The shapes are gone when the characters approach, or perhaps disappear with a tiny splash. (The alligators can attack if appropriate.)

- Designs are carved onto the sandstone walls. Some are recognizably humanoid, others are reptilian and some are human with alligator heads. The designs are done in black, blue and rust-red. (Intelligence + Academics reveals their Egyptian style.) They are hieroglyphics. Images of the river, of pyramids and occasionally of other (non-Sobek) gods appear. Also, appearing once or twice is a dark, indefinable shape. Under close examination, the shape seems to writhe and twist in movement both ancient and fetal; a mouth seems to open wide to engulf to observer and drag him into wet, suffocating mucous-teeth. This is the sign of the Lizard Brain. (See the "Discovering the Lizard Brain" sidebar, earlier in this chapter.)

Eventually, the characters find themselves in a subterranean landscape of flowing water, river flora and Egyptian architecture. The overall impression is of an Egyptian ruin reclaimed by the wilderness.

Urban Renewal

In addition to the contract to drain the wetlands and build in their place, Stanley Construction also has a contract to effect extensive urban renewal in an area of Riverside called Upper Riverside. The river's waters are relatively unpolluted here, and the area is close to other nice neighborhoods. The city would like to clean it up, get rid of the homeless and poor and create a pleasant, suburban-style neighborhood. The project has been underway for several months now.

Due to the construction and demolition, Upper Riverside is the strongest hotspot of alligator activity. Clogged sewers and waste spilled into the river attracts Sabek's influence, which brings dreams and the Riverside Syndrome. The Cult of the Nile is especially active here, and drags people into the sewers to be consumed. The alligators aren't always content to wait for the cult to feed them, however, and occasionally wander to the surface (usually via the river or storm drains) to attack lone pedestrians. It is here, in Upper Riverside, that the first rumors of alligators in the sewers surfaced.

The Cultist

Daniel Montgomery is an African American man whom society has failed.

Daniel's parents raised him well, and he was a good kid, but the world just kept *taking* from him. It took his mom, who died of a coronary complication when Daniel was 13.

His father grew distant and depressed afterward, neglecting his son and paying more attention to his bottle. A couple years later, he died of liver failure.

Daniel bounced around among foster homes and government institutions for two years after that, always finding people who didn't care about him, who were looking for a tax break or someone to drive their kids around or a bit of extra income from another job. Finally, Daniel was 18 and on his own. He had graduated high school but had no money; he worked at the local grocery store, and his pay was just enough for a meager apartment and food. He took public transportation to get around the city.

A few months later, a large corporate grocery chain purchased the local store and laid off Daniel. Walking home after cashing his last check, he was mugged. The man took the last of his money. Daniel returned home. A week later, someone robbed his apartment and stole everything of partial value Daniel owned, including a wooden music box his mother had given him.

Daniel went to Social Services. The sleazy bureaucrats refused to help him; they made up some excuse about his parents owing back taxes, and they had to take the money that would have gone to Daniel to make up for it. The story was clearly bullshit, but Daniel couldn't do anything because he was poor and powerless and they were rich and powerful.

Through all his hardships, Daniel gritted his teeth and survived. Finally he became homeless and bitter, but he never turned to drugs or alcohol, and he never stole except when he was forced to do so in order to eat. He lived on the street for two years.

Finally, Daniel had a stroke of luck. He answered an ad in a discarded newspaper, and a wealthy family in an affluent suburb hired him as their groundskeeper/handyman. He lived in a studio apartment above their garage. He had at last received a leg up, the start of the good things he deserved.

Of course, it was not to be. Two weeks later, the family fired Daniel for flirting with their daughter (he was black and poor, they were white and rich). The sky poured rain, and they threw Daniel and his few possessions out in it.

Finally defeated, Daniel wandered in a daze, eventually leaving the neighborhood. He slept. The heavy rains caused the storm drains to back up, and a leak somewhere allowed the sewage and rainwater to mingle. It bubbled to the surface near Daniel, and he dreamed. Dreamed of an alligator-headed man. Of days of endless sun and cool waters.

When Daniel awoke, he remembered the dreams. He researched the alligator-headed man at the local library and discovered Sobek, the Egyptian crocodile god. A god of bounty and fertility. He read of ancient ways to appease Sobek and gain his favor.

Daniel put the book down and thought. What did he have to lose? Out of melancholy and despair, he performed the archaic appeasements.

Did Sobek answer? Probably not, as the Lizard Brain entity cares nothing for human emotions and desires — does

not even realize that they exist. Yet when Daniel found a wallet on the street the next day, he attributed the find to Sobek. A dozen \$100 bills were in the wallet. So was a driver's license.

Daniel hesitated. His mom and dad would say he should turn in the wallet to the police. But Sobek had provided it — clearly Daniel was supposed to keep it. And no sane person carried this kind of cash; it obviously belonged to a drug dealer or other such undeserving individual. And — and — for God's sake, the world had taken *so much* from Daniel. It was time he started *taking back*.

He pocketed the money and tossed the wallet in a Dumpster. Uttered a small thank-you to Sobek.

This action was the first step down a dark path. Daniel's research increased. He tried to find more ways to appease Sobek. Two months ago, his homeless contacts told him rumors of alligators in the sewers. Daniel entered the sewers and discovered that the rumors were true. The sewers were Sobek's new domain, he believed, and he traveled them.

Daniel discovered the Crocodile Tunnels in his first foray into the sewers. He stared in awe. Here was proof that the god he honored existed. Waist-deep in sewage and uncaring of the consequences, he held his lighter to the markings on the walls. His conscious mind didn't recognize them, but some ancestral instinct did. Dark shapes seemed to writhe, and mouths opened wide to receive him.

He sensed a presence, and turned. Alligators were all around him, their snouts and eyes visible. This was the sacrifice. Daniel flipped off his lighter and spread his arms in the dark, waiting for the gators to devour him.

They did not. After some time, he re-lit the lighter. The gators were gone. On some level, Sobek recognizes that a human servant will help it achieve its goal: for it and its minions to survive. Whispering devotions to a non-existent god, Daniel left the sewers, his mind whirring with possibilities.

The Cult of the Nile

Daniel is now the head of a small cult dedicated to what the cultists think is Sobek, believing that if they offer prayers and sacrifices to the god, he will grant them favors. This belief is only partially correct. Daniel and his followers descend into depravity, and gain mad pleasure in doing so. They develop the Riverside Look, including its associated psychology and reptilian urges, but most don't make the entire change to alligator-like monstrosity. Rites come to them in dreams and through research, and these cement the divine nature of the being they worship. They do not recognize that the rites are horrific and evil, symptoms of something beyond the abilities of mortals to control or even conceive.

Perhaps 30 people belong to the cult. Most are poor and live in Riverside, where the sewers often back up. The cultists fall into three categories. Some are those like Daniel, who feel *their* turn has arrived; they want to take something from the society and the world that has taken so much from them. Another segment of the cult wants to feel a connec-



tion to other people, and the cult is a perverse way to do that; these are lonely people looking to belong, and by bad luck or obscure manipulation, discovered the cult. Finally, some cultists use the cult's — and Sobek's — influence to further their personal ambitions.

As cults dedicated to unspeakable terrors go, this one is pretty tame. The cultists do not revere the Lizard Brain; they revere Sobek. They do not think their master will rise from eternal slumber to cleanse the world. They do not believe that they are the chosen few dedicated to leading a crusade against the impure. They do not commit bloody and perverse human sacrifices. The cultists are relatively normal people who have beheld the supernatural. They venerate Sobek because they think he can grant them the *material, immediate* needs that conventional faiths cannot. Also, the God espoused by the Christians, Jews and Muslims resides in some faraway plane and works in mysterious ways. Sobek resides beneath their feet and works in obvious ways. Their leader can *turn his head into an alligator's head*, for God's sake! Clearly, Sobek is the proper choice.

However, while these people may once have been good, honest (if bitter and disgruntled) folks, that time is over. In their attempts to appease Sobek and do his bidding, they cross moral lines that they cannot re-cross. For one, they try to keep Sobek's children happy and full. To this end, the cultists capture homeless people, drifters, prostitutes and other undesirables and feed them to the alligators (many of which are themselves transformed homeless people,

drifters, prostitutes and other undesirables). This operation was an idea of Donna Angstrom, a bureaucrat, who sees the homeless (and others) as human rats, and believes this is an excellent way to get rid of them.

The cultists also do their utmost to protect their secret and the secret of their god, and are willing to kill to do it.

Discovering the Cult

The characters might encounter the Cult of the Nile in a number of ways.

- **Disappearances.** Investigation into missing person reports eventually leads the characters to the cult members, who feed people to the gators.
- **The Cult Takes Notice.** Cult members might keep an eye on the characters if they take an interest in the "alligators in the sewers" rumor. One or two fanatical members might act on their own, attempting to kill the characters or subdue them to use as alligator feed. Alternatively, Daniel might approach them peacefully, hoping to discuss the situation and bring them to his side. He isn't above killing them, however, if he feels doing so is necessary to protect his god.

- **The Renegade.** One of the cultists might grow disillusioned. Where's the bounty he's been promised? All he sees are people running around in weird clothes and performing actions he can't understand. He escapes and talks.

Other Players

In addition to Sabek, Daniel and the Cult of the Nile, several other characters are involved in this scenario.

Miriam Albright

Miriam Albright is the Stanley representative in charge of the urban renewal project in Upper Riverside. Tales of marauding alligators, even if untrue, would undercut Stanley's objective and decrease property values. No one would want to move there. Therefore, Miriam works with Donna Angstrom to keep the lid on the rumors. To the degree that doing so is impossible, they deflect the rumors to focus on the rest of Riverside. Upper Riverside is the only safe area — or so the whispers say.

Donna Angstrom

Donna is a city bureaucrat and a driving force behind much of the modern construction. While inspecting progress in Upper Riverside, she contracted the Riverside Syndrome. The dreams intrigued her. Using her connections and political power, she learned of the Cult of the Nile. Donna met with them in disguise, as a prospective member, and witnessed their strange rites. She saw Daniel Montgomery transform his head into an alligator head. She was convinced — convinced that, while the cult may indeed have access to something supernatural, she can manipulate it to her own ends. She's a practical woman.

Donna wants the urban renewal project in Upper Riverside to succeed. To do so, the rumors of alligators must be quashed. The cult's goals coincide with hers. Also, Donna is a ruthless pragmatist. She hates the homeless, the destitute, the infirm and the elderly, seeing them as drains on society. It was her idea that the cult feed these undesirables to the gators. The fewer homeless people on the streets, the less money the city has to shell out for shelter food. Everything is a numbers game for Donna.

While she is officially a member of the cult, Donna pays it lip service only. Her true loyalties are to herself. She, however, believes she is a civil servant. She thinks she is one of the few people willing to get her hands dirty and make the hard decisions to better the world.

Kenny Nguyen

Kenny has perhaps the most unenviable job of anyone in the city: head animal control officer. His job has never been easy; the proximity of the wetlands made wild animal

intrusions common. He hoped that, with the draining of the swamp, most of his problems would be over, and his biggest worry would be the occasional escaped pet. He was wrong.

Kenny believes that alligators live in the sewers. One of his employees went to check out the rumors on a whim, and his remains were found several days later. *No human could have mutilated the corpse so badly*, Kenny thought. *Something is loose down there.*

No stranger to bureaucracy, Kenny went through the proper channels, requesting backup and additional instructions for this particularly dangerous situation. He was stonewalled. "No such situation exists," came the terse return letter. "Please focus your attention elsewhere." (This was Donna Angstrom's doing.)

Kenny was immediately suspicious. He didn't know why someone in a high position would want to conceal the alligators, but he didn't want to push anyone too far. Rumors say that those who pick at City Hall's secrets don't last long.

So Kenny is in a quandary. He wants to do something about the alligators. Specifically, he wants to transport them to an environment more suitable to them. He likes animals, and his job is to ensure their survival. He is becoming more vocal to members of the media (as an anonymous source), claiming that the alligator rumors are true and that a large-scale mission must be undertaken to remove them to the Florida Everglades or a similar area.

Current Situation

In summary:

- A force called Sabek dwells beneath the city — specifically, beneath the Riverside district, in a series of tunnels and ancient basements altered to appear in an Egyptian motif.
- Supernatural alligators live in the city sewers, feasting on sewage, animals and people. The alligators are most active beneath Riverside, especially Upper Riverside. Rumors that *something* (alligators are indeed mentioned) lives beneath the city float around and, when the occasional mutilated body appears, make the news.
- Bureaucrats and cultists due their best to discredit and deflect the rumors. Some people believe a serial killer is responsible for the deaths. Others think it's all a hoax.
- A cult called the Cult of the Nile reveres Sabek as the ancient Egyptian deity Sobek. The cult works to appease him by feeding the alligators and protecting his secret.
- Sabek's dark influence transforms human beings into alligators. Those afflicted with the "Riverside Syndrome" change mentally and physically, gaining the "Riverside Look." Eventually, they descend into the sewers to join their brethren.

The Sewers

The city's sewers play a central role in this scenario. Much popular fiction portrays sewers as cavernous areas with

raised walkways alongside slow-moving rivers of sludge. This image of sewers is inaccurate in most modern cities.

“Sewers” come in two varieties: actual *sewers*, which transport wastewater to water treatment plants, and storm drains, which collect rainwater and funnel it to rivers, reservoirs, irrigation canals and the like. They are separate systems.

Storm Drains

Storm drains are large and, compared to sewers, clean. Characters descending into a storm drain likely notice the following:

- It is a big, empty, rectangular tunnel.
- It is 12 or 13 feet wide by six or seven feet tall.
- It is musty and cool.

Storm drains are often empty, with perhaps a trickle of water due to people watering their lawns and such. Thus, people can move around in storm drains relatively easily. Rushing water can fill storm drains during large rainstorms, and in this case the water poses a danger to people within.

Since storm drains are largely free of the disease and filth that characterizes sewers, some animals could theoretically live there. (In fact, in the real world, while the “alligators in the sewers” urban legend is fictitious, in Florida alligators can and do live in storm drains.) Sabek’s alligator monsters live mostly in the sewers, since they are supernaturally resistant to disease and enjoy the constant liquid flow, but they occasionally range into the storm drains, particularly after a rain shower.

Sewers

Sewers carry unclean water. When people take showers, wash the dishes or flush the toilet, the water flows into the sewers. In fact, it flows into pipes called laterals, which are four to six inches in diameter. Laterals from homes and businesses transport the wastewater to larger pipes, called main lines or interceptors, which then transport the water to sewage treatment plants. In this scenario, the alligators spend much of their time in the city’s main lines.

Accessing the Sewers

The good people at the Public Works don’t like it when random citizens enter the sewers. Manholes are the primary means of entry, and they are sealed against random openings. Sewer workers can enter the manholes easily, but others are not so lucky.

The first hurdle is to find a manhole a character can access covertly. Doing so might necessitate distractions, moving in the wee hours of the morning, and/or Dexterity + Stealth rolls to access the manhole quietly.

The second hurdle is opening the manhole. Doing so requires a Strength roll at a –2 dice penalty. A crowbar eliminates this penalty, while a crowbar-like implement (such as a castoff piece of fire escape) mitigates the penalty to –1. Open-

ing a manhole takes a minimum of one minute (though an exceptional success can reduce this time to a single turn). Opening a manhole is usually pretty loud, too.

Getting Caught: Normal folks aren’t allowed in the sewers; only sewer workers are. If the authorities become aware of people climbing down manholes, the authorities get upset. Bystanders might call the police. Police then arrive and take offending characters to the police station.

The penalty for illegal sewer-entering is not strict, but the police ask why the characters want to go into the sewers at all. If the characters cite stories of alligators in the depths, the authorities tell the characters that these stories are probably just rumors, but the city is looking into it – the characters shouldn’t worry or take matters into their own hands. Offending characters offering stranger stories receive odd looks and some time in a holding cell.

In the end, characters are held for anywhere from 30 minutes to a few hours and fined \$500. Of course, characters with Merits such as Contacts or Status, or those making successful use of Social Skills (Manipulation + Expression, Persuasion or Socialize), can mitigate this.

Repeat offenders are shown little leniency. The second time, the police and a Public Works employee sit down and tell the characters exactly why going into the sewers is a bad idea (disease and drowning being foremost). The fine increases to \$1,000, and the police tell the offender that if he’s caught in there again, it’s jail time.

The third time the police catch a character illicitly entering the sewers, they lock her in a cell overnight, fine her \$2,000 and tell her they will not be lenient at all next time.

The fourth time, the character is tried for repeated trespassing.

Sewer Features

Characters who climb down a manhole find themselves in one of the city’s main lines. They likely notice the following:

- They are in a large pipe. It is claustrophobic; there’s not much headroom. (Main lines are usually four feet, five feet or six and a half feet in diameter.)
- The walls are brown tile. A dark, encrusted line marks the height the sewage regularly reaches (usually four feet). The walls are marred with grime.
- Waist-deep, brownish sewage flows down the pipe.
- Small holes in the wall allow additional sewage to trickle in. Occasional brown lumps pop out of these.
- Things bump against characters legs and feet. (A variety of solid matter ends up in the sewers: feces, dead pets and so forth. Also, the bumps could be carp – perhaps the only natural creature that can survive in such a hostile environment.)
- Footing is uncertain. The floor is concave and slimy.
- It doesn’t smell nearly as bad as it should. (A lot of water, from toilets as well as from dishwashers, laundry machines and the like, dilutes the nastiness – though it does have it moments.)
- The sewage flows slowly – two feet per second (1.36 miles per hour).

• A Perception (Wits + Composure) roll allows characters to detect a faint, downward grade — the sewage flows downhill. An exceptional success on this roll allows a character to determine that the grade is a little more than 2%.

Sewer Dangers and Sewer Systems

Sewers are unkind places; that's one reason Public Works doesn't want know-nothing citizens down there. Sewer explorers face the following dangers:

Drowning. The water isn't deep, but it fills half — or more — of the pipe. Characters in one of the small main lines (those a mere 48 inches in diameter) walk around in sewage up to their necks, and the pipe might fill entirely. The flow increases to around four feet in height when lots of people use water at the same time: in the mornings when everyone wakes up, and in the evenings when they get home from work.

Slipping. More icky than dangerous, the footing on the pipe's bottom is uncertain. Characters must move slowly or risk slipping on the slick, round surface. A reflexive Dexterity + Athletics roll allows a character to keep his footing in uncertain situations. You might call for such a roll at random points during a journey as well, as there's no telling when a character might put his foot in something especially slick.

A failed roll means the character gets dunked under the sewage, and is at increased risk of disease and of being swept away.

Being Swept Downstream. The flow is not fast, but it might accelerate when more people use water or for other inexplicable reasons (especially in the World of Darkness). Sewer workers use harnesses to make sure they don't end up on the wrong end of a bar grill.

If a character slips, or if the flow increases, Strength + Athletics should be rolled for each affected character. Failure means the character loses contact with the ground and starts flowing. Every three turns (nine seconds) later, another Strength + Athletics roll should be made for the character, until he ends up at the waste treatment plant or regains his footing. If you feel particularly cruel, you can rule that the unfortunate character's head is under the sewage during this time (perhaps on a dramatic failure) and risks drowning.

Disease. It's not as bad as one might think. Still, close proximity to raw sewage (especially being dunked in it) is bad for one's health.

After a sojourn through the sewers, or after slipping under the water, Stamina + Resolve (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 49) should be rolled for all such characters to resist disease. Failure indicates a disease such as E. coli, cholera, typhoid or one of a variety of generic GI ailments afflicts the character, but probably doesn't come to full force for several days. Those with such a disease suffer penalties as you decree.

The Riverside Syndrome. Being partially immersed in sewer water certainly places characters at risk of contracting the Riverside Syndrome. See "System — The Riverside Syndrome," later in this chapter, for more information.

Poison Gas. Contrary to some beliefs, methane is not particularly present in the sewers, as water from a variety of sources dilutes the shit. However, another sort of gas is a danger: hydrogen sulfide (H_2S). This gas builds up when the sewage stops flowing and becomes "septic." Symptoms of exposure include dizziness, numbness, unconsciousness and death (probably by drowning), in that order. Professional sewer workers know that, if they feel lightheaded, it could be an indication of hydrogen sulfide, and they should get out into the fresh air — but other people might not recognize the symptoms. When sewer workers need to enter an area filled with the gas, they use machines called ventilators that clear the air in a matter of minutes after they are set up.

What could cause the sewage to stop flowing? It usually happens when a backup or blockage occurs. A problem with the pipe (causing sewage to pool) might also cause it. Also, even when the sewage is clipping along at its normal pace, hydrogen sulfide sometimes arises anyway — even in the real world. In the World of Darkness, the gas more likely to do so.

When a character is exposed to hydrogen sulfide gas, a reflexive Stamina + Resolve roll is necessary (perhaps at a penalty if the gas is particularly potent or prevalent). Failure means the character is dizzy and lightheaded, suffering a -1 die penalty to all rolls (including further rolls to resist the gas). After a minute, if the character has not left the area, another Stamina + Resolve roll is called for. Failure worsens the previous symptoms and causes tingling and numbness in the extremities, nose and eyes. The penalty on all rolls increases to -2. After another minute, if another Stamina + Resolve roll fails, the character passes out. Stamina + Resolve rolls should be made every minute thereafter, with failure indicating that the character enters a coma and dies shortly thereafter.

At any point, moving to an area of fresh air and breathing deeply for a few minutes alleviates the symptoms.

Intelligence + Medicine allows a character to identify the symptoms of hydrogen sulfide poisoning. Intelligence + Science clues in a character to this possible danger if he bothers to think about it at any point.

Alligators. In this scenario, Sabek's alligators dwell in the sewers, as well. These are *very* dangerous, and can compound the sewer's other dangers.

Sewer Drama

Sewers are unpleasant places, even when alligator-like monstrosities spawned by an incomprehensible being *don't* swim around in them. Play up the drama of the protagonists entering the sewers. In most stories, doing so shouldn't be something they do easily or cavalierly. Entering the sewers should be an act of desperation — it's the only way to save the ones the characters love, to stop the subterranean menace or to uncover the conspiracy, and they are the only ones to do it.

The characters stand at the top of a manhole, looking down. The slender, vertical tunnel ends at a flow of brownish sewage. It is dark. The sounds of sluggish water echo up

the tunnel, and slight, unpleasant odors accompany them. It is cramped and wet down there; the characters will be vulnerable. On top of that, what they are doing is illegal; they make enemies of the proper authorities. Do the characters go forward? Do they have a choice?

In addition, once the characters are in the sewers, play up the danger. They creep down water-logged tunnels beneath city streets. Holes on the walls emit trickles and occasional gouts of sewage. Unknown objects bump against legs. The sewage is up to their waists... up to their chests... up to their necks. And prehistoric predators could be lurking anywhere.

Place sewer dangers where dramatically appropriate. If the characters don't seem worried, have them enter a section filled with hydrogen sulfide gas. One of them encounters a slick section and slips. The flow inexplicably increases.

Of course, the highlight of this dark, dripping tension is when the alligator attacks. It does so suddenly, by surprise, snapping, dragging, and then it is gone. Devouring.

System – The Riverside Syndrome

Characters who fall under Sabek's otherworldly sway plunge down a slimy path. They lose their minds, their bodies and eventually their humanity.

Exposure

Characters exposed to Sabek's influence – through sewage, for example, or perhaps just being in the entity's proximity – are at risk of developing the Riverside Syndrome. Roll Stamina + Resolve for the character.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character progresses directly to stage 2 of the syndrome.

Failure: Sabek's transforming influence affects the character; she progresses to stage 1 of the syndrome.

Success: The character remains unaffected – for now.

Exceptional Success: Not only is the character unaffected, but some facet of himself draws strength against Sabek's presence. He gains a +1 die bonus to resist the Riverside Syndrome for one week.

Possible Bonuses: Second exposure (+1), slight exposure (+1 to +3), first exposure (+2), Natural Immunity Merit (+2).

Possible Penalties: Heavy exposure (–1 to –3), primal or instinctive personality (–1), fifth or subsequent exposure (–2).

The Progression

The Riverside Syndrome progresses in stages. If the initial roll to resist Sabek's influence fails, the character

enters stage 1 (or stage 2 on a dramatic failure). Thereafter, roll Stamina + Resolve each week for the character.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The syndrome advances by two stages.

Failure: The syndrome advances by one stage.

Success: The syndrome remains at its current stage.

Exceptional Success: The character's situation improves; the syndrome regresses by one stage.

Stage 1: Dreams

In the syndrome's first stage, affected characters dream lizard dreams. They experience sensations of drifting in the river, images of pyramids and muddy water, basking in the sun, of fragile bones and warm blood in their mouths. The dreams are pleasant, and the character feels an urge to keep them hidden.

Stage 2: Thoughts

The character can't get the dreams out of his head even when awake, and experiences waking dreams in a similar vein. He also feels urges: to spend time in the water and in the sun, to lie around and do little, to eat raw meat, to eat *living* meat. He can control the urges (if he wants to), but they grow more powerful.

Stage 3: Actions

Each day during this stage, roll Resolve for the character. Failure means he acts on one his primal urges, which are now too strong to ignore. The first such urges are benign – the character stays home from work to lounge in the bathtub all day – but they progress to the weird and then to the freakish.

Also at this stage, the character develops a physical abnormality: the beginning of the Riverside Look. See "The Riverside Look," earlier in this chapter, for ideas.

Stage 4: Physical Changes

In addition to following stranger and more inhuman urges, the character develops more characteristics of the Riverside Look; usually two. For each week the character remains at this stage, he develops another such characteristic.

Stage 5: Join Your Brothers

The character cannot resist the urge to descend into the sewers, for that is where he is *supposed* to be. His transformation into monster is complete at the end of the week. Stop rolling Stamina + Resolve at this point.

Reversing the Process

Whether or not characters can reverse the process – changing alligators back into people – and how they accomplish this feat, is for you to decide. It might be as "easy" as destroying Sabek (either physically or by recreating

the alligators' soggy habitat). It might require supernatural means (spirits, magic). It might be impossible. If it is impossible, however, you don't want to tell your players that; the possibility of redemption for the monsters lends depth and moral ambiguity to the stories.

Motivations

Characters can enter this scenario via a number of methods. Of course, the exact motivations depend on the story and characters involved.

- **She's Been Acting Strange.** One of the characters' loved ones (a lover, spouse, child or someone similar) begins acting oddly: in fact, she's picked up the Riverside Syndrome and is transforming into a human-eating monstrosity. For added urgency, danger and creep factor, one of the player's characters is *himself* transforming.

- **In the Name of Science.** Scientifically-minded characters hear rumors of alligators in the sewers, and wonder how the creatures can survive in such a hostile environment.

- **Riverside Workers.** The ongoing construction in Upper Riverside plus the urban expansion into the wetlands puts a strain on Stanley Construction's manpower, and they hire a large number of temporary workers. The players' characters might all be such workers. This situation gives the characters good reason to be acquainted with each other, with Upper Riverside and with the rumors circulating about the place. Sewer workers have a similar connection.

- **Activism.** Earth-conscious characters (such as environmental activists, Green Peace members, concerned citizens, werewolves or Thyrsus mages) might have been fighting the city's decision to expand into the wetlands for some time. These characters know alligators used to live there, and after they hear the sewer rumors, grow suspicious.

- **Call of the Cult.** The Cult of the Nile can serve as an excellent hook for characters. One of their friends or loved ones might join the cult, leaving characters to wonder where he's going all the time. Alternatively, one of the characters might hear of the cult.

- **Supernatural Resonance.** Supernatural characters might become involved through a variety of means depending on their nature. Mages detect traces of Sabek's presence with Mage Sight. Local spirits tell werewolves of a new player in town. Vampires who dwell in the darkness become aware of the gators and bring the matter to the rest of the Kindred – or, at least, to the players' characters.

Act 1, Scene 1

After hooking the characters with a motivation, you might maintain their attention with one (or more) of these events, depending on the story you wish to tell.

- **Abduction.** The Cult of the Nile mistakes one of the characters for a drifter (or perhaps the character is a drifter) and attempts to kidnap him. Different members

have different methods of doing so, from buying the victim a drink and slipping a mickey into it to accosting him in an alley with overpowering numbers.

- **Murder, Murder!** Someone close to one of the characters (a friend, family member or simply an acquaintance) is murdered. The mutilated remains are found in the Riverside district. The victim was the prey of a sewer gator, of course, but to muddy the waters, she might have been mugged, stabbed, shot or even murdered before the gator got to her. The characters might discover the body themselves (perhaps having an appointment to meet with the victim), or might become involved after the police give up.

- **Shadowy Sight.** At night in the Riverside district, the characters notice a large shape sliding into the sewers. (It is humanoid, reptilian, both or indistinct, depending on the needs of your story.) When they investigate, they find little trace of the creature – except for a bloody finger, the remnant of its last meal. For added horror and incentive, the finger wears a ring that one of the characters identifies as belonging to someone she knows.

Stories

Many stories are possible within this scenario; you can use it to portray any theme or mood you wish. The scenario is set up to contrast the human and the inhuman – the alligators (and Sabek and the Lizard Brain) represent the inhuman, the poor folk of Riverside represent the human and the cult bridges the gap. Characters should be forced to ask: Is one more *right* than the other? Do human conceptions of good and evil, of right and wrong, even apply to the instinctive forces that threaten humanity?

Also, urban expansion into nature caused this problem. It would be easy (and appropriate) to craft a story with the moral that industry at the expense of the environment is a bad idea. However, not every story needs to portray that moral. Indeed, some might convey the opposite.

Something Wrong in the Depths

This story emphasizes the progression of realization. The characters gradually become aware of the full extent of the danger, which should leave them looking at each other in desperation.

First (using the motivation and scenes presented earlier), the characters realize that something is wrong – that something is killing people. They don't know what it is – maybe a serial killer, maybe an animal, a gang, a cult and so forth. Depending on how many false leads you want to supply, this chapter can last for some time.

Eventually the characters realize that the killer comes from the sewers. Going to the authorities gets the characters laughed away, so they might decide to head down themselves. Here, they encounter the disgust of the sewers as well as the feeling of being stalked, of hearing splashes in the distance, seeing dark shapes at the edge of their light....

They might even discover a hieroglyph on the wall as they get close to the Crocodile Tunnels.

Finally, the characters discover the truth — the killer is an alligator. Perhaps they arm and armor themselves to do battle. They return to the sewers and find the alligator. They discharge shotguns, they throw grenades, they fill the tunnels with machinegun chatter. Finally, they defeat the alligator, though it takes all their resources to do so — and find that the beasts surround them.

This story can progress further as well, allowing the characters to realize Sabek's involvement — and perhaps that of the Lizard Brain as well.

Metamorphosis

This story focuses on a single character's change into a monster; the rest of the scenario is backdrop. One character — a friend or loved one of the players' characters — contracts the Riverside Syndrome. (For added psychological oomph, the victim is one of the players' characters. This is a good idea only if the player has to leave the troupe for some reason, or if he doesn't like his character and wants to create a new one.)

The symptoms and progression of the Riverside Syndrome are described earlier in this chapter. They occur slowly, so the characters watch in increasing horror as their friend... *changes*. They might scabble for a cure. They might try to find the source of the problem (Sabek) and destroy it. They might be forced to prevent their friend from descending into the sewers, and thereafter must leave one of their number with him to restrain him from joining his alligator brethren. Of course, this character witnesses the most horrific aspects of the change, as his friend turns into a monster — and attacks him in its attempt to escape.

This story also works well threaded throughout another story (whether or not from this scenario). A scene of depth and character development contrasts nicely with a scene of cosmic terror, mysticism or violence.

Fire in the Hole!

Characters learn of the alligators in the sewers — and go down to kick gator butt. Perhaps the characters are motivated by the death of a friend or horror at what the gators can do. They might be sewer workers, animal control officers or even members of the military charged with eliminating the menace.

This story can easily become a simple, action-oriented sewer romp, which is fine if that's what you'd like. Adding more horror and depth might make it more interesting, though. For example, perhaps the characters don't know what they're dealing with — they just know that the authorities ask them to destroy "the threat." The mounting horror as they discover signs of their prey, lose radio contact with their devoured buddies and lose one of their own to a sudden splash of water and teeth increases the creepiness factor.

The story ends when the characters wipe out the gators — or when the gators wipe *them* out. It might also end when the characters have to call for heavy-duty support — in the

final scene they stand and watch as napalm plumes from manholes. The gators are defeated, but questions about morality and human corruption of the ecosystem remain.

Egypt in the Sewers

If you have access to **World of Darkness: Chicago**, you might know that the **Mage** story presented in that book, "Unreal City," uses a lot of Egyptian imagery and includes a crocodile-headed god in subterranean tunnels. It might seem like these things are just popping up all over the place!

Indeed, telling these two stories in the same chronicle without acknowledging the similarities might make them seem implausible. However, the two stories give you an excellent opportunity to connect them and create a larger story arc and a more interesting dynamic. You might do so in the following ways:

- Sabek and the alligators have nothing to do with the Lizard Brain — they are further ramifications of Upuaut's coming.
- Daniel Montgomery's Cult of the Nile delves deep into Egyptian occultism, eventually performing a ritual that awakens Upuaut and sparks the events that begin in "Unreal City."
- The two events could be apparently unrelated but orchestrated by a higher intelligence: a powerful mage or spirit, for example, or perhaps an entity similar to the Lizard Brain but with more interest in Earth. This individual or entity should have an Egyptian tenor, of course.

Fight City Hall

In this story, the characters' battles are mainly political. They might already be aware of the alligator menace and a possible way to solve it. They might be trying to convince the bureaucrats that they need to organize an attack on the gators, pull out of the wetlands, inform the public, transfer the gators to a more suitable habitat and/or anything else they might think of.

The characters find themselves stymied. Two or three important people have stakes in Upper Riverside and in the urban expansion project and do not want anything to thwart their plans. The characters must use intrigue, blackmail, political savvy, rhetoric and any other tools they can muster to fight the good fight.

This story emphasizes a much more common — and human — form of corruption than that which Sabek supplies.

Human Evil

In this variation, Sabek doesn't exist, and the Lizard Brain's responsibility is extremely peripheral. The true villain is Daniel Montgomery.

After the world took so much from him, Daniel finally decided to *take back*. Research allowed him to grant his soul to the Lizard Brain, and in return he gained rites of power — and the ability to strengthen the local alligators, a few of which he dropped into the sewers. Daniel and his cult have some control over the gators, and the cult members compel the gators to kill people. The killings aren't random, either; investigation reveals that, while many of the murders seem unrelated, a good number of the victims were wealthy individuals whose homes were burglarized soon after. The characters might also discover that numerous victims are connected to Daniel Montgomery or other individuals — the cult members use their power to revenge themselves on those who wronged them in the past.

This story speaks to the human capacity for inhuman evil. Daniel committed the one sin that Sabek and the Lizard Brain cannot — he *chose* to be this way. Alternatively, the story might instead represent the cosmic and alien evil that exists outside humanity. Contact with the unspeakable Lizard Brain sent a flash of evil and a spreading darkness through Daniel's mind.

Depending on how you want to spin it, this story might also portray the decadence of society. The system and civilization care nothing for most of its constituents, and force a young man to take drastic action.

Scapegators

In this variation, alligators *do* live in the sewers, forced out from the drained wetlands — but they are sickly and scrawny and few, surviving (for a short time) on the rats and fish that live in the sewers. The occasional rumor surfaces about them, and one person — perhaps Daniel Montgomery, perhaps someone else — uses them to his advantage.

The villain in this story is a serial killer. He might have a reason behind his murders, or he might not, depending on the story you wish to tell. Whatever the case, the killer sets up the gators to take the fall. He does his best to make the deaths seem as if wild animals — the alligators — tore the people apart. (His success at this con attempt is likewise up to you.)

The story can progress in several ways. Perhaps an angry mob organizes and demands that City Hall rid the sewers of the gators — or descends into the sewers itself. Perhaps the players' characters head down to kill some gators, but after they shoot a couple, realize these animals could not possibly be responsible for the deaths.

Similar to "Human Evil," this story portrays human capacity for evil. This story also emphasizes human rape of nature: not only does the city expand into the wetlands and destroy the gators' habitat, but a human then uses the ousted animals for his own bloody goals.

Finishing It

Several options exist for solving the alligator problem; which one(s), if any, are viable depends on the story you want to tell.

- The city must pull out of the former wetlands and return them to their former state. Obviously, for a few characters to accomplish this is no easy task.
- Even if the characters destroy Sabek's physical form, it re-manifests a short time later. The characters must lure him (and his taint) to a different location, preferably a natural one far from any city.
- Destroying Sabek ends the corruption and causes the alligators to lose their powers, so they become subject to disease and starvation in the sewers. However, defeating Sabek permanently might require ancient rituals, mystical weapons or the like.
- Wiping out the alligators is good enough.
- Dispersing the cult robs Sabek of his power — the incarnation withers away, and the alligators die.
- Transporting the gators to a new habitat works; Sabek vanishes, and the Lizard Brain remains quiescent.

Cast

The Lizard Brain

Description: The Lizard Brain is a primal entity of boundless depths and incomprehensible might. Among other aspects that human minds cannot grasp, it is the instinct for survival in every living thing — survival at all costs. It is likely unaware of events that occur in this scenario, but its influence is still felt.

Storytelling Hints: As with most reality-bending horrors, the Lizard Brain is unlikely to come face-to-face with the characters. In fact, the characters are unlikely to even realize its existence or involvement. If they do, it should come as a moment of crushing realization, of suddenly glimpsing the vastness that exists beyond human experience. The "problem," if that's what the characters call it, is far greater than their, or anybody's, ability to handle — the best they can hope for is to quell this particular incident.

Items marked with an asterisk (*) appear in **World of Darkness: Second Sight**, "Chapter 4: Reality-Bending Horrors."

Influence*: 4

Virulence*: 7

Note that these values represent a Lizard Brain far removed from the world in almost every aspect. If the entity stirs again or casts part of its alien attention toward Earth, the values increase as you desire.

Vulnerability*: Signs of great human intelligence inked onto the skin in henna or more permanent tattoos. In Egypt, some cults that sought to banish Sobek used lengthy mathematical formulae involved in constructing the pyramids. (Research — an extended Intelligence

+ Academics, Investigation or Occult roll requiring 12 successes — can reveal this information.) Mathematical and scientific equations work, but other signs of human intelligence might work at your discretion. The signs must cover at least half a character's body, including around the mouth, to be effective.

Sabek. Incarnation of the Lizard Brain

Background: When the city's urban development projects expanded into the nearby wetlands, dozens of species lost their habitat — including alligators. This event caused the Lizard Brain to stir in some alien fashion, and Sabek, an incarnation of primal power, formed in the city's sewers. More information on Sabek appears earlier in this chapter.

Description: This entity is slightly translucent; shapes of objects behind it are barely visible. It resembles a man with the head of an alligator. Sabek is shirtless and shoeless, and a black and gold wrap around its waist hangs to its knees. Thick gold bracelets encircle its forearms.

Storytelling Hints: Sabek is a powerful being — especially if the players' characters are mere mortals. Make sure they know the scope of the danger if they insist on confronting Sabek. Physically defeating Sabek should be unnecessary for stories involving mortal characters (unless they are exceptionally experienced), but is more of an option for mage, vampire or werewolf characters. Werewolves and, to a lesser extent, mages are particularly appropriate, because Sabek is a spirit.

Sabek rarely manifests physically. Usually, its presence is felt in various ways throughout its domain (the Cult of the Nile, the Riverside Syndrome and the like). Characters proceeding deep into the Crocodile Tunnels feel a malign and primal presence that stirs ancestral survival instincts buried in their monkey DNA. The urge might be strong enough that they flee (perhaps if a Resolve roll fails), but Sabek remains invisible, intangible and untouchable unless

the characters go to extraordinary means to call him out (means likely involving research and ancient rites) or you want to give the characters a real challenge.

More information about spirits appears in **Mage: The Awakening** and **Werewolf: The Forsaken**. They function much as ghosts. Items marked with an asterisk (*) appear in **Mage: The Awakening** and **Werewolf: The Forsaken**. You can also see a description of the Materialize Numen in "Chapter 3: Bloody Mary," in Bloody Mary's description.

Attributes: Power 10, Finesse 9, Resistance 10

Willpower: 20

Essence: 20

Initiative: 19

Defense: 10

Speed: 24

Size: 5

Corpus: 15

Influence*: Alligators 4

Numina: Animal Control (19), Materialize* (19), Phantasm (19), Telekinesis (19), Terrify (19).

Sewer Gator

Description: Something is not right about this hulking reptile — aside from the fact that it shouldn't be here at all. Its muscles bulge from its skin. The spines along its back look long and tough. Patches of its skin shine wetly, and strings of mucus stretch from its body to its legs as it moves. Its mouth opens wide, and its teeth look abnormally long and serrated.

Sewer gators come in two varieties: normal alligators from the swamps that Sabek's influence altered and former humans who succumbed to the Riverside Syndrome. The latter variety is more prevalent; only about half a dozen alligators escaped from the swamp to the sewers.

Storytelling Hints: The sewer gators are primal and powerful. They are lurking predators, and the threat of their attack should be a constant fear for the characters. Even supernatural characters can worry, for multiple gators attacking at once can threaten even mages and werewolves.

Some of the gators, however, might not be pure animal. Transformed humans show vestiges of their former lives, and using this aspect in your Storytelling can bring a powerful point to the story. It also makes killing the gators morally ambiguous. You have many options to portray the remnants of a gator's former humanity: the creature might clench a once-cherished possession (or piece of a person) in its jaws, it might frequent areas where people (such as sewer workers or the homeless) live, it could show a preference for a food, location, person or item it did in life or it might feel flashes of memory when confronted with pieces of its old life.

Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 4, Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6, Presence 4, Manipulation 1, Composure 4

Skills: Athletics (Swimming) 5, Brawl 5, Stealth 5, Survival 4





Willpower: 8

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 14

Size: 6

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	2 (L)	13

Armor:

Type	Rating	Defense Penalty
Natural	1/2	0

Health: 12

Flash of Memory: If a once-human sewer gator confronts (or is confronted with) a memento from its former life — something important — roll Resolve + Composure for the gator. Exceptionally important items (such as a spouse or child, its prize-winning screenplay manuscript or the basketball it practiced with before playing professionally) impose a penalty of -1 to -3 on this roll.

If the roll fails, the gator is overcome with a flash of memory: discordant images rage through its malformed brain. The gator takes no action for one turn, then throws off the spell — but may slink away or stay its attacks, at your discretion.

A dramatic failure on the Resolve + Composure roll means the gator is overcome with a memory for a full minute, during which time the gator might display humanlike characteristics: approaching the person or item and nudging it lovingly, for example.

Daniel Montgomery.

High Priest of the Cult of the Nile

Quotes: “My master is Sobek. The ancient Egyptians knew him, and he is here again.”

“You fight because you don’t *understand*. Who says we *people* have more right to be here than the alligators? This planet is as much theirs as it is ours. At least.”

“Look. I was a good kid. But that didn’t do a goddamn for me. The world, society, I don’t know what, but it took everything from me. Mom, Dad. Everything. So now I’m taking back. And I don’t think the score is even yet.”

Background: Daniel’s background appears earlier in this chapter, under “The Cultist.”

Description: This African American man has a shaved head and powerful features. His eyes are black, as if the pupils have expanded to fill the irises. Patches of skin on his head and bare arms look rough, and he scratches at them with short fingers. He wears a black tank top and cargo pants.

Daniel is afflicted with the Riverside Look, but Sabek’s influence has not claimed him completely — some instinctual part of the incarnation, or of the nameless entity that spawned it, recognizes that Daniel helps it and its children survive.

More information about Daniel and the cult appears under “The Cultist,” earlier in this chapter.

Storytelling Hints: Daniel represents the blending of human and inhuman concepts — as such, he is important to the theme and statement of many stories in this scenario. Ideally, the characters meet him once or twice without the desire (or perhaps the ability) to blow him full of holes. In roleplaying encounters with Daniel, emphasize both his human and inhuman features. He scratches at his rough



patches of skin, discusses feeding people to the gators and eats raw (perhaps live) meat, but at the same time he discusses his past, his motivations, his desperation to achieve *something* in a world that apparently wants him to fail, and about how much he still misses his mother and father.

Daniel does not apologize for his actions. He thinks he acted, and has acted, wisely — taking advantage of an opportunity that most people never receive. He thinks his parents would be proud of him.

Items marked with an asterisk (*) appear in **World of Darkness: Second Sight**, “Chapter 4: Reality-Bending Horrors.”

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4, Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Skills: Animal Ken (Alligators) 2, Athletics (Swimming) 3, Brawl (Biting) 2, Drive 1, Intimidation 1, Firearms 1, Larceny (Pickpocketing) 2, Persuasion 2, Occult (Egypt) 3, Politics 1, Science 1, Stealth 2, Streetwise (Homeless People) 3, Survival 2

Merits: Allies (City Hall) 2, Contacts (Street People) 1, Cult of Things That Must Not Be* 4, Resources 1

Willpower: 7

Morality: 3

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Greed

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Dmg	Size	Range	Shots	Dice Pool
Bite (alligator head)	2 (L)	1	—		
Heavy	3 (L)	—	30/60	7+1	6
Pistol			/120		

Armor:

Type **Rating** **Defense Penalty**

Health: 8

Derangements: Narcissism (mild), Vocalization (mild)

Rites*: Dread Voyage (•), Harbinger (••), Perverted Desire (••), Betrayal of Memory (•••), Deadly Form of the Lizard Brain† (•••), Sacral Invocation of the Demarcated (••••)

† See the accompanying sidebar.

New Rite: Deadly Form of the God (Level Three Rite)

The cultist transforms a portion of his body into a weapon appropriate to his god. The portion of the body, and the form it takes, varies by god and the specific way in which the cultist worships the

god. A performer might grow a scorpion-like tail, or his arm might become an oozing tentacle of acidic slime. In this scenario, Daniel Montgomery's head becomes an alligator's head.

Whatever the case, the new weapon has a dice pool equal to the cultist's Strength + Brawl + 2 and does lethal damage. The transformation lasts for three turns (five on an exceptional success).

Rules for rites appear in **World of Darkness: Second Sight**, “Chapter 4: Reality-Bending Horrors.”

Cultist

Quotes: “I feel at home here.”

“Nobody wants them anyway. Better that the alligators live than these guys.”

“My god gives me the things I need *now*, not promises that *some day* I'll be rewarded.”

Background: The members of the Cult of the Nile come from disparate backgrounds. For more information, see “The Cult of the Nile” earlier in this chapter.

Description: Cultists come from all walks of life. About 30 cultists belong to Daniel's Cult of the Nile, and all are individuals.

Storytelling Hints: Despite the previous peaceful natures of some of the cultists, they are all now brutal people. Use the gangbanger statistics (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 205) for a cultist, but note that few of them carry around guns. They may have knives, or they may rely on their fists and numbers. Also, cultists are likely to have a dot or two in the Cult of Things That Must Not Be Merit and may possess rites (both of which appear in **World of Darkness: Second Sight**, “Chapter 4: Reality-Bending Horrors”), as you decide. You are, of course, free to alter their other statistics (Skills, Merits and so on) to suit your needs.

Donna Angstrom, Bureaucrat

Quotes: “No alligators live in the sewers. Those are simply rumors gone wild.”

“The homeless, the infirm, kids with Down's syndrome... What do they do for society? Nothing. Except demand that we pay for their condition.”

“I am a *good person*. Better than you. Because I'm willing to get my hands dirty to do the right thing.”

Background: Donna knew she wanted to be in politics after her freshman year in college, when a passionate professor inspired her. She got her wish shortly after graduating, and has been working on improving society — which means making the rich and middle classes more comfortable — since that time.

More information about Donna's background appears earlier in this chapter, under “Other Players.”



Description: This woman is perhaps in her 30s. Her face is smooth, her hair dark blonde and her nails short and red. A pair of rimless glasses perches on her thin nose. She wears a brown pantsuit and extends her hand in greeting – but her smile does not touch her eyes.

Donna is businesslike and formal, though she knows how to play the friendliness game if doing so furthers her goals. She looks younger than she is (45) because of several plastic surgery sessions and a rigorous routine with a personal trainer.

Storytelling Hints: Donna is the primary stumbling block for characters seeking to solve the problem through political or official channels. As such, her exact position in City Hall and her powers therein can be as important or vast as you'd like. An army of political minions keep the characters from contacting Donna if she doesn't want to see them, and she pulls strings – perhaps with the city police or even organized crime – to stymie the characters' efforts.

Abilities:

Academics (dice pool 5) – Donna has a master's degree, and she makes a habit of doing copious research on her political opponents – which is why she no longer has any.

Politics (dice pool 7) – Donna spent her schooling learning to play politics, and has been doing it ever since.

Kenny Nguyen, Animal Control Officer

Quotes: “There *are* alligators down there. They killed a friend of mine. Pete Summers.”

“The gators are just gators. They don't mean any harm; they're *animals*.”

“I tried to go through the proper channels. It didn't work. Someone at City Hall... wants to keep this under wraps.”

Background: Kenny's diligence and compassion outstrip his intelligence, which is why he was never able to become a veterinarian, like he wanted, or even a vet tech. He settled for animal control officer, and is glad he did. Though the job is difficult and thankless, he feels like he does real good for the city. The fact that someone at City Hall stonewalls his requests therefore stings even worse.

Description: This Asian American man has gray at his temples and flecks of it throughout his hair. Smile lines are prevalent around his mouth and eyes. He wears coveralls with a white nametag: “Kenny.”

Storytelling Hints: Kenny is one of few potential allies the players' characters might have – but he could also turn into an enemy. He doesn't want to kill the alligators, and does his best to thwart characters who attempt to do so. However, he doesn't want the gators in the sewers, and he has access to tranquilizer guns, traps, and similar materials.

Abilities:

Firearms (dice pool 5) – Kenny received basic training using his tranquilizer gun and has been wielding it effectively for years.

Animal Ken (dice pool 5) – Animals have always been Kenny's passion, and his animal ken stems mostly from his inherent kindness toward them.





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Tomorrow!

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Doppelgängers

The Legend

From the Testimony of M. Bolton

"Okay, I know you're gonna think I'm nuts, but hear me out. There's this guy named Ron who works in my division in the cubicle across from mine. Well, a couple of weeks ago, he mentioned to everybody that he had big vacation plans over Memorial Day. Then, the Thursday before the holiday weekend, our supervisor, Gary (yeah, *that* asshole), cornered Ron just before lunch and tried to get him to not only cancel his vacation but to come in and work all weekend just because Gary had forgotten a deadline. They had a big argument in front of everybody, and Ron walked out, yelling that he'd had enough of Gary's crap and that he quit.

"Well, I'm getting to the weird bit if you'll just shut up!

"Anyway, I ended up working that weekend in Ron's place — Jennifer's been getting clingy and I wanted to avoid spending the whole weekend with her — but when I showed up on Saturday morning, Ron was there, busy typing up some invoices. He said that it was 'wrong' to put his selfish needs above 'the team,' which was about the last thing I ever expected Ron to say about *this* office. Well, that was weird enough, but then, a few minutes later, just after I logged in, my phone rang. It was Ron ...calling from Cancun, he said, even though I could still hear him typing in the next cubicle!

"Phone-Ron said he was sorry that I got stuck working in his place and that he'd miss me and the rest of the guys, but that he was sick of this crappy-ass job and that Gary could blow him. Then Ron laughed and hung up. And at that very second, I heard the typing stop. When I looked over, Cubicle-Ron was gone with a half-written invoice still sitting in his typewriter.

"If that had been all that happened, it would have just been a spooky story. But then, the next week, the cops found Ron dead in his apartment.

"The police said that it looked like somebody jumped him as he got back in from his vacation and then strangled him to death. But his landlady said he never left on his vacation.

"No, that's still not the creepiest part. The creepiest part is that Jennifer left me a message on my answering machine the other night. She said she wanted me to know how much she enjoyed spending last night together. *I* haven't been with Jennifer since before Memorial Day. So who has been?"

The Doppelgänger

Taken from the German for "double walker," the word doppelgänger traditionally refers to an apparition that appears to be the double of a living person. Although the term doppelgänger is most clearly associated with European folklore, the word has echoes in other cultures as well. Folklore associates the doppelgänger with the concept of an "evil twin," and seeing one's own doppelgänger is often considered an omen of bad luck or even death.

In truth, the doppelgänger is more of a self-fulfilling prophecy than a mere omen. Ill fortune and eventually death plague the man who sees his own doppelgänger because the creature is the living antithesis of the one it copies, summoned into existence when the original is faced with some sort of existential dilemma. Once manifested, this dark reflection is inevitably driven to harm and even kill the one it mimics.

The reflection of her here, and then there, Is another shadow, another evasion, Another denial. If she is everywhere, She is nowhere, to him. But this she has made.

— Wallace Stevens,
Bouquet of Belle Scavoir

Summary

A doppelgänger is the antithesis of a preexisting Storyteller and/or player's character. The first part of this chapter provides game systems for creating and controlling doppelgängers.

Because of their genesis, the nature and agenda of any particular doppelgänger varies according to the personality of its template. The second part of this chapter is a short scenario in which a Storyteller character manifests a doppelgänger and involves other characters in her troubles. The chapter ends with a number of other sample doppelgängers who might be built on other character templates. Ultimately, however, "doppelgängers" may work best if you simply adapt the systems provided for doppelgänger creation and use to insert the creature into an ongoing chronicle.

History

Introducing a doppelgänger into a chronicle is a matter of first identifying a character (either a player's character or a Storyteller character) who is undergoing any sort of existential dilemma: an ethical choice between two conflicting facets of the character's personality. One possibility is a character who harbors a dark secret or repressed guilt, such as closeted homosexuality or childhood abuse.

Another possibility is a character who has lost a precipitous number of Morality points in a fairly short time — say three or more within just a few game sessions. On the other hand, a character who has succeeded on a significant number of Morality rolls but whose player has done a poor job of roleplaying the character's resulting guilt might summon a doppelgänger to act out those repressed feelings. Thus, a previously moral character whose recent conduct has sent her Morality spiraling is a good candidate for a doppelgänger, as is one who has repeatedly committed immoral actions without paying any psychological toll.

A third possibility is a character who relies on either his Vice or his Virtue to the exclusion of the other trait. A character who constantly suppresses his Wrath, for example, might give rise to a doppelgänger of uncontrollable rage, while one who never acted out of Faith might generate a doppelgänger of intense religious mania.

Systems — Doppelgängers

The doppelgänger, in its natural form, is not a sentient being at all. Until it manifests, the doppelgänger has no discernible existence and cannot be perceived by any means short of the most potent of magical senses, such as specialized (and masterful) Auspex ••••• or Mage Sight by a mage with at least five dots in the Spirit Arcanum. The creature is an inchoate character that has no true existence until circumstances provide it with a template for assum-

ing a fixed state. Most typically, this template is based on a mortal, although nothing save Storyteller discretion prevents the doppelgänger from assuming an existence patterned on that of a supernatural being.

The common denominator among doppelgänger templates is that the original being faces a choice or dilemma that cuts to the core of the original's personality. Generally, this means that either circumstances compel the original to act wildly out of character, or else that he faces a choice between two options, both of which threaten to vitiate an essential part of his sense of self. The template makes his choice, whatever it is, and a doppelgänger representing the rejected option is born.

For example, consider a cowardly person who must choose whether or not to rush into a burning building to save a loved one. His decision summons his doppelgänger regardless of his choice. If the coward conquers his fear and braves the fire, his doppelgänger is even more cowardly and venal than the original. On the other hand, if the character refuses to enter the building, his doppelgänger may be filled with reckless or suicidal courage.

Similarly, a decision on whether to quit a disagreeable but well-paying job, or whether to have an abortion or whether to cheat on a spouse could all trigger the manifestation, depending on the personality of the character making the choice. Regardless, when in the vicinity of a character confronted with such a dilemma, the doppelgänger immediately patterns itself on her, using her as a template to define its existence. Thereafter, the doppelgänger can manifest as a physical copy of the original character, identical to the original in all respects except in personality.

Creating a Doppelgänger

As a physical representation of what the character might be had she gone down the road not taken, the doppelgänger is physically and mentally identical to the original, while its moral and psychological outlook is a mirror reflection of the original's. In other words, the doppelgänger differs from the original only in Morality (or whatever trait substitutes for Morality in the case of supernatural beings) and in attendant derangements. In addition to having all of the original's Skills, the doppelgänger also possesses all of the template's memories up until the moment of the doppelgänger's manifestation. After that point, the two are separate individuals who live their own lives, and the doppelgänger has no knowledge of what the original is doing when they are apart. Indeed, until the two first meet, the doppelgänger is unable to conceive of the original's existence.

To determine the doppelgänger's Morality rating, subtract the original's rating from 10. For example, a standard beginning character has a Morality of 7 while her doppelgänger has a Morality of 3. Thus, extremely moral characters tend to produce equally immoral doppelgängers, and vice versa.

If the doppelgänger's Morality is below that of the original (which is typically the case), assign the doppelgänger

one derangement for every two dots by which the original's Morality exceeds the doppelgänger's. These Storyteller-chosen derangements should be symptomatic of the original's repressed fears and desires.

If the doppelgänger's Morality exceeds the original's, the doppelgänger is free of any derangements the original suffers, but suffers from one or more Storyteller-chosen derangements that invert the original's. For example, if the original suffers from a Phobia, the doppelgänger might suffer from an Obsession with confronting the object of the original's fears.

Also, doppelgängers break the rules of Morality. To the doppelgänger, Morality is not the result of conscious choice, but rather a set of emotional constraints arising from the original's personality. Thus, while a high-Morality doppelgänger typically acts in a more "moral" fashion than its template, the doppelgänger is fully capable of taking immoral actions, including violent ones, when those actions are in the service of its derangements. As long as the doppelgänger can rationalize its actions as fitting in with its peculiar world view, the doppelgänger need never roll for degeneration.




Equal and Opposite

So what happens when a template with a Morality of 5 manifests a doppelgänger? The Storyteller has several options. First, the doppelgänger might manifest with a Morality of 5, similar to the doppelgänger's template but with new derangements emblematic of the original's spiritual dilemma. On the other hand, the Storyteller might choose to play with the rules a little and say that the doppelgänger's derangements (if any) are identical to those of the template, making the doppelgänger a perfect copy of the original.

Second, the Storyteller might determine the doppelgänger's persona based on how the template views her own Morality. If the template has been attempting to raise her Morality and atone for past mistakes, the doppelgänger might be free of such guilt. A template who embraces her moral descent might manifest a doppelgänger seeking redemption at all costs.

Finally, the Storyteller is always free to simply disregard the standard mechanism of doppelgänger creation, arbitrarily lowering or raising the doppelgänger's Morality and making the creature as immoral or moral as the story requires.



The doppelgänger first manifests when its template confronts a profound spiritual dilemma. An intensely honest cop

whose wife's illness causes catastrophic medical bills is offered a bribe to destroy evidence. A faithful parishioner considers abandoning her church after learning that her revered priest molested children. A ruthless businessman who cares only for his aging mother learns that he stands to inherit a large fortune if she dies before a certain date. Each of these individuals must choose between two mutually exclusive facets of their own personalities, and whatever choice they make, their actions could lead to the manifestation of doppelgängers who reflect the consequences of those choices.

Borrowed Lives

Once the doppelgänger manifests, it maintains its corporeal form for a scene, and continues to manifest during every scene in which the original remains conscious. The doppelgänger does *not* manifest near the original, but rather in some other location determined by the doppelgänger's new agenda. While the parishioner skips church services, her doppelgänger, consumed by religious mania, attends every service so that the doppelgänger can fulfill whatever needs the church hierarchy has. Whenever the cop visits his wife in the hospital room paid for with blood money, his dark self prowls the streets, taking out its wrath on random criminals.

During scenes in which the original is asleep, the doppelgänger can continue to manifest only if it spends one Willpower point per scene. The doppelgänger regains Willpower in the same manner as the original, but the frequency with which the doppelgänger must expend Willpower generally requires the creature to act on its Vice regularly.

A doppelgänger need never make a Morality roll since the doppelgänger doesn't really have a Morality, just a mirror reflection of someone else's Morality. The doppelgänger never performs any action outside its established nature, and never commits any action that violates its Morality *except* where such an action is in service of the doppelgänger's derangements. The psychotic doppelgänger of a police officer may brutally slay drug dealers and mob figures, but generally doesn't harm random small children who cross its path. High-Morality doppelgängers rationalize their Vice-driven actions as being somehow morally necessary. Low-Morality doppelgängers just don't care.

If the doppelgänger doesn't have any Willpower with which to fuel its existence, or if the doppelgänger chooses not to spend Willpower, the creature winks out of existence until its template awakens, at which point the creature returns with one Willpower point.

Whenever someone observes the doppelgänger and the original simultaneously, the doppelgänger must immediately spend a Willpower point to remain corporeal. The doppelgänger also loses its corporeal form if it goes to sleep or is rendered unconscious, returning to existence later sometime within about eight hours. A doppelgänger remembers nothing from its periods of nonexistence except for a vague feeling of dread. Consequently, doppelgängers try to avoid sleep, and one may be able to recognize a doppelgänger by its perpetually haggard appearance.



The Vanished Doppelgänger

When a doppelgänger disappears, it does not simply dematerialize as a spirit or ghost might, and observers cannot detect the creature as if it were a dematerialized being. Indeed, the only phenomena capable of detecting a doppelgänger when it has abandoned its corporeal form *might* be master-level mage spells of the Fate, Time or Spirit Arcana, a vampiric Devotion that incorporates Auspex ••••• or highly specialized Uratha Gifts. Those rare individuals capable of detecting an inactive doppelgänger describe it not as a spiritual entity but as a sort of “stain” on the Gauntlet, not unlike a faint image burned onto a computer screen. The doppelgänger’s Resonance is superficially identical to its template, but astute observers describe the Resonance as feeling fake or artificial.

When a doppelgänger reappears, it manifests in some location important to the original, but generally not where the original is at that time. While the doppelgänger may encounter its template randomly, the doppelgänger spends much of its time doing things the original subconsciously *wants* to do but *doesn’t* do. As such, encounters between the two are rare, at least until they become aware of one another.

While corporeal, a doppelgänger absolutely believes that it is the original character, and believes the original to be the copy should the doppelgänger learn of his existence. Persuading a doppelgänger that it is actually the copy is extremely difficult, and even then, the doppelgänger retains an unshakeable belief in its superiority over the original. Consequently, a doppelgänger aware of the original is often consumed with an overwhelming obsession with killing him and permanently assuming his identity. Of course, by doing so, the doppelgänger also destroys itself, since the creature cannot survive without the template. Unfortunately, persuading a doppelgänger of that truth is nearly impossible.

Failing at outright homicide, a doppelgänger usually settles for destroying the original’s professional and social relationships so that neither of them can enjoy the life to which the doppelgänger feels entitled. Indeed, doppelgängers with sadistic derangements may do so anyway as a prelude to killing the original.

The Tell

Although a doppelgänger is physically identical to the original in every fundamental sense, those who truly know the original or who have carefully studied her can detect subtle differences. Each doppelgänger has at least one “tell,” a slight difference between it and its template that only the most attentive and knowledgeable observers may detect. For example, if the original is left-handed, the doppelgänger might be right-handed. A doppelgänger may favor a certain style of dress that its template would not normally use or

perhaps only used in her younger days. An original might have a mole or beauty mark in a different location on her doppelgänger or in a different shape. In some cases, the tell might not be a physical distinction. Perhaps the original is a devoted pet owner, but his dog or cat growls and hisses at his doppelgänger.

Identifying a tell requires a Wits + Composure roll (or, at Storyteller discretion, Wits + Investigation or Wits + Empathy) with a dice penalty based on how well the observer knows the original.

Identifying a Tell

Dice Pool: Wits + Composure

Action: Instant and reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The observer misidentifies the tell and is convinced that the original is actually the doppelgänger.

Failure: The observer cannot tell the difference between the doppelgänger and its template.

Success: The observer detects the tell and realizes that the doppelgänger is not the original.

Exceptional Success: The observer recognizes the tell and can always spot the difference between the doppelgänger and the original.

Possible Penalties: The observer is a lover or close family member to the original (-2), the observer is a close friend or co-worker to the original (-5). If the observer is only an acquaintance of the original, the roll is automatically reduced to a chance roll.

Procreation

A doppelgänger presents one additional danger to those who encounter it: it reproduces easily. Whenever the doppelgänger is in the presence of someone who might be a suitable template for a doppelgänger (as described earlier in this chapter), the doppelgänger can spontaneously generate a new doppelgänger capable of copying that person and starting the process over again. This spontaneous generation doesn't happen all the time — doppelgänger reproduction occurs most frequently when a potential template observes both the doppelgänger and its original simultaneously. Awareness of the creature's existence (even subliminally) opens the observer to the possibility of duplication.

In any scene in which a character is in the presence of the doppelgänger and has compelling reason to believe that the doppelgänger is merely a copy of the original template, the Storyteller should roll a single die. On a 10, a second doppelgänger based on that character manifests at some other location important to the character (her home, her place of business, the home of her parents or significant other) and begins living its life as if it were the character. If the character would actually provide a suitable template for a doppelgänger — that is, the character is undergoing some sort of existential crisis or is regularly ignoring her Virtue and/or Vice — the doppelgänger manifests on a roll of 8 or higher.

Slaying the Beast

The exact procedure for eliminating a doppelgänger depends on the narrative goals of the story to be told. Some possible resolutions are described below.

The Direct Approach: Simply killing the doppelgänger's physical form achieves nothing, as the doppelgänger re-forms after an eight-hour interval. Killing the original destroys the doppelgänger, although this solution is rarely optimal.

Psychopomps: In Stephen King's *The Dark Half*, novelist Thad Beaumont manifests a doppelgänger that calls itself George Stark, after the pen name Beaumont had previously used in writing violent crime fiction. Beaumont, after discovering that his doppelgänger has an aversion to sparrows that congregate wherever Stark remains for any length of time, tricks Stark into remaining in one place long enough for an enormous flock of sparrows to gather and destroy him. In the novel, King associates sparrows with the idea of the psychopomp, an animal that acts as a guide between the spirit and physical realms. Psychopomps are inevitably drawn to a doppelgänger and, when given the opportunity, can attack and even permanently destroy it. Other animals that might serve this spiritual function include cats, dogs, whippoorwills, ravens, horses and dolphins.

Occultism: Many mythologies from around the world have legends and myths concerning the duality of the soul, and these tales can provide any number of supernatural means for binding or destroying a doppelgänger. For example, according to ancient Egyptian spirituality, every person's soul has seven component parts: the Ren (or name), the Sekem (spiritual power), the Akh (the part that travels to the afterlife), the Ba (the personality), the Ka (the life force), the Khaibit (the shadow) and the Sekhu (the physical remains). One possible explanation for doppelgänger manifestation is that some part of the original's soul, most likely the Khaibit, has splintered and left the body to manifest a separate existence. Thus, solutions to doppelgänger manifestation might be found in writings on Egyptology, such as translations of spells from *The Book of the Dead* or *The Coffin Texts*.

Similarly, Tibetan mysticism speaks of the *tulpa*, a being or object created through sheer willpower alone. Western mysticism posits a similar concept known as a thoughtform. Perhaps the doppelgänger is essentially a rogue *tulpa*, and as such, the original might be able to dispel her doppelgänger through meditative practices or through magical techniques contained in the *Bardo Thodol* (commonly translated as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*) or other obscure Sanskrit texts.

Finally, Taoist medicine might attribute a doppelgänger manifestation to an imbalance of the original's chi. According to Taoist mysticism, the soul can be divided into two components: the *hun* (or higher soul) and the *po* (lower soul). A Taoist healer might seek to cure this imbalance through obscure medical techniques. Possibilities for incorporating Taoist mysticism into this scenario are further detailed in the section on Taoist Alchemy contained on pp. 94-97 of **World of Darkness: Second Sight**.

Spiritual Dilution: The doppelgänger's existence is defined by how the doppelgänger differs from its template. Consequently, the original may be able to draw vitality from the doppelgänger by coming to terms with the psychological effects that gave it birth. One possibility is to become more like the doppelgänger in personality, acting either more or less immoral depending on the doppelgänger's Morality. In this way, the original might be able to "dilute" the doppelgänger, since its existence is defined by how it differs from the person it copies.

Another possibility is for the original to directly confront the dilemma that led to the doppelgänger's creation. The church parishioner visits her former priest in jail, confronts him with her disappointment and then prays that God will forgive him for his sins and help her to do the same. The cop, after paying off all of his wife's medical bills, turns himself in to Internal Affairs and offers to help set up his benefactors in a bribery sting. The businessman takes legal steps to ensure that even if his mother dies soon, the money he would stand to inherit goes to charity. In all of these scenarios, the original cuts to the source of the emotional conflict that created his copy and resolves the conflict definitively. By doing so, the doppelgänger is stripped of its meaning for existence, and fades away.

Psychological Warfare: If another character slays the doppelgänger, it dematerializes and re-forms later at some other location. However, the creature's existence is predicated on the doppelgänger own sense of self-identity. If a character can persuade the doppelgänger of its own nonexistence or of its lack of worth, she may be able to induce it to take its own life. A doppelgänger who willingly commits suicide does not re-form.

Motivations

So how do characters discover the doppelgänger and how are they moved to act against it? That depends on the nature of the doppelgänger and the circumstances of its creation. Some possible motivations are described below.

- **Investigation into the Bizarre.** In this scenario, the players' characters are individuals who are customarily called upon to investigate strange or unusual happenings. For example, **World of Darkness: Tales of the 13th Precinct** presents options for player characters who work in the police force. Police characters in a **13th Precinct** chronicle constantly answer calls to investigate criminal activity, and one such call might lead them to the low-Morality doppelgänger of an upstanding citizen. What happens when the police arrest someone for a brutal double homicide, only to see the suspect vanish from custody when the template falls asleep? What happens when officers check out the suspect's home and find the original there, complete with an airtight alibi?

- **Friends, Lovers and Next-Door Neighbors.** This scenario strikes closer to home. The doppelgänger is not based on the template of a stranger, but on someone whom one or more characters know well. For example, after a female character

dumps her unfaithful boyfriend, she might be confronted with his doppelgänger who declares his undying devotion to her, and possibly begins stalking her. Or perhaps character's conservative Christian roommate goes home to visit his family for the Christmas holidays, only to show up at the apartment the next day with noticeably different personality traits, including being openly homosexual. In this manner, a player character's Allies, Contacts, Mentors and Retainers can be transformed into plot elements rather than just dots on a page.

- **My Enemy, My Self.** Finally, the most direct way to involve players is to base the doppelgänger on a player's character. In this scenario, the character must be one who suffers from the type of emotional conflicts previously described. The character initially might notice disturbing signs that someone has been in her house — she arrives home to discover that her bed has been slept in, her CD collection is rearranged or even that her normally slovenly apartment is thoroughly cleaned. Neighbors and friends remind her of conversations and events that she doesn't recall. Such events might serve to make the character doubt her sanity, particularly if the possibility of some mundane outside stalker is eliminated.

If the player of the template character and the Storyteller are both willing, perhaps the player can play both the original and the copy in some situations. After all, the doppelgänger is in all respects identical to the original character, save for alterations in personality. If the same player portrays both characters (at least when only one is present and interacting with other players' characters), it can serve to heighten the sense of paranoia while also initially concealing the fact that the "bad character" is a separate individual rather than the original with an altered personality. Naturally, once the original and the doppelgänger have finally met face-to-face, the player should no longer portray the doppelgänger, since both it and its template will be antagonistic toward one another.

Act 1: Seeing Double

Once a connection is made between the characters and the doppelgänger, the characters may initially just assume that the original is simply deranged. What sort of events might lead them to realize the truth — that the original is actually being stalked by an evil twin? A few possibilities are listed below.

- **I Know Her Too Well.** The first and simplest clue might be intuition. If the original is someone well-known to a character, such as an Ally, Mentor or Retainer (or simply a Storyteller character with whom the character has an intimate connection, such as a lover or family member), the original might be able to persuade the character of her innocence (perhaps with a Presence + Persuasion roll). Of course, the character's intuition doesn't constitute evidence sufficient to get the original out of jail, but if the character

has Hope or Faith as a Virtue, he might recover Willpower if he insists on the original's innocence despite all evidence to the contrary.

- **Alibi.** On the other hand, the doppelgänger initially manifests in places where the original is not. Consequently, the original may have an airtight alibi for whatever crimes she is accused of committing. Indeed, police may be baffled when they have photographic evidence of the doppelgänger committing some crime but also photographic evidence of the original in some other location.

- **The Perfect Escape.** Whenever the template is asleep or unconscious, the doppelgänger must spend a Willpower point to maintain the creature's corporeal form. If the doppelgänger is unable or unwilling to do so, it temporarily ceases to exist. Thus, no matter how well restrained the doppelgänger is, it can escape any confinement simply by not spending additional Willpower at the end of the scene. The doppelgänger later returns, at some other location, with no memory of how it got there. Characters may become intrigued by a being who can escape any bonds or containment, possibly assuming that the doppelgänger is a teleporter or something stranger.

- **Mistaken Identity.** Many characters in the World of Darkness are suspicious of mysterious cases of mistaken identity. Supernatural powers such as Obfuscate allow vampires and other creatures to pose as other characters, often for the purpose of discrediting a mortal so as to prevent exposure of the supernatural world. A vampire hunter or similar personality might hear tales of someone who claims that "someone who looks just like me" committed some crime might assume that the doppelgänger is a supernatural being — and soon gain a doppelgänger of his own.

- **Confrontation.** Inevitably, any investigation into the activities of a doppelgänger results in the doppelgänger and the original meeting in the same place, possibly in front of witnesses. While the doppelgänger (more often than not) temporarily winks out of existence when a third party sees the two together, the instant of contact might be enough to persuade the characters that maybe the original really does have an evil twin.

- **But It Wasn't Me!** Finally, a character may become certain of the existence of a doppelgänger the hard way — when the doppelgänger uses the character as a template, and then does things that the character knows she couldn't have done. While it may be difficult to prove the truth to others, almost every template realizes when someone else is trying to live her life.

Story: The Other Me

Doppelgängers present Storytellers with an almost infinite variety of plot opportunities. The following story serves as an example of how to build a storyline around a doppelgänger manifestation.

Dramatis Personae

Brad Woolsey: A rape suspect and former client of Jenny's; he's next on Jenny-D's hit list.

Gordie Evans: A bouncer who witnessed Jenny gun down her former client.

Jenny Langston (Jenny-R): An overworked criminal defense attorney who creates a doppelgänger.

Jenny-D: Jenny's doppelgänger.

Jovan Brozovich: A taxi driver who helps incriminate Jenny.

Madeleine Cord: Jenny's neighbor.

History

The template is an overworked criminal defense attorney named Jenny Langston. Jenny's latest client, a drug dealer named Paolo Escrivar, has brazenly admitted to her in confidence that he ordered the murder of two potential witnesses, thereby leading to dismissal of the charges against him. Her idealism shaken, Jenny unwittingly summons her doppelgänger into existence, and it is consumed with hatred for the "low-life scum" she is hired to defend.

The story assumes that Jenny has a close relationship with one or more of the players' characters. At the very least, she should be an extremely close friend to one of them, if not a lover or family member, so as to justify her calling the character when things get weird. If such a pre-existing relationship is too difficult to work into the story, Jenny might be a friend or relative of a Mentor, Ally or Retainer.

Act 1: The Problem

Act 1 lays the foundation of the story as a respected attorney and a close friend of the players' characters is arrested for murdering a client in cold blood.

Scene 1: Flannery's Bar

Jenny calls up the character with whom she has a previous relationship and arranges to go out with him (or her) for drinks. Other characters are certainly welcome to join them. The characters meet at a neighborhood bar called Flannery's, where Jenny is distraught and already mildly intoxicated. Earlier that day, a judge dismissed the charges against her client, Paolo Escrivar, because of the deaths of the only witnesses against him, and even though Escrivar smugly admitted to Jenny that he arranged the killings, he also noted that she can't do anything about it — legal ethics prevents her from disclosing a confidential confession by a client. Consequently, even if Jenny revealed what Escrivar said, it would be inadmissible in court. Escrivar still wouldn't be punished, and Jenny would probably be disbarred.

Normally, for ethical reasons, Jenny would not be willing to discuss these concerns even with a close friend. At the

moment, however, she is so frustrated with her job and life that a Presence or Manipulation + Persuasion roll gets her to reveal the facts surrounding Escrivar. The four martinis Jenny has already downed also help loosen her tongue a bit. The conversation between Jenny and the characters can play out however you wish, but at the end of this scene, Jenny is obviously too drunk to drive, and the characters should give her a ride to her nearby apartment.

Scene 2: Jenny's Apartment

Early the next morning, Jenny calls one of the characters. Apparently, Paolo Escrivar was shot and killed the previous night at around 2 AM, and police want Jenny to come in for questioning. Some of Escrivar's men identified Jenny as the shooter, and while the police find that improbable, they would like to question her about her whereabouts. Jenny has no alibi, since she was home in bed alone. More importantly, Jenny has discovered that the handgun she keeps in her apartment for personal protection is missing, as are her purse and wallet.

Assuming a character comes over to check out the apartment, he finds no evidence of forced entry, but a thorough search reveals that some of Jenny's clothes are also missing: a rather racy black minidress that Jenny hasn't worn since her pre-law-school clubbing days. Also, an exceptional success on a Wits + Investigation roll reveals that someone used Jenny's shower the previous night, and her makeup and curling iron have been moved.

Once the initial investigation of the apartment is completed, Jenny asks the character to drive her to the police station and to provide moral support.

Scene 3: The Police Station

If a player's character is an attorney or otherwise makes use of appropriate Social Skills, Contacts, Status or the like, he can accompany Jenny to the interrogation. Otherwise, the character must wait outside. Jenny's natural inclination is to cooperate fully, although revealing the missing handgun raises police suspicion — the ballistics report indicates that Jenny's gun is the same model used to kill Escrivar. Also, while Jenny might ask the police to question the other characters about her actions last night, none of them can provide an alibi past midnight, and the fact that she was distraught over her dealings with Escrivar and extremely intoxicated is even more incriminating.

The final piece of evidence slips into place when Jenny is positively identified by a cab driver as the woman he picked up the previous night at 2:15 AM just a block from the nightclub where Escrivar was slain. At that point, police formally place Jenny under arrest and lead her away. All the while, she protests her innocence and begs her friends to find out the truth.

If none of the characters are willing to accompany Jenny to the police station, she uses her one phone call to contact one of them. Also, the police eventually contact the characters to check out what little alibi Jenny has to offer.

Act 2: Legwork

During Act 2, all of the characters should take part in the investigation. The first three scenes detail the three main leads in the investigation:

1. Alberto's, a local salsa club where Escrivar's shooting took place.

2. Jenny's apartment, which may yield more clues to a determined investigator, particularly if the characters interview some of her neighbors.

3. The cab driver, a Serbian immigrant named Jovan Brozovich, who claims to have picked up Jenny near the crime scene.

These scenes can take place in any order, and if characters don't think to check those locations, you can skip one or more, although the characters can find valuable clues at each location.

The fourth scene takes place later that night, back at Flannery's, where the characters finally encounter the doppelgänger, although they may not realize what it is.

Scene 1: Alberto's

Alberto's is a popular salsa bar known by police to be a regular meeting place for many of the drug dealers in the city's Latino community. If characters arrive at Alberto's before noon, the building is closed and police tape remains around the area where Escrivar's body fell. After noon, the staff arrives to prepare for the night. One of the bouncers stands out in front with a garden hose, nonchalantly spraying Paolo Escrivar's blood off the sidewalk and into the gutter. The bouncer, Gordie, was present when the shooting took place. He is not particularly eager to talk to the characters, and he is fairly resistant to intimidation attempts. On the other hand, he cheerfully answers any questions for 50 bucks.

According to Gordie:

"I think I first noticed this chick about 1:30. Man, she was a hot young thing, in this sexy little black dress. Anyway, she came up and asked if Paolo was around. I didn't know who she was, but I figured she was there to pick up some blow, so I told her he'd probably be in around 2:00. She nodded and walked down to the corner for a smoke. Actually, she was smoking like a chimney the whole night. I figured she might be comin' down from something, ya know what I mean. Anyway, Escrivar showed up about half an hour later, and when he saw her, he whistled and yelled out 'Hey, counselor! You

clean up pretty nice!' or something like that. Then, this crazy bitch pulls out a gun and pumps six shots into Escrivar's chest before running off. Now, I know a little first aid, but I could tell that Band-Aids weren't gonna do shit for Paolo after that. Anyway, before he died, Paolo said the girl was Jenny Langston, his lawyer, and a couple of his guys backed that up, so that's what I told the cops."

Once Gordie tells his story, several details should jump out at any character who knows Jenny well. First, the description of Jenny as sexy and wearing provocative clothing is out of character. She was a bit wild before law school, but has been almost prudish in her personal appearance since becoming an attorney. Jenny also quit smoking years ago.

None of the other staff from Alberto's knows anything more than Gordie, and Gordie has nothing else to add.

Scene 2: Back to Jenny's Apartment

At Jenny's apartment, the characters have two options. First, they can interview Jenny's neighbors to find out if anyone knows anything. Second, the characters can attempt to re-enter Jenny's apartment to look for more clues. Either approach yields intriguing new evidence.

Madeleine Cord is the most helpful of any of the neighbors. She is a 57-year-old freelance writer who lives next door to Jenny, and she refuses to believe that Jenny could have done anything wrong, no matter what police suspect.

According to Madeleine:

"Well, I think it really is so much nonsense, and I told those Stasi agents from the police as much when they came in this morning. I've known Jenny for years. She's a pillar of the community, and a lawyer to boot. It's simply inconceivable that she could murder someone on a street corner like that. I'm just glad to know that that the police released her so quickly."

If characters point out the inaccuracy of this last statement, Madeleine responds, "What do you mean she's still in custody? If Jenny is still in jail, then who did I hear in Jenny's bathroom running the shower not an hour ago?"

In response to learning that someone has been in Jenny's apartment using her shower, the characters, depending on their inclinations, might either summon police back

to the apartment (the cops came by with a search warrant three hours earlier) or might try to enter Jenny's apartment themselves. The latter approach involves breaking police tape and entering a potential crime scene, which may have repercussions later.

Inside the apartment, the characters find evidence that someone has indeed been there since they left with Jenny that morning. The remains of a sandwich sit on the kitchen table, and someone definitely took another quick shower in Jenny's bathroom. On the floor is a black minidress, a bra and a set of thong underwear. The closet door is open.

Bringing these details (without more) to the police's attention is unlikely to do anything to persuade them of Jenny's innocence. More likely, the investigators threaten characters with charges of tampering with evidence and interfering with a police investigation. Depending on how the characters act, police might do more than threaten.

Scene 3: The Mercury Cab Company

Jovan Brozovich is a Serbian immigrant who drives a cab for the Mercury Cab Company. He is also an illegal immigrant with a forged green card.

According to Jovan:

"It like I say to police. I am driving over on Mulholland St. about three blocks from Alberto's at about 2:15 when I see very pretty woman hail for taxi. She is wearing little black dress and was walking quickly. I stop, and she get in cab. She very nervous and tell me to go to 1135 Thurston Avenue (the address of Jenny's apartment). Then she ask for cigarette. I drop her off. That is what happened and what I say to police when they ask."

However, Jovan knows more than he has said, and with a Wits + Empathy roll (resisted by Jovan's Manipulation + Subterfuge roll; dice pool four), an astute character can tell Jovan holds something back. Getting this extra information out of him requires roleplaying and, most likely, a Manipulation + Intimidation roll.

If the characters pry the information from Jovan, he continues:

"Okay, you promise not to laugh at me? Okay. Everything happen like I say. But when I pull up in front of building, I look in rearview mirror to tell pretty girl that we are there. But the girl, she is

gone! I do not mean she leave without paying. The girl leave without even opening door. I even get out and check in backseat. Doors are still locked, but I find cigarette with lipstick on it still lying on seat." He crosses himself. "I think she was ghost, just like in tales from old country."

Scene 4: Back at Flannery's

Eventually, the characters find themselves back at Flannery's to regroup, where they are surprised to see "Jenny," wearing a different provocative outfit and flirting shamelessly with a young college-aged boy. (If the characters do not wish to return to Flannery's, a friend or contact of one of the characters alerts them to her presence here.) With an Intelligence + Streetwise roll, a character recognizes the boy as Brad Woolsey, a fraternity member from a local college whom Jenny recently represented on rape charges. (Brad does not recognize Jenny, as he paid little attention to her during the case.) The charges were dismissed when the victim refused to testify in court, which was the beginning of Jenny's growing dissatisfaction with her job.

If the characters attempt to interact with the doppelgänger ("Jenny-D"), she is vivacious and charming but is otherwise identical to the real Jenny ("Jenny-R"). If the characters ask why she's not in jail, Jenny-D genuinely doesn't

know what they are talking about. Remember, Jenny-D truly believes that she is the real Jenny, and she doesn't know that Jenny-R exists, let alone has been arrested.

If the characters mention the death of Paolo Escrivar, Jenny-D suspects that they know about her involvement and she will try to leave with Brad.

Brad is a stereotypical drunk and belligerent frat boy, and if the characters upset Jenny-D or otherwise interfere with his plans for the evening, he almost certainly becomes violent. Five of Brad's fraternity brothers accompanied him to Flannery's, and they come to his aid if a confrontation occurs within the bar. (If a fight breaks out, assume that each of them has traits identical to Brad's for combat purposes.) None of Brad's fraternity brothers follow if Brad and Jenny-D leave together.

If the characters allow Jenny-D to leave the bar with Brad, the characters can try to discreetly follow. At this point, the scene can play out in several different ways:

- If the characters do not intervene, Jenny-D leads Brad down the street into an alley (claiming that it's a shortcut to her apartment) and then shoots him twice — once in the genitals and once between the eyes. Jenny-D then leaves to return to the apartment.

- If the characters prevent Jenny-D from shooting Brad, he runs away, screaming hysterically about a "crazy bitch" unless they intervene before she has a chance to draw the gun. In that case, Brad gets into a fight with one or more characters while Jenny-D runs back to her apartment. Characters should easily be able to track her, as the apartment is rather close.



- If the characters attempt to restrain Jenny-D, she fights back. If she is rendered unconscious, she discorporates, re-forming the next morning either at the apartment or at Jenny's law office with no memory of the intervening time.

Even without Jenny-D's physical form, the characters may be able to get Jenny-R out of jail if they can persuade Brad to make a police report swearing that Jenny or someone who looked just like her tried to kill him. However, doing so requires the characters to make some major Persuasion rolls against the police and the Assistant DA if they don't have Jenny-D in custody.

Regardless of how this scene plays out, the players should have enough information to figure out that Jenny-D is some kind of duplicate of the real Jenny. Characters with knowledge of the supernatural with an Intelligence + Occult roll to research doppelgänger-related phenomena may also be able to figure out that Jenny-D is a doppelgänger. With a success, the character learns that doppelgängers sometimes manifest when individuals are going through a difficult time, that they sometimes manifest as "evil twins" and that they are often a harbinger of the original's death. With an exceptional success, a character learns the basic properties of doppelgängers outlined earlier in this chapter, including some reliable means of capturing and dispelling one.

In any case, if the characters haven't captured Jenny-D yet, they should be able to do so soon, as the doppelgänger cannot help but pursue Jenny-R's old clients to seek vigilante justice against them. If the characters fail to capture Jenny-D at the end of this scene, they can get information from Jenny-R about her client list, and a stakeout over the next several days should allow them to locate and capture the doppelgänger. Don't make it easy for the characters, but at the same time, don't make it too difficult. The doppelgänger has no real supernatural powers and is neither stronger nor smarter than its template. Capturing Jenny-D should not be any harder than capturing Jenny-R would have been. The real problem comes in dealing with the doppelgänger after caging it.

Act 3: The Solution

Act 3 begins after the characters capture the doppelgänger, however long that takes. By revealing the clearly deranged double to the authorities, the characters can arrange for their friend to be released from jail.

However, no jail can hold a doppelgänger who can simply fade away when either it or its template falls asleep, and then rematerialize in some other safe location. When the doppelgänger turns its attentions to both the template and the characters who side with her, the characters must find some way to permanently dispel the creature.

Scene 1: The Police Station

Eventually, by hook or by crook, the characters successfully restrain Jenny-D without knocking her unconscious,

and they can then present her to the police. Enraged at this "betrayal" by her friends, Jenny-D confesses in front of police to killing Escrivar (and any other victims) because "the filthy pig deserved it and worse." With a little luck and quick thinking, the characters can even arrange for Jenny-D and Jenny-R to meet in the same room in front of police witnesses. This situation clears Jenny-R of murder charges. (Jenny-D spends Willpower to avoid disappearing in front of Jenny-R — the doppelgänger instinctively hates its template and welcomes a chance to shout her down.)

Of course, this confrontation also makes it possible for any witnesses present (including the characters) to manifest their own doppelgängers, which manifest at the original characters' homes and then go their own way from there, depending on their individual natures and agendas. (If you do not wish to extend this storyline, perhaps indefinitely, you can ignore the rules for doppelgänger reproduction outlined under *Procreation* in "System — Doppelgängers.")

Jenny-R is released, while Jenny-D is held on suspicion of murder and also for psychiatric evaluation in light of her obvious insanity. If the characters have observed the doppelgänger's tendency to disappear when rendered unconscious, they may warn Jenny-R that her double might escape and urge Jenny-R to find a safe place to spend the night. Assuming they can persuade her of the potential danger, she agrees to stay with one of the characters for the night. Otherwise, the character who is closest to Jenny-R receives a panicked phone call from her at around 4 AM saying that the police have called to warn her that her double has somehow escaped from jail.

If any of the characters has Allies or Contacts among the police, the characters are able to learn that, according to a prisoner trustee, Jenny-D simply disappeared. The trustee has a history of drug use, however, and the police remain convinced that she simply escaped, possibly with the aid of an accomplice.

Scene 2: The Hunt

This scene takes place sometime in the afternoon after the doppelgänger's escape (actually it just discorporated and reappeared later at Jenny's law office). After lying low for a while, Jenny-D abandons her immediate plans for going after the rest of Jenny-R's clients and instead becomes fixated on killing Jenny-R. The doppelgänger is now obsessed with destroying "that mousy little pretender." Consumed with paranoia, Jenny-D is also prepared to go after any of the characters who assisted in her capture.

If the characters have neither put Jenny-R in a safe house nor placed her under round-the-clock protection, assume that the doppelgänger can track and capture the original without any difficulty. If the characters have taken reasonable precautions for protecting Jenny-R, then the doppelgänger shifts her attentions to the characters, attempting to isolate one and use him as a hostage. Failing that, the creature uses whatever knowledge it has of the characters to kidnap someone close to one of them. In any case, she takes the hostage back to Jenny's law office before calling the characters and demanding that they bring "that other me" to the office. The doppelgänger

threatens to kill the hostage within one hour if the characters don't comply. Naturally, she gives the traditional warnings to come alone and not call the police.

If the doppelgänger captured Jenny-R without the need for a hostage, Jenny-D takes Jenny-R to the law office (the “scene of the crime,” to the doppelgänger’s mind) to kill her. Jenny-D takes her time before pulling the trigger, spending considerable time ranting to the original about her weakness and cowardice and the doppelgänger’s superiority before pulling the trigger. This display should give the characters sufficient time to figure out where the doppelgänger might have taken Jenny-R.

Scene 3:

Confrontation at the Law Office

The characters probably make their way to Jenny’s law office. The only two people there are the doppelgänger and either Jenny-R or the doppelgänger’s hostage tied to a chair. When the characters enter, Jenny-D is standing behind Jenny-R with gun in hand. Only a crack marksman has any chance of shooting the doppelgänger without risking Jenny-R’s life (–3 dice penalty to all Firearms pools). In any case, characters may suspect that simply killing the doppelgänger won’t make it go away. (Indeed, they may actually *have* killed it in a previous scene only to have it reappear later and begin anew.) Permanently dispelling the creature demands another approach.

As noted under *Slaying the Beast* in “Systems – Doppelgängers,” several possible approaches for dispelling a doppelgänger exist, and the “right” choice depends on the type of mood you wish to evoke. A story based on esoteric themes (perhaps in a chronicle in which the characters include thaumaturges, as described in **World of Darkness: Second Sight**) may require supernatural solutions. If you decide that Jenny-D is actually the manifestation of Jenny-R’s Khaibit, or shadow, then the characters might capture her through judicious use of Egyptian charms and merge Jenny-D back into Jenny-R through rituals based on Egyptian mysticism. If the doppelgänger is a *tulpa*, getting Jenny-R to concentrate on a Tibetan sigil and on Jenny-D’s dissolution may dispel the creature. If the doppelgänger was created through Taoist philosophy run amok, a Taoist healer might be able to prepare a potion that, when Jenny-R drinks it, causes her double to dissipate.

For a more emotionally dramatic approach, consider the “Spiritual Dilution” and “Psychological Warfare” options. If the characters confront the doppelgänger and the original and persuade Jenny-R that the doppelgänger is only a manifestation of her suppressed desires, Jenny-R can dispel the doppelgänger by confronting those desires. Achieving this solution has no right or wrong method, so long as the characters convincingly persuade Jenny-R to deal with her own issues in some way besides either wallowing in self-pity or going on a killing spree. If Jenny-R declares that she is quitting defense work to become a prosecutor and go after criminals within the system, that might be sufficient to dispel the doppelgänger. On the other hand, getting Jenny-R

to angrily denounce her doppelgänger’s self-righteousness and to reaffirm her conviction that even the worst criminals deserve a zealous but ethical defense might work just as well. In either case, the dilemma that has been tearing her apart is resolved, and her doppelgänger ceases to be.

Finally, instead of using psychology on Jenny-R to weaken the doppelgänger, the characters might use psychology on the creature. If a character suggests that by going on a vigilante killing spree the doppelgänger is no better than the people it kills, a persuasive argument may induce the doppelgänger to take its own life – which ends the manifestation. You may choose to resolve such a psychological assault through roleplay or rely on dice rolls (or a combination of the two). In the latter case, one or more characters must accumulate 20 successes in an extended Manipulation + Persuasion roll (resisted by the doppelgänger’s Resolve + Composure; dice pool four). A dramatic failure on the roll means that characters lose all accumulated successes and are not be able to use this approach again within the same scene.

Aftermath

Once the characters defeat Jenny-D, they gain valuable insights into the strange nature of the doppelgänger. Such insights may be essential if any of them manifested their own doppelgängers during the story. Unfortunately, these insights do little to prove a character’s innocence in a court of law, and the characters may begin to wonder just how many people who sit in prison claiming to be innocent of their crimes actually *are*.

Future developments that might spin out of “The Other Me” include a loyal ally in Jenny-R, who now has firsthand knowledge of the true nature of the World of Darkness and is willing to use her legal acumen to aid the characters in future activities. Characters may also have gained valuable new Contacts and Allies among the police, as well as a potential Contact or Retainer in Jovan Brozovich. Some characters with occult backgrounds may seek out more information on doppelgängers, perhaps trying to find out how to reliably capture one or to discover how the creatures reproduce. Such characters might dare to consider using the doppelgänger as a weapon against their adversaries, inflicting the curse of the doppelgänger on enemies among the vampires, werewolves or mages with whom the characters contend.

Cast

Jenny Langston

Quotes: *Answering machine:* “Hi, you’ve reached the offices of Jenny Langston, Attorney at Law. No case too big. No case too small.”

After one martini: “I’m sorry. I don’t mean to be such depressing company right now. I’m just going through a phase of hating my life.”

After four martinis: “They’re scum! And I defend them! So, aren’t I [hic] scum too?”

Background: Jenny Langston would be beautiful if she could just be happy. Jenny used to be a party girl, complete with skimpy outfits and an attitude to match. Then, one day, the partying got a little too intense, and Jenny took control of her life. She got into law school and excelled, but somewhere along the way, she lost her old sparkle. Now, she's a successful defense attorney and private practitioner, despite being only 29, but she's worn down before her time, not only by the pressures of her job but by the veneer of respectability she wears like an old coat.

Description: Jenny is a 29-year-old white female, about five-foot six, but she looks years older. She has long reddish-blond hair that would flow in the wind if she didn't keep it up in perhaps the world's tightest bun. She wears fashionable but conservative business attire and little makeup. Anyone who looks closely, though, sees that she could be a stunning beauty if only she wouldn't try so hard not to be.

Storytelling Hints: Jenny (the real Jenny) is the linchpin of this story. A dedicated attorney, worn down by her career of defending clients she despises and suppressing a tidal wave of emotions, Jenny begins the story at a low point, depressed because she knows her current client is a murderer and drug dealer but is unable to do anything about it. Unbeknownst to Jenny, her depression has already unleashed a dangerous alter ego: a doppelgänger willing to do all the things that Jenny is too respectable or frightened to face.

Note: The remainder of Jenny's traits is listed in the description of her doppelgänger, Jenny-D. The two characters' traits are identical, except that Jenny has no derangements, while Jenny-D has two.

Jenny Langston-D, the Doppelgänger on a Rampage

Quotes: "Why yes, I am wearing my hair differently now. Do you like it?"

"These 'people' deserve what I give them and worse!"

"This other Jenny is not the real one. Look at her. She's weak. She's nothing!"

Background: Jenny-D sprang into existence at the moment that Paolo Escrivar informed Jenny-R that he had put a hit out on witnesses against him and then laughed at the fact that she would never be able to tell anyone without ruining her career. While Jenny-R was chugging martinis and bemoaning how depressing her life had become, Jenny-D was

doing what needed to be done — preparing to put six bullets in Paolo Escrivar's worthless body. Now that he's out of the way, she has a whole rolodex of murderers, drug dealers and rapists who need to settle accounts, and heaven help whoever gets in her way.

Description: People who don't know the real Jenny might think that Jenny-D is Jenny's younger sister rather than a twin. Where Jenny-R dresses conservatively with her hair in a bun, Jenny-D dresses like the club-goer that Jenny R used to be. All the better to draw in her targets for the kill. Jenny-D favors slinky and suggestive attire, high heels and lots of makeup. She wears her hair down and lets it fall where it may.

Storytelling Hints: Jenny-D is disgusted with the life she has inherited from her template — a life she views as wasted on defending criminals and lowlifes who don't deserve to live. A beautiful avenging angel, Jenny-D is a natural at leading men on with her good looks and then, when she has them alone, going for the kill.

Whatever feelings Jenny-R has for the characters, Jenny-D does not let them get in the way of her mission.

Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Skills: Academics 2, Brawl 1, Computer 1, Drive 1, Empathy 1, Expression 2, Firearms (Close Range) 2, Investigation 2, Persuasion (Seduction) 3, Politics (Law) 3, Socialize 2, Stealth 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Fleet of Foot 2, Influence (Law) 3, Quick Draw 1, Resources 3, Striking Looks 4

Willpower: 4

Morality: 7 (Jenny-R) or 3 (Jenny-D)

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 12

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Shots	Dice Pool
Heavy Pistol	3	30/60/120	7+1	8

Health: 7

Derangements: None for Jenny-R. Paranoia (severe) and Irrationality (mild) for Jenny-D.



Brad Woolsey

Quotes: “Hi, my name’s Brad. Brad Woolsey. I’m a Sig Ep!”

“Hey baby. Can I get you another drink?”

“What are you looking at, asshole?”

Background: Brad Woolsey is a third-generation member of the Sigma Epsilon fraternity at the local college. Raised by a wealthy stockbroker and his trophy wife, Brad is arrogant, conceited and convinced he is God’s gift to women. Several months ago, Jenny represented him on charges of raping a young co-ed at a fraternity party when she was too drunk to say no. The charges were dismissed because the girl refused to testify in open court and also because the prosecution had no DNA evidence. Brad does believe in “safe sex,” after all.

Description: Brad is just over six feet tall and well built, the product of many hours spent in the gym lifting free weights while staring at himself in the mirror. He has blond hair and is clean-shaven, with piercing blue eyes and something of a sneer when he’s not talking to a pretty girl. Then, his expression is one of angelic innocence. He favors expensive casual wear — J. Crew, A&F and Old Navy. Indeed, he could pass as a model for any of those companies.

Storytelling Hints: Brad is a potential victim of the doppelgänger, but also a potential threat to the characters if they try to protect him without properly alerting him to the danger he’s in. Brad is belligerent with any male character who confronts him unless totally outmatched or outnumbered. Then, cowardice takes over, and Brad runs away. If he sees that the doppelgänger means to kill him, the characters might persuade him to tell what he saw to the police but must

intimidate him into doing so (either through direct intimidation or the possibility that Jenny-D will come for him again), as his sense of civic responsibility is nonexistent.

Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2, Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 1

Skills: Academics 1, Athletics 3, Brawl (Cheap Shots) 2, Computer 1, Drive 1, Empathy 1, Intimidation 2, Investigation 1, Larceny 1, Persuasion (Seduction) 3, Politics 1, Socialize 1, Stealth 1, Subterfuge 2, Weaponry (Baseball Bats) 2

Merits: Influence (Fraternity Members) 2, Resources 3, Striking Looks 2

Willpower: 3

Morality: 5

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 11

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Strike	0 (B)	5

Health: 8

Gordie the Bouncer

Quotes: “I already talked to the cops. You don’t look like cops, so piss off.”

“Sorry, my memory’s a little hazy. I’m supposed to be takin’ medicine for it, but, ya know, it get’s kinda expensive so sometimes I do without. Ya get me?”

“Listen, pal! When some bitch dressed like a whore shows up and starts shootin’ up the place, I tend to remember it.”

Background: Gordie (last name Evans) is the bouncer for Alberto’s. An ex-con, Gordie bulked up while in prison and became a pretty good boxer. Those traits, along with a few jailhouse connections, got him a job as a bouncer at the salsa club.

Description: Gordie is a 37-year-old white male with a shaved head and a black goatee with a few gray threads starting to show. He has a gold ring in his left ear. He is a mountain of a man, standing six-foot-seven and weighing in at 320 pounds, almost all of it muscle. When at work, he wears blue jeans, black boots and a black “Alberto’s” T-shirt with “Security” emblazoned on the back.

Storytelling Hints: Gordie is gruff and unsociable, although he is vulnerable to flirting from attractive women. He’s not particularly honest, but he doesn’t do anything that might get him sent back to prison. On the other hand, he sees no need to cooperate with investigators who are not with the police — at least not until some money changes hands. Attempts to intimidate Gordie almost certainly fail absent supernatural aid, since he’s seen a lot over the years. In fact,



even trying to intimidate Gordie likely causes him to intimidate right back, and also to drive up his price for information.

Abilities:

Awareness (dice pool 4) — Gordie gets paid to stay aware of his surroundings, and to his mind, not knowing what's going on around you when you work at a gangbanger club is a good way to get shot.

Brawl (dice pool 6) — Three years in the joint toughened Gordie. He's pretty confident about taking down anyone who wants to start something with him but who isn't smart enough to bring weapons or friends.

Intimidation (dice pool 6) — Gordie can be a scary man when he wants to be, particularly when confronted by someone who tries to push him around without being able to back it up.

Madeleine Cord

Quotes: "Excuse me, but who are you? Are you with the police?"

"Why, that's absurd! I know Jenny would never hurt a fly!"

"I'm a writer, you see. It's the writer's job to observe the world around her and to examine the human condition."

Background: Madeleine Cord is a 57-year-old freelance writer who lives off sizeable alimony payments from a wealthy ex-husband. She has an apartment next door to Jenny's where Madeleine spends her days working on a novel that may never get finished while delving into the personal details of her neighbors like some sort of divorced, boozy Mrs. Kravitz from TV's *Bewitched*.

Description: Madeleine Cord is late-middle-aged, with curly and unkempt black hair ("teased like a Gorgon," is her description) that has gone gray at the tips. She favors loud, flowing clothing with lots of frills, and she usually wears a long print scarf with an obnoxious pattern that trails behind her in the breeze. She invariably wears far too much makeup for a woman of her age, or indeed any age.

Storytelling Hints: Despite her nosy nature, Madeleine rarely has a good grasp of the true personalities around her. As an aspiring novelist, she views the people in her life as if they were characters in a novel, projecting imaginary storylines onto whatever emotions they display. She is also inclined to think in terms of stereotypes, especially in male/female relations and in liberal/conservative politics. Consequently, she finds the idea that Jenny could become a wanton murderer inconceivable, and thinks it far more likely that "bullying police" are trying to railroad her into jail because she's a criminal defense attorney. Characters who want to get close to Madeleine should best be feminist women. Failing that, they should be men who are simultaneously gallant and sensitive, romantic and modern. Regardless, they should have a dim view of police officers picking on poor helpless working girls.

Abilities:

Politics (dice pool 5) — Madeleine still keeps her old social contacts up. She regularly plays bridge with the mayor's

wife, and is on several charity committees with the spouses of other political figures. One would be surprised at how well she can parlay these connections into minor favors or a chance to learn gossip about the political scene.

Socialize (dice pool 5) — As an example of what she calls a "professional first wife," Madeleine has an encyclopedic knowledge of the upper-class social scene in her city. Should it become necessary, she would have little difficulty getting invitations to events such as an art gallery opening or a charity regatta.

Jovan Brozovich

Quotes: "Yes? You need cab. Yes?"

"No, I already talk to police. You police? I have green card."

"Jovan know what he saw, okay? When pulled up to address, girl she was gone! No girl! Just cigarette on seat!" [followed by excited mutterings in Serbian]

Background: Jovan Brozovich came to this country from Serbia on a guest visa eight years ago, and he's been here ever since, having somehow fallen through the cracks of the INS. His entire family died in the Kosovo war, and nothing remains for him in the old country. He is terrified of being sent back to Serbia and wants nothing to do with a police investigation into a high-profile gangland slaying.

Description: This fellow is a tall, thin man with a receding hairline, about 26 years old. His hair is reddish-brown, and he has about a week's worth of stubble. He wears faded jeans and a pullover shirt carrying the logo of a local sports team.

Jovan may appear somewhat shifty and suspicious, but that is more a result of his fears of deportation than anything related to the plot.

Storytelling Hints: In this storyline, Jovan exists only to provide plot exposition. He is noticeably frightened of any interviewers, and his poor English exacerbates the problem. Intimidation attempts only get him to clam up, and when he panics, he slips into Serbian completely. However, if a character calms him down and persuades him that she is not with Immigration Services, he tells her what he told the police. Getting the complete story also requires a character to intuit that Jovan saw something strange and then to persuade Jovan that she won't think him foolish or insane. Jovan is superstitious, particularly after his encounter with the doppelgänger, but he is reluctant to talk about it because he associates ghost stories with the superstitions of his native land and thinks that modern Americans will only laugh at him. If persuaded otherwise, Jovan tells a character about the girl's supernatural disappearance.

Jovan has acquired considerable knowledge of the city in his short time here, and he also knows many of his homeland's folk tales about the supernatural. Characters who pick up on these facts may choose to develop Jovan as a potential Contact or Ally.

Abilities:

Drive (dice pool 5) — Jovan has worked as a cabdriver for the last several years and has gotten good at it. While

not a stunt driver, he almost never gets into accidents and is unusually good at tailing other cars.

Occult (dice pool 4) — Jovan's grandmother was something of a wise woman back in the old country, and as Jovan was growing up, she taught him much in the way of lore. While he doesn't believe much of it anymore, his knowledge about such topics as the weaknesses of ghosts, vampires and werewolves is surprisingly accurate.

Streetwise (dice pool 5) — Just as most cabdrivers, Jovan has learned to navigate big city traffic with ease and to find his way almost anywhere in the city. In particular, he knows all of the dark alleys and back roads, as well as what areas are best to avoid at night.

Other Doppelgängers

Rather than using Jenny Langston as a template, the doppelgänger in "The Other Me" might pattern itself instead on some other character who is already a part of an ongoing chronicle. Also, as noted previously, any character, including a player's character, can produce a doppelgänger in certain situations. With that in mind, listed below are a number of sample doppelgängers, including their motivations and the type of characters that produce them. Using these doppelgängers as guidelines, you should be able to quickly produce a doppelgänger for any character.

The Crazy Girlfriend

Concept: The crazy girlfriend (or boyfriend, if the template is a male) is a doppelgänger that defines itself by an obsessive interest in the template's romantic partner. This interest may be positive or negative — the doppelgänger may stalk the partner out of blinding passion, possessiveness and paranoia or even a psychotic hatred, depending on the template's personality.

Template: The crazy girlfriend may manifest when the template suddenly faces strong conflicting emotions regarding her romantic partner. Perhaps the template gets cold feet on the eve of the wedding. Perhaps the template suddenly suspects that the romantic partner is cheating on her or is simply not "the right one." Or perhaps the template is trying to work up the courage to leave an abusive relationship. Any of these situations can result in a manifestation of this doppelgänger.

Storytelling Hints: A high-Morality crazy girlfriend begins by calling the template's significant other at odd times to "check up on him." This practice escalates to following him all the time, showing up at odd hours with expensive gifts and inevitably to hysterical tears when nothing the boyfriend can do is sufficient to persuade her that he loves her. When the breakup comes, the high-Morality crazy girlfriend tries to kill the romantic partner out of misplaced jealousy and feelings of rejection.



The low-Morality crazy girlfriend cuts to the chase, assuming instantly that the partner is using her and toying with her affections. She sets about trying to ruin the romantic partner by whatever means are necessary. The crazy girlfriend does not become homicidal toward the partner until she first encounters the template, at which point she decides to kill the partner as soon as possible as punishment for cheating on her with "that whore."

The Bad Cop

Concept: The bad cop is the doppelgänger of a police officer or other law enforcement agent. The bad cop defines himself by his office and is driven to act outside the confines of law enforcement for good or ill. Depending on the template, the bad cop might be a ruthless vigilante or utterly corrupt.



Template: The bad cop manifests when a law enforcement official is confronted with the limitations of his official position. An honest police officer watches helplessly as an obviously guilty suspect in a vicious crime walks free on a technicality. A crooked cop is confronted with the ramifications of his corruption, perhaps when his beloved child is killed in a drive-by shooting by rival gangsters trying to get him.

Storytelling Hints: The high-Morality bad cop is a vigilante, disgusted with the limitations placed on police officers and driven to punish the guilty to atone for his misdeeds. The doppelgänger is just as dangerous to other officers as he is to criminals, though, as he subconsciously believes that all the other cops are just as corrupt as the template upon which he is based.

The low-Morality bad cop wants to see how the other half lives. During his manifestation, he engages in any vice, from drugs to hookers to taking bribes. Perhaps he devises some grand scheme to use his police influence to commit the perfect crime before high-tailing it to South America, although the doppelgänger's rampant derangements typically prevent it from successfully executing such grandiose plans.

Doctor of Death

Concept: The doctor of death manifests whenever a doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional begins to doubt her usefulness to the medical field. The doppelgänger defines herself by how she responds to the patients under

her care, becoming psychopath eager to hone her medical skills on unwilling patients, an “angel of death” who practices euthanasia or an obsessive “super doctor” consumed with hatred of other medical personnel who lack her overwhelming concern for patient care.

Template: The doctor of death manifests when a healthcare professional receives a powerful blow to her faith in the value of her skills. A surgeon makes a tragic mistake on the operating table, leading to the death of a patient. An intern misses an obvious symptom as part of a diagnosis and is humiliated by his supervisor. A nurse watches helplessly as a child withers away from leukemia. Under the right circumstances, even a dentist might produce a doppelgänger with the doctor of death persona. Indeed, to some that might be the most frightening scenario.

Storytelling Hints: The high-Morality doctor of death, born of the weaknesses of a low-Morality physician template, does whatever is necessary to save her patients, so long as she's the one doing the saving. Does the patient need a heart transplant? A suitable donor meets a tragic but timely accident. Does another surgeon with seniority insist on performing a delicate procedure on one of the doppelgänger's patients? That surgeon may never make it to the operating room. When it comes to the doppelgänger's patients, the doctor knows best. Alternatively, the doppelgänger might decide whether a patient's life is worth saving ...or worth living. The high-Morality doctor of death might consider euthanasia simply another part of her duty of care.

The low-Morality doctor of death, on the other hand, thrills to the power of life and death. Megalomania is a com-



mon derangement among this type of doppelgänger, who often seeks to improve her surgical skill while off-duty, occasionally by taking “undesirables” off the street for home vivisection. Other doppelgängers of this type reflect the template’s jealousy of other more experienced or more promising co-workers. In such a case, a doctor of death might seek to undermine her rivals, perhaps by discreetly adding a few extra drugs to a patient’s IV.

The Good Son

Concept: The good son (or daughter) manifests when the template suffers a profound trauma in his relations with his parents. The good son defines itself by a new twisted relationship with his parents or, if his parents are dead or otherwise unavailable, on suitable surrogates.

Template: The good son manifests when a child’s relationship with his parents is damaged, if not severed. A young boy who is suddenly orphaned and taken in by relatives might manifest a good son, as might a child who is savagely abused. Worst of all, the good son is commonly produced as a side effect of some other manifestation — the shock and horror a child feels when the woman who seems to be his mother (but who is actually her doppelgänger) is hateful and abusive to him might generate the type of emotional trauma capable of generating a good son doppelgänger. Alternatively, a teenager rebelling against her abusive mother might trigger a manifestation if the mother suddenly seemed to “mend her ways” and seek redemption.

Storytelling Hints: The high-Morality good son is quite rare, since children rarely lose precipitous amounts of Morality. He most often manifests when the template is abused to the point of developing profound psychological problems. Once manifested, the doppelgänger displays none of the template’s former trauma but does show a powerful sense of attachment to some parental figure in his life. Unfortunately, this attachment rapidly evolves into a potentially homicidal jealousy over anyone who might come between the good son and his adopted parent figure, including the figure’s other children.

The low-Morality good son is more common and is notable for his burning but subtle hatred for his entire family unit. The good son seeks to break up his family by any means necessary, from falsely accusing the father of abuse and molestation to smothering a baby sister in her crib. Although no more intelligent than his template, the good son is guided by an almost demonic cunning in its actions.

The Penitent

Concept: The penitent is the doppelgänger of someone suffering a crisis of faith. Depending on her Morality, the penitent might reject the template’s faith entirely, to the point of attacking symbols of that faith, or she might embrace it to an unhealthy degree, unleashing her wrath on perceived enemies of the faith.

Template: The penitent manifests when a deeply religious person faces flaws either in her religious leaders or simply in the precepts of her religion. A mother is enraged to learn that her son has been molested by a priest and that the local church hierarchy knew of and concealed past incidents. A pre-med student with a fundamentalist upbringing discovers that she cannot rationally deny the evidence in favor of evolution. An elderly woman who has been devout her entire life loses her entire family in a tragic accident and wonders why God punishes her.

Storytelling Hints: The high-Morality penitent defines herself by a fervent passion for the religion that the template has probably long since abandoned. She looks everywhere for the faith’s enemies and usually finds them. Perhaps she stalks prominent gays or atheists or even members of other religions. Perhaps she looks at the conduct of the template’s children and decides that a more “biblical” approach to discipline is necessary.

The low-Morality penitent rejects her faith and seeks to undermine it. She might vandalize a local church





or try to burn it down, or she might attack members of the clergy. Depending on her looks and personality, she might be more subtle and attempt to seduce a priest or engineer a situation that looks unseemly — and then publicly accuse the priest sexual misconduct.

The Twisted Artist

Concept: The twisted artist manifests from the dark dreams a novelist, painter, filmmaker or someone else who works in artistic media who undergoes a fundamental change in his approach to his chosen medium.

Template: In order for the twisted artist to appear, the template must face a fundamental shift in the way he approaches his art. For example, in Stephen King's *The Dark Half*, a crime novelist who has publicly retired his pseudonym and begun writing other forms of fiction under his own name is plagued by a doppelgänger bent on physically recreating the dark, bloody crime scenes envisioned in the writer's earlier novels. Other possibilities include a painter who considers giving up the brush after a disastrous gallery opening, a playwright who slaves over a new work only to see it close on opening night or a one-hit wonder who can never quite live up to his early success.

Although not involving a doppelgänger, Alan Moore's classic Batman graphic novel *The Killing Joke* posits that the Joker was originally a struggling stand-up comedian unable

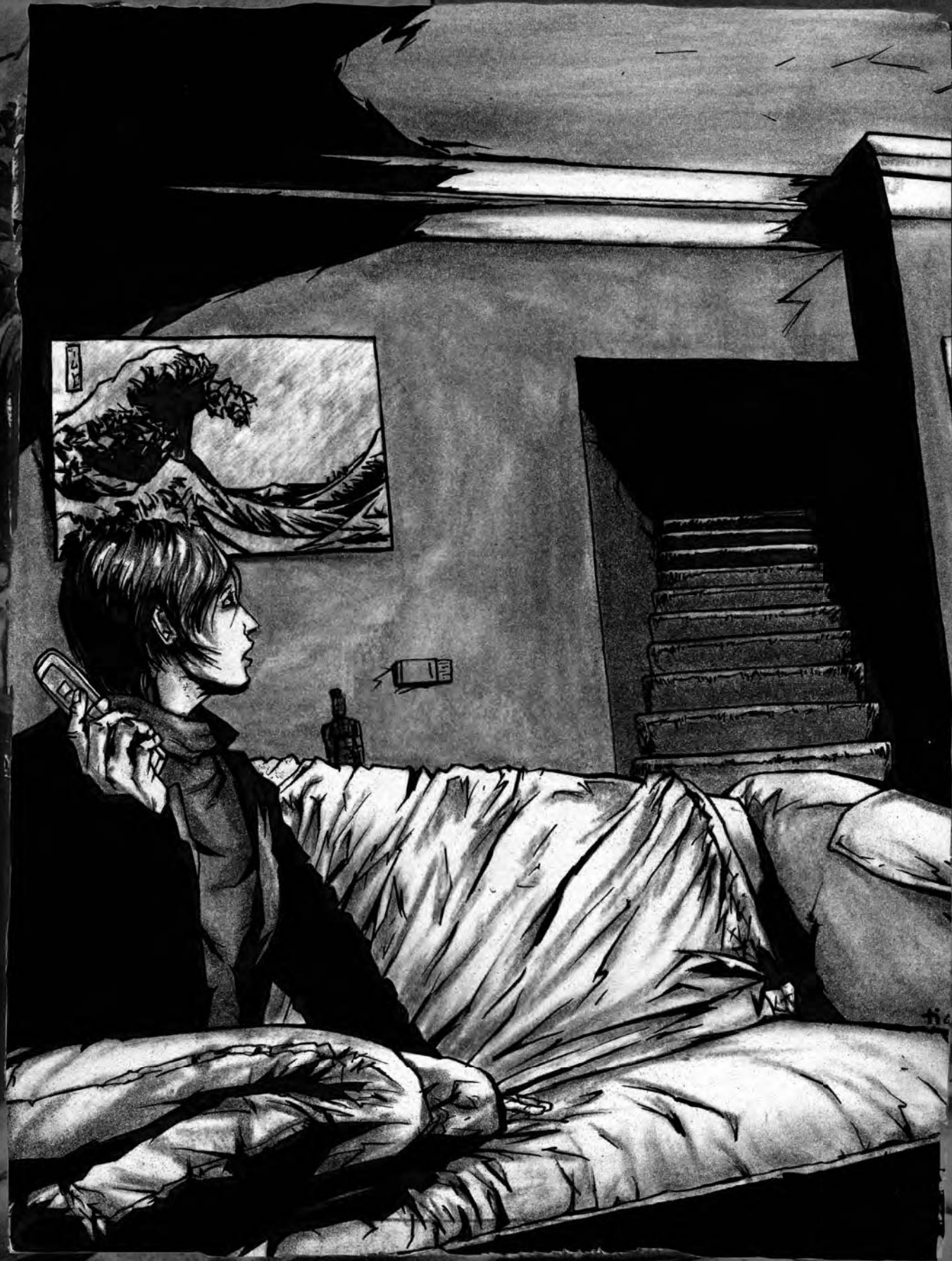
to get laughs. After his pregnant wife is killed in an accident and he is permanently disfigured to look like a clown, the comedian assumes a new and psychotic persona based on murder and mayhem through dark humor.

Storytelling Hints: The high-Morality twisted artist raises his artistic vision to the highest level of importance and is willing to sacrifice anything to create a new and compelling vision. His enemies are the forces of artistic conformity and banality. Consequently, unfavorable critics or rivals who succeed with what the artist considers a mediocre product enrage the doppelgänger. Even when moved to brutal homicide, the twisted artist kills only those characters who commit "crimes against Art," and the murders are usually dramatic and elegant in execution. In the film *Theatre of Blood*, Vincent Price plays a deranged thespian who murders his critics in ways inspired by Shakespearean death scenes, which represents the artistic sensibility of the twisted artist.

The low-Morality twisted artist, on the other hand, is consumed by a vision of horror. The artist might lure a friend home to show her the "exciting new medium" in which he is working — human skin, for example. The twisted artist might also seek to expunge all "distractions" from his stolen life, including the template's loved ones.

Finally, the twisted artist might reject the template's artistic inspirations entirely and seek the destruction of all art. How violently the doppelgänger pursues this goal depends on his Morality rating.





Somebody Told Me

This story could happen to anyone.
Danger lurks everywhere.

Even the noblest or most innocent neighborhood can conceal deadly threats.

These are the lessons that urban legends teach us. These stories frighten us, but we tell them over and over because they *appeal* to us. Urban legends tell us that our fears and taboos are justified, that so much evil is trying to get into our lives that we're better off not looking for more. They're also full of sex, violence and unexpected twists. What more could a Storyteller want?

How to Use this Chapter

This chapter presents several classic urban legends and reinvents them for the World of Darkness. Each legend includes several supplementary sections to help you bring it into your chronicle:

- **History:** This section explains how the events in the legend came about. These are the things that occur before the troupe's characters enter the story.
- **Motivations:** These are reasons characters might become involved with the events described in the History and Story sections. The motivations are particularly useful for one-shot stories or for chronicles in which the characters have no ongoing interest in peculiar events.
- **Story:** This section provides suggestions for what happens when the characters get involved and the people the characters may encounter.
- **Variations:** This section includes other possible versions of the legend.

Arsenic in White Lace

"Beautiful dress, isn't it? A Paris original, if I'm not mistaken. Don't often see one of those down here in my morgue, you know? When the lady came in here in it, I was careful with it. Sure enough, the family wanted to bury her in it.

"No, no, they did. That's what I'm getting at. So they bury her, right?

"And then, last week, I get this kid on the slab... poor thing, only twenty-two. But she's wearing the same dress. Not a thing wrong with her, either... till we got the toxics back.

"Long story short? She had embalming fluid in her bloodstream. Turns out she was practically soaking in it. So was the dress. Somehow, it didn't go in the grave with its owner; it turned up in a pawn shop, where this girl bought the dress on the cheap. Went out dancing, and she broke a sweat. Nasty stuff soaked in through her pores.

"What a waste. Beautiful dress."

History

This phenomenon is nothing new. Truth be told, the same dress has been coming home to the city morgue for the last 14 years. No one knows why, but Red Anderson, the county coroner, could make a good guess.

"There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before."

— Willa Cather

Willa Cather



The story started back when Anderson was a young doctor, just beginning his career as a medical examiner. His wife Cheryl, a few years older, was a real estate agent at the top of her field. She was also quite the gambler, and they both liked heroin a little too much. Eventually, the couple's squabbles over money drove Red a little mad. One night after a party, when they were both strung out, he made sure she took a little extra. Then a little more after that. By morning, he was sober, and she was dead of an overdose.

Red didn't remember for sure what he'd done, but he knew enough to cover his tracks. He exploited his position and got Cheryl's death rubber-stamped and her body safely in the ground. She was buried in the lacy, white gown she died in: the last one she hadn't pawned to cover her debts.

Cheryl stayed dead, but not all of her stayed buried. A few months after the funeral, a young woman named Vanette Parker keeled over at a society ball. When she arrived in the morgue, Red and his assistant discovered that her arteries were full of embalming fluid. Lucky for Red, only he recognized his wife's dress. He had it burned.

Since then, the dress has returned on nearly a dozen accidental poisonings, aneurysms, overdoses and even a runaway dead of exposure. The deaths always leave the dress pristine, and no matter how Red tries to dispose of it, somehow it always finds its way back to his morgue, and usually into his hands.

The first two cases were six years apart. The next one was two years later. Last year, three corpses came in wearing the dress. Red's a calm man, but he's starting to get nervous.

Motivations

Characters working in law enforcement, health care or the mortuary business have obvious reasons to dig into the mystery of the returning dress. They may also know one of the victims. Alternatively, Red may seek out the characters, looking for their help in ridding himself of the dress.

The Story

The "haunting" has been going on long enough for the morgue staff who have noticed to grow jaded. Most of them are open about the mystery, even eager to talk about their experiences, but few are interested in helping the characters get to the bottom of it. Only the oldest were even around when Red's wife died.

Red, however, is only too happy to help. His initial confusion has mixed with years of denial to the point where he no longer believes he did anything wrong. Sometimes, he doesn't even think about Cheryl when the dress comes back. On the other hand, he dreads its return more every time. He just wants to be rid of it, wants the dead woman in white out of his head and out of his morgue. He encourages and assists with any investigation that looks like it might end the haunting, as long as the investigation doesn't get too close to exposing or reminding him of his secrets.

The circumstances of Cheryl's death are not recorded in her obituary or her files at the morgue, since Red wrote both. They do, however, mention that she was survived by her sister, Taryn Reader. If the characters talk to Taryn, they find that, beneath a carefree façade, she still seethes over her sister's death. Taryn believes Red killed Cheryl by drawing her into a world of drugs and gambling. Taryn knows about the overdose, and that Red covered it up, but she doesn't know it was deliberate. If someone suggests to her that Cheryl was murdered, though, Taryn believes it.

What Red doesn't realize is that his own denial fuels the deaths and manifestations. The only way to stop the dress from returning (and claiming more lives in the process) is to force him to confront and admit his crime. As the characters near the truth, however, the haunting attempts to encourage them by occurring more frequently. In addition to claiming more victims, the dress appears in other, more personal ways. A character might see it momentarily in a shop window, have it returned with her dry cleaning or find it hanging in her closet. If the characters begin to give up, the haunting might threaten them. One gloomy night, a character might wake to find herself wearing the dress....

Variations

- **Mythic Associations:** In Greek myth, Medea murdered her lover's bride with an enchanted dress, and Heracles' jealous wife sent him a poisoned robe. Mages have long looked to classical mythology for clues to ancient truths, and some local researchers believe that the tale of the

deadly dress comes from Atlantis. If one of these poisoned garments, or even just an echo of one, has surfaced, it might be useful in spells with a similar purpose. The ultimate coup, of course, would be to get an enemy to wear the dress....

• **Killer Threads:** The dress certainly looks the same... but perhaps that's because it's an imitation, rather than the same dress. Perhaps each of the women sews her own dress, then wears it for one last night out on the town. Are they part of some strange suicide pact? Or is there an external compulsion at work? Or is someone peddling poison dresses?

Bad Candy

Dear Parents,

With the back-to-school rush only just past, and the leaves only just starting to turn, it's hard to believe that Halloween is already upon us! While this season is often regarded as a time for fun and abandon, we urge you to remember that it is also a time for increased caution. Every year, children around the country are hurt and killed by poison or razorblades concealed in candy given out during the yearly "trick-or-treat" tradition. Those with an occult mindset often perpetrate these horrible, and apparently random, crimes. Too often, however, the culprits go undiscovered.

Because of this and other dangers, we urge you not to allow your children to engage in "trick-or-treating." Many churches and community groups offer safe Halloween parties as an alternative to this dangerous ritual. We will be hosting our own gathering on the 24th in the gymnasium. Remember that children belong safe at home or school, not begging for candy on the streets.

Sincerely,
Principal Edwards

History

Every October, concerned schools, churches and police departments keep careful watch for tainted Halloween candy. In the World of Darkness, their fears are more than justified. In a few towns each year, disturbed individuals secrete poison or dangerous objects in treats intended for children. This year, though, something different endangers the town's children — and adults.

Miranda Jacobs, of Cohasset, Massachusetts, is a therapist with an unusual gift. Over the course of conversation and shared meals, she can do more than ease pain — she can actually remove painful memories from her patients, leaving their thoughts clean and their hearts light. The ritual is simple: Miranda gently questions her subject while they share some food. As the patient talks, the memories leave him. By the time the meal is done, the memory and the

pain are no longer a part of the subject, and are contained in the leftover food. For years, she baked bread and other goodies to drain the agony from others. More recently, she's discovered that mass-produced candies work just as well.

Of course, once she's drained a patient's misery, she has to do something with the food. Destroying or discarding the food voids the ritual and returns the memories to their owner, and anyone who eats it gets stuck with the memories. Miranda's practice used to leave her with a cellar full of rotting bread. With candy, the solution was easier, as it didn't start stinking.

Some horrors, though, are potent even when spread across hundreds of pieces of candy. Through her involvement in self-help communities on the Internet, Miranda has found scattered people who *want* to experience personal fears and tragedies. These men and women pay a lot of money to experience particular types of trauma over and over again. So she sends them the tainted candy, and they eat it, and they experience nuggets of trauma. All told, Miranda has a tidy business, and she believes she's making the world a better place by distributing sadness more evenly.

Unfortunately, one of her packages, intended for someone in the city where the chronicle takes place, was damaged in transit. With the source and destination illegible, the package was given to a postal worker named Mike Davis to deliver with some canned goods to a local church. Mike dropped off the cans, but kept the candy to give to the neighborhood children. It's Halloween, after all.



Motivations

Since the story starts on a night when children can roam freely without being noticed, and involves mainly younger victims, this tale of tainted treats is an ideal mystery for a group of meddling kids to solve on their own. The adults most likely to become involved are parents or first responders such as police or paramedics.

For a twist, one of the characters or their friends might be the candy's intended recipient. A scientist or occult investigator might be curious about the strange sweets from Massachusetts. A mage or other supernatural creature also might have a use for fun-size pieces of human misery, perhaps in bartering with spirits or manipulating enemies.

The Story

The story begins just before sundown on Halloween, when trick-or-treaters with cautious parents (or large appetites) begin their rounds. The Davis house isn't known for particularly generous handouts, but it's located centrally on many children's routes. Mike is a genial, trustworthy man, so parents have few qualms about letting their children take a miniature candy bar or two from him.

Carol Bradley is a parent supervising a gaggle of youngsters in addition to her six-year-old daughter. As Carol walks with the children, she idly samples some of their candy. A few minutes after eating one of the bars from Mike's house, she experiences a horrific, garbled vision of being mugged and beaten. Panicking, she leaves the children and runs through the streets, screaming for help.

As the sun sets, the streetlights come on, and children affix orange safety reflectors to their costumes. More trick-or-treaters and parents come by the Davis house, and more consume the goodies as they go. Shortly after eating, they experience a rush of fragmented, traumatic memories. Most react in panic or fear; a few become violent. One or two might have heart attacks or other stress-related health problems. Psychotic and delusional incidents break out across the neighborhood, puzzling and distracting police. As the night goes on, the apparently random chaos escalates. Neighbors, paranoid about Halloween crimes, retaliate, while intoxicated revelers strain law enforcement. If the story takes place in a small town, this strife could become a full-scale riot.

A little after eight o'clock, Mike turns over door duty to his teenage son, Robbie. Wistful for younger days, and more than a little annoyed at his father for not letting him go out tonight, Robbie gives out larger handfuls of candy. Just to be polite, he does the same when the police visit, retracing Carol Bradley's steps. Robbie obviously doesn't have a clue what happened to Carol, but some candy leaves with the officers. If the police are working with the characters, the candy might be an important clue. If not, then a set of particularly agonizing memories have just been passed off to a few armed patrolmen.

Unless the characters wield magic themselves, they can't take back the memories that have already been consumed, but they can stop Robbie from handing out any more candy, and they can try to get trick-or-treaters to discard what they have already. The characters can also try to stop the worst incidents, and encourage people to return to their homes. When the sun rises, the initial confusion and panic pass, and people recover from the alien memories. "Aftershocks" might occur as the remaining candy is eaten, but testing doesn't turn up any suspicious substances in the victims or the treats. The whole incident gradually becomes just one more story of a Halloween that got out of hand.

As for Miranda, she continues taking memories for a price and reselling them at a premium. If the characters track her down, she defends the morality of her practice, but they can intimidate her into stopping. She's also willing to perform her rituals on the characters, should they be having a little trouble sleeping through the night (or day). Given enough incentive, she might even take memories from an unwilling subject.

Variations

- **Occam's Razorblades:** Throughout the World of Darkness, monstrous but otherwise ordinary people murder their families and neighbors under the cover of Halloween revelry. Their motives range from money to revenge to simple cruelty. While the characters are distracted by a crisis like the one described, their enemies might take the opportunity to move against their friends and family.

- **Tainted Blood:** Some vampires tell their own stories of Halloween paranoia. In a few cities each year, they say, an occult branch of the Catholic Church doses tempting young victims with holy poisons. These poisons make the humans fearless and easy to lure, but kill any vampire foolish enough to partake. Other versions of this legend replace Halloween with holidays such as Easter or May Day, or substitute the CIA, MI5 or any number of vampiric conspiracies for the Church.

Circles in the Fields

Posted by [james](#), 12:01 EDT (8 comments)

Today's post is brought to you once again by a few sad lunatics and a news media more interested in counting ratings and web traffic than it is in the truth. Today, though, it isn't the power of prayer or healing energy from magic rocks. No, this one's so retro it will have you looking for your vinyl albums. I'm talking, of course, about crop circles. [Take a look](#). We get this gem early on:

Crop circles are not a new phenomenon. The first circles were reported in England in the early 1970s, when relatively simple “rings” began appearing in fields of cereal. These were quickly supplanted by more complex images, often resembling Celtic knot designs or even fractal patterns. By the end of the decade, hundreds of circles had been reported worldwide.

By the end of the decade, of course, two pranksters had not only admitted to producing the vast majority of English and Scottish crop circles, but also demonstrated their technique for television crews. Notice how that doesn’t get mentioned. Wouldn’t want the truth, much less the obvious, to get in the way of a good story.

Now, I have no doubt that the farmer in this story can’t explain the weird designs in his field. I’d be pretty surprised to wake up and find that my back yard had been decorated with rings and spirals, too. I wouldn’t, however, assume that my grass had been singled out for contact with creatures from beyond. Indeed, the farmer seems fairly level-headed about the whole thing. Good for him.

Unfortunately, I have no doubt that his field will soon be trampled further, not by more aliens, but by a horde of claptrap believers, all eager to offer their own woo-woo answers about what happened. In fact, they’ve already started:

Jeremy Wilton is a leading light in the community of “cerealogists”: people who study crop circles. With his short beard, graying hair and careful manner, he looks more like a college professor than a paranormal investigator. “It’s arrogant,” he says over coffee, “to assume that there’s nothing that our science hasn’t already explained — especially when our ancestors understood it just fine. World mythology is full of powerful beings who communicate with Man through natural signs. We’ve really turned a blind eye to those kinds of oracles; is it any wonder they might be resorting to larger demonstrations?”

Perhaps more embarrassing than the plethora of occult explanations for the circles is the response from the scientific establishment. Circular blights, ball lightning and even Russian lasers have all been cited by credulous scientists as explanations for circles.

Such a shame, dear readers, when two men with a board will do.

History

Most people don’t appreciate the level of effort that goes into being a modern doomsday cultist. Does a frozen



goat make an adequate sacrifice? If not, how is the prospective priest of the end times going to get a live one, much less get it out to the sacrificial field before the witching hour?

These are the kinds of questions that used to afflict the mind of Eddie Samson. Eddie was the leader of a group of spare-time cultists whose gods owed more to comic creator Jack Kirby and pulp author H.P. Lovecraft than any authentic mystical tradition. Recently, however, Eddie got his hands on some genuine magic in the least likely of places: an Internet file sharing network.

The document Eddie downloaded was scanned from a 16th-century pamphlet depicting designs found in a number of fields in and around Hertfordshire, England. These patterns, allegedly created by the Devil himself, struck a chord deep in Eddie's heart. Once he saw them, he couldn't get them out his head. He sketched them while waiting for the bus, during his day job at the copy shop, as he watched erotic thrillers on late-night cable.

Eventually, Eddie convinced one of his fellow travelers to join him in trampling the designs out in a field off the turnpike. Then they immolated (well, defrosted) a goat and smoked some weed, just for good measure. Just as they were getting tired and figured nothing was going to happen, Eddie felt something. His eyes went blind, his heart stopped beating and all he could hear was his friend's screams. Then the screams died out, and he heard a voice. Deep, booming and contemptuous, it told Eddie he'd better keep making the signs, or it would come to kill him.

When his heart started beating again and his eyes were working, it was almost dawn. His friend was dead. Eddie clumsily dismembered the body and threw it in a nearby creek. And then he drove back to the city and went to work.

Motivations

Police finding or investigating the remains of Eddie's friend are likely to be drawn into the mystery, as are friends and relatives of the deceased. Journalists might become interested in either the apparent murder or the string of crop circles that begins with it. Farm employees or insurers also have reason to investigate the vandalism.

The Story

Some strange phenomena slip through the cracks, unnoticed by anyone except the people who witness them and whoever has to pick up the pieces. Crop circles are a little different: they're big, they're obvious and the public loves them. Doubly so when a circle shows up half a mile from a chopped-up corpse.

True to form, Eddie's ritual site attracts a horde of visitors — occult investigators, reporters of varying legitimacy and plain old gawkers. This activity hardly pleases Liz Quinn, the manager of the corporate cereal farm where Eddie performed the ritual. Although Liz is willing to cooperate with

the police and the media, she or the spectators she attempts to drive off may accidentally obliterate evidence.

The autopsy performed on the recovered body parts confuses authorities. The victim appears to have had a high degree of smoke inhalation combined with a fatal, toxic reaction to burning wheat covered in a common pesticide. (A reaction to the same smoke could have caused Eddie to hallucinate the voices.) The only evidence of foul play is the grisly manner in which the corpse was disposed. If the police don't have the characters' help, the police take some time to identify the victim, since he hasn't yet been reported missing.

At Eddie's workplace, the characters find that he came in briefly the morning after the ritual, picked up his check, then left. His locker is stuffed full of photocopies of his sketches, mostly of the symbol in the field and other, similar ones. His coworkers noticed him drawing, but the symbols mean nothing to them. They also point out that he didn't pay for the copies.

Eddie has gotten over his initial shock, but is almost unreasonably terrified. He was always rooting for the end of the world, but that was because he figured he'd get to see it. Now that his life is threatened, he's terrified. As soon as he can cash his paycheck, he takes off on the road, stopping as often as he dares to make the circles again.

If the characters catch or confront him, he offers a panicked explanation of what happened the night of the ritual, and tries to explain why he needs to keep making the circles. He resists any attempt to detain him, and turns violent as a last resort; Eddie knows that he's never been good at fighting. The characters may be able to calm him down, but they can't convince him to stop making circles. Even if he's imprisoned (for vandalism, desecrating his friend's corpse or violence as he evades capture), Eddie finds ways to continue making circles — scratching them into walls, drawing them in mashed potatoes, even cutting them into his skin. Just in case...

Variations

- **Spiral Sickness:** Werewolves know that the scientists are half-right: crop circles and "fairy rings" can be the work of disease. The disease, however, isn't anything as simple as a fungal infection. Viewed in the spirit world, the patterns are dark and rotten, black spirals spreading over miles and miles. The spiral patterns are symptoms of a sort of spiritual gangrene, where spirits of death and decay feed slowly within the bloated and still-living forms of growth spirits.

- **Cereal Cryptography:** Crop circles are human-made signals, meant to be seen in the heavens — not by gods or aliens, but by other humans. Each "genuine" circle contains a secret message, meant to be received by people looking at satellite imagery. These might be clandestine government agencies, supernatural conspiracies or just other hobbyists on the Internet. Eddie might have accidentally sent off a distress call. Or ordered a hit...

To: Daniel
From: Monica
 Daniel,
 Just checked in. The trip out here was a blur... a bumpy blur! But it's worth it. Amanda and I actually scored separate rooms. Promise I'll write more tomorrow morning.

To: Daniel
From: Monica
 Can't find 'Manda. She must have gone out early; Just my luck, she's the one who speaks all the French. Need to go find her. Promise I'll write more this afternoon.

To: Daniel
From: Monica
 Oh, God. Well, this would be the mail I promised you. But it's not good. I'm kinda freaking out.
 Amanda's missing. I asked the front desk clerk if he'd seen where she went. He said he didn't know who I was talking about. I said I was looking for the girl I came with... he said I arrived alone!
 Maybe it's my fault? My French isn't good, and nobody here speaks English. They don't even speak French, really, it's all local dialect. Do you know anything about contacting the embassy?

To: Daniel
From: Monica
 I broke into her room. It's all different from what I saw last night. Even the wallpaper. I got caught, though. Now, the hotel's kicked me out. They're treating me like I'm crazy. So are the police.
 They did something to her. I know they did. But why? All we were doing was helping with relief. In a whole other country!
 Look, call me on my phone. It's GSM, it'll work out here.

To: Daniel
From: Monica
 Oh, God. I know what it is. When we were helping at the clinic. She must have caught something. Something terrible. And they took her away to prevent an outbreak.
 I'm all alone. I barely speak the language. I don't even know where the embassy is. What the fuck do I do?

To: Daniel
From: Monica
 Daniel?
 Are you getting my messages?

To: Monica
From: Mailer Daemon
 Your message could not be delivered for the following reasons:
 - User does not exist.

History

Everybody's missing time. Everyone has afternoons, days, even weeks that they just don't remember, almost as if they never happened. Most people don't complain, though. Why should they? If it was important, they'd remember it.

Most of us are even missing people. The best friend from grade school that Mom doesn't remember. The cute boy from that party whose number turned out not to be in service. The Internet pen pal who dropped off the face of the Earth. Harmless, usually. No one gets very upset. There's the occasional moment of "but what if they really never existed?" — and then people move on.

The truth is, many of these disappearances are more than just bad memory — they're the work of an outside force.

Picture lives as little clouds of moments and people arranged loosely together, like plankton floating in the sea. Similar to plankton, people have predators — *Predators*: massive beasts that share the same sea. Beasts that blunder through and devour them, unresisted. These Predators are as little like us, and have as little to do with us, as whales do with plankton.

When one of these beasts takes a bite out of our universe, the bite leaves holes. Our lives heal, though: they rearrange themselves to almost make sense again. Usually. Sometimes a Predator develops a taste for moments and people with a particular flavor. The Predator consumes them, chunk by chunk, and leaves only a scattering of memo-

ries behind. When it gets hungry again, it goes looking for lives and times with the same flavor, gradually consuming entire networks of people and events.

That's what's about to happen to the characters.

Motivations

The Predator picks chains of lives to devour effectively at random, so the characters might become its chosen victims for no reason at all. In order to tie the story more closely into an ongoing chronicle, however, tampering with the paranormal might have attracted the Predator's attention. Perhaps one of the characters' major victories or defeats roused the giant's appetite.

The Story

The disappearances begin with a Storyteller character. He should be someone significant to one or more of the troupe's characters, but without strong ties to many other Storyteller characters. A person whom only the troupe's characters will miss. (If this story takes place in a chronicle, you may also hint at the story in advance, by having a peripheral character disappear during an earlier, unrelated story.)

Not only can the missing person not be found, no record of him remains. Coworkers have forgotten him. Ex-lovers deny having met him, or are also missing. Public records (such as those of driver's licenses or taxes) no longer record any information about him. He has even disappeared from any photographs the characters own.

As they investigate, the characters find themselves becoming gradually less real. First, inanimate things stop accepting them — ATMs refuse to dispense money, house keys can't be found, automatic doors stop opening. Then, the memories of people who know the characters become progressively more indistinct, eventually reaching the point where people no longer recognize the characters. This may happen to all of the characters at once, or it may affect only one of them at a time.

While the Predator may lead a varied, fulfilling life in its own plane of existence, the Predator comes near ours only when it wants lunch. The only way it interacts with the world is consuming parts of people's lives. All interactions with the Predator or attempts to resist it center around these facts.

Characters can protect themselves from the Predator by staying in groups and staying awake — as long as their attention is on each other, they're too closely linked to disappear. Similarly, strengthening their ties to other people makes them less likely to be consumed. Staying around places that are old, well-known or otherwise connected to many people, such as churches, schools or famous landmarks, can also deter the Predator.

To save themselves from the Predator permanently, the characters must either defy it, by finding a way to persistently commemorate the lives it has devoured or satiate it, by deliberately letting go of memories. If

they choose the latter course, they must let the Predator consume one last, important person — probably another of the characters. Thus, to defeat the Predator, they must embrace their past... or let go of it forever.

Either of these solutions gets the characters out of harm's way. Getting rid of the Predator may also cause it to disgorge random pieces of its recent meals. What parts of the characters' pasts have now returned, with the characters still unaware that they even happened?

Variations

- **Bad Memory:** Nearly all vampires have their memories distorted during torpor. An unlucky few, however, suffer the same affliction during their daylight sleep. These vampires, while otherwise perfectly sane, remember events that never occurred, or remember them differently from



everyone else present. In a society as small and paranoid as that of the Kindred, even level-headed vampires have trouble ruling out that everyone collaborates against them.

While vampires who have experienced torpor usually react cautiously, younger victims of this illness often lash out at other Kindred. The most extreme (and hence, most repeated) case was a vampire in the northwestern United States who killed four other Kindred in retaliation for their imagined murder of her mortal brother — who never existed.

- **Disease Control:** The speculation in the original legend is correct: the disappearances are the work of someone trying to prevent a disease outbreak. Still, obliterating all traces of person's existence is a monumental task. Could the conspirators erase lives so completely just by manipulating various bureaucracies, or are "they" employing a more frightening weapon?

The Hook

"Okay, I got one. Gather 'round, ladies.

"One night (dark and stormy, of course) my cousin was driving with her boyfriend. They lost the keys somewhere around Oak Street. Back seat, listening to the smooth jazz station, the whole deal. All of a sudden, just as you-know-who was rounding third, the radio switches over to the news.

"This is an emergency alert,' it says, 'A man has escaped from the Hill Hospital for the Mentally Unwell. He is considered armed and extremely dangerous. This lunatic is missing his left hand, and may be using a hook in its place.'

"Well, my cousin's stupid brave, so she wanted to keep going, but her boy had kind of lost his charge. So they got back in the front seat and started driving home.

"By the time they were home, they'd managed to work each other into a real terror. Didn't help that they'd hit a raccoon or something in the road on the way back. So they were real glad to get to her dad's house. Her boyfriend got out of the car, then came around to open her door... and stopped dead.

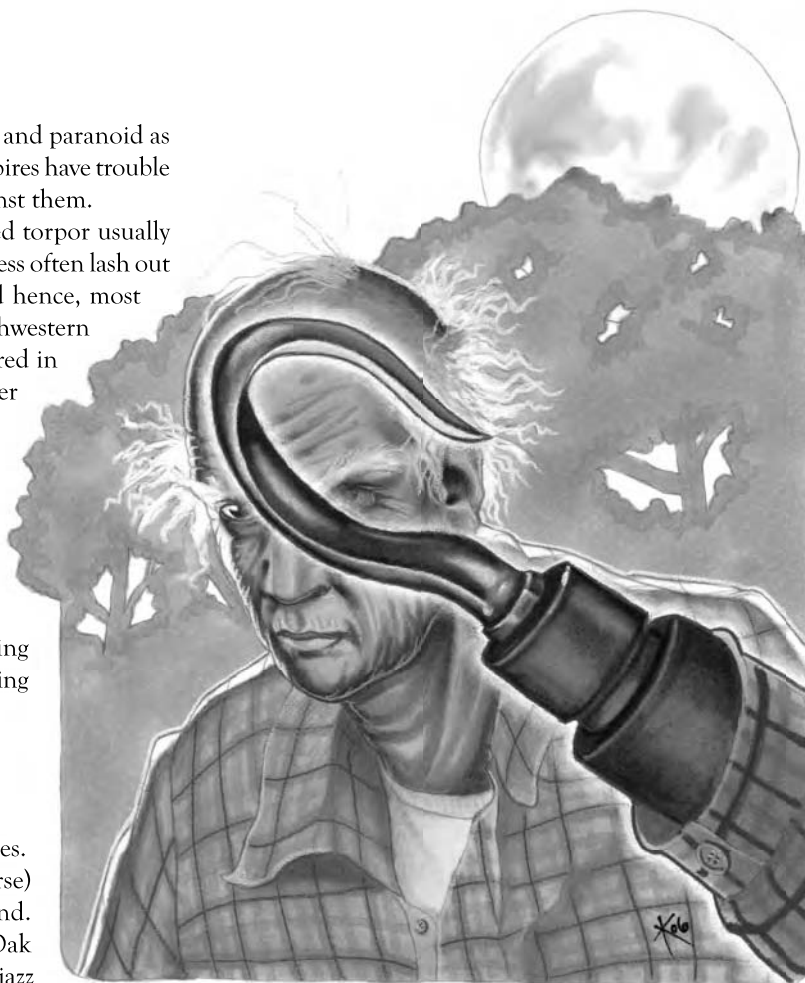
"He stopped *abruptly*. Jesus.

"So she said 'what, what is it?' and he didn't say anything, just kept staring in terror. She shoved the door open and turned around to look... and then she freaked, too. He says she even fainted.

"Because there, hanging from the door... was a hook!"

History

Moses Ezekiel MacDonald was born a long time ago. Too long by half, he figures every time he wakes up. Once upon a time, though, he was too young — too young to join the Army and spit in the Führer's face. Moses was walking



in the woods one day when he met the Devil, or at least somebody about the right height. Now, Moses wasn't afraid of anybody, German or Devil, so they got right to talking.

"Devil," said Moses, "How am I going to get in the Army?"

"Lie," said the Devil. "It's what I'd do."

"Devil, I can't even grow a beard. Give you my soul if you'll help me out."

"I've got a lot of souls," said the Devil, "but I'm sure I can think of something else. Tell you what, you go town and you sign up for the Army, and I'll make sure you get in and I'll make sure you see action."

So Moses shook the Devil's hand, and he went down to town. Sure enough, they took him, and a year later, he was starving in a foxhole in the French countryside. One day, during an advance, he stepped on a landmine. As he lay there bleeding, he saw the Devil again.

"You here for my soul, Devil?" he asked.

"I told you, son, I don't need souls. I'm starving out here, though. All the meat is mangled and charred. I don't suppose you need that hand?"

Moses started to argue, but he realized that the rest of him was all torn up and that his left hand was the only part of him he was sure was intact. A deal is a deal, so he let the Devil gnaw it off.

"You're a plain dealer," said the Devil, "And I really don't need one of those in Hell. Kill one more man for me when you get home, and I'll make sure you live a good long time."

Sure enough, some Frenchmen found Moses within the hour and got him to safety. After he recovered, Moses shipped back to the United States, and he killed his brother-in-law not a day after he got off the boat.

At least, that's how Moses remembers it all. That's why he's been locked up in a mental hospital for the last 60 years.

Motivations

Hospital staff or law enforcement agents try to recapture Moses and make good protagonists. Moses may also still have living relatives who are afraid that he'll attack them. Teenagers or others may encounter the escaped lunatic on a lonely road.

The Story

The story begins as Moses escapes once again from the mental hospital in which he has been held, killing an orderly in the process.

Moses' memories are damaged; he's had at least two life-changing encounters with a powerful supernatural force, and has greatly simplified them. Each time, it took a passing interest in his problems and helped him in a small way. The creature might be a mage, a spirit, a vampire with blood sorcery or a stranger being — perhaps one already playing a role in your chronicle. For all of Moses' intents and purposes, however, it might as well be the Devil.

The basics of Moses' memories, despite some core misconceptions, are correct: he sacrificed his hand to a being, and that being extended his life and improved his health. This supernatural protection keeps Moses fit despite years of confinement, and allows him to recuperate from injury with unusual speed. While his wounds don't actually heal any faster than those of an ordinary human being, Moses can shrug off pain and keep moving when hurt in ways that would cripple another mortal. Use the statistics for the Monster Hunter (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 207) for Moses, and allow him to ignore wound penalties.

Moses has replaced his left hand with an old-fashioned hook-style prosthesis. (Through some supernatural influence, the hospital staff has not been able to remove the hook. The staff members instead force Moses to bundle it up in an old cloth — which he removes when he escapes.) Although he was originally left-handed, Moses is proficient with using his right hand to perform complex tasks. He has secretly sharpened the hook to a razor-like edge, with which he maims or kills anyone who interferes with his freedom. The hook deals lethal damage.

Dr. Paula Connelly has administered the Hill Hospital for the Mentally Unwell since the '60s, and she's a firm believer in tradition. While the hospital has welcomed a few younger doctors and some newer treatment strategies, Paula keeps it a virtual prison, believing that the patients need protection from each other just as much as her staff and the community need protection from them. She is well aware of Moses' capacity for violence; he's escaped three times before

and been recaptured. The hospital has not kept official records of these escapes, but rumors of a hook-handed maniac in the woods near the hospital have never gone away. To avoid any interference in running the hospital, Paula does her best to conceal these escapes. However, she ultimately cooperates if she has a genuine need for the characters.

Moses, meanwhile, is roaming the thick woods, surviving on wild game. His only desire is to keep his freedom, but he lacks most real-world social skills, and can't drive an automobile. With the hospital tucked far away in the woods, his best hope for evading searchers is to get someone else to help him, most likely by force. At night, he stays within sight of the road, waiting for a car to slow down, or, better yet, park.

Variations

- **Shifter, Shifter:** The lunatic can be identified by the hook that replaces his hand... and only by that hook. His appearance is fluid, allowing him to take the form of anyone he wishes, but he can't regrow his missing hand or remove his prosthesis.

- **Handling the Truth:** The real story isn't the hook, but how the patient lost his hand, and who imprisoned him to keep it a secret. Moses lost his hand to cancer after handling a strange, metal object he found by the side of the road. Soon, men in dark suits came and took him to the hospital, and now no one will believe him at all.

The Maker's Mark

FW: WARNING! PLEASE READ!

Attachment(s): Drugz.jkt

Drug dealers are using a dangerous new strategy to drum up business. As usual, it is at the EXPENSE of our children's safety.

To lure in innocent kids, they are offering a form of temporary tattoo, marked with a blue star or a popular cartoon character. When the child handles, licks or wears the tattoo, it releases LSD ("acid"), causing euphoria and hallucinations.

This crude LSD is often produced in basement laboratories and laced with poisons such as STRYCHNINE.

Often they distribute this dangerous product by using other kids who are looking for their next fix. THEY ARE TURNING CHILDREN INTO JUNKIES AND DEALERS.

Although elementary school students are the usual targets, a high school student at Springbrook died from this last week.

CHILDREN HAVE ALREADY DIED. PLEASE FORWARD THIS AND HELP SPREAD THE WORD.



History

The most dire warnings always arrive too late. Lucy Holmes discovered she had pancreatic cancer when she had only a few weeks left to live. Her husband, Simon, and their young son, Jonah, were still in shock by the time they had to start mourning.

Lucy and Simon were married for 12 years, and had dated for four years before that — since the beginning of high school. Simon had no more idea how to live his life without her than he had hope of finding companionship with anyone else. As the months went by, as he raised his son on his own, Simon's depression grew deeper and darker. He tried going back to church. He tried suicide. He couldn't go through with either.

Even before his wife died, Simon had been a stay-at-home dad. He owned his own business: cooking LSD, ecstasy and methamphetamines in the family's basement, then selling them wholesale to local dealers. The profits were tidy, and, after Lucy died, he had plenty of time to read while Jonah was at school. Simon started with self-help books on mourning, then books on mysticism and finally to the musings of talk show psychics. He found the passage that changed his life in a dictionary of angels. The angel Gabriel, it said, tells each child a secret as they're born, like a fingerprint on the soul.

That clicked for him. Simon no longer indulged in drugs, but he remembered the feelings of his youth, how some of his trips felt like flying over the surface of some greater, inner truth. He thought of trying it again, but he realized that he was too old, that he'd lost the joy. If he looked inside himself, he knew, he'd find only a bleak and lonely hole. If he wanted to learn the secrets of how to find Lucy again, he'd need someone not so spoiled, not so destroyed. So he went looking for his son.

After subjecting the boy to a few trips, Simon realized two things. The first was the result of a small lab accident: he could follow his son's journey by mixing a drop or two of his own blood into the acid. Second, the secret (the only secret) in Jonah's soul wouldn't do Simon any good — it was

a mental blueprint for a mechanical bird's wing, fashioned from a metal that never stopped weeping. Fascinating, beautiful, but not what he wanted to know. Nothing about what comes next, nothing about how to contact his wife again.

Simon needed to expand his range of subjects. He made up more batches of blood and drugs, and told Jonah to give them out at school.

Motivations

Teachers or parents of schoolchildren are naturally concerned about a drug problem at school. Criminals involved in the drug market may also be concerned about the apparent break in the distribution chain: who's the new guy dealing hallucinogens, and what if he starts expanding into the more profitable teen and adult markets? Police have the same questions, though obviously for different reasons.

The Story

As the story opens, principal Henry Edwards becomes aware of a trade going on in temporary tattoos among his students, accompanied by strange behavior on and off campus. While he hasn't yet gotten his hands on any of the tattoos, he realizes that the trade network is sophisticated, with multiple levels of children acting as sellers and distributors, all leading back to someone at the top. Henry doesn't know it, yet, but the man at the top is nine-year-old Jonah Holmes.

Simon has stopped seeing his son as a person — almost — and doesn't give much thought to how Jonah sees him. He certainly doesn't realize that the boy is emulating him and selling the drugs for money. Of course, with his scheme succeeding, Simon rarely sees anything other than the inside of his lab and the drug dreams of his subjects. His original quest, to discover the nature of life after death, has become grander as his fascination with the world's hidden secrets grows. He doesn't even notice that his son is buying the groceries.

When Henry or someone else finally contacts the police, they give the case to narcotics detective Arthur De Marino. Arthur's loyalties are divided — he works full-time for the police and part-time for a local drug baron — but both of Arthur's bosses want the elementary schools free of unauthorized dealing. Arthur is reluctant to cooperate with other characters: he doesn't want anyone to notice his indiscretions, and he also feels, genuinely, that the investigation is his job and he best knows how to do it.

The tattoos are made from small pieces of blotter paper, crudely stamped. They're not good tattoos, just paper soaked in hallucinogens with a bit of colored ink on the front. Ordinarily, Simon would stamp them with his maker's mark — a blue star. However, he's been trying to avoid attention from his usual customers by giving them to Jonah blank. The boy has purchased stamps and ink with his own money, and has been using them to "brand" his merchandise with various popular icons.

When a person applies a tattoo, it leaves a blurry mark on her skin, followed shortly by a feeling of euphoria and then a series of bizarre, symbolic visions, possibly interspersed with visions of the past or future. Unlike ordinary acid trips, these experiences often have no obvious root in the user's environment. Any character who has used LSD can tell the difference. Simon experiences the trip alongside the user.

Although Simon has withdrawn from everyday life, he is a dangerous and well-prepared adversary. Among the secrets he's harvested, scattered among visions of windowless towers, eyeless men and wolves that eat worlds, are more practical tidbits. He knows when the characters will confront him, even if he doesn't know details. He also knows fragments about them (as well as many other people). If the group or a single character has committed some heinous sin, Simon knows about it and tries to negotiate with or blackmail them.

If confronted and then left alone, he doesn't pursue the characters. After all, he just wants to get on with his search.

Variations

- **Sticker Shock:** A high school student comes back to her desk to find one of her notebooks covered with childish stickers. She begins scraping them off, but, on contact with her skin, the stickers release a powerful stimulant. In minutes, she overdoses and dies of a heart attack. Who planted the stickers? How did they know about her premature heart condition?

- **What Shelters Them:** The tattoos aren't hallucinogenic at all — the school is haunted. The tattoos that children craft and sell protect them from the dread spirits that walk the halls. Why can't the teachers see the menace?

The Mexican Pet

"Yeah, I know Mrs. Jenkins. She's lived there for about six years. Pleasant lady, but a little... well, I don't want to say anything really bad, but she always seems just a bit too happy. Like it's all an act or something. Of course, if my husband had died of a weird disease, I might be kind of fake, too.

"He passed away about a year ago... a little while after they got that dog. After *she* got that dog, really. I never saw *him* with it.

"She says she found it downtown, but I think she got it in Mexico. That's where they were right before I first saw it, and it's where her husband got sick. Thing's damn creepy. It's almost silent, and sometimes I see it watching me from the roof of her house, with those big, shiny eyes. Even when she's walking it, I swear, it looks like it's sizing up everything for a fight.

"She says it's a dog, but it looks more like a rat."

History

Some things should just stay outside. Rats don't belong in the house. Spirits don't belong in the physical world.

Pamela Jenkins violates both rules. To be fair, her familiar spirit, Fetch, isn't precisely a rat. Rats don't have those tiny, humanlike hands. They don't generally grow three feet long, either.

Fetch is one of those creatures that normally exist on the edge of our comfortable reality, scratching and chewing to get in. Such spirits rarely break through; the walls surrounding our world are thick, and their guardians are fierce. Still, some can come in if they're invited.

Pamela and her husband, Mitchell Jenkins, were married more for passion than for love. He wanted to be a sorcerer, and she was his devoted apprentice. During the week, they'd go to work: she as an insurance agent, he as an information systems architect. Saturday nights, they'd work on deciphering the secrets of magic. Nothing ever really happened, but Mitchell assured his wife they were getting closer.

For the first couple of years, that worked for them. They moved to the suburbs, got a big house with a big pool and took vacations abroad. Their last trip to Cancun was the breaking point. Fed up with Mitchell's cautious and well-researched approach to each failed ritual, Pamela kicked him out of their hotel room and tried something a little different. Sacrificing a sick rat she'd found behind a nearby restaurant, she called out with all of the rage and frustration she felt over her dead-end marriage and thwarted magical ambitions.

Something responded. A near-mindless spirit of hunger that could identify with eternally gnawing and striving but never getting anywhere broke through and took up residence in the rat's corpse. Mitchell returned to the hotel room later that evening, battered bouquet of roses in hand, to find his wife cuddling a bloody rat.

Mitchell helped his wife smuggle the creature back home, but he had his doubts that it was actually the demon from beyond space she claimed. The beast Pamela had named "Fetch" was an unusually large rat, yes, but he had trouble believing that it was really the mystical success she claimed. He suspected that Pamela had snapped.

For Pamela's part, she grew frustrated with her husband. He didn't understand her the way her new pet did. After all their years of trying and failing to summon abyssal creatures, he wouldn't even believe Fetch was something other than a rat (or, he thought as it grew, maybe an ugly dog). She was pretty sure he was cheating on her.

Fetch, meanwhile, was experiencing something it had never even considered before: being loved. Its mistress cradled it, sang to it, fed it her blood and hair to keep it alive. The only time it felt the love stop was when she argued with her mate. Fetch bit Mitchell one day, and infected the man with a wasting disease. Mitchell died a few months later.

Fetch is more than a carrier of the disease — Fetch is a victim. Even as Fetch grew fat on his owner's blood and affection, the creature grew ill from the sickness that was killing his rat host. Unknown to Pamela, just as Fetch possessed the rat, a spirit of disease and devouring possessed the illness within it. Fetch is dying.

Motivations

Pamela's neighbors suspect that her pet is something unwholesome, whether they believe that it's a dangerous dog, a mutant rat or a monster. She also has yet to obtain her husband's life insurance money, so one or more of the players' characters might be representing her or the insurance company in the investigation process. A doctor or other medical professional who treated Mitchell might be suspicious. Pamela might contact a supernatural creature or expert if she believed that he could help her learn occult secrets or save Fetch.

The Story

Pamela Jenkins is almost happy, and for the first time in years. She realizes that Fetch killed her husband, but that's not really her fault, and she was thinking about a divorce, anyway. Although she has yet to successfully perform another spell, she believes she's close. Mitchell's Latin chanting and fancy symbols were the wrong tactic: magic, she's decided, is about pain, anger and will.

As the disease killing Fetch becomes stronger, it infects others, starting with neighborhood residents. Since Pamela summoned the spirit, she remains healthy, but her beloved pet has become a carrier for a spiritual disease that could eventually kill dozens, if not hundreds. The disease kills its victims over a period of weeks, gradually blocking their ability to absorb nutrition. They slowly starve to death.

Pamela doesn't realize the nature of the problem, but is determined to find a cure for Fetch's illness, since her familiar is the only being that means anything to her anymore. She's working on a plan to feed Fetch progressively larger sacrifices, starting with rats and dogs. If those don't work, she'll move on to human children, then adults. (Pamela doesn't realize that she's beginning to imitate her late husband's pseudo-scientific methods.) As part of this plan, she's making prioritized lists of people she wouldn't mind seeing dead — which the characters find if they search her home.

Any character whom Pamela sees as an antagonist may become a target for Fetch. Although she is unlikely to command Fetch specifically, it responds with hostility to anything that interrupts the stream of affection and contentment Fetch receives from its mistress. In order to harm a character, Fetch must use its teeth and claws, but it can bypass physical obstacles by stepping just outside the physical world, then returning. All four of its claws resemble human hands and have opposable thumbs, giving it the ability to manipulate objects such as doorknobs.

If Fetch's body is destroyed, the disease-spirit is destroyed with it. Similarly, both Fetch and the disease disappear if Pamela dies.

Variations

- **Harbinger:** The Mexican pet is only the scout for a spiritual invasion force. Once the rat has the lay of the land,



its brethren will burst from their extra-dimensional warrens and lay waste to the city.

• **Hungry Eyes:** The rat is simply the host for the mind and soul of a Mexican mage who was killed in a car accident. Now, he's looking for a new body to host his consciousness.

The Phantom Caller

Naked Man Found in Attic

WEST VALLEY An ordinary babysitting job became a terrifying adventure for one local teen. Seventeen-year-old Ashley Cove was babysitting for a regular customer when she received an ominous phone call.

"I picked up my cell," she recalls, "because the caller ID said it was the mother [of the children]. But all I heard was static, and what sounded like breathing. After a second, I heard a man's voice saying something about terrible danger. And then he hung up."

Cove tried to call her employer, but got no answer. Frightened that something had happened to the young mother, Cove called 911. The operator was skeptical, but agreed to send police to the restaurant where the woman was dining. Within minutes, however, Cove received another call, telling her to "check on the children."

Cove realized that she and her charges were in danger. She fled to a neighbor's house and called 911 again. When police arrived, they found thirty-two-year-old Terence Marinelli in the attic of the house, naked and carrying a gun. A phone extension was found in the attic, from which police believe *Marinelli* made the calls.

Now, sitting at her father's kitchen table, Cove reveals the secret of her quick thinking. "The second time, I looked at the number, not just the name. It wasn't [the mother's] cellphone — it was her home line. That's when I realized that the call was coming from inside the house!"

History

The scale of the modern public telephone network is awe-inspiring, reaching into nearly every home and office in the industrialized world. Mobile phone technology now connects individuals to the network in the same way. The network has grown organically — workers have not only extended it, but also upgraded it incrementally. Through this network flow the lives and secrets of practi-

cally everyone. Just as any sufficiently huge and powerful thing, the mobile phone network has worshipers, people fascinated by its omnipresence and complexity. These are the phreaks, the priests and hackers of the telephone network.

In 1986, Logan Bruno was one of them. Given a receiver and 30 seconds, Logan could eavesdrop on any call on his block. His long distance was free, and the kids who picked on him at school seemed always to get caught with hours of charges to phone sex lines. He spent his afternoons skulking around phone company Dumpsters, looking for any shred of information he could find.

One day, Logan was crawling in a maintenance tunnel, scavenging some parts from an old telephone switch, when rain started to fall. The tunnel was leaky and filled quickly with water. Logan drowned almost before he knew what was happening. He was never seen again.

He was hardly gone, though. Logan's ghost fled into the city telephone systems. He became one with the leviathan he loved. In the years since, Logan's consciousness expanded and changed. He sacrificed much of his original memory, but gained the ability to listen to and process thousands of telephone calls at once. Moreover, he can correlate and cross-reference that information almost instantly, giving him an extensive understanding and knowledge of the lives of nearly everyone in the city, and a fair few outside it.

As a cyclopean entity with innumerable ears, Logan finds that he needs a purpose. Something to occupy his time. He started by saving Ashley Cove from the stalker in the attic, but Logan's not done, not by a long shot.

He's decided he wants to *help*.

Motivations

Almost any character can become involved with the Phantom Caller, since he chooses when and where to manifest via telephone.

The Story

"The Phantom Caller" plays out differently from the other stories in this chapter. Rather than forming a stand-alone story in your chronicle, "The Phantom Caller" is meant to form an ongoing, eerie aspect in the background of your World of Darkness.

Short, static-filled messages are the Caller's stock in trade. He has a particular interest in preventing violent crimes. If, for example, he hears a would-be killer discussing a murder, the Caller may attempt to warn the victim. Due to the Caller's difficulty communicating clearly and necessarily short attention span, however, people often mistake him for noise on a bad connection, an accomplice or even the perpetrator.

When the Caller makes contact, he chooses a number from which to call. Typically, he chooses the number of



the person he is calling or someone close to her. He hasn't yet realized that mysterious phone calls from home tend to frighten the people he tries to help.

With great effort, the Phantom Caller can assume the vocal identity he most associates with a number, but rarely does so. This ability is based on his memory of the person's calls, so he can mimic her voice no matter her current state — living or dead. At least one suicidal man has reported being talked out of killing himself after receiving a mysterious phone call from his late mother.

The Caller has at least vague knowledge of anything that has been discussed in the city on a telephone in recent years. He also has limited access to newer telephone features, such as GPS and text messaging. Between these and his connection to the entire local telephone system, he can track the characters and determine when he wishes to help. He can contact them if they are outside the area, but his eavesdropping and other abilities are limited outside the local telephone network.

The Caller has no desire to move on to any kind of afterlife, and no longer remembers the location of his body. (He could, however, provide enough information to find it.) He would be as surprised as anyone else if the characters uncover the tunnel in which he died and discover the state of the body. The corpse now has cables growing through it like the roots of trees, and an entire new switch has grown in its chest cavity. The body, like the soul, has become a part of the network.

Variations

- **Stranger Calls:** The telephone network hosts not one ghost, but millions. Fragments of every person who ever makes a telephone call may lie, sleeping, in the network. Presumably, they could be extracted... or awakened.

- **Killer ID:** The Phantom Caller is no ghost, but he is a monster. A living killer who escaped justice years ago now phones random people, leaving them clues to his unsolved murders. Is he confessing his sins, or just trying to make sure people remember him when he kills again?

The Vanishing Hitchhiker

"Had a weird night last night. Well, it started Saturday, I guess. I was driving down 18th, right near the waterfront, and I saw this girl trying to flag down a taxi. I admit, I basically noticed because she was hot and she wasn't wearing much.

"No, she wasn't. I just mean like she'd been clubbing or something. At some retro place, looked like.

"Anyway, she was trying to get a taxi, and they kept passing her. I figured, what the hell, I can always use the karma, right? Not to mention the company. So I pulled over and offered her a ride. The good news is that apparently I don't look like a serial killer, and she got in.

"She was, um... well, she looked really cold, so I gave her my jacket out of the back seat. She said her name was Sarah Cooper and she lived down on Fenton, so we drove out there. She was real quiet at first, but once she opened up... man. I've never met a girl like that... she was even into Wagner, man. How lucky is that? It was a long damn drive, but it just flew by. She had me drop her about a block from her house, right by a church. I didn't want to let her walk, but she said her mom would freak if she saw a guy dropping her off. I let her off, and I drove back home. I was, like, flying, so it didn't occur to me she hadn't given me my jacket... or her number.

"Anyway, that was Saturday. Last night was the part that was messed up. I dropped off Sean, and it was really damn cold again. It was still early, so I figured, hey, why not drop by her place and get my jacket back, and maybe see if she'd let me stick around? So I went up there, and this little old lady came to the door. I told her I was looking for her granddaughter, and she got this sad smile.

"You mean my daughter, Sarah," she said, and then she bit her lip. I was kinda surprised — this woman looked like she was going on eighty. I figured I'd really put my foot in it, but she just gave me a look, and then said, 'Try the church.'

"I went down there, right? I looked inside, and there was nobody there, so I walked back to my car... and then I noticed my jacket blowing around behind the church... in the graveyard. I went over there to pick it up, and I saw the gravestone behind it.

"Sarah Cooper," it said, '1960-1979.'

History

In 1979, after a long night of drinking and dancing, Sarah Cooper stumbled out onto the street to look for a taxi home. As she stepped into the road to flag a cab, another car hit her. The taxi driver stopped and called 911, but Sarah died moments before the ambulance arrived. Her last, irrational thought was that she was never going to get home by morning.

Since that night, Sarah's ghost has haunted various portions of the road where she died, in what used to be a thriving part of the club district. The ghost doesn't remember what happened to her, and she's unclear on the details of her life, sometimes including her name. She is, however, animated enough to pass for a living woman and coherent enough to pass for a mildly intoxicated club-goer.

Sarah's vague memory also prevents her from realizing that she's dead, or (consciously) using any Numina. Combined with her determination to get home, she can pass as one of the living. She seems solid, and can interact physically with people or objects without any special effort.

When she catches a ride, she always asks the driver to drop her off at the same church, down the road from her mother's house. Although she doesn't recall it, this is where she was buried. If a driver insists on taking her the rest of the way home, she vanishes as they pass the cemetery.

Two months ago, Sarah rode home with a young man named Tom Kelly, who became infatuated with her. Just as several of his predecessors, Tom tried to find Sarah again. Unlike them, however, his infatuation turned to obsession. Even learning that Sarah was a ghost didn't deter him — she was real enough when she rode home with him. Every night afterward, Tom drove up and down the stretch of road where he met Sarah. Last night, he finally spotted her again. Unfortunately, she was getting into a car with another man, Ewan Blake. Consumed by jealous rage, Tom followed Sarah and Ewan to the church where she usually disembarks.

After grabbing Sarah and ordering her to stay still, Tom beat Ewan with an aluminum bat. Leaving the young man for dead, Tom realized that Sarah had disappeared. In a final act of rage, he visited her headstone again and hammered it with the bat, cracking it and damaging the inscription.

The noise awoke the pastor, who called the police. By the time they arrived, however, only Ewan remained, bleeding on the sidewalk.



Motivations

Detectives or other police officers investigating the attack on Ewan Blake have an obvious reason to become involved. Ewan or Tom might be a friend or relative of one of the characters. Working from the other direction, if Sarah's mother finds out about the attack, she may suspect that her late daughter was involved, and seek help from characters with whom she has a personal connection.

The Story

Ewan's car is still running when the police arrive. If the characters are already on the scene, they find paramedics taking away an unconscious and badly wounded Ewan.

The church's pastor, the Reverend Carlton Hodge, notices the graveyard vandalism the next morning and reports it to police or the characters. However, he is not aware of Sarah Cooper's post-mortem activities, and does not know why her grave, in particular, was vandalized.

After a day or two in the hospital, Ewan recovers enough to speak with police or the characters. Due to severe injury and the speed with which the assault occurred, he remembers little about the attack. He remembers taking a young woman named Sarah home, and knows where he picked her up. Night shift employees of businesses along Sarah's haunt recall frequently seeing a young woman flagging down rides, and a few may have given her rides themselves.

If the characters visit the church at night, they almost certainly notice Tom cruising the road. Although he visits every night, Sarah only appears on Fridays. She instinctively avoids Tom, and tries more urgently to get a ride if she sees him. (As mentioned earlier, she can't disappear or use Numina to defend herself.)

Wilma Cooper, Sarah's mother, can tell the characters about the young woman's life and subsequent appearances. Although elderly, she still lives in the brownstone where she raised Sarah. Several dozen times a year, people visit her and claim to have driven Sarah home. However, Wilma has never seen her daughter's ghost, since Sarah disappears at the church (even if her ride doesn't drop her off there) and never makes it home. Wilma has looked for Sarah herself a few times, but has never seen her.

If the characters give Sarah a ride, she gives them her usual line — she has to get home, drop her off at the church and so on. However, she's clearly frightened, and, if asked or pressured, admits that she's trying to avoid the man following her. By this point, Tom is following the characters' car. When they stop, or if he otherwise gets the opportunity, he angrily confronts Sarah and whoever is with her, demanding that she come home with him. He does not immediately resort to violence, as he did with Ewan, but threatens the characters with his bloodstained bat and attacks anyone who helps Sarah resist him. Use the statistics for the gangbanger (see

the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 205) for Tom. His dice pool with his bat is eight, and it does bashing damage.

Should the characters manage to reunite Sarah and her mother — which may be as supernaturally difficult as you desire (perhaps they can simply ask the older woman to meet them at the church, or perhaps they must track down Sarah's secret engagement ring that Wilma didn't know about and has been missing for decades) — the two embrace and talk for the rest of the night. As the sun rises, Sarah says goodbye to her mother and asks the characters to leave; as soon as they comply, she flags down a man in a black car and drives off with him, never to be seen again.

Variations

- **Dinner on the Road:** A “vanishing hitchhiker” is vampire slang for a particular feeding strategy. A vampire “pulling a hitchhiker” catches a ride with a lone motorist, feeds lightly from him and then clouds his memory to remove the evidence.

- **Miles to Go:** Almost every town or city has a story about a vanishing hitchhiker. American versions of the story go back at least to the turn of the 20th century, and similar motifs appear in older folklore. The dead regularly seek the help of the living to return to their graves. Where were the dead going when they left?



"DEEP INTO THE DARKNESS PEERING, LONG I STOOD THERE, WONDERING, FEARING,
DOUBTING, DREAMING DREAMS NO MORTAL EVER DARED TO DREAM BEFORE."

WE KNOW DEEP DOWN THAT THE WORLD
IS A FAR MORE TERRIFYING PLACE THAN WE ALLOW
OUR RATIONAL MINDS TO ACKNOWLEDGE.

BEST TO SHUT OUR EYES, PRETEND IT'S NOT THERE.
IF WE DON'T SEE IT, IT MIGHT NOT SEE US.

PRETENDING SOMETHING IS NOT THERE,
HOWEVER, DOES NOT MAKE IT GO AWAY.

IT ONLY HELPS IT TO HIDE BETTER,
AND PREDATORS LIKE TO HIDE FROM THEIR PREY,
LEST IT BE SCARED AWAY.

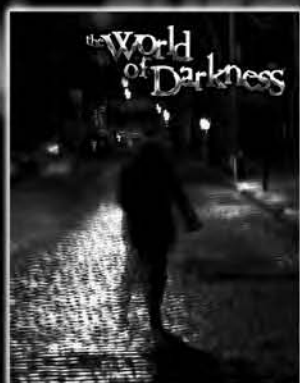
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